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Gilla Críst (Christian) of Lismore

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Gilla Críst (Christian) of Lismore (*? – † 1186)

1. Name variants: Christianus, Gille Críst, Giolla Críost (baptismal); Connery, Ó Con Áirge, O'Conarchy, Ua Conairche, Ua Condoirche, Ua Connairche (family).

2. Places: Abbeydorney, Bangor, Clairvaux, Mellifont, Lismore

3. Biography: Born in Co. Kerry, G. C. may have initiated as a monk at Bangor under Malachy Ua Morgair, who brought him to Rome in 1139/40. He trained at Clairvaux under Bernard, alongside the future Pope Eugene III, and was appointed 'father' of the Irish in continental Cistercian houses. He returned to Ireland in c. 1142, with the French monks who established the first Cistercian house in Ireland, at Mellifont, Co. Louth. He was appointed its first abbot and attended the abbey church's consecration in 1157. In c. 1151, he was appointed bishop of Lismore and permanent papal legate in Ireland. He accompanied John Cardinal Paparo to Ireland in late 1151. Together, they convened the synod of Kells-Mellifont in 1152, which reformed the Irish Church and distributed pallia to the four newly-created archdioceses of Armagh, Cashel, Dublin, and Tuam. He presided over the synod of Brí meic Thaidc (perhaps Braymount, Co. Meath) in 1158, a general synod in 1162, a provincial synod at Lismore in 1166, and the second synod of Cashel in 1171–72. His career coincided with the English invasion of Ireland. Henry II of England visited him at his episcopal residence at Lismore in Oct 1171 and stayed with him two days. The degree to which he collaborated with Henry in support of the English invasion and wider church reform has been debated. G. C. resigned all his offices c. 1175–79, 'worn out by infirmity and having conceived a vow of quietude and retirement in old age'. He retired to Abbeydorney, where he died and was buried in 1186. The hagiologist John Colgan († 1658) knew of a vita but never procured it. The English Martyrology, Arnold Wion, Ferrarius, Vincentius, and Hugh Menard include him in their calendars. He was sometimes listed, erroneously, as bishop of Down or archbishop of Armagh, though he may have been Malachy's archdeacon. His brother, Malchus of Mellifont, was regarded as a saint.

4. Cultus:

a. Relics: –

b. Liturgical commemoration: 18 Mar (PASCUAL 2019, 100)

c. Patronage: –

d. Attributes: –

5. Fontes: Bernard of Clairvaux, *The Life and Death of Saint Malachy*, transl. R. T. MEYER, Kalamazoo, 1978, 53, 140; J. P. Migne, PL, 204, 218f.

6. Literature: A. BREEN, Ua Conairche, Christian (Gilla-Críst), in: *Dictionary of Irish Biography* 9, Cambridge 2009, 567; D. Ó CORRÁIN, *The Irish Church, its Reform and the English Invasion*, Dublin 2017; M. T. FLANAGAN, *The Transformation of the Irish Church in the Twelfth Century*, Woodbridge, UK 2010; A. GWYNN, *The Irish Church in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*, ed. G. O'BRIEN, Dublin 1992, 134–135; J. O'HANLON, *Lives of the Irish Saints* 3, Dublin 1875, 839–41; A. GWYNN / R. N. HADCOCK, *Medieval Religious Houses: Ireland*, Harlow 1970, 139; J. WARE, *History of the Bishops of Ireland*, ed. W. HARRIS, Dublin 1739, 550–551; F. R. de PASCUAL, *Nuevo Menologio Cisterciense, Cóbrecas* 2019, 100–101.

7. Illustrations: –

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