AN INTRODUCTORY HISTORY OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH IN BRITAIN AND IRELAND
From its Beginnings to the Eleventh Century

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PART I (until 600 AD)

"In all parts of Spain, among the diverse nations of the Gauls, in regions of the Britons beyond Roman sway but subjected to Christ... the name of Christ now reigns."
(Tertullian in "Adversus Judaeos" Ch. 7, *circa* 200 AD)

Introduction

There is a saying on Mount Athos that it is not *where* we live that saves us but the *way* we live. This is a play on the Greek words *topos* and *tropos*. One could add that neither is it *when* we live that saves us. And yet on reading the lives of saints who lived in other epochs and other lands it is easy to feel that it is impossible for us, in our circumstances, to approach their level of repentance and humility. This is one reason why many British and other English speakers are being attracted to the saints of the British Isles: although these saints lived over a millennium ago they lived on our own soil, or at least on that of our ancestors. It is as though these local saints are not only supporting us from heaven, but are also with us here, on the same soil where they once struggled in the spiritual life.

How eagerly the saints of Britain must await our prayers that the land in which they so mightily laboured should again become a garden of virtue!

It is difficult to be inspired by saints about whom we know little. But when we do read their lives, they begin to emerge from obscurity and become real people. And on learning something of these saints as individuals, it is natural to want to understand the Church and the society in which they lived and which they profoundly affected. This essay is a response to just such an increasing interest in the history of the early Church of Britain. It outlines the historical context of the Church in Britain and Ireland for the first millennium after Christ, and so concentrates not so much on individual lives as on the overall pattern of the Church's history.

Archimandrite Vasileios, the present abbot of the Holy Monastery of Iviron on Mount Athos, once said to a group of Englishmen that to become truly Orthodox it was necessary that we be ourselves, as Englishmen, and at the same time it was necessary to go beyond Englishness, into the realm of uncreated grace. He stressed the paradox: in order to discover and clarify the qualities of our particular culture, we needed to let go of that culture and strive to enter the divine-human culture of the Church. This was of course another way of expressing Christ's words, that they who leave their mothers and fathers and lands for His sake will gain them a hundredfold.

A study of the early history British Christianity bears out this paradox. On the one hand the saints of the British Isles reveal what is good in their particular race; their holiness clarifies and intensifies the qualities of their culture. A different tongue of the fire of Pentecost burns brightly above each saint. On the other hand the saints' love for Christ transcends earthly categories like race and time: the uncreated grace which they bear surpasses such boundaries. Indeed, this love led many of them to seek exile for the sake of Christ.

The following article provides a brief history of the Church in Britain and Ireland up to 1054 AD and the social background to its development. Much is based on the conclusions which recent scholars have drawn from archaeology, contemporary literature, and place-names. The scope of the article has not permitted the inclusion of any lives of saints in detail; the emphasis instead is on the historical roots of the British saints and the subsequent fruits of their spiritual labours for Christ. There is in any case an increasing number of Lives of British and Irish saints.

It is often asked why the Orthodox Church venerates only those Western saints who lived before 1054 AD. Until the Great Schism of that date, and for while afterwards, Christendom of Western Europe, Britain and Ireland was in communion with the Church of the East. This is to say, Western Christendom was Orthodox until that time (excepting of course those groups and periods which held erroneous views like Arianism and Pelagianism.[1])

It might be said that the date of 1054 is somewhat arbitrary: Surely things did not change overnight? it might be asked; Could an event in Constantinople suddenly open a great chasm between every bishop and lay Christian East and West? There is a point here of course. In fact the crucial event of 1054 was the impulsive initiative of a single bishop, albeit a papal legate. Pope Leo IX had sent three representatives to Constantinople in response to a conciliatory offer by Patriarch Michael Cerularius. (There were conflicts over differing liturgical practices, but most importantly over the Latins' addition of the *filioque* clause to the Creed, namely, that the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father *and the Son.*) Primarily because of one legate's abrasive character - Bishop Humbert of Silva Candida - communications with the Patriarch quickly failed. The visit ended with Humbert, of his own initiative, laying down on the altar of Agia Sophia a Bull of Excommunication against Patriarch Cerularius, and departing for Rome. Later the Patriarch anathematised Humbert, but not, it must be noted, the Roman Church as such.

Tensions between the East and Western Churches had indeed been accumulating for a long time before these mutual excommunications; the clash in Constantinople was an eruption of a volcano that had been brewing for some time. However, it was only many decades later that this event of 1054 came, in retrospect, to symbolise the rupture of East and West.

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[1] For example, for some time the Goths were Arians, but then of course Arianism was for a considerable time dominant in the East as well. In fact, for the first millennium the West was less prone to heresy than the East, perhaps because by temperament its people were less inclined to metaphysical speculation than the Greeks - they were a more pragmatic. It is pertinent that the only heresy to have originated in the West during this period was supremely pragmatic, namely Pelagianism. This stressed human effort to the detriment of divine grace.

Intercommunion continued for some time after that date in many, if not in most places. An instance of this is found in the writings of Abbot Daniel of Tchernigov, Russia. He mentions that at the time of his pilgrimage to the Holy Places (1106-1107 AD) the Greeks and Latins (who were there subsequent to the Crusaders' capture of Jerusalem from the Turks in 1099) worshipped together in harmony. Indeed, hopes of a possible reunion were only finally shattered one hundred and fifty years after the Great Schism, when in 1204 the Crusaders sacked Constantinople.

Although the moving of western Christianity away from the Church in the East was gradual, a date nevertheless must be set somewhere to enable undisputed commemoration of western Orthodox saints - and 1054 AD is the natural and commonly accepted date. In the case of Britain it can be argued that it was not until its invasion by the Normans in 1066 that any practical implications of the Schism were felt. But if such finer details are to be taken into consideration for one country, we must do it for all, and then uncertainty and confusion reigns.

Among the saints of the Isles venerated by Christians today, perhaps the Celtic ones are the most popular. There is however a modern tendency to contrast Celtic Christianity too starkly with the Roman Christianity reintroduced by St Augustine of Canterbury. This school presents St Augustine's mission as a sort of invasion, and the Council of Whitby, where Roman customs were promulgated, as a death blow to Celtic Christianity. But such an interpretation forgets that the early Church in Britannia was, via Gaul, Roman in its structure. Indeed, for some time after the Roman Empire relinquished its rule in Britain in 410, many Britons, particularly those in present-day south Wales, actually prided themselves in continuing Roman ways. There are for example fifth- to sixth-century memorial stones in Wales which proudly sport Roman titles: at Llangian we read of a *medicus*(doctor) and at Penmachno "a *citizen* of Gwynedd and cousin of....(a) *magistrate*".

Three Periods

The history of the Church in Britain during the first millennium can be divided into three periods. These are summarised below so as to give a birds-eye view, before the more detailed examination which follows. But first, for clarity's sake, a brief explanation of the various ethnic groupings referred to in this history would not be amiss. These are the Britons, Picts, Scots and English.

Britain was brought into the Roman Empire at its conquest by Emperor Claudius' commander, Aulus Plautius, from 43-51 AD.[2] At this period two main Celtic groups inhabited the Isles. The Brythonic Celts or Britons (whence Britain, or *Britannia* as the Romans called it) occupied present-day England, Wales and south Scotland. They spoke Brythonic or British. In north-eastern Scotland were the Picts (from the Latin *pictus*, since they *painted* or rather tattooed their faces). These Picts are of unknown ethnic origin, although some of their tribes spoke a Celtic language. The Goedelic Celts or *Scotti* were found in Ireland, and a little later in western Scotland as

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[2] Julius Caesar had landed earlier, with smaller forces, once in 55 BC and again in 54 BC. Because of difficulties in Gaul and elsewhere however he had had to withdraw after only three months.

well (whence the name). According to the writings of St. Bede and St. Patrick, these Scotti came to Scotland in an organised immigration under their chieftain Reuda, in the fifth century. They came to be called Dalreudians, *dal* meaning a division. Ireland remained unconquered by the Romans.

The term *English* applies to the Germanic tribes of the Angles (whence the word English), Saxons and Frisians, who conquered and settled in the area approximating present-day England. Many Britons, however, remained in the conquered area and presumably interbred with the Anglo-Saxons. The term English therefore must to an extent imply some Celtic British blood as well as Germanic. Another people referred to in this history is the Gauls. This was another Celtic grouping, dwelling approximately in present-day France.

The first thousand years of Church life in Britain falls into three main phases, which are outlined below.

1. The Roman Britain (From the coming of the Gospel to the withdrawal of Roman rule in c.410)

In this period the Church comprises chiefly of Roman Christians who were part of the Empire's occupying forces, and of those native Britons in closest contact with Romans. Such intercourse was naturally strongest for those Britons with administrative positions or involved in commerce.

Precisely how and when the Gospel came to Britain is not known for certain, although there are numerous traditions. We are left to construct a picture of the Church's possible origins and nature primarily with the aid of archaeological evidence, since written accounts are rare and scanty in detail. As shall be discussed in more detail later, the evidence suggests that the faith spread among the native Britons primarily through resident Christian citizens and administrators of the Roman Empire and that it was a filtration process rather than a radical conversion through any one individual's efforts.

Roman rule in Britain came to a close when the Empire withdrew its military, administrative and economic support around 410 AD, the time of Rome's fall to the Goths. Although Roman rule ceased at this time, it was natural for at least some Britons to try and continue Romanity, with its sense of culture and urbanity. Unfortunately, according to the writings of a sixth century saint called Gildas, this desire for urbanity often translated itself into an elitism within the priestly class. Since it was a 'class' implanted by the Romans, it was in Gildas's time used by many as a means of gaining prestige. Yet despite such signs of decadence, the literary evidence does suggest that Christianity had become the dominant religion among the Britons by the end of the fifth century, albeit only nominally held in many places.

The Romano-British phase continues through to the 470's, from which time isolation from the Continental Church and the rapid growth of monasticism begins to give the British Church a more indigenous character. This second phase has come to be called Insular.

2. The Insular Celtic Age (The late fifth through to the seventh centuries.)

Soon after the withdrawal of Roman rule, Picts from the north (present-day Scotland) and Irish *Scotti* from the west stepped up their attacks on the now disorganised British. In an attempt to stay these attacks the Britons employed mercenary fighters from the Germanic Angles, Saxons and Jutes from across

the Channel. Very soon however, about 441 AD, these tribes, along with Frisians, turned against the British. The boundary continued to fall back before these advancing waves of allies-turned-invaders. Eventually the Britons managed to hold their own in the more mountainous areas approximating contemporary Wales and Cornwall; many later migrated into Amorica (now Brittany) in Gaul. Present-day England was to be born out of the final settlement of these Angles and Saxons.

Modern historians label this period "Insular" because the Christian Celts' communications with Europe were greatly hindered by upheavals both in Britain and Europe. One consequence of this was that the British sent no more bishops to councils on the Continent.[3] Such isolation caused the Celtic Christians to continue their life largely ignorant of the various changes in liturgical practices which were adopted by the sister Churches in Rome and Byzantium - the dating of Pascha and the method of tonsure for example. As we shall see, these differences later became a big source of friction when the two British and Roman 'sisters' had to live together.

By divine providence the English invasion of the British worked for the good of the Irish. We know from archaeological finds that there had been some Christian presence in Ireland in the Roman times. Nevertheless, it was not until the Saxon invasions drove Christian Britons into south and west Britain that the faith gained any real impetus in Ireland. Although we are unsure of details, it is known that contact with Wales was particularly important in the conversion of the Irish. By the latter half of the fifth century the Church had become a considerable influence in Ireland.

Toward the end of the fourth century, but mainly in the beginning of the fifth, a new element entered Celtic Christianity - monasticism. It had begun in the Egyptian deserts, and was probably introduced to the Isles through Gaul (although during the fifth century, Mediterranean seaways opened up more direct contact with eastern Mediterranean monks). The new movement's ideals quickly fired the Celtic spirit to the point that Celtic monks soon matched their eastern co-strugglers in prayer and ascetic exploits. Communal monasticism or the coenobitic way also offered the ideal alternative to the urban-based structure on which the Continental Churches based their episcopal structures. The Celts had always been a tribal rather than urban people, and so the coenobia offered the perfect Christian expression of the close-knit village. In a sense, monasteries became for the Insular Church what the cities were to the Continental Church.

Through the Anglo-Saxon invasions, the Christian population therefore shifted its concentration from the south-east of Roman times, towards the west into what is now Cornwall, Brittany, Wales, and from thence, Ireland. To the east of the Britons were the pagan Anglo-Saxons, apparently settled for good. But the Britons had no interest in evangelising these their conquerors. This was a work which Continentals and the Irish would have to do.

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[3] One exception turns out to be only apparent. One Mansuetus at the Council of Tours in 461 signed himself *episcopus Britannorum.* Scholars are generally agreed that he is the same as a Mansuetus, bishop of Toul, in eastern Gaul. If this is so, then the *Britanni* referred to were immigrants from southern Britain, rather than people resident in Briton itself.

3. The Anglo-Saxon and Irish Period (seventh century through to the Norman invasion of 1066)

With the coming of St Augustine of Canterbury to Britain in 596, the mission proper to the Anglo-Saxon or English tribes begins. One consequence of the mission was that after almost two centuries of relative isolation the resident Celtic Christians were exposed again to the ways of Roman Christianity - and Rome expected them to conform. After initial resistance the various Celtic Churches adopted Roman practices where they differed from their own. But this was not the end of Celtic Christianity by any means.

Whilst the Celtic Christians 'Romanised' in regard to some particulars, they did not forfeit their essential personality: the amazing knotted designs found in their illuminated manuscripts, stone carving and metalwork are an artistic expression of their continued vitality. But more fundamental than this artistic expression is the distinctive form which Celtic monasticism developed over the centuries. Britons and *Scotti* were very much attracted to the ascetic and erimitic ethos of primitive Egyptian monasticism - they were not so attracted by the more formalised shape that western European monachism had quickly assumed. Irish monasticism is well known for its love of *peregrinatio pro Christo,* or 'wandering for the sake of Christ'. Ironically it was primarily this form of asceticism rather than any evangelistic zeal which caused the Irish monks to be so fruitful in mission, both to the English and all over the Continent.

Beginning with Augustine, the Anglo-Saxon peoples converted over the opening decades of the seventh century. The initial impetus for the mission came from the Continent - from Saint Gregory the Great of Rome in particular. In a short time the Irish joined the mission, beginning with St Aidan of Lindisfarne. Soon after, through the influence of St Aidan, the Anglo-Saxon converts joined in the evangelism of their own people. St Cuthbert of Lindisfarne is perhaps the most famed of these early English saints..

But this apostolic zeal was not to be contained within the Isles. Following the example of St Columbanus (*c.*543-615), Irish and English monks and scholars spread far and wide throughout the Continent, establishing new Christian communities, monasteries, and centres of learning.

The next major social change for the Isles occurred around 835 when Scandinavian raiders began coastal attacks. These Danes and Norwegians wrought havoc especially with monasteries, which tended to be on or near the coasts. Eventually the English mustered themselves and began to offer effective resistance; they had to, for it was evident that many of the North Sea raiders were intent on pressing inland, settling and ruling. Victories and treaties now favoured one side, now the other.

This turbulence continued for two centuries until things were decided by an invasion from yet another quarter - the powerful Norman kingdom from Gaul. The victory by William the Conqueror at Hastings in 1066 was decisive; the Normans were there to stay, rule and transform.

As far as Britain is concerned, the schism of western Christianity from its Orthodox roots started to have its practical effects from 1066. With their characteristic vigour and organisational skills, the Normans swiftly reorganised both Church and State to suit their ideals. A new spirit was

sweeping through western Christendom, and Norman rule proved to be its channel into Britain.

Having sketched the outline of the Church's early history in Britain and Ireland, we can now go back and draw in some more detail.

I. Roman Britain

Sources

Written sources of information until the sixth century are scarce, and those that exist need to be checked against one another and compared with other sources of information, such as archaeological finds. Another helpful field is the meaning and distribution of place names. These give clues to such things as the extent of Romanisation by natives, and possible spheres of influence of church founders. Of these three sources, archaeology gives the most abundant information for the Roman period.

Because of the scarcity of information, scholars have had to tread carefully. One example of how written history can become muddled is to be found in *De excidio Britanniae* written by St Gildas. His chief purpose in writing was to denounce the decadence of secular and ecclesiastical rulers of his time; he in fact blames them for the conquest of Britain by the pagan Anglo-Saxons. But along with his prophetic denunciations he includes some history. He claims that in the year 156 AD a certain British king called Lucius wrote to the pope of Rome, Eleutherus, asking to be made a Christian by his direction. This request was granted, Gildas says, and so the Britons received the faith. Using Gildas as a basis, the Venerable Bede (675-735) repeats the story in his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People.* However, it is clear that this story is a confusion of another account, found in the *Liber Pontificalis* (c. 550 AD), under the paragraph on Eleutherus (170-85 AD). This, probably factual account refers to a certain Lucius, the King of Edessa, and to one of his castles called Britium (whence the confusion with Britannia).

One such historical error in Gildas does not of course imply that all his writings are to be dismissed as an unreliable source of history, but it does show that statements must be checked and compared.

The main literary sources relevant to the Roman period are the following:

- Gildas's *De Excidio Britanniae* ("The Destruction and Conquest of Britain"), written c. 554.

- Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (c. 731 AD). Although Bede wrote this somewhat later than the Roman period with which we are concerned, he was in general an historian who sought for accuracy. He also drew on earlier sources not now extant.

- Acts of Councils on the Continent.

- St Patrick of Ireland's *Confessio* and his letter to Coroticus (fifth century).

- Lives of saints written on the Continent which refer to Britain: Sulpucius Severus' *Life of St. Martin of Tours* and Constantius of Lyons' *Life of Germanus* (written c.480) are two examples.

- Allusions to Britain in histories and letters written on the Continent, such as Eusebius's *The History of the Church* (c. 326), and a letter by Vitricius of

Lyon (who visited Britain c.396) *de Laude Sanctorum,* Theodoret's *Ecclesiastical History (c. 440),* and certain of St Jerome's letters .
   - Chronicles, e.g. the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.

   Unfortunately there are few Lives of saints in Britain which were written close to the saint's time. Apart from St Patrick's 'autobiography', the earliest Lives are the anonymous *Life of St Samson* (which is thought to be basically from the early seventh century, although the oldest manuscript extant is of the eleventh) and Adomnan's *Life of St Colum Cille* of the late seventh century.

Beginnings

   Since the Gospel probably came to Britain through the Romans, it is necessary to know a little of the method of Roman rule in the land. As was their practice in other colonies, they generally placed local administration in the hands of those tribal leaders who were co-operative. Tribes which resisted were dealt with by military force. The conquerors restructured the Celtic tribal system along Roman lines. London (Londinium) was the seat of the head of Britain, the *vicarius.* Then there were four *colonia* -York, Lincoln, Gloucester, and Colchester, each with their own territories. The rest of the country was divided into *civitates.* These were run by magistrates, who were supported by a council of *decuriones* (St Patrick's father was one of these).
   This arrangement worked particularly well in the Lowlands, in the south-east. There, after initial resistance had failed, the Britons settled down to work with, and even take advantage of the new system. It was not so in the Highlands of the west (Wales and Cornwall) and the north. The rugged terrain made military resistance to the Romans easier. These areas were also more subject to attack from other tribes beyond the frontiers, like the Scots and Picts. With these problems and the harsher weather, postings in the Highlands were understandably not so popular with the Romans.
   With the above mentioned patterns in mind, it is pertinent that archaeological evidence points to the predominance of Christians in the Lowlands, that is, where the most Romans were, and also around the concentration of military forces along Hadrian's Wall, on the northernmost border. It is this correspondence between Christianity and a strong Roman presence which suggests that the faith was established among the Britons through the Romans. This is confirmed by excavation finds, which indicate that among Britons the faith was most prevalent among those whose work brought them in closest contact with the Romans - mainly administrators and merchants.
   It could be argued that these archaeological finds do not necessarily reflect the historical realities, but are influenced by the possibility that mainly only wealthy people had the means of making objects durable enough to last until our times and so be discoverable. (A parallel argument concerns the Celtic churches: because they were usually made of perishable wood, wattle and daub, archaeological evidence by itself would lead us to deduce that the Celts had very few churches and monasteries, something we know for certain from written sources was not the case.) However, it is known for certain that on the Continent the Church tended to get established first in the cities, and there among the upper classes, and only later in rural areas. Interestingly, this

is a possible origin of our term "pagan". The word is from the Latin *paganus,* a rural dweller: since paganism continued longest in the country districts, the terms *paganus* and heathen became virtually synonymous.[4]

We have few early literary references concerning the beginnings of Christianity in Britain. What we have are more allusions than descriptions. But they help form a mosaic. Tertullian, as quoted at the beginning of this article, claimed that at his time (200 AD) the faith was held in parts of Britain that were *beyond* the borders of the Empire. As is discussed in more detail in the live of St Ninian below, this is quite possible in the northern area between the Antonine Wall and Hadrian's Wall.[5]

Other early references come from Tertullian's Alexandrian contemporary, Origen (died c.253). In a number of places he writes that the faith had reached *Britannia* or *terra Britanniae.* In these works his purpose was to show how the Church was already "established at the very ends of the (Roman) world." In another place he puts the rhetorical question: "When before the coming of Christ did the land of Britain agree on the worship of one God?" Evidently by his time the faith was already well established in Britain.

Eusebius (260-339) supports this view of an early Christian presence in Britain in his *Evangelical Demonstrations.* Without naming them, he states that "some apostles passed over the ocean to what are called the British Isles." St Paul, Simon the Zealot, Aristobulus and Joseph of Arimathea are among those for whom various traditions have claimed the part. For example, the Greek collection of Lives called the Menaion has the Apostle Paul make Aristobulus bishop of Britain. It says that after many sufferings at the hands of the pagans, Aristobulus's mission began to bear fruit with baptisms, ordinations and the building of churches. Eventually he died there peacefully. A work attributed to Hippolytus of Rome (c. 235), *On the Seventy Apostles,* lists Aristobulus as Bishop of Britain.

A letter from St Athanasius the Great to the Emperor Jovian (written 363 or 364, as quoted in Theodoret of Cyprus's *Ecclesiastical History,* IV:3) includes the following important affirmation of Britain's orthodoxy:

> "With this faith [i.e. that confessed at the Council of Nicea] all the churches throughout the world are in agreement, in Spain, in Britain, in Gaul, in all Italy...."

The chief stepping stone for the Church's establishment in Britain was neighbouring Gaul - just as it had been for the Roman Empire's conquest and subsequent administration of Britain. It is primarily through Gaul that the British believers had their links with the ecumenical Church, via Councils, visiting bishops, and later, the influence of monks and monastic writings like those of St. John Cassian. During the Roman period the British Church seems to be very much the child of Gaul. The nature of the Empire's secular administration strengthened the Britons' contact with the Continent, for the Romans employed a wide range of peoples from the Continent to help run and defend their colonies. Members of the Roman armies in Britain, as elsewhere, were not always, or even usually, Italians. Mercenary fighters and generals were employed in large numbers from among the Franks, Goths,

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[4] Another reason for the association is that countrymen were non-militant and so were contrasted with the *miles Christi,* the soldiers of Christ - that is, heathen were at the mercy of the "elemental spirits of the universe" and demons, whereas Christians had the divine power to resist their influence.

[5] For a fuller discussion of this, see the section on Saint Ninian below.

Alemanni and numerous other tribes, mostly Germanic. A number of notable "Roman" generals were Germanic, one Stilicho for example. If some of the Roman bearers of the faith to Britain were also Gauls, this naturally would have strengthened the British Church's cross-Channel connections even more.

One instance of Britain's ecclesiastical relationship with Gaul concerns how British bishops dealt with the heresy of Pelagianism. This teaching was propagated by Pelagius, a Briton who asserted that salvation could come through human effort alone and without God's grace. When it was clear that his teaching was gaining a foothold in Britain, it was from Gaul that the British bishops requested help. In response, St. Germanus of Auxerre and St Lupus of Troyes were sent to refute the heresy (in 429 AD, and again in c.447).

In the light of the Romano-British Church's dependency on Gaul - and via it, Rome - it is understandable that we do not find distinctive Celtic characteristics emerging at this stage. For this we must wait until the decline of the Empire's influence during the fifth century.

Episcopal Structure

Throughout the Empire, the Church organised its episcopal sees around the temporal regions: bishops' seats were generally in civil capitals and important towns. Roman Britain was no exception - at least until the sixth century, when monasticism was to interweave another pattern. Ireland had never been conquered by the Romans, and so did not have their urban based infrastructure. Consequently, when the Church established itself in Ireland it based its diocesan boundaries for the most part on the indigenous territorial divisions, which were chiefly the small petty kingdoms called *tuath.*

That the Church in Roman Britain used the customary diocesan system can be deduced from records of the Council of Arles in Gaul, 314 AD[6]. These contain the earliest irrefutable references to Bishops in Britain. Represented at the Council were bishops from thirty-five sees from North Africa, Gaul, Britain, Spain, Italy and Dalmatia. Signatories include three bishops from Britain. These were Eborius of York, Restitutus of London, and Adelphius. The latter's see was either Lincoln or Caerleon-upon Usk, or perhaps Colchester (depending on how one reads the existing codexes of the councils). Besides these bishops there was a priest named Sacerdos and a deacon Arminius.

In the first instance, the fact that the Church in Britain had bishops to send at all shows that the faith was by that time reasonably established. Secondly, the sees of these bishops confirms that episcopal diocese corresponded to civil regions. By 312 AD Britain was divided into four provinces. York was the capital of Britannia Secunda, London of Maxima Caesariensis, Lincoln of Flavia Caesariensis, and Cirencest (or Corinium as it then was) of Britannia Prima. Perhaps Sacerdos and the deacon Arminius were representing this fourth province, standing in for their bishop. Furthermore, it is unlikely that these were the only sees present in Britain at the time. Gaul had thirty-six

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[6] The Donatist schism which arose in Africa threatened to disrupt the western Churches, and so Constantine the Great called this council. This and subsequent councils were now possible thanks to the official toleration of Christianity ensured by the 'Edict' of Milan, which Constantine and his fellow Emperor Lucinius issued in 313.

sees, of which only sixteen were represented at the council - and this despite the fact that the council was being held in their own country. It is therefore not unlikely that the Church in Britannia, from across the waters, also sent only a proportion of their bishops.

It can be noted here that the fact that names of the bishops from Britain are given in Latin does not necessarily imply that they were Latin Romans. They were more likely Britons, who had either adopted Latin names, or had had their British names Latinized by the council scribes.

British bishops were probably present at the councils of Nice in 325 and Sardica in 343. We have interesting details about three of the apparently numerous British bishops who were present at the Council of Ariminium (Rimini) in 359. Sulpicius Severus, informed personally by a member of the council, writes that the bishops of Gaul and Britain declined the imperial treasury's offer of payment for expenses, except for three of the party from Britain. These three accepted due to their lack of funds and because they did not wish to burden the Church. Severus praises this act of the three as a sign of their ascetic poverty. The incident suggests to us a few things. It shows that while there were impoverished bishops in Britain, the fact that the other British bishops did *not* accept financial assistance hints that there also existed British sees which did have reasonable funds. Indeed the total expense for the Britons must have been substantial, considering that Arminium was a considerable distance from their homeland, and that the council lasted from May until October. It is likely that the three poor bishops came from smaller towns, which confirms the theory that as well as bishops in big towns there were also 'provincial' bishops to cater for smaller, perhaps more remote areas.

An illuminating account exists from Victricius of Rouen's hand in 396. He is explaining his delay in arriving back in Rouen from Britain to greet the arrival of relics from Milan. "(My delay) is pardonable, and you will forgive me for it; if I have gone to Britain, if I have stayed there, it is to carry out your own orders. The bishops, my brothers in the priesthood, called on me to make peace there. Could I, your soldier, have refused them?" This passage implies firstly that there existed a substantial enough body of bishops in Britain to have had some dissension among themselves. In the second instance it shows that their numbers and importance were such that they could attract a busy metropolitan from Gaul and have him stay some time.

The contemporary historian Charles Thomas suggests the following diocesan order by the end of the fifth century.[7] As we have seen, in Britain as elsewhere in the Empire, a bishop's seat was normally to be found in at least the capitals of each *civitas.* By the end of the fifth century Britain had increased these from four to five: Carlisle, York, Lincoln, Cirencester, and London. But bishops were likely to be found also in other towns of some importance, such as the *coloniae*, in some fortresses (e.g. Richborough) and in certain rural settlements (such as at Icklingham, where a small Romano-British church has been excavated). On this basis, and drawing a parallel with Spain whose character was similar to Britain's, Thomas tentatively suggests that about twenty-five seats may have existed in Britannia by the end of the

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[7] Charles Thomas *Christianity in Roman Britain to AD 500*, London, 1981.

fifth century. It needs to be kept in mind that in these early times a bishop's flock could be very small, even as low as one hundred.

Martyrs

As with the rest of the Church, Britain had her martyrs from the times before Galerian's Edict of Toleration, 311. Saint Alban is popularly celebrated as Britain's protomartyr. Our main account is from the Venerable Bede, who bases himself on Gildas's work, on Constantius of Lyon (c. 480), and a *Passio* not now extant. He tells us that Alban was a pagan soldier who sheltered a Christian priest, and was converted by him. Before soldiers pursuing the priest arrived to search his house, Alban exchanged his clothes with the priest's and so enabled the latter to escape. The new convert was arrested and after refusing to offer sacrifice to idols, was put to death outside the city walls of Verulanium. The present-day town of St Alban's grew up around the site of his martyrdom, that is, outside the Roman walls. In time this new town displaced the old Roman one, whose excavated ruins can be seen today.

According to Gildas and Bede's description, the martyrdom would have been in the year 304, during Diocletian's anti-Christian reign. However, various factors lead contemporary historians to assign it to an earlier persecution, such as those of Decius (250-1) or Valerian (257-9), or even the earlier one of Septemius Severus (c. 209).

St Alban's fame was not limited to Britain. In his *Life of Germanus* (c.480), Constantius of Lyon refers to the existence of St Alban's shrine in 429. Furthermore it is pertinent that Constantius does not need to explain further to his Gaulish readers who this Alban is; he is evidently already well known to them. The numerous post-Roman church dedications (*Albanskirche*) in Germany confirm Alban's fame on the Continent. Indeed not all of these are necessarily named after the British martyr. It is however likely to be the case when the church's patronal feast is the same date as our St Alban's celebration, such as the ancient foundation of Albansberg in Mainz. Veneration of St Alban was not only widespread, but also lasting. Writing about four centuries after the martyrdom, the famed Italian poet and bishop Venantius Fortunatus (530-c.610), testifies in verse: "And fertile Britain, famous Alban yields".

But Gildas alludes to more martyrs than just Alban. He says that God saved His Church during Diocletian's persecution (303-11) only through "the most brilliant lamps of the holy martyrs". After Alban, he mentions the martyrs Julius and Aaron, who he says were *legionis urbis.* Bede makes this *legionum urbis cives,* "citizens of the City of Legions". This place is now thought to be Caerleon in south-east Wales. Then, not knowing their names, Gildas simply adds that there were also other martyrs, male and female, who were citizens "in various other places". He also refers to the reconstruction of "damaged churches" after 313 AD (the time of freedom after Constantine the Great's "Edict of Milan") and to the building of new "churches of the holy martyrs". These last were probably martyrium, to house a martyr's relics, or were built to mark the site of martyrdom.

Clues from Archaeology

Archaeological finds are difficult to assess, in part because the distribution of finds can sometimes reflect current population patterns rather than those of the cultures one is trying to explore. For example, taken at face value the present weight of evidence points to a concentration of Christians in and around many modern city sites and not so much in what are now rural areas. But it is possible that this distribution pattern may in part be a consequence of the fact that the digs which bring this evidence to light are so often necessitated by the intensive building in contemporary cities. However, taking this and other factors into account, archaeologists can give us valuable information and likely models concerning early Christianity in Britain.

As has been mentioned already, archaeological evidence to date suggests that Christianity clustered around, and perhaps was introduced by, the wealthier Roman citizens, and that it flourished particularly in the south-east, around the northern frontier zone bordering Hadrian's Wall, and in south-east Wales. This pattern corresponds, not surprisingly, with the areas of most intense Roman population. This distribution pattern is deduced from findings of fixtures, chiefly church-sites, heavy lead baptismal fonts, tombstones, villa mosaics, and building stones with engravings. Movable objects, even large single collections like hoards, are an uncertain base for deduction since their find site can be the result of theft or trade rather than Christian settlement.

Church buildings

Perhaps the most spectacular archaeological finds to date are the beautiful fourth century floor mosaic of Hinton St Mary in Dorset, and the wall paintings in the villa chapel of Lullingstone, Kent. The former shows Christ in a roundel, and is one of the earliest non-symbolic[8] depictions of Christ within the whole Roman Empire - perhaps the earliest. It measures 6 metres by 9 metres, and can now be found in the British Museum. Christ is depicted as young, fair-haired and beardless. Behind His head is the Chi-Rho sign common to early Christian symbolism.

The Lullingstone paintings are found in a Roman villa and date some time between 363 and 378. They are found in a room that had been converted into a chapel at this time; it is indeed one of the oldest house churches extant. Six human figures are depicted on the west wall, half life-size, and clothed in colourful beaded robes. They show a man and woman, a child, a youth, and two other figures of which only fragments survive. In three figures the hair is orange-red, which suggests that these at least were of the same family; it could well be that these people are in fact the owners, recently converted to the faith. They stand in the orans position - that is, with hands stretched out in prayer. They face the eastern end, where presumably the altar was (a fire later destroyed the whole villa and it was not possible to discern any remains of a wooden altar amidst the rubble).

On the south wall is a large depiction of the Chi-Rho monogram, set within a floral wreath, about 1 metre in diameter. To the north is an anti-chamber,

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[8] In the first centuries Christ was usually depicted symbolically. Favourite images included the Good Shepherd and Hermes.

where another Chi-Rho is painted. This room probably served as the narthex where the catechumens remained during services.

Strangely, it seems that in the room immediately below the chapel pagan rites continued over the same period as Christian worship was practised upstairs. At the time of the above room's conversion into a chapel, down in what is now referred to as the "Deep Room", a fresh clay floor was spread over the older one. Two new votive clay pots for receiving offerings were inserted in the ground in front of marble Roman portraits. From this it would appear that some form of ancestor worship, common in Roman culture, was being practised. We cannot from our vantage say if the owners themselves continued the old religion alongside the new, or whether this pagan chapel was a concession to still pagan servants. Whatever may be the case, the Christian chapel was intended for the public and not just house members, because a door to the outside for visitors was made in the vestibule attached to the narthex.

In his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* Bede refers a number of times to churches built in the Roman period. He relates that after "the peace of Christian times was restored" (i.e. 313 AD) a "church of wonderful workmanship" (*ecclesia...mirandi operis)* was erected to mark the sight of St Alban's martyrdom. Elsewhere he tells us that a church outside Canterbury "was built while the Romans were still inhabiting Britain". On the east side of the city he says there stood an old church that was "built in St Martin's honour during the Roman occupation of Britain." Martin died in 397, and the occupation ceased around 410, so if Bede's account is accurate the church was built almost immediately after the saint's death.

What sort of buildings were these early churches? From excavations to date, we have floor plans for six congregational Roman churches (as opposed to house chapels and baptisteries). These are St Pancras in Canterbury, Icklingham, Richborough, Silchester, and two sites at Verulamium (St Albans). Excluding the exceptionally small Icklingham church (3.6 by 6.5 m interior measurements), these average 9.1 m by 12.8 m inside. The dimensions exclude any apses, porches or other extensions - that is, they cover the area that would normally contain the congregation. This average is similar to a sample of twelve contemporary European churches (which average 8.8 by 13.0 m). All six churches are simple basilica designs. Excavations show that three definitely had apses, and that two perhaps had them. Silchester has two side isles and a narthex. It has a semi-circular apse in the east. A separate baptistery exists in the west. The church in the SE quarter of Verulamium has two side isles and a rectangular eastern apse.

Remains of a large basilica have been found in Lincoln (the Flaxengate Street site). It measures about 48 by 17 m. However it is uncertain if this was a church or not. Since secular basilicas and early churches were virtually identical in their floor plans, it can be difficult to ascertain a building's use solely from excavations of their foundations. The foundations of a large basilica at Wroxeter are likewise ambiguous. The results of a new system of earth radar has however suggested that this large basilica was in fact a church and not a secular structure, as was previously thought. The truth will have to await excavations of the site.

Numbers and Distribution of Christians

We have already referred to Charles Thomas's suggested picture of Roman-Briton diocesan structure. He also suggests some tentative conclusions that might be drawn from the various sources as to the size, nature and distribution of the Church in general. He uses distribution maps of archaeological finds, place names, and places defined by Bede as *civitas*. These maps suggest concentrations of Christians down the eastern half of present-day England, along the boarder areas of Wales and England, and, the greatest concentration, in the south-eastern areas, especially in the region running east-west from the Thames estuary to the mouth of the Severn.

As has already been mentioned, archaeological evidence points to a Christianity most prevalent among an elite of administrative and entrepreneurial Romano-British. It was their involvement in government or their enterprises that brought them into more intimate contact with the Romans - and therefore with the Christians among these Romans - than their rural compatriots.

Trade links via the western seaways (i.e. via the Atlantic and Irish Sea) with eastern Mediterranean countries seem to have decreased during the Roman period of Britain. This would explain why Christian excavation finds of this time do not cluster around coastal areas, as one would expect if such marine trade links were a major factor in bringing the Gospel. This temporary demise of western seaways is primarily due to the Roman Empire's conquest of Gaul, which stabilised land routes and the Channel crossing between Britain and the Continent. It was only when barbarian invasions blocked these routes that direct marine links with the Mediterranean again became active. This was particularly so in the fifth and sixth centuries, and was to have a marked influence on the course of Celtic monasticism. In contrast to the Roman period, distribution maps from the fifth century show clusters of Christian, and particularly monastic, activity around key ports.[9]

Professor Thomas points out that before 313 AD the existence of a bishop in a given area did not necessarily imply a purpose-built church. Spasmodic persecutions and the small number of believers could make church building difficult. Instead, a simple meeting place centred on an existing building, like a villa, might have served as a seat. Of such "house churches" we have next to no written sources to go by in early Britain. However, in writers like Gregory of Tours (539-94) we have reasonably detailed descriptions of how a congregation developed over the first centuries in Gaul. Given the close links between the two countries it is likely that similar developments occurred in Britain. Professor Thomas summarises how two such sees developed in Gaul. First, Tours. Under their first recorded bishop (c.250-96) the brethren gathered secretly in a place outside the city, *per cryptas et latibula*, a *latibulum* being a hiding-place. After about thirty-seven years the second known bishop, who was a local man, was able to provide the congregation with a church by converting part of a senator's house. Soon after St. Martin of Tour's death in 397 a purpose-built church was raised, a 'small basilica', over his tomb. A different pattern of church growth occurred with the

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[9] For a detailed discussion of these seaways, see E.G. Bowen, *Saints Seaways and Settlements* University of Wales, Cardiff, 1977.

community in Bourges. After the Decian persecution its first bishop, Ursinus, persuaded a rich sympathiser to rent them his home, since the congregation at this time had only 'small resources for building'. By the time of Gregory of Tours a proper church had been built on the same site; the present Cathedral of St Etienne is probably on this spot.

Language

In Britain, as elsewhere in western Europe, Latin was the language of both the liturgical services and writings of the Church. This remained the case for church services up until the time of the foundation of the Anglicanism under King Henry VIII, when for it (though not for Roman Catholics) English became the liturgical language. By-and-large Latin was also the means of written communication for clergy and monks. A relatively early exception to this rule is Welsh monks from the ninth or tenth centuries, who wrote poetry in Welsh. These works are found in a collection of literature called the *Black Book of Carmarthen.*

The fact that Celtic Christians used Latin as their liturgical language supports other evidences that the main foundations of the Celtic Church was laid by western Christians. It was however a foundation whose subsequent building incorporated strong influences from the Christian East - Egyptian monasticism in particular. We will look at these influences later.

Since Ireland was never in the Roman Empire it at first appears curious that it also had Latin as its liturgical language. But this is readily explained by the fact that it received the faith through Britain, and through it also received its Church language.

What are the reasons for this use of Latin rather than the vernacular? It was the custom in the eastern Church to use the native language, but why not in the West? Firstly, Latin was virtually the only written language of the western Roman Empire. During the Roman period of Britannia both Latin and British were spoken , but only Latin was written. It was only at a later date that Celtic languages were transcribed into written form.[10]

Since the services depend very much on the Scriptures, the Gospels and Psalter in particular, it was natural to use the language of the only existing translation into a western language - the Latin Bible. Study of Scriptural quotes in Patrick and Gildas show that the Bible they used was the *Vetus Latina* or 'Old Latin' Bible. This version was used in Gaul from the third century. Its textual variations distinguish it from, say, the 'African Old Latin' version used in the north African provinces. These versions were superseded by Jerome's Vulgate. The Gospels of the Vulgate were ready by 384, and his 'Gallican' Psalter by 392. R.P.C. Hanson has discussed the probable stages by which the Vulgate was assimilated into the British Church[11]. He suggests that it was probably not until the 440's that it became widely used. Even then it did not entirely supplant the *Vetus Latina*; as we have noted, the educated Gildas was still using the latter in the mid sixth-century. W.H. Davies notes[12]

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[10] A simple alphabet called ogam was developed through southern Ireland and South Welsh contact in late Roman times. It does not use letters as such, but strokes across a base-line. They are known today mainly on inscribed tombstones; from after the fifth century the majority of such ogam inscriptions are Christian. Ogam stones are found also in Irish-settled areas of Wales and Cornwall.

[11] Hanson, R.P.C. *St Patrick - His Origins and Career,* 1968, Oxford, ch. vi.

[12] Davies, W.H. 1968 'The Church in Wales', in :Barley and Hanson eds. (1968) p. 140.

that use of a particularly early rendering of Job from the *Vetus Latina* 'presupposes in itself a continuous history of Christianity reaching well back into Roman Britain'.

Eventually the Celts began to transcribe their languages into written form using Latin characters. This began with Irish around the beginning of the seventh century. Written British began to appear in Wales about a century later.

A second reason for ecclesiastical Latin was that by the late Roman period, native British were automatically considered Roman citizens. If a Briton was to be involved in government or education he was expected to know Latin, since it was the official language of his citizenship. Conversely, knowing Latin in itself came to be a sign of urbanity and culture for a Briton. Having in mind that the early British converts tended to come from 'upper classes', Latin rather than the vulgar tongue probably better suited their tastes anyway. After the Edict of Milan when Christianity became the official religion of the Empire, it was even more natural for the Church to consolidate this link by using the Empire's official language.

The question arises of what language was spoken in ecclesiastical gatherings, such as episcopal councils. There is no direct evidence to answer this. However, in the case of Celts present in councils in Gaul it is unlikely that all the British and Gaulish bishops knew each other's demotic languages. Apart from the rather clumsy alternative of interpreters, the natural solution was to use Latin. The fact that mid fifth-century British bishops criticised St Patrick for his poor Latin suggests that most bishops knew it reasonably well.

In any event it seems that in many quarters Latin was spoken beyond the elite circles of clergy and administrators. This is attested to by the fact that a large proportion of discovered incidental writings, like scribbles, graffiti and incidental notes, are not only in Latin, but of an informal demotic type. This suggests that Latin had penetrated the daily life of British to a surprising degree. Precisely how wide-spread this knowledge was we have no way of knowing for sure, although it was certainly more the case in the Lowlands than the Highlands. A foremost scholar of this subject, K.H. Jackson, writes in his *Language and History in Early Britain* (1953) that in the Roman times the inhabitants of the Highland zone "knew and used practically no Latin, except what was necessary for relations with the occupying army." We have no references that tell us what language sermons were in, although one wonders what language St Germanus of Auxerre used on his visits to Britain when he preached to such large groups of the general public.

Summary

Romanity continued in Britain for some decades after 410, albeit in a disembodied form; grand Latin titles were still claimed, but which no longer signified their original role. We cannot talk of the sudden departure of the Romano-British Church in 410, when Roman secular rule ended, and the sudden appearance of a Celtic Church. But changes did gradually transform the British Church into an entity distinct from Rome. Two factors in this transformation were the collapse of the urban centres and the natural Celtic predilection for "charismatic" monastic rule rather than institutionalised forms.

Another factor, already referred to, was that the collapse of Roman rule in western Europe undermined land travel and ironically opened up direct contacts by sea between Britain and eastern Mediterranean.

As we now enter the fifth century we are able to personalise our history somewhat, since more information about individuals emerges. The increase in written records at this time also paints a clearer picture of the social background to Church events in Britain.

II. The Insular Celtic Age

Insular Celtic Christianity has been so called because of its relative isolation from Europe; the barbarian invasions made communications with the Continent perilous. This was one important element in forming Insular Christianity. Another was the introduction of monasticism. This vigorous ascetic life ignited the Celtic spirit and imagination, and it soon become the heart of their Church life. In most quarters it was primitive Egyptian monasticism which Celts took as their inspiration, rather than the more institutionalised form which soon developed in Gaul. To understand why monasticism became such a formative force among the Celts we need to know something of the social background to its development. And in general the political and military vicissitudes of the time are an important factor in the wax and wane of the Church's influence.

Social Context

Barbarian invasions had gradually caused the western Roman Empire to weaken. As these barbarians, chiefly Goths, pressed closer to the most important centres, the Emperors called back armed forces from the outlying colonies. But it was not only these enemies from without that weakened the Empire's colonies: usurping Emperors had at times also drawn troops from the colonies for their own battles (one such usurper was a Briton, named Magnus Maximus). After the Goths sacked Rome itself in 410, the last of the Roman forces were withdrawn from Britain and resident mercenaries were no longer paid; the natives were left to their own devices. What happened then?

Dr. John Morris in his *The Age of Arthur* (1973) conveniently divides the time from after the withdrawal of Roman forces until the coming of Augustine into four periods. For the first three of these he bases his interpretation on the writings of Gildas. Not all scholars follow Morris's interpretation of events, especially his emphasis on the importance of king Arthur and the battle of Badon. Nevertheless, for our general purposes his divisions are valid.

I. 410-440 AD. After the withdrawal of Roman rule the Britons followed a certain inertia and continued for a while in a system of Roman organisation. Nonetheless, without a real central authority the system inevitably began to collapse, and their neighbours took advantage of the ensuing confusion. Irish raiders stepped up their attacks from the west, and the Picts, coming from

present-day Scotland, attacked from the north. It was however Germanic tribes from the east who proved to be the Britons' biggest enemies.

II. 440-495 AD. This is the period of Germanic invasion. In order to help the British tribes defend themselves against the *Scotti* and Picts the most powerful of the British tribal leaders named Vortigern asked for help from the Germanic Saxons from across the sea. Initially three boatloads arrived, under commanders Hengst and Horsa. However, Vortigern's tactics backfired, for very soon the mercenary defenders became conquerors. Other tribes of Angles, Jutes and Frisians soon followed the Saxons, and in 441 or 442 they all combined against the Britons into *foederati* and struck out over the land. Over the fifth and sixth centuries they were to conquer most of present-day England. British culture, and with it its Christianity, retreated into Wales (its rugged terrain making it more easy to defend) and south-west England (Cornwall). A little later, mainly in the mid-sixth century, many Britons migrated across the sea into Amorica in Gaul.[13] Amorica's modern name of Brittany is derived from these immigrant Britons, and even today they and the Welsh can understand each other in their native tongues.

In retreating west and south-west the Christian Britons took the Faith into parts of the Isles where it had been hitherto little known, since Roman influence had been minimal. Whereas in Roman times the Church was strongest in the Lowlands of the south-east, in this Insular period the western and northern Highlands had the advantage. As already noted, the outcome of the Anglo-Saxon invasions was that British and Irish Christians were now walled off from the Continent, and therefore from the Roman Church: the Anglo-Saxons barred the way in their own land, and the various barbarian tribes in Gaul blocked the western Continent. Ireland, which had never been part of the Roman Empire anyway, was even more sequestered from Roman influence by these events..

III. 495-570. According to Morris's interpretation of events, the Britons finally won a decisive victory at Mount Badon in 495 or 500 or thereabouts. The Saxon advances were halted and relative stability held until about 570.

IV. 570-600 and after. This period begins with a second wave of Anglo-Saxon attacks, with forces spreading further north. It is from this time that more written records appear.

It was not however only the invading Saxons who put an end to the urban-based life which the Britons had inherited from the Romans - it was as much, if not more, the infighting among the British themselves. Such civil strife is a major target of Gildas's prophetic tirades. It was so bad that Gildas says it had become a reproof among the 'surrounding nations', by whom he probably means the Irish and Gauls. He reproves some of the British kings by name: Voteporix (of Dyfed), Aurelius Caninus , Cuneglasus (perhaps around Cardigan), Constantine (of Dumnonia), and Maglocunus or Maelgwn (of Gwynedd). What is important to us is that he writes to them not as to

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[13] Perhaps this trend began its momentum when at the request of Emperor Anthemius (467-72) in 470 A.D. 12,000 British under king Riothamni came to France to fight against the Visigoths.

pagans, but as to Christians, albeit lapsed. Clearly by Gildas's time the Britons considered themselves a Christian people.

Did all the British flee before the advancing Saxons? Archaeological finds and place names suggest that a great deal did not. There is a particular concentration of such continuity in a wide band running from the mouth of the Severn to the Thames estuary. Place names and the type of burial used are two guides used to guess continuity of some British in occupied territory. (Christians used burial rather than the cremation common to the still pagan Saxons). Assuming that at least some of these British living among the Anglo-Saxons were Christians, it can be safely accepted that the invaders had some contact with Christianity before St Augustine's missions of the 600's.

 For various reasons the presence of a place name with *eccles* or variants thereof (e.g. Eccles, Eccleshall, Exley) strongly suggests the continuance of a Romano-British community through the fifth and sixth centuries. The term derives from the Latin *ecclesia* (which in turn comes from the Greek), which the British would have pronounced as *eglesia*, whence the primitive Welsh word *egles.* There is a particular concentration of these names in the principality of Elmet, around modern Leeds; this supports other evidences that this principality was not only British after 400 but also a Christian one.

Apart from the Saxon invasion there is another factor in Christianity's growth in western Britain. From about the fifth century there was considerable marine trading between Gaul, the Eastern Mediterranean and the Celtic communities on the coasts of the Irish Sea. Evidences of this contact are chiefly imported pottery (some of which bear Christian symbols) and memorial slabs of Mediterranean inspiration.[14]

In summarizing the fifth and sixth centuries, we can say that the British principalities in the south west, Wales, the north of England, Cumbria and southern Scotland, were predominantly, if not often nominally, Christian. Although there were no longer the considerable Roman towns to act as seats for bishops, these British communities nevertheless had their bishops. The Roman provinces or *civitates,* whose capitals acted as episcopal seats, were replaced by British kingdoms. These kingdoms were often also subdivided by dynastic arrangements. This continued episcopal nature of the Romano-British Church is borne out, among other evidences, by references to bishops in Gildas, inscriptions on tombstones, and later literary references like Pope Gregory's in about 600 to "all the bishops of Britain". By contrast, the invading Anglo-Saxon people were pagan, although in their midst their remained a fair number of British communities, some of them Christian.

At this point it must be noted that some historians hold that Christianity in the north and south was all but wiped out by the Saxon invasions, and that a Church existed west of the Saxons only thanks to a massive re-implantation from Gaul. There was certainly Gaulish contact by sea with the west coast of Britain and with Ireland. However, it seems clear on balance that the Church existing through these centuries in non-Saxon England is a continuation of the preceding Romano-British Church, albeit influenced by these contacts with Gaul and the East.

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[14] These slabs are in three categories: inscribed memorial stones of words current in the Mediterranean - *nomen, nomina,* and *memoria;* in south-west Ireland, the ogham equivalents of *nomen* inscriptions; other small memoriae and slab-shrines of Mediterranean influence.

We can now begin to crystallise the story of the Church in the Isles by talking about individual saints, about whom we know a fair amount from written sources.

St Ninian (Nynia) of Whithorn (5th century)

Our earliest written information about Ninian is from Bede's *History.* In this it is said that Ninian was British, an apostle and bishop to the southern Picts, and had been "regularly instructed in the mysteries of the Truth in Rome." This latter phrase does not necessarily mean that he had actually gone to Rome, but that he had been schooled in Roman practices.

At the time of Bede's writing (early eighth century) St Ninian's see was named after St. Martin of Tours, although we cannot be sure if it was so in Ninian's time. He had built a church there which came to be called Candida Casa, or the White House (known today by its Old English version, Whithorn). The name was on account of the church being built of stone, and not of the wood and wattle which was usual among the Britons. Whithorn exists north-west of Hadrian's Wall, near the southern coast of the Galloway peninsula. Bede writes that Ninian's relics were there, along with those of "many other saints". Later traditions say that monasticism was introduced to this area by Ninian himself, inspired by St Martin's example. At present we have no way of knowing if this is true.

The remains of a small plastered-walled oratory have been found below the east end of the medieval priory. Although the precise dating of this oratory is unclear, it is certainly no later than the seventh century. Other excavation finds do however confirm a Christian presence at Ninian's time, if not earlier. East-west oriented graves (which implies that they were Christian) of pre-Anglian origin have been found; one of these displaces an earlier Roman cremation grave. These finds suggest a pagan Roman settlement with a cremation cemetery, which was later, around 400, used by Christians for their own inhumation burials.

 Another pre-Anglian find at Whithorn is an inscribed tombstone, to be dated probably to no later than the mid-5th century. The inscriptions begins "We praise Thee, O Lord..." and commemorates one Latinus, aged thirty-five, and his daughter, and that the stone was erected by "a grandson of Barrovadus". What we probably have here is a Christian Briton who Latinizes his name, and the reference to Barrovadus suggests two or three generations of Christians at Whithorn by the time of about 450.

Four other inscribed stones have been found, originating probably from a place called Curgie, some 40 km west of Whithorn. One of these has the ancient Chi-Rho symbol, and commemorates two "holy and outstanding bishops", called Viventius and Mavorius. Another of these stones, now lost, apparently commemorated a Ventidius, deacon. Since this burial site is too close to Whithorn to have been a separate episcopal seat, we can guess that for some reason the seat of Whithorn was temporarily moved west, and therefore that these bishops were successors soon, or perhaps immediately after Ninian.

To translate these archaeological finds into a possible history, Charles Thomas suggests the following way that Christianity came to Whithorn. At the time that Ninian probably was active (early 400's), Whithorn was *beyond*

the Roman frontier. In the latter fourth century the border between the aggressive Picts in the north and the Romans in the south alternated between the Antonine Wall (running east-west from present day Glasgow to Edinburgh) and Hadrian's Wall. Finally in 398 the Picts, helped by the Saxons and Irish *Scotti,* pushed back the Roman forces over Hadrian's Wall and thereafter kept them back. However, the four British tribes resident in this area between the walls - the Dumnonii, Votadini, Selogovae and the Novantae - remained. Now there are no known precedents in the history of imperial Rome for sending bishops *beyond* the Roman boarder purely to convert barbarians; bishops were appointed to existing Christian communities, albeit often small ones. It can be assumed that this was the case also with Ninian and Whithorn - that is, that a Christian community had begun there before his arrival, and it was this seminal community that in due course asked for a bishop to be appointed to them. But how could this community have formed in the first place?

The Navantae tribe inhabited the Galloway peninsula where Whithorn is, and they had relatively good relations with their fellow British neighbours on the southern side of the Wall, the Carvetii. We know from archaeological evidence that there was a Christian presence, centred on Carlisle, in this region bordering the south of the wall. It is therefore quite conceivable that members of the Navantae in and around Whithorn received the Faith from these Carvetii people. Or perhaps, as suggested by the Roman cremation graves, a small Roman trading post had been established there, before the final re-occupation by the southern Picts. By whichever means, growing numbers and the threat of severance through war from the nearest bishop probably inspired the Christians at Whithorn to ask the nearest bishop, probably in Carlisle, to provide them with their own. Ninian was sent, and, through his holiness and labours, extended the Church among other southern Picts. His see continued after him through others like Viventius and Mavorius, mentioned above.

Saint Patrick

We can now turn to another great figure of the period, Saint Patrick. He lived in the same epoch as Ninian, and probably came from within Ninian's orbit, near the north-western part of Hadrian's Wall, possibly present-day Bewcastle. It is a formative period in which Romano-British Christianity shows signs of becoming more indigenous, and of spreading beyond an elite Latinized class to reach the common people. St Patrick's mission to the completely un-Romanized Irish was a discomforting challenge to the urbane British clergy. It is in fact his need to justify his mission to these clergy to which we owe his inspiring *Confession.*

Our main sources for Saint Patrick's life are two of his own works - the *Confession,* and a later Letter to Coroticus. *The Confession* is a sort of autobiography in which Patrick defends himself against various accusations from unnamed British bishops. He gives no dates, and few place names, and scholars have debated much trying to deduce some. The following is the outline of his life which we receive from the *Confession,* with the gaps filled in with what are presently the most commonly accepted places and dates.

Patricius (his Roman name) was probably born late in the 4th century, c.390. He was British by birth, the son of a deacon and *decurio* (a sort of town councillor), and the grandson of a priest. While a youth he was captured by Irish pirates and taken to Ireland as a slave. We are not sure where this was, although some scholars suggest a place on the northern coast. There he tended his master's sheep for six years, after which he was told by God in a dream that the time had come to return to his own country. After his escape and about a 180 mile walk he came to a port, probably on the southern coast, and there bordered a ship. We are not told where this ship landed, only that the journey took three days. He and his companions travelled on foot for 28 days. The duration of the sea journey and the descriptions of the overland trek suggest that they had landed in Gaul, and probably present-day Brittany.

Eventually he returned to his family in Britain - perhaps after only a year, but the period is not known for certain. Some scholars have him remaining on the Continent for many years. Either there or in Britain he received some sort of ecclesiastical training, , and was ordained a priest. Whatever his education was, his written Latin was such that he was later ridiculed by British bishops for its mistakes! Despite opposition from these bishops he was eventually made a bishop for Ireland. He arrived about 435. His work seems to have concentrated on the north, with his see at Armagh.

Patrick was not however the first bishop in Ireland. We are told by a contemporary chronicler, Prosper of Aquitaine, that in 431 a certain Bishop Palladius had been sent by Pope Celestine "to the Irish believers in Christ, as their first bishop". Charles Thomas surmises that Christians may well have come to the south of Ireland from west Britain (south Wales) in the fourth century. Subsequent verifiable accounts are silent about Palladius's work thereafter, although later traditions variously claim either that shortly afterwards he fell ill, left Ireland, and died in Britain or Scotland, or simply that he abandoned his see. For whatever reason, his work in Ireland does not seem to have lasted long, or at least to have made an impression on subsequent writers of history. This silence about Palladius might however be explained in part by the authors wanting to highlight Patrick's success.

Patrick probably chose Armagh because of its proximity to a powerful Irish king. Patrick knew that if the Gospel was to take root he had to work among influential people 'at the top' as well as with the common folk. He organised the Church with diocesan sees as was the custom on the Continent. Monasticism was then in its extreme infancy in the Isles. He did however encourage it, although there is no evidence that he was himself a monk in the traditional sense. Monasticism was not to become a powerful force in Ireland or in Britain until around the 540's.

Irish tradition has aptly divided its early Church history into two 'orders'. In what it calls the 'first order' generation, the leaders were 'all bishops'. In the 'second order' there were 'few bishops and many priests', and many monasteries both large and small. Patrick and Palladius built the foundations of the first order. The second order is more or less equivalent to the period covered by the term Insular, and is created primarily by the profound influence of monasticism. The leading figure in this period is St Finnian of Clonard.

Insular Episcopal Structure

The Roman Empire was structured around its urban centres. The Church episcopal structure within the Empire followed this pattern, having bishops' seats in the capitals, and sees conterminous with civil boundaries. The Romano-British Church was no exception. The faith was introduced through those living in the centres, and, as elsewhere in the Empire, episcopal sees were identical with civil boundaries.

Things developed differently in the Insular Church. Celtic life was not urban but rural, and territories were tribal, or based on petty kingdoms. Social life consisted of a multitude of such more-or-less autonomous units. Some regions - particularly the south-east of Wales - did for a while continue the diocesan structure inherited from the Roman system. However, the majority of Celtic lands began to centre their Church life on the newly introduced monasticism. Either a hermit or a monastery offered the necessary core around which Church communities grew. The proliferation in Wales of place names beginning with *llan* is a testimony to this. A *llan* means an enclosure, or more specifically, a monastic enclosure. Usually following the term is the name of the monastic - hermit or community founder - around which the village or town grew.

Monasticism's prophetic and ascetic aspects were also seen by Celts as a fulfilment of their ancient bardic class's aspirations. Altogether, monasticism seems to have corresponded to the Celtic character and ideals. In Ireland and in Irish-founded monasteries elsewhere, apart from sacramental acts like consecrations, the actual running of Church life gradually shifted from bishops and into the hands of abbots. Many bishops lived in a monastery, and subjected themselves to the abbot. Their roles were restricted to ordinations and consecrations of churches. One factor in this spread of monastic influence was the tendency for one community to found other communities, which thereafter remained under the control of the mother monastery. It was a family atmosphere which appealed to the kin-group society traditional to the Irish. Indeed, for better or for worse, many of the monasteries kept abbatial appointments within a certain family. This was not an automatic hereditary system as such, but abbots were expected to be drawn from the traditional kin-group.

Monasticism never seems to have become so dominant among the Britons for this partial eclipse of episcopal power to happen. As mentioned above, the more common practice of diocesan sees run by their respective bishops rather than abbots is particularly evident in south Wales. In the early-seventh century *Life of St Samson* it is clear that the bishop Dubricius had control over all the monasteries in his diocese. When for example the abbot Piro died from falling into a pit in a drunken state(!), it is Dubricius who calls a council to elect the successor.

In contrast to the south-east, it would appear that monasticism in western Wales, inspired by St David's example, had a more ascetic emphasis. In David's model the stress is on manual labour, non-possessiveness, prayer, and fasting. South-eastern Welsh monasticism tended to follow the urbane Roman tradition, and under St Illtid's influence emphasised intellectual activity and permitted monasteries to accept grants of land.

In the period before monasticism took root, it seems from Gildas's denunciations that the clergy had degraded into a smug, lax and even

immoral elite. Ordination was apparently one way of moving up in society, and Gildas saw that many, if not most clergy of his time, were in orders just for that reason. He claims that some men, having been refused ordination in Britain, had gone abroad for it. Some even sold their possessions to procure this post, thinking by it to obtain "such display and incomparable dignity". St Patrick's *Confessio* confirms this picture of decadence. British clergy had scorned him and doubted his mission merely on account of his faulty Latin. Reading between the lines, these clergy apparently considered Latinity more requisite than holiness. In fact, they may even have disapproved of his mission to uncouth Irish in the first place; having 'lower class' people become Christians sullied their image of the Church as a cultured, urbane club. The time was certainly ripe for the holiness and zeal for which monasticism stood!

.The only people whom Gildas exempts from his denunciations are certain devout people, whom we can assume to be monks. "All the controls of truth and justice have been shaken and overthrown," Gildas writes, "leaving no trace, not even a memory, among the orders I have mentioned: with the exception of a few, very few... By their holy prayers they support my weakness from total collapse; and no one should suppose that I am carping at their worthy lives, which all men admire and which God loves..."[15] Elsewhere (34:1) he writes of the "godly life and Rule of the monks". Gildas indeed writes that he plans to adopt their way of life before his repose. In western Europe the initial fervour of monasticism had by the end of the fifth century "fallen into torpor and sterility"[16]. In Gildas' time St Benedict of Nursia (*c*.480 - *c*.547) was founding a number of monastic houses, apart from Monte Cassino. But these and other communities were not to have any large scale effect in Europe until the next century.

The direct influence of Ireland on western Britain is probably another big factor in the development of Britain's episcopal structure. Ireland had never been conquered by the Roman Empire, and so had never known its urban system. Although the *Scotti* initially came to Wales as marauders and plunderers, many ended up settling and converting, especially in the Dyfed and Brecon areas. At least until the sixth century, these Irish came to play quite a role in British Church life. Mutual word borrowings suggest a degree of influence both ways. For example, the word *segynnab* in Welsh comes from *secndab* (from the Latin *secundus* abbas) in the Irish tongue. These terms signified the deputy abbot who was expected to inherit the abbacy. As the life of Saint Patrick testifies, the initial Christian movement between the two cultures was more from the Britons to the Scotti. But soon the Irish Church was to become more independent and eventually, more influential. It appears from ecclesial canons that some tensions developed between Irish and Welsh clergy. By the sixth century we find canons restricting the activities of British clergy within Ireland. The Britons were eager for learning however, and many went to Ireland to spend time at the feet of holy and scholarly monks like St Finnian.

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[15] *The Ruin of Britain.* 26:3,4 in "Gildas: Arthurian Period Sources Vol. 7" (Ed. John Morris), publ. Phillimore, London, 1978.

[16] C. de Montalembert in *Les Moines d'Occident,* 1,288.

Monasticism

Through monasticism the Britons and Irish found a way of transforming and offering to God the indigenous elements of their society. The prophetic, poetic and scholarly features of the bardic class could be fulfilled through monastics; ascetic struggle could direct the passionate Celtic spirit into spiritual warfare and away from military warfare; and thirdly, the scale of a monastic unit was akin to traditional tribalism. As we have seen, for this last reason the Insular Celts tended to organize their Church life around monasteries and their sphere of influence. Monasticism offered the ideal solution to the absence of the urban centres which acted as episcopal seats in Europe: the scale of a monastery was tribal, and yet it offered a centre akin enough to a town to be suitable for a bishop's seat.

John Morris gives the following broad outline of early western monasticism[17]: "[Early Lives of Saints] amply attest a sudden large scale growth before the plague years of the later 540's, and a rapid acceleration thereafter, simultaneously in Wales, Ireland, Cornwall and Brittany, where many hundreds of new monasteries entailed a massive shift of population; the impact was noticeable but less in north Wales and northern Britain, and in northern Gaul, from Normandy to Belgium. The impetus of the reforming monks was brought to Burgundy in the 590's by Columbanus, and there erupted into an extensive movement in the 640's. In the 630's the Irish brought monasticism to the Northumbrians, then dominant over most of the English, and thenceforth increasing numbers of English and Irish monks founded or inspired monasteries in northern and central Europe, culminating in the conversion of most of the Germans and some Slavs in the eighth century."

Beginnings of monasticism

When and how did monasticism come to Britain and Ireland? Before we try to find an answer to this, we must more clearly define monasticism. From the first centuries it was not uncommon for devout people to withdraw from the world, vow celibacy, and live a life of prayer. In our present context however, by monasticism we mean communities of such people, with an abbot or abbess, living according to a rule, or hermits living according to the Egyptian desert ideal. Monasticism in these two senses began in the mid-fourth century in the Egyptian deserts. St Anthony the Great (c.251 - 356) founded the lavra system, where hermits lived in loosely-knit communities, and St Pachomius (c.290 - c.346) founded coenobitic or communal monasticism. Soon reports of these holy people and their manner of life spread through Europe. By the end of the fourth century Gaul had a number of communities imitating them - St Honoratus' monastery at Lerins; Marseilles in the south; St Martin's further north at Liguge and at Marmoutier near Tours.

For the Isles our earliest literary reference to monasticism is from St Patrick. Writing in the mid- fifth century he mentions that sons and daughters of Irish chiefs were becoming "monks" and virgins. But it is not certain that in his lifetime such monastics formed monasteries in the formal sense. As mentioned above, Gildas in c. 540 writes of certain holy people, whose way of life he hopes to adopt himself. But again it is not yet certain that he is

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[17] *The Ruin of Britain,* ibid. Note 65.2.

referring to organised communities. These holy people are moreover still a very small minority and do not appear yet to be a large factor in British life. They are the spiritual scouts, the vanguard going before the main army.

The earliest archaeological evidence for monastic communities in Britain is the Celtic Tintagel, on the coast of Cornwall. Archaeologists date its foundation to the period 470 to 500. Raleigh Radford[18] and Dr John Hayes have done an intensive study of the pottery sherds and glass fragments found there. Radford noted the parallel between some of these sherds and ones manufactured in Egypt. Similar pottery is found in North Africa and Tunisia. A sherd stamped with a cross found at Tintagel has a parallel in St. Blaise, near Marseilles, which is of fifth century date. Of the five pieces of glass found in the same layer as the above sherds, D.B. Harden says four are almost certainly eastern in manufacture. He dates them somewhere from the late third to fifth centuries. Some of the finds are containers for wine (it is thought in some cases for Eucharistic use) and perhaps oil. In conclusion, sources for these various imports "must include many of the major eastern ports, like Antioch, Tarsus, Athens, and Constantinople, and (for at least some of the table-wares) North Africa, while the wine itself may have come from Rhodes or Chios."[19] Trade from Britain to the East is confirmed by an albeit later reference, of the early seventh century. In the Vita of the Egyptian St. John the Almsgiver; we read that a vessel came to Alexandria from Britain with a cargo of tin (probably from the productive mines of Cornwall).

These and other such finds in Ireland of imported material point to considerable sea trade in the fifth and sixth centuries. This is chiefly between the Mediterranean, the west coast of Britain and Ireland. No such imports are found in what was Roman Britain. Barbarian invasions had made seaways through the Narrow Seas along the east of Britain perilous, but the Atlantic seaways to the west were still open.

If objects could be thus transported from places where monasticism was born, so could ideas, people, and books.   It is therefore feasible that it was partly in this way that monasticism either came to Cornwall, West Wales and Ireland or was further stimulated. The monasticism first introduced to the British through Gaul tended to be of a more urbane type, and usually involved individuals or small groups. It proved to be of limited inspiration to the Celts. The more radical, ascetic and pristine form which at this later date came directly from the East by sea proved to be what the Celts wanted. Certainly most early Celtic monasteries are found on the coasts bordering those seaways which had contact with Egypt and Byzantium. For example a fifth- or early-sixth century inscription found at Aberdaron on the west coast of Wales, opposite Bardsey Island, implies a monastery. It commemorates the burial of a priest Senacus "with a host of brethren". In the half century after Tintagel we see monasteries growing up in the south coast of Wales, including St Illtud's Lantwit Major[20], Nantcarban (Llancarfan), and Llandaff. These inspired others, like St David's on the west coast, and Bangor on the north-west.

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[18] *Imported Pottery found at Tintagel, Cornwall. Dark Age Britain* (Ed. D.B. Harden), London, 1956, pp. 59-70.

[19] C. Thomas, "*Britain and Ireland in Early Christian Times*", p. 87.

[20] Hugh Williams suggests that Caldy Island may have been Lantwit Major, that is, the first Llantwit.

Although trade provided the seaway traffic, it was not only goods that were transported. Pilgrims also used these vessels. As early as 385 we have a mention from St Jerome of British pilgrims to Jerusalem:

> "Of all the ornaments of the Church our company of monks and virgins is one of the finest (i.e. those in Jerusalem)...The Briton, 'sundered from our world' no sooner makes progress in religion than he leaves the setting sun in quest of a spot of which he knows only through Scripture and common report."[21]

These pilgrims would have brought back reports of the ascetics they met and heard of. Theodoret of Cyprus (393-c.458) mentions in his *Philotheus* (xxvi) that St Simeon the Stylite (390-459) attracted not only local Arabs, but also Persians, Armenians, Spaniards, Gauls and Britons. A saint as great as Simeon would have had a profound affect on such pilgrims. In this context it is interesting that there are some marked similarities between fifth century Syriac churches and Irish churches. W.C. Borlose in his *The Age of the Saints*, comments that the churches of St Simeon's, Kelat Sea'n, Chagga and Kherhet Hass in Syria strongly resemble those of Ucht Mama, Cashel, St Cronans, St Kevin's and others in Ireland. He also refers to an inscription (near the oratory of Gallerus in Ireland) with Byzantine characters of the fourth or fifth centuries. Clearly contact with the Christian East quickly left an impression on the British and Irish Churches*.*

Welsh Monasticism:

 The watershed for Welsh monasticism was around the 540's. Before this time British monasticism consisted mainly of individual hermits and ascetics, whom the people called *sancti*, saints. Gradually their way of life became accepted and more popular. Saint Samson's election to the bishopric (to a new see somewhere north of the Severn) signifies that his vigorous asceticism and prayer had by that time become a commonly accepted ideal. Around the same time another desert-dweller, Paul Aurelian, was asked to become a bishop. As it turned out he refused and went to Brittany; there however he was to become bishop of the 'Osismi' people. These early signs of monasticism's popularity coincided with St Gildas's writing, whose condemnation of lax clerics and praise of ascetic monastics gave further impetus to the movement.

During this spring-time of Welsh monasticism a conflict developed between the ascetic, renunciatory form epitomised by St David of Wales in the west, and the more 'cultured' form associated with Saint Cadoc in the south. This friction was in many ways paralleled nine hundred years later in Russia, in the clash between the 'non-possessors' under St Nilus of Sora (d.1508) and the possessors under St Joseph of Volokolamsk (d. 1515). St. Cadoc was following in general the ethos of Romano-British Christianity which had always been strong in the south, and in particular the tradition of his teacher, St Illtud. Illtud was of noble lineage, and his foundation of Llantwit Major was on his own lands. It employed one hundred labourers and received rents. It also had a school in which classical learning was taught as well as the Scriptures. St Cadoc's foundation at Llancarfon was of the same ilk: it possessed ample land, had paying tenants and kept labourers, and even

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[21] Letter XLVI, par. 10, from *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers,* Volume VI, Michigan (1989).

had a hundred armed men stationed in a fort above the monastery! If this was not enough, as a monk and abbot Cadoc inherited and ruled his father's kingdom of Gwynnliauc. This was clearly a monasticism which continued the Roman sense of the clergy as a privileged, ruling society. It had parallels in Italy, like the house of Cassiodorus where the monks lived comfortably off rents of their peasants. Cassiodorus admittedly instructed his monks to use their position responsibly: "Teach your peasants good conduct; do not exploit them with new and heavy impositions, but call them often to your feasts."

Saint David's approach was quite different. Although his earliest extant Life is written late (c.1090, by Rhygyvarch) it is thought to contain old and reliable material. Certainly its description of the saint's monastic rule is confirmed by his contemporary Gildas's portrayal of the monks' manner of life. David's nickname *Aquaticus* or "water-drinker" refers to his meagre diet of bread and water. According to Rhygyvarch the monks lived by their own manual work - they even had to pull the plough themselves, since David disallowed oxen or other beasts for the job. Obedience was central. Monks obeyed the church bell instantly, if necessary leaving "only the tip of a letter or even half the form of the same letter...written". Many hours were dedicated to vigils, prostrations, and prayer in the cell. Meals consisted of bread, water and cabbage. The monastery accepted no gifts or lands, including anything from those entering as monks. With such a way of life David became the epitome of stricter monks, who came to be called *meliores,* or 'better' ones. His avowed ideal was to imitate Egyptian fathers like Anthony.

The life of the 'meliores' was too extreme for the more urbane Cadoc and even for Gildas. In his later letters Gildas scribes a derisive portrait of these 'better ones'. He accuses them of priding themselves on exterior asceticism. "They eat bread by measure, and boast of it beyond measure; they drink water and with it the cup of hatred" (Ep. 3); an abbot "who owns animals and carriages, because he is physically weak or because it is the custom of the country" is less sinful than "those who drag ploughs about and drive spades into the earth with arrogance and prejudice" (Ep. 4).

The two parties were to clash at the Synod of Brefi. This Council is described in the Lives of both David and Cadoc. According to the former's Life, David charges Cadoc and his followers with Pelagianism, and the council sides with David. According to the other Life, David's victory is unfair since Cadoc was absent abroad and therefore could not defend himself. Wherever the truth lies, both monastic traditions continued afterwards. David's tradition was strongest in the poorer uplands (where, pertinently, Irish settlers were most common), while Cadoc's was followed in the richer Glamorgan area.

St Deiniol (died *c.*584) is associated with the invigorating of monasticism in north Wales. He came from Demetia in North Britain and founded the two great Bangor communities: Bangor Fawr (on the mainland facing Anglesey Island) and Bangor Iscoed (Clwyd). According to the Venerable Bede, the latter came to number over 2,000 monks. He tells us that twelve hundred of these were later massacred at Chester by the pagan Ethelfrith. Having fasted three days they had gathered in a place apart from the battlefield in order to pray for victory against the pagans. On learning what they were doing Ethelfrith commanded his men to slay them, and then went on to defeat the Welsh army.

Bede interprets this defeat as judgement for the Britons' refusal to agree to the proposals St Augustine of Canterbury. At a gathering since called the 'Council of Augustine's Oak', the British had declined the request from this bishop, newly arrived from Rome, for help in evangelising the English. Augustine then prophesied to the British bishops that "if they refused to accept peace with fellow-Christians, they would be forced to accept war at the hands of enemies; and if they refused to preach to the English the way of life, they would eventually suffer at their hands the penalty of death."[22]

Monasticism in north-west Wales has its origins in communities founded by St Cadfan, that on Bardsey Island in particular. St Cadfan lived in the fifth century, and migrated from Brittany to Wales. A number of towns bear his name: Llangadfan, Pistyll Gadfan, Eisteddfa Gadfan and Llwbyr Gadfan are places he visited on his travels from a church which he founded in Towynd (in Gwynedd). A stone pillar in Towynd church, which is possibly genuine, bears the inscription: "Beneath a similar mound lies Cadfan, sad that it should enclose the praise of the earth. May he rest without blemish."

Powys in central Wales seems to have developed monasteries only towards the end of the century; Bangor-on-Dee was probably new when the English attacked it and slaughtered its monks.

Monasticism Elsewhere in Britain

Because of the Saxon invasions, monasticism elsewhere in Britain was sparse. For a twentieth-century reader it seems more scarce than it probably was, due to the paucity of records, and the unreliability of those writings which we do have. The figure who does stand out is St Kentigern (d.612), monk, bishop, and missionary in Cumbria and Strathclyde. His spiritual father nicknamed him 'Mungo', or 'dear one'. Extant sources are from the 11th or 12th century. If one puts aside uncertain details from these accounts, the following can be assumed about Kentigern. He was the illegitimate grandson of a British prince, and was educated in Culross by the Scottish bishop Serf, or Servanus. He was a monk of the ascetic Irish tradition, and was eventually consecrated bishop of Strathclyde by an Irish bishop. Political unrest led to his exile. When things settled he returned to his see, dwelling primarily in Dumphries and Glasgow. His relics can still be venerated in the crypt of Glasgow cathedral.

Irish Monasticism:

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[22] Bede's *History,* II.2.

By the early sixth century monasticism was firmly planted in south and central Ireland. It was probably introduced through a combination of seaway contact with Gaul and Egypt, and through Britons from Wales. Scholars tend to think that the latter was the strongest initial influence. But as well as Welsh going to Ireland, Irish came to Wales. Such Irish settlements were concentrated around Anglesey, Llyn Peninsula of Caernarvonshire, Pembroke, Cardigan, Carmarthen and Brecon (named after an Irish king, Brychan). According to Charles Thomas it was these Irish who introduced to Wales the system of an enclosed hut group - two or more huts within a close encircling wall. These came to be called *llan* Welsh, and soon came to be almost identified with a specifically monastic enclosure.

From the beginning of the sixth century an abundance of monastic foundations arise, most linked with individual saints. Among the best known of these saints and their foundations are Buithe of Monasterboice, Brigid of Kildare (died *c.*525), Finnian of Clonard (abbot c. 512 - c.545), Ciarán of Clonmacnois, Colum mac Crimthainn of Terryglass and Brendan of Clonfert (c.486 - c.575).

St Finnian of Clonard (d. 549) is the outstanding figure in this formative period of Irish monasticism. His tenth-century Life tells us that after founding monasteries at Rossacurra, Drumfea, and Kilmaglush, he went to Wales to learn the tradition of David, Cadoc and Gildas. Other foundations followed on his return to Ireland, the most famous being Clonard. His biographer tells us that in his time there the monks numbered 3,000.

 The salient feature of St Finian's foundations was their union of Scriptural study (he was called 'The Teacher of the Saints of Ireland') with asceticism. The former emphasis must have been reinforced by his contact with Saints Cadoc and Gildas, whilst Saint David would have stressed to him love of isolation, manual labour and asceticism.

The Penitential named after Finnian is considered genuine. It is based on Jerome and John Cassian, as well as on Irish and Welsh sources. However, it also contains much material gleaned from Finian's own experience. One senses from it that his is not a merely borrowed monasticism; through a life of repentance and humility he has imbibed the spirit of the founding Egyptian fathers.

The middle of the sixth century to its end is the spring of Irish monasticism; in this time most of the great foundation arose. Tradition tells us that many of these grew around pupils of St Finian; St Columba or Columcille (c.521-97) is perhaps the most famous of these second generation monks. He first founded the communities of Derry, Durrow, and probably Kells, all in Ireland, and then the great monastery of Iona in Scotland.

Scotland and Northern Islands
The fire of Irish monasticism could not be confined to Ireland, or even to the British Isles. From early times the Irish monks had revealed their love for voluntary exile for Christ's sake, to become *peregrini.* This ascetic feat usually had mission as its fruit rather than its cause. St Maughold (d. 498) is an early instance; he founded the Church in the Isle of Man. Holy emigration in any numbers begins however with St Columba. Different traditions give different reasons for his leaving Ireland, but for whichever, in 563 he sailed

with twelve disciples to west Scotland. There he established the famed Irish monastery on the island of Iona.

Other Irish went further afield and founded monastic communities in other islands - foundations at Birsay and Deerness on Orkney may be of the seventh century. By the end of the eighth century these Irish *peregrini* founded monasteries as far north as Iceland. The *Islandingabok,* the *Landnamabok* and the Norwegian *History of Theodericus* all record that when the first Norsemen arrived in Iceland they found Irishmen already settled there, called *papar.* They were monks. We are told that these ascetics did not however want to share the island with the pagan newcomers and so departed, leaving some of their Irish books, croziers and hand bells.

Anglo-Saxons
Monasticism came to the newly converting Angles and Saxons through Iona. We recall that the British apparently had had little interest in evangelising their conquerors; it was the Irish who were to fulfil this task.

The Northumbrian prince Oswald had spent time in exile at Iona. When he became king of Northumbria he asked help of the Ionian fathers to evangelise his people. Consequently in 634 or 635 St Aidan (d. 651) was ordained bishop and sent. He made his monastic and missionary base on the island of Lindisfarne, modelling its life on Iona's. The island was ideally suited to his work as both monk and missionary. The necessary monastic seclusion was provided when the tide was in, but when it was out a sand bank gave access to the mainland. Many other saints flourished in this spiritual garden, St Cuthbert (c.634-87) being the most famous.

From Iona other monasteries were soon formed in Northumbria: Whitby, Yarrow and Monkwearmouth are just some. Then disciples, both Irish and English, went further south to establish communities in other Saxon kingdoms - St Fursey in East Anglia for example, and St Cedd among the East Saxons. A church of Cedd's monastery is still standing at Bradwell-on Sea. Kings were often eager to support these new houses; King Oswy for instance granted land in Mercia (in Deira and Bernicia) for the foundation of twelve communities.

The Nature of Celtic Monasticism
What sort of monasticism was practised by these Celts? They usually followed the original Egyptian model of separate dwellings for each monk. We see this from the remains of such monasteries as Skelleg Michael, situated on a rugged island on Ireland's south-west coast. Prayer rather than any social or educational work was paramount. Although monks - especially scholarly Irish ones - did respond to the desperate need to rebuild western European culture after its devastation by barbarians, such work was tangential to their ascetic life. Unfortunately no very early Celtic monastic rules survive. However, those later ones which we do have, along with references in Saints' Lives, all indicate an extremely ascetic way of life. The earliest extant rules are those of Ailbe (although this is not in its original form) and St Columbanus, written for his foundations on the Continent. Both these are in the Egyptian spirit of great ascetic struggle. We read of frequent vigils, even of monks praying all night standing in the sea or rivers, perhaps to keep

themselves awake. And this life of ascetic struggle was often the *podvig* (a Slavonic term, meaning a voluntary ascetic exploit) of former nobles, even of heirs to the throne. St Columba for example was of such nobility that he would have succeeded king Diarmit of Ireland had he not been a monk.

Not all monasteries however managed to sustain an ideal life. We have noted that Samson was at St Illtud's newly founded community at Caldey Island when the abbot, Piro, died after falling drunk into a well. Even as abbot, Samson was not able to amend the ways of the monks. His Life speaks of the "ample dinners and abundant drink" they were used to. In disgust he left. Some years later, when he was a bishop, he went to the monastery of Docco, at St. Kew in Cornwall. When Samson asked if he could remain for a while the abbot, Iuniavus, replied: "..your request to stay with us is not convenient, for you are better than us; you might condemn us, and we might properly feel condemned by your superior merit; for I must make it clear to you that we have somewhat relaxed our original rules..."

Irish monastics keenly felt the need not only to withdraw from the world, but also to transform it, to let the Gospel mould the laws of their nation. Where they could not stop violence, they attempted to restrict it. For example, in 697 a council of bishops and abbots was held which established a code of war, now known as *Cain Adomnan,* after St Adomnan who instigated the council along with the English Egbert of Iona. It outlawed offences against civilians, especially women, children and students. Other war crimes were also defined. It is pertinent that these laws were ecclesiastical, without recourse to secular power to enforce them. Apparently the spiritual authority of the monks was in general sufficient to deter warriors from violence to civilians, at least until the chaos which ensued after the Danish invasions.

Intimacy with creation is a commonly known aspect of Celtic monasticism. And this is not surprising: the miraculous relationship of saint and wild creatures is affirmation of the fact that repentance returns man to his pristine, Paradisical harmony with the rest of creation.

The type of work done by the Celtic monks varied from monastery to monastery. Bede tells us in his *History* that the monks of Bangor-is-coed (near Chester) "all supported themselves with manual work"(II.2). As has been noted, St David of Wales placed great emphasis on manual work. Other monasteries gave more emphasis to study and teaching. In the opening centuries of British monasticism such scholarly communities tended to be found in south Wales. This is probably because the high concentration of Romans in the region during the Empire led to more deeply instilled urbane cultural values than the north or west. Most famous of such learned foundations is Llanilltud Fawr (Llantwit Major), founded by St Illtud, who died early sixth century. The early Life of Samson states that he was a pupil of St Germanus of Auxerre and was ordained priest by him, and that he was the most learned Briton in the Scriptures and philosophy. Gildas is probably referring to Illtud when he writes that Maelgwn of Gwynedd was once taught by "the refined teacher of almost the whole of Britain".

What about the size and organisation of the monasteries? As in Mount Athos today, forms varied from the large communal monasteries, through the smaller semi-erimetical clusters, to isolated hermits. Bede tells us that Bangor was "divided into seven sections, each with its own head, and none of these

sections contained less than three hundred monks" (II.2). Such a size and sub-division are strongly reminiscent of communities run by the founder of coenobitic monasticism, St Pachomius. The life of St Samson is akin to that of many other founders, like St Benedict of Nursia, in that whilst he himself "longed for the desert" as his Life tells us, so many sought him out that he had to found communities. Often communities housed themselves in abandoned coastal or promontory forts, as is the case with Tintagel, Deerness and Coludesburh, having a ditch or bank across the neck. It is interesting that many early purpose-built monasteries did not have the round enclosure customary for the Irish, but followed the example of Egyptian rectangular walls: Iona, Clonmacnois and perhaps late fifth century Glastonbury are examples.

As in Eastern Orthodox monasticism, so in Insular monasticism there existed sketes - that is, communal hermitages. Skelleg Michael is one such. This remarkable site is a naked pyramid of rock, Great Skellig, thrusting out of the stormy ocean off the south west coast. Its corbelled stone cells and oratories can still be seen, in perfect condition.

It is well known that Irish monks helped to restore learning to the battle-torn Continent. Besides knowing Latin well, these scholar-monks often knew Greek. And this learning arrived none too soon. Only fifty years before they began to arrive, St Gregory of Tours wrote: "Culture and education are dying out, perishing throughout the cities of Gaul...You often hear people complaining, 'Alas for our times; literacy is dying among us, and no man can be found among our peoples who is capable of setting down the deeds of the present on paper'."[23]

III. The Anglo-Saxon and Irish Period
(Seventh to Eleventh Centuries)

Compared with the previous two periods, the seventh century onwards provides historians with a greater bulk and complexity of material. There is much more reliable written material for one thing. Secondly, the numbers of groups interacting are greater: ecclesial influence from Rome becomes a new and major feature; conflicts arise between the various English kingdoms which had developed by this time; Celtic and English monks begin to have a marked influence on the Continent.

In this account we will draw the lineaments of the period by concentrating on the lives and influence of the period's most prominent saints, for the history of the British Isles and Ireland in this epoch is largely the history of its saints. Reference will also be made to the outcome of wars between the various Saxon and Celtic kingdoms, for these directly affected missions. The success of early missions depended on the support of the local king, and on whether he could keep neighbouring pagans at bay - and not just pagans, for sometimes Christian kings, both English and Celtic, went to war against fellow Christian kings. For example the Christian Cadwallon of Gwynedd allied himself with the pagan Penda of Mercia, to defeat and kill the Christian king Edwin of Northumbria. Later, having stopped Northumbrian expansion in 678 at the battle of Trent, the now Christian Mercians turned on the Christian

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[23] *The History of the Franks,* tr. John Morris in 'The Age of Arthur'.

British of Wales. In battles and skirmishes which lasted up to the end of the eight century they pressed the British back to approximately the present Welsh boarder. Political stability, or lack of it, obviously affected Church life.

St. Augustine of Canterbury (died *c.*604)

Up until now the story of Christianity in the Isles has been mainly the story of the Celtic Church - its beginnings in the Roman times and its subsequent development after the fall of Rome. Things change with the coming of Saint Augustine of Canterbury from Rome. Beginning with his mission the Anglo-Saxons begin to convert, and eventually come to dominate Church life in the Isles.

Augustine was an Italian monk and, at the time of his summons by Pope Gregory to go to England, was the prior of the monastery of St Andrew, on Celian Hill, Rome. Gregory had planned to go himself to the English as a missionary, but this was made impossible by his election as Pope of Rome.

Augustine was sent to England with thirty monks, and was made a bishop in Gaul *en route* by order of Gregory. He landed in Kent, the most developed of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, in 597. By all accounts the beginning of his mission was auspicious. Within the first year of his mission he was able to report to the Pope over ten thousands baptisms. By 601 A.D. the king of Kent, Ethelbert, was also baptised.

Despite the scale of this beginning, it seems that Augustine was not of the same visionary, expansive nature as Gregory. Augustine preferred to limit the bulk of his labours to Kent and its environs, and not hurry to establish the broader scale of works intended by Gregory. The Pope envisaged a northern and a southern province, each with twelve suffragan bishops under the guidance of their respective Archbishop in London and Metropolitan in York (who was to be initially subject to Augustine but independent after his death). In his lifetime Augustine in fact established only three bishoprics, those of Canterbury, Rochester (under St Justus) and London (under St Mellitus). York became a metropolitan see only in 735. Augustine established his southern archbishopric in Canterbury (not in London as Gregory had planned[24]). For this the Pope sent him the *pallium*[25], which made him an Archbishop with the right to consecrate bishops. Augustine also founded at Canterbury a monastery, dedicated to the Apostles Peter and Paul, where he lived with fellow monks. He also established a school, which later became a centre of learning renowned in Europe. In due course he consecrated Justus to be bishop Rochester, another city of Kent, just twenty four miles west of Canterbury.

Augustine himself limited his mission to Kent. He did however consecrate Mellitus as bishop, and sent him to preach to the East Saxons. At that time this kingdom was under Ethelbert's suzerainty, so this mission was still under his auspices. When the mission proved a success Ethelbert appointed London, its capital, as Mellitus's see, and built a church there dedicated to the Apostle Paul.

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[24] Gregory had mistakenly thought London was the king's principal town because he had studied only outdated documents.

[25] This was a band of white wool, worn over the other vestments; it was used only by popes and archbishops.

St Gregory's wisdom and discretion are clearly revealed in his extant letters to Augustine and Mellitus. He realized that the paganism of the English could not be replaced by the Faith overnight. Since he believed that what the pagans had been searching for in their religions was to be found in Christ, he told the missionaries not to destroy the pagan temples but to convert them into churches; destroy the idols but transform the temples was his advice. "In this way, we hope that the people, seeing that their temples are not destroyed, may abandon their error and, flocking more readily to their accustomed resorts, may come to know and adore the true God."[26] He also suggested that they convert the pagan feasts into Christian ones.

Although Gregory was directive in his letters to Augustine, he also left a lot to his disciple's discretion; for example, he left him free to adapt Gallican or other liturgical rites if he thought fit: "...if you have found customs, whether in the Church of Rome or of Gaul or any other that may be acceptable to God, I wish you to make a careful selection of them, and teach the Church of the English, which is still young in the faith, whatever you have been able to learn with profit from the various Churches."[27] It seems that Augustine was of a conservative bent, and did not follow this advice.

But Augustine was not a mere organiser, for the Lord also wrought miracles by his hand. Bede includes in his *History* a letter from Gregory to Augustine, in which the Pope warns him to keep humble in the light of these wonders: "Bear in mind that whatever powers to perform miracles you have received or shall receive from God are entrusted to you solely for the salvation of your people."[28]

Augustine's success with the pagan English was not however matched in his attempts to work with the Christian British. Reading his mandate from Pope Gregory, one can in hindsight only expect that he would conflict with the native British clergy. Although Saint Gregory stressed that Augustine had no authority over any bishops whom he should meet in Gaul *en route* to Britain, he stressed that he did have authority over those in Britain: "[We] give you no authority over the bishops of Gaul...All the bishops of Britain, however, we commit to your charge. Use your authority to instruct the unlearned, to strengthen the weak, and correct the misguided."[29] This authority was reiterated in a later letter, when he sent Augustine the *pallium.*[30] Considering that these British bishops had been self governing for at least two centuries, such a mandate made conflict inevitable. Furthermore, the British Church's relative isolation from Europe over the previous two centuries, and the more rural basis on which its episcopal system had subsequently grown meant that it was highly likely that Augustine would find in its ways much that he would consider strange and unorthodox. He would clearly find ample customs which he felt needed his "authority to correct".

The British for their part were likely to be startled by the authority presumed by this effective outsider and new-comer. On this account their first meeting did not offer good omens. Augustine called the bishops and teachers of the nearest British province to a council, probably somewhere in

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[26] Bede's *History,* I.30.

[27] *ibid.* I.27.

[28] *ibid.* I.31.

[29] *ibid.* I.27, answer VII..

[30] *ibid. 1:29*

Gloucestershire. Besides encouraging them to help him in the task of evangelizing the English, he called them to conform to Roman customs concerning such things as the dating of Easter, the method of tonsure, and baptismal rite. The few British bishops present said that they could not change these things without "the consent and approval of their own people". So they called for a second and fuller conference. Before this second council, the seven bishops and "many very learned men" consulted, to use Bede's words, a "wise and prudent hermit". This hermit said that if Augustine rose courteously as they approached, this being a sign of meekness and humility, they were to listen to him; if he did not, they should not comply with his demands. Unfortunately, for whatever reason, Augustine did not arise, and so the British did not agree to his terms.

The account of this event suggests some of the differences in approach between the Celts and Romans. Taken at face value it suggests that the Celts were more democratic in their approach - the bishops wished to act in consultation with their people; they gave importance to the opinion of learned people even if they were not necessarily clergy; they sought for divinely inspired counsel from those close to God, such as the hermit, regardless it seems of clerical status; humility and meekness rather than self confidence were considered the marks of true leadership. Although not to be pushed too far, these features do contrast with the more centralised and authoritarian approach of the Romans.

Augustine's main task had been to evangelize the English people. Since the British refused to help him in this mission, he felt that they were intransigent and unchristian. And the gap between the two peoples continued in many quarters even after the Saxon's conversion. Writing in the eighth century, the English Saint Aldhelm complains that the British priests in Dyfed, Wales, refused to eat with the English clergy. Furthermore, they even ordered the left-over food from English meals to be thrown out, and the plates to be scrubbed and scoured clean before their own use. The English clergy for their part did not accept as valid the ordinations performed by British bishops. [31] Bede takes the side of the English, and considers the slaying of 1,150 unarmed British monks and priests of Bangor monastery, who were praying for the victory of their army against the heathen, as divine retribution for their not accepting Augustine as their Archbishop. [32]

Augustine died on May 26. We do not know the precise year of his death, but most place it at 604 or 605, the latest estimate being 609. A remarkable amount of work was achieved in the probably seven or eight years of his mission. Although the scope of his work was not geographically great, the tree he planted in Kent was well rooted and of sturdy enough stock to eventually spread elsewhere. But Augustine's contribution to Britain did not stop at the Church, for he helped Ethelbert to draft what may be the first written laws in England.

According to Augustine's wish, St Laurence (d. 619), who was a companion from the mission of 596, succeeded him to the Archbishopric.

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[31] *Aldhelmi Opera,* ed. R. Ehwald (M.G.H.), p. 484, cited in Stenton, *Anglo Saxon England,* p. 103.

[32] Bede's *History II.2*

Initially Laurence had opposition from Ethelbert's pagan son and heir, Edbald, and so he contemplated flight. However, Bede tells us that Saint Peter appeared to him in a dream and soundly thrashed him for his cowardliness. So, unlike his fellow bishops Mellitus and Justus who had withdrawn to Gaul until things were more advantageous, Laurence remained.

In due course king Edbald converted and the two bishops were recalled from Gaul, although Mellitus could not return to his see in London because of continued opposition from the pagan sons of the previous Christian king Saeberht of the East Saxons. Mellitus succeeded Laurence in 619 and died in 624. He in turn was succeeded by St Justus (d. 627), who, along with Mellitus, had been sent by Gregory from Rome in 601 to reinforce Augustine's work.

Like Augustine, these three bishops tried to reconcile the Celtic clergy to Continental traditions. Bede gives us an extract of a letter they sent to the British Bishops. In it they express their disapproval of the British and Irish contempt for Romans ways, and relate how the Irish Bishop Dagan refused to either eat with them or even to eat in the same house[33]. The tone of the letter is aggressive and so needless to say, it bore no fruit.

In stages however, the various Celtic peoples did conform. Southern Ireland was the first to accept the Romans ways, about the year 630. The next stage was the Council of Whitby, held in 663. Despite the fact that the Council consisted mainly of Northumbrian men, their acceptance of Roman customs rapidly led to the whole Church in Britain conceding, although some of the Celtic clergy present did protest and return to Ireland. The Celtic Church in Wales was the last to agree, in 768.

Northumbria, East Anglia and Wessex

On the basis of the undeniable tensions that did indeed exist, it is common today for people to starkly contrast the Celtic and the Roman inspired Christians, giving the impression that they rarely worked together. In reality the conversion of the various English kingdoms was usually the work of both parties. The stories of Northumbria, East Anglia and the West Saxons are cases in point. Although British monks did not want to aid Augustine's mission to the English, Irish monks were zealous to bring them the Gospel. Seen from a human point of view, the Irish did not have cause for bitterness against the English as did the British, since they had not been conquered by them. Also, missionary work fitted well with their ascetic ideal of voluntary exile for Christ's sake.

As we have seen, Augustine concentrated his work on the south-east of England. However, one of his companions called Paulinus did have some considerable, although temporary success in Northumbria. He had come as a bishop to the court of the Northumbrian king Edwin in 625, on the occasion of Edwin's marriage to daughter of King Athelbert. In two years this Edwin was baptised, and through the labours of Paulinus and his companions the number of converts were sufficient for the Pope to send Edwin a letter announcing that Paulinus was now Archbishop of York. News travelled slowly in those times however, for the Pope did not know that in 633 Edwin had

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[33] *ibid.* II.4

been slain in battle, Paulinus had fled, and only one member of the mission, James the deacon, remained to carry on the work.

Northumbria was ruled for a year by the British tyrant Cadwalla, until Oswald, the son of the earlier king Ethelfrith, defeated and killed him in battle. Oswald united the two parts of Northumbria (Deira and Bernicia) under his rule. He was furthermore accepted by the other English kings as their overlord. His sphere of influence was therefore extensive. Whilst in exile at the Irish monastery of Iona in Scotland, Oswald had become a Christian. On ascending the throne of Northumbria he therefore asked Iona to send a worthy monk to evangelize his people. The first monk sent was too severe to have success, but the saintly Aidan who replaced him bore much fruit. Oswald gave him the island of Lindisfarne as his monastic missionary centre. Saint Aidan's labours were blessed with great success, and Lindisfarne continued long after his death to be the seedbed of many saintly ascetics, bishops and missionaries.

After eight years of rule, Oswald was slain in 642 by the pagan Penda, but the work continued under the protection of his cousin, St Oswin. In 651 his cousin Oswy, king of Bernicia, led an army against Oswin to take Deira. Because Oswin did not wish to shed more blood in the already violent history of Northumbria, he decided not to defend his throne, and withdrew his forces and went into hiding. He was betrayed however, and slain under order of his cousin. Because of his reluctance to shed innocent blood, he has long been venerated as a martyr, or more accurately, a passion bearer.

The missionary labours of subsequent Lindisfarne monks is discussed below.

To move to contemporary events further south, in 630 a Burgundian bishop called Felix (d. 647) was sent by Honorius of Canterbury to be bishop of the East Angles. The occasion of this was the return of the Christian King Sigeburt from exile. Felix established his see in Dunwich and founded a school inspired by Gaulish models. He evidently did not view Celtic monks with the suspicion of the Romans, for he allowed the Irish abbot St Fursey (d.650) and his companions to establish a monastery at Burgh Castle, which King Sigeburt had offered them.

Another missionary from the Continent (possibly born in Lombardy), called St Birinus (d.650) helped evangelize Britain. He was sent by Pope Honorius I, and had planned to penetrate the Midlands. *En route,* however, he decided to labour instead among the West Saxons. Initially he was an itinerant evangelist, with no episcopal see. Soon however, in 635, King Cynegils expressed his desire to learn the faith. In due course Birinus baptised the king and his family and received the town of Dorchester as the base of his see. Among the numerous churches he established in the kingdom, that of Winchester was destined to become the most important and eventually the new centre of the see. Just as the Irish Fursey had happily established a presence in Felix's diocese, so another Irishman, the scholar Maildubh established a centre of learning in Malmesbury, among the West Saxons.

Lindisfarne Island Monastery

We have already mentioned the foundation of Lindisfarne under Saint Aidan. Until its sack by Vikings in 793 it was the seedbed of many saints and

labourers. From it many new churches, monasteries and convents were established throughout the large Northumbrian kingdom and beyond.

Until the coming of Archbishop Theodore, whom we shall discuss shortly, the whole of northern England looked to Lindisfarne as its ecclesial centre.

Saint Finan, the second abbot and bishop of Lindisfarne, extended the Church south of the river Humber. A major breakthrough occurred when Finan baptised Peada, the king of the Middle Angles under his pagan father, Penda. This was occasioned by Peada's marriage to Alhflaed, the daughter of king Oswy. Although an avowed pagan, Penda allowed his son to introduce four priests into his kingdom. So began the mission to central England. Soon after Penda's death in 654, Finan consecrated one of these priests, an Irishman named Diuma, to an enormous see which covered Mercia, Middle Anglia and Lindsey. The pedigree of the three subsequent bishops of this see, until the Council of Whitby in 663, show that Aidan's vision of an indigenous mission was being adhered to: the first was Irish in birth and training, the second English but Irish in training, and the last English, of unknown training.

Another of the original four priests in Middle Anglia, an Englishman called Cedd (d. 664), was sent by King Oswy to Essex, since he had recently convinced its king Sigeberht to receive baptism. Cedd was one of the English children educated by Aidan and Finan at Lindisfarne, precisely with a mind to establishing an indigenous mission among the English. His labours were so fruitful that Finan and two other Irish bishops consecrated him bishop of the East Saxons. Cedd laboured like many missionary Celtic bishops in that he had no fixed see, but combined travelling to preach with periods of residence in monasteries which he had founded. There remains to this day a church of his founding on Bradwell-on-Sea, Essex. Though now standing alone near the shore, it was then in the Roman fort of Ythancaestir.

In later life Cedd often returned to his homeland of Northumbria, and on one occasion was given land for a monastery at Lastingham, on the Yorkshire Moors. Although he remained to the end of his life bishop of the East Saxons, it was in Lastingham in Northumbria that he died of the plague. His relics can be found there today, in the crypt of the church of St Mary.

Cedd had been educated at Lindisfarne along with his three brothers, Chad, Cynebill and Caelin. Like him all became priests, and Chad a bishop also. In 669 Chad was made bishop of Mercia by the Greek Archbishop of Canterbury, Theodore. In the three years of his episcopate he laid the foundations of an enduring see of Lichfield. He founded a monastery in Barrow (Lincolnshire) and another close to Lichfield Cathedral.

Chad was greatly loved for his humility and asceticism. Theodore was impressed by Chad's humble response when he informed him that his consecration had been irregular, and so rather than deposing him he "completed the rites". "If you know that my consecration as bishop was irregular," Chad had replied, "I willingly resign the office; for I never thought myself worthy of it. Although unworthy of it, I accepted it solely under obedience."[34] Immediately upon his death Chad was venerated as a saint, and miracles occurred at his tomb. Bede tells us that his first wooden shrine was like a house, and had an aperture through which people could take a little

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[34] *ibid.* IV.3

dust, mix it with water, and give it to ailing people or animals for their healing. Portions of his relics can be found today in the Roman Catholic Cathedral of Birmingham.

Another important monk of Lindisfarne was Saint Cuthbert (*c.*634-87). This greatly loved Saxon saint became a monk of Melrose monastery in 651, but shortly after moved with its abbot Eata to help found a monastery at Ripon. The controversy over Roman versus Celtic customs was then at its height. When the monastery's patron, King Alcfrith, insisted that the Roman customs be used at Ripon, the Melrose monks returned to their home community, to be replaced by Wilfrid. About 661 Cuthbert became prior of Melrose, and from there frequently went out on journeys to minister to the surrounding people. After the Council of Whitby in 663/4 he was elected prior of Lindisfarne, with the task of persuading the monks to adopt the Roman customs. Using patience and forbearance he succeeded. He continued his journeyings to the surrounding people and became famed for the holiness of his life. Later he withdrew to live a more erimitical life on Inner Farne island. However even there his reputation grew, and after nine years, in 685, he was chosen by Archbishop Theodore and King Egfrith to be bishop of Hexham, although it was only with difficulty that they persuaded him to accept consecration. For unknown reasons, he almost immediately exchanged his see with St Eata for that of Lindisfarne.

Sensing his end drawing near, after only two years in the episcopate, Cuthbert withdrew again to his beloved Inner Farne island, where he reposed on 20 March 687. His spiritual gifts of miracle working, prophecy, and healing, along with his sweetness, gentleness and ascetic life continue to attract love and veneration to this day. His relics are still preserved at Durham Cathedral, along with the head of King Oswald and Bede.

The Council of Whitby (663 A.D.)

Mention has often been made of the Council of Whitby. Its importance for the development of the Church is such that it deserves a more detailed description.

The influence of those adhering to the Continental practices had so grown in the influential Northumbrian Church that the discrepancy of Celtic and Roman customs could no longer be ignored. Also, the older generation of monastics who had came from Iona and who naturally felt a strong link with the Irish traditions of Iona's founder, Saint Columba, were decreasing in number, whereas the younger generation of Celts in England perhaps did not all feel so strongly about keeping the customs of their forebears. But the most influential factor which prompted the council stemmed from the very court of the king. Whilst King Oswy, being tutored in the Irish ways through Lindisfarne, celebrated the Pascha by the Irish reckoning, his Queen Eanfled and her court celebrated Pascha according to the Roman dating; this was under the influence of her chaplain, the Kentish Romanus and the deacon James (who, we recall, had remained after Archbishop Paulinus had fled).

The obvious way to resolve the question permanently was to call a synod. As in Byzantium, this synod was initiated by the ruler of the time, King Oswy, who also acted as the chairman. It was held in the autumn of 663 at Streanaeshalch, in all probability present-day Whitby. This was the site of an

influential double monastery under the leadership of the famed Saint Hilda, renowned for her wisdom.

The Celtic side was led by Saint Colman, the third bishop-abbot of Lindisfarne after Saint Aidan and Saint Finan. Supporting him was Saint Cedd, bishop of the East Saxons and disciple of Aidan (Cedd acted as an interpreter for both parties), and Abbess Hilda. Although King Oswy had been following Irish customs up to this time, he was not irrevocably committed to them. His wish for the synod was rather that it agree on a single tradition the Church in his kingdom was to use.

The most senior clergyman on the Roman side was the visiting Bishop of the West Saxons, the Frankish Agilbert. He however requested that Saint Wilfrid, then abbot of Ripon, speak on his behalf since he did not speak English but Wilfrid did. They were supported by Romanus, James the deacon, and Agatho, a priest present with Agilbert. Oswy's son Alchfrid, the sub-king of Deira, was also supporter of Roman customs since he had been instructed in the faith by Wilfrid.

Although there were a number of variant customs, the debate centred on the dating of Easter. It transpired that the members considered the important criteria for judgement was the historical source of the customs rather than their inherent merits. Colman claimed the authority of his saintly predecessors like St Columba, and ultimately the evangelist Saint John himself. Wilfrid said that the Roman customs were followed by everyone in Rome, where "Peter and Paul lived, taught, suffered and are buried", and also throughout all Italy, Gaul, Africa, Asia, Egypt, Greece and "wherever the Church of Christ has spread."[35] The British were therefore alone , Wilfrid asserted, in following their particular customs. Using historical and astronomical arguments, he went on to challenge Colman's claim that Saint John used his method of calculating Easter. What finally decided the synod in favour of the Roman ways was Oswy's opinion that if Peter did indeed hold the keys to the kingdom of heaven, he would not contradict him least "when I come to the gates of heaven, there be no one to open them, because he who holds the keys has turned away."

Colman did not accept the synod's judgement however, and along with other protesters withdrew to Iona and thence to Ireland.

What are we to make of this conflict in hindsight? It is a common opinion held by contemporary Orthodox that the Paschal dating favoured by the Celts was the Orthodox one, and the Roman system was deviant. Consequently the Synod of Whitby is judged an unmitigated triumph of incipient Roman Catholicism over the Celtic Orthodox Church. In reality however, it was the Roman dating system that was being used by the Eastern Churches. The Celts were still using the system which the Romans had used up until 463, which was based on a faulty eighty-four year cycle. (The Celts were not however Quartodecimens, as their detractors alleged, which was a system anathematised by the Ecumenical Council of Nicea.) In 463 A.D. Rome, and soon also the other Churches of the East, adopted a system based on a more accurate five hundred and thirty-two year cycle. Hence Wilfrid was correct when he said that this system was used at his time "in Africa, Asia,

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[35] *ibid.* II.25

Egypt, Greece, and throughout the world wherever the Church of Christ has spread."[36]

There was surely error on both sides. For the Britons' part, should they not have agreed to help Augustine evangelise the English? And would it not have been wiser to put unity in celebrating Pascha together with all the Churches of the world before faithfulness to a system which no one else used? On the other hand it seems that Augustine was heavy handed in pressing for conformity with secondary customs such as the method of tonsure and, more importantly, in not giving due regard to the whole British episcopal structure, which had existed and had worked well for at least two centuries before his coming. But behind these specific conflicts lay a more essential problem, namely the scope and nature of jurisdiction exercised by the Roman Patriarchate. Although in her dealings with the British Christians Rome was 'Orthodox' in particulars, the ultimate issue was whether or not she had the right to exercise authority over all Churches of the West. Pope Gregory was the first of the Popes to actively claim this right

Celtic and English Monks on the Continent

Concurrent with the growth of the Church in England during the seventh and eighth centuries was a remarkable emigration from the Isles to the Continent of saintly Celtic and English missionaries, educationalists and ascetics.

The Irish St Columbanus (c.543-615, and to be distinguished from the older St. Columba) was at the vanguard of this great movement. Indeed, he is considered an apostle to Burgundy, Switzerland, and Northern Italy. He was first a disciple in Ireland of St Sinell (a follower of St Finnian), and then of St Comgall of Bangor. Like Columba, he eventually went into voluntary exile for Christ with twelve companions, only he went to Gaul rather than to Scotland. Arriving in 590, he founded a monastery at Annegray, and then another at Luxeuil. Harassed by rulers for his prophetic denunciations of their immorality, he moved up the Rhine and founded a community at Bregenz on Lake Constance. But opposition there drove him and his disciples still further afield. He moved to Bobbio in Lombardy, Italy, where he founded yet another monastery, helping to build it with his own hands. It was there that he died, on November 23.

But it was not only secular rulers who sometimes found Columbanus uncomfortable to live near; ecclesiastics often found his monastic rule too extreme in its ascetic rigour. Columban also insisted on continuing ancient Irish customs which differed from those of the Continent: Easter was according to the Irish date, bishops were subordinate to the abbot in whose monastery he was based, and penances were according to Irish custom - severe! He defended his traditions in letters to the popes Gregory the Great and Boniface IV, and to the Synod of Chalon. These extant letters reveal both his boldness and humility.

Numerous writings by Columbanus are extant. These are his monastic Rule; a book of monastic penances; seventeen short sermons; a work on the eight main vices; five letters, two to Boniface IV, one to Gregory the Great, one to the Gallican synod of Chalon about the dating of Easter, and another

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[36] *ibid.* III.25

to his monks of Luxeuil. His Vita was written by a contemporary, Abbot Jonas who was a monk of Bobbio.

The Rule of Columbanus and his monastery at Bobbio, with its extensive library, and at Luxeuil were all influential in Europe. The severity of the Rule was however such that its influence was soon superseded by the more measured Rule of St Benedict of Nursia (*c*.480-*c*.550).

From the eighth century English monks extended the faith and monastic life over the Narrow Seas to pagan tribes in Germany, Frisia and the Low Countries. For the Irish a move to the Continent was an emigration, but for the Anglo-Saxon Christians it was a return to the land of their predecessors, a desire to share the Gospel with their own flesh and blood. The English St Willibrord (658-739) laboured in present-day Holland. The Irish St Fursey (d. 650) laboured first for ten years in East Anglia, establishing a monastery in the old Roman fort of Burgh castle. He then continued in the regions around Paris. A pupil, St Cellan of Peronne and his disciples went on to establish many other houses from the Seine to Meuse. The English St Boniface of Crediton (c.675-754) is remembered for many ministries - as monk, scholar (his was the first Latin grammar written in England), apostle of Frisia and Germany, Archbishop of Mainz and martyr. And there are many more such monk missionaries who laboured in Europe.

Since the motive of these monastic emigrations was voluntary exile for the sake of Christ the conversions which invariably followed were an "incidental" fruit of this peculiar form of asceticism rather than of a deliberate strategy of evangelism. The following anecdote illustrates this (although it is from a period somewhat later, in the reign of King Alfred, 871-899). Three Irish monks arrived on the Cornish shores in a frail skin-covered vessel, having cast themselves adrift from their homeland and abandoned themselves entirely to the mercy of winds and tides. At the court of King Alfred they explained their motive for this self abandonment - they "wished to go into exile for the love of God; they did not care where they landed."

The account of St Brendan the Voyager's travels into the Atlantic might be imaginative in details, but there is no practical reason to discount the journey as such. He may even have landed in North America - Newfoundland is the most likely landing spot. To prove this possibility a reproduction of the craft (for which a detailed description is given in the Life) has even been made and sailed to North America this century.[37]

The list of places where Irish monastics and scholars founded monasteries or settlements in Europe is long. The following were founded in the seventh and eighth centuries - others followed later. Moving in a south-easterly direction, early foundations include: Leuconnais, Wurzburg, Jumieges, Meaux, Jouarre, Faremoutiers, Rebais, Luxeuil, Remiremont, Lure, St. Ursanne, Sackingen, Lake Constance, St Gall, Salzburg, Nantes, Angers, Tours, Fontaines, Auxerre, Beze, Moutier, Taranta, Bordeaux, Narbonne, and Bobbio at the heel of Italy. Later, in the eleventh century, Irish foundations were established as far east as Kiev in the Ukraine. I do not know if they were, at this late date, essentially Orthodox or not, but Dr. John Morris gives

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[37] St Brendan's Life, along with those of Sts Cuthbert, Wilfrid and of five abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow, can be read in *the Age of Bede,* tr. J.F. Webb (London, 1988); they are near-contemporary Lives.

their background as follows.[38] In 1076 Domnall man Robaraig, abbot of Kells, sent his cousin Muiredach (also known as Marianus Scottus) to found the Irish monastery of St Peter at Regensburg. Soon this active house founded other monasteries not only reasonably nearby at such places as Vienna and Nuremburg, but also Kiev. The Kievan foundation lasted until the 13th century, when it was destroyed by the invading Mongols.

Saints Theodore of Tarsus (d. 690) and Adrian of Canterbury (d. 709/10)

We return now to events on the Isles. In the year 669 two remarkable men arrived at Canterbury, an old Greek monk from Tarsus in Cilicia called Theodore, and his assistant, the African Abbot Adrian. Pope Vitalian had sent Theodore to be the new Archbishop of Canterbury. Theodore was a surprising choice: he was sixty-six years old; he had had no previous experience as a bishop, nor even as a priest - he had in fact to be ordained by Adrian through all the prerequisite orders from subdeacon upwards before leaving Rome; he knew no English, and had had no experience of life in western Europe. But he proved to be an inspired choice (albeit Vitalian's second, since Adrian had declined and suggested Theodore in his place). As well as being a monk of some experience, he was a scholar in Latin and Greek and, what proved to the most important, was a highly gifted organizer.

He came to a Church in crisis. In 664 a great plague had swept through the Isles, killing so many churchmen that few bishops were alive when he arrived. Warring kingdoms and the Celtic-Roman tensions had also demanded a toll. His first task therefore was to visit the country of his diocese and appoint bishops to vacant sees. He also appointed Adrian abbot of St Augustine's monastery in Canterbury and with his help established there an important school. This served over the centuries to educate many future bishops and abbots. It taught Latin, Greek (a rarity in those parts), Scripture, Roman law, poetry, music and astronomy. In the course of its history great scholars such as the famed St Aldhelm studied there.

Theodore also created new and smaller dioceses, and arranged that a yearly synod be held so that the Church could be governed in an orderly way. He requested that all Christians pay a tithe of their income to help the poor, pilgrims and churches. In 673 he called a synod in Hertford, the first such synod of the Anglo-Saxon Church. Its ten decisions were based on those canons of the Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon which Theodore thought particularly pertinent to England. These canons stipulated the system for dating Easter, defined the relationships of bishops with one another and with monasteries, called for a yearly national synod (to be held at Clovesho, which is probably near London), called for increasing the number of bishops in proportion to the growing number of faithful, and detailed laws regarding marriage.

Theodore was also aware of events overseas. Learning of the troubles caused by the Monothelite heresy in Constantinople he called a council in 680 at Hatfield, to examine the beliefs of the many bishops and teachers gathered there. He found them all orthodox, and so wrote a synodal letter to affirm the Church of Britain's belief in the first five Ecumenical Councils. (The Sixth

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[38] John Morris, *The Age of Arthur: A History of the British Isles from 350-650*' London, 1977, p. 402.

Ecumenical Council, which condemned monothelitism, was held soon after Theodore's council, from 680 to 681.)[39]

Theodore was the first Archbishop of Canterbury under whom all the clergy and people in England agreed to be united. His zeal and organisational abilities established an order which became the administrational basis of the English Church for centuries to come. Another important feature of his ecclesiastical ordering of England is that he united the Latin aptitude for hierarchy and organisation with the native, more charismatic monasticism; this is confirmed by the flourishing of monasticism in England until the end of the eighth century, and its spread into northern Europe.

Perhaps the only reason for his not being more widely venerated as a saint is the absence of miracles attributed to him, although his body was found to be incorrupt in 1091.

Benedict Biscop (628-89)[40]

Along with Adrian, Theodore was accompanied by another monk when he came to England. This Northumbrian monk, a wealthy nobleman named Benedict Biscop, had been in Rome on the third of his total of six visits when Theodore was elected. Pope Vitalian asked St Benedict to accompany them both as guide for their journey to Britain, and as interpreter. On their arrival in Britain St Benedict was appointed by Theodore as abbot of St Peter's in Canterbury. But ever drawn to Rome, two years later he set out on his third journey to the great city.

After his return he founded the two influential monasteries of St Peters, Wearmouth (in 674) and St Paul's, Jarrow (in 682). But he is also remembered for the many craftsmen, liturgical arts and books which he imported from the Continent to construct and endow these foundations. With the help of the generous grant of seventy hides of land from king Egfrith of Northumbria, and perhaps also from his own means as a nobleman, Benedict imported Frankish stone masons to build the church of Wearmouth in the Roman style, as well as glassmakers and other craftsmen. Bede tells us that these were the first glaziers known in Britain, and that they also taught the craft to locals. Not content with this he carried on to endow his foundations with the many "sacred books and holy relics of the blessed apostles and martyrs" which he had bought or received as gifts on his pilgrimages.

On a fifth visit to Rome (or the fourth from England) he acquired still more books and relics. By Benedict's request Pope Agatho also allowed the chief cantor of St Peter's to return with him, that he might train English people in the ways of Roman chant. He also brought back icons of the Mother of God, the twelve apostles, and of scenes from the Gospel and the book of the Apocalypse. These he placed in his monastery church of St Peter's. Judging by the few extant examples we have of contemporary Roman iconography, these were probably in encaustic (tinted wax) on wooden boards, and of a profound spiritual style, not unlike the famed Fayum portraits from Egypt.

Three years after founding Jarrow, Benedict went on his sixth and final visit to Rome, from which he returned with yet more books, icons, and this time also silk cloaks of high quality workmanship for the king. These silks

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[39] Extracts of the Hatfield Synodal decree can be found in Bede's *History,* IV.17.

[40] Most of what we know of St Benedict is found in Bede's *History* and in his *Lives of the Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow* [tr. J.F. Webb (Penguin, 1988)].

were probably from Byzantium, the source of most fine silks at this time - for example the so-called Nature Goddess silk deposited in St Cuthbert's coffin is a Byzantine work, from about the late eighth century.[41]

Such an influx of the best Continental Church culture naturally served to be a formative influence on subsequent artistic and scholarly developments in England. Not least it was on the basis of the two monasteries' libraries that Bede was able to write his works on the history of the Church, to which we are now so indebted for most of our historical information up to his time.

Eighth Century

Broadly speaking, the seventh century was the era of conversion for England, and the eighth was the era of consolidation: there was greater ecclesial order, thanks to the foundation laid by Theodore, and more monasteries and centres of learning were founded. The migration of many Celtic and English monastic monks and scholars to the Continent in the latter half of the century also had a considerable impact on Europe, although it does seem to have seriously depleted resources at home

Northumbria took the lead in this golden age, both in the number and spiritual quality of its monasteries, and in its centres of learning. Jarrow produced the Venerable Bede, that great scholar whose books on so many topics were sought after not only in Britain but also on the Continent. One of his pupils, Egbert, became the first archbishop of York in 735, and founded there a school which came to possess one of the best libraries in Europe. The learned and influential Alcuin spent the first half of his years as a scholar of York, and eventually a master, until from 782 he became the chief adviser to Charlemagne on doctrine and head of the palace school. In 796 Alcuin was appointed abbot of the monastery of St Martin in Tours, which he transformed into a great centre of learning. The abbacy of Ferrières and St. Lupus in Troyes, which he had previously held, were given to two other Englishmen, Sigulf and Frithugisl respectively. Alcuin's gift was not so much in original work, but in transmitting the learning of other men. In this he proved to be a profound influence in the Carolingian age, above all by conveying the learning of England to a western Europe that was beginning to emerge from the confusion of barbarian invasions.

This flowering of learning in England is all the more remarkable because it is centred on a Northumbria which for the second half the century was racked by civil war. Usurpers contended with legitimate heirs to the throne up until 808, when Eardwulf ascended the throne. Northumbrian supremacy over other kingdoms had suffered a mortal wound in 641, when its king Oswald was killed by the Mercian king Penda. After killing Penda in battle 654, Northumbrian Oswiu briefly became overlord of England, but soon lost the south to Penda's son Wulfhere. The final blow to Northumbrian supremacy came when its king Ecgrith was killed on a military expedition into Pictish Scotland in 685 (at a place the Irish call Duin Nechtain and English chroniclers call Nechtanesmere). Politically, the Mercian kingdom was the strongest from around 704 until 802, when the West Saxon rulers, beginning with Egbert, took the reins.

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[41] See page 329-337 in *St Cuthbert: His Cult and Community until A.D. 1200,* ed. Levison, Colgrave, Brown (Suffolk, 1995)

Although Northumbria was no longer the dominant English kingdom during the eighth century, and was plagued by civil war from 759 until 808, it was still powerful and rich. It was King Aldfrith, son of Oswiu, who reigned from 685-704 who did most to establish the political stability necessary for this great spiritual and educational springtime. His main military task was to defend his borders against the Picts, which he did well. As Bede put it, Aldfrith "ably restored the shattered fortunes of the kingdom, though within smaller boundaries."[42] From Aldfrith's reign onwards no more Northumbrian kings tried to extend their kingdom further south, and it is this freedom from enervating wars of conquest which allowed them to concentrate resources on fertilising spiritual and cultural life within their lands.

Aldfrith was much more than an able military king; he was learned and a lover of the Church. Bede describes him as "a man well-read in the Scriptures", and "of wide learning".[43] Before becoming king he had in fact trained for the priesthood. He probably began his studies at Malmesbury in Wessex, and there came to know St Aldhelm. Malmesbury was an Irish foundation, and its scholarship was still provided chiefly by the Irish at his time. The future king then spent some time in Ireland among its monastic scholars, and even though an Englishman, he came to be respected by Irish as a poet in their own language. We later find him at, Iona the year before his accession to the throne. As king his continued love of learning is evidenced by his commissioning copies of Adamnan's book on the Holy Places, "for lesser folk to read" as Bede puts it. He even exchanged a considerable tract of land with Wearmouth monastery for just one book on cosmography which Benedict Biscop had purchased in Rome. It was also during his reign that the first history written in English appears, the anonymous life of St Cuthbert scribed at Lindisfarne. Indeed, in his marriage of military prowess and love of learning Aldfrith was akin to the great king Alfred , who was to rule later in the century.

Bede (c.673-735)

Whilst saints like Columba, Aidan and Cuthbert were venerated and loved for their personal charisma, their spiritual gifts, energetic missionary labours and asceticism, the Venerable Bede's influence was almost entirely through his writings. What is more, his many works were penned without moving from his two monastic homes of Monkwearmouth and Yarrow. He says of himself in the epilogue to his *History,*

> "I was born on the lands of this monastery [Wearmouth], and on reaching seven years of age, I was entrusted by my family first to the most reverend Abbot Benedict [Biscop] and later to Abbot Ceolfrid for my education. I have spent all the remainder of my life in this monastery and devoted myself entirely to the study of the Scriptures. And while I have observed the regular discipline and sung the choir offices daily in church, my chief delight has always been in study, teaching, and writing."44

He goes on to tell us that he was ordained a deacon at the age of nineteen, and priest at thirty, both at the hands of St John of Beverley

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[42] Bede's *History* IV.26
[43] *ibid.* IV.26; V.12
[44] *ibid.* Autobiographical Note, transl. from Leo Shirley-Price

(d.721). Although in all his career he never travelled outside Northumbria even in his lifetime he was known and loved by people on the Continent; when St Boniface learned of his death in Germany he wrote that "the candle of the Church, lit by the Spirit, has been extinguished".

The volume and scope of Bede's writings were possible thanks to three main factors: the great library acquired from France and Italy by Benedict Biscop and later supplemented by Ceolfrith; the relative stability of his surroundings (Jarrow and Monkwearmouh had 600 monks in 716); and the educational standards set by predecessors like St Theodore.

We have a very moving and personal account of his last days, written by a monk Cuthbert, later Abbot of Jarrow[45]. This tells us that to the very end Bede continued to sing praises of God, and to write - he was working on translations of the Gospel of St John into Old English and certain excerpts from *The Book of Cycles* by Bishop Isidore of Serville.

Although he was a fine scholar and, typically for the times, wrote most of his works in Latin, his pastoral concern also led him to translate and write many works in the vernacular Anglo-Saxon language. In his letter to Egbert he counsels the bishop to ensure that those of his flock, laity and priests, who do not know Latin "learn [the Creed and the Lord's Prayer] in their own tongue and accurately sing them". In his *History* (IV.24) he also gives due emphasis to the importance of St Caedmon's poems being in English. By writing his beautiful poems and songs in the vernacular, Bede tells us, Caedmon was able to "turn his hearers from delight in wickedness and to inspire them to love and to do good."

As well as prolific Bede was very diverse in his writings. In the introduction to his *History* he lists at least thirty-two books. Most of them are compilations of extracts from the Fathers on the Scriptures, along with Bede's own interpretations. These commentaries were widely used both on the Isles and the Continent*.* Then there are letters, Lives of Saints - some of which he himself wrote, some of which he translated or corrected - books of hymns, books on epigrams, works on cosmology, orthography and the art of poetry, and perhaps most importantly for us, his *History of the English Church and People.* His genius is chiefly in his ability to gather, edit and synthesise historical data from many source and write them into an ordered and meaningful whole. In the words of the historian Sir Frank Stenton, "In an age when little was attempted beyond the mere registration of fact, he had reached the conception of history." [46]

Although his life of earth was not evidenced by miracles, within fifty years of his repose Alcuin tells us of miraculous cures through his relics. His relics eventually came to rest in the Galilee chapel of Durham Cathedral, where they can be venerated to this day.

Boniface (Winfrith) (*c.* 675-754)

Although St Boniface is not such a formative figure for the history of the Church in Britain itself, he is a shining example of the many English missionaries to Europe. He is chiefly known as the great apostle to Germany, and archbishop of Mainz, and is today still greatly venerated in Germany and

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[45] This is appended to the Penguin edition of *The History.*

[46] F. M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England* (1965), p. 187.

Holland. It must however be said that his legacy is a mixed one. In terms of the conversion of the German nation and subsequent organisation of its Church, his labours in Friesland, and the reform of the decadent Frankish Church, he was in truth a builder of spiritual kingdoms. And culturally his monastic foundations, with their learned monastics imported from England, became important educational and literary centres in western Europe.

But in his close alliance with emperors and the papacy Boniface also did more perhaps than any other person, apart from popes themselves, to establish the papacy as a secular power. The first pope with whom he worked, Gregory II, was ambitious to establish the Roman papacy as a formidable power, and has been regarded by many historians since as indeed the founder of the papal monarchy. As it turned out, wittingly or unwittingly as the case may be, Boniface served this purpose well; his success in converting Germans in the wake of conquests by Christian Frankish kings effectively brought those people within the orbit of papal influence. And the conquerors for their part, notably Carl Martel, Carloman, and Pepin, found that if their new subjects converted they were less likely to rebel. Hopefully, such political manoeuvres were not the main motivation in the mission, or even a factor at all as far as Boniface was concerned, but they were at least a major factor with popes and the emperors. Winfrith later admitted that without the backing of Christian rulers and the pope he could have done nothing. The alliances which he facilitated between popes and emperors were to be formative in the future history of Europe.

He was born of landed peasantry in Devon, probably Crediton, in the kingdom of Wessex. He was given the name Winfrith, although later on in life this was changed to the Latin name of Boniface. At an early age (seven or thirteen according to different traditions) he was sent to be educated at a monastery in Exeter, which at this time was probably Celtic.[47] His intelligence and piety were noted there and he was transferred to the monastery of Nhutscelle (Nursling), near Southhampton, under the abbot Winberct. Here he became proficient in Scripture, poetry and rhetoric.

At the age of thirty he was ordained priest, and over the next six years his evident gifts were put to use. Besides teaching history, poetry, rhetoric and Scripture at Nutscelle, and preaching, he was once entrusted with and succeeded in a delicate diplomatic task. On behalf of King Ina of Wessex he was asked to explain to Berthwald, the Archbishop of Canterbury, why a synod had been held in Wessex without his former knowledge. That he had been recommended to this mission by the famed Aldhelm, Bishop of Sherburne, shows the regard Winfrith was held at such a young age. All, including his Bishop Daniel of Winchester, expected him to become in due course a bishop in England, but this was not to be.

Reports were reaching England of St Willibrord's apostolic labours in Friesland.[48] These accounts fired Winfrith's imagination and he set his heart on being a missionary to pagans there. These were in fact his own people; although the Angles, Saxons and Frisians of England had become Christian, their descendants back in the homeland had remained pagans. Their gods

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[47] J.M. Williamson, The *Life and Times of St. Boniface,* London 1904*;* p.25.

[48] Willibrord (658-739) was a Yorkshireman, who had become a monk under Wilfrid at Ripon. On Wilfrid's exile in 678 he had gone to Ireland for twelve years, where he was ordained priest. In 690 he returned to England and then went with twelve disciples as missionaries to Frisia.

were largely nature-based or warrior figures. Among the chief gods were: *Wodan*, the Supreme ruler, who indulged in endless mead-drinking parties with his heroes in the land of *Walhalla*; *Zio*, king of war; *Thor* the god of thunder and weather; and *Freia* the moon, and goddess of love. Worship was in sacred groves, and could include cruel rites of propitiation. The warriors' bravery in battle was largely attributable to the belief that thereby they would be accepted among the host of Wodan's brave companions.

Winfrith went to Friesland in 716, but the political situation made it impossible to continue long, and so he temporarily returned to his monastery of Nutscelle. On the death of Abbot Winberct the brethren implored Winfrith to accept the abbacy, but he firmly declined - his mind was set on mission work on the Continent. Perhaps following Willibrord's example, he decided to seek a direct commission from the Pope for his missionary work, and so in 718 he set off to Pope Gregory II.

 In May of 719 he received letters from Gregory which appointed him a papal legate and empowered him to preach throughout Germany. Following on the example of his namesake, Gregory I, this pope was keen to extend the influence of the papal see, and no doubt saw Winfrith as an opportunity to further control Germany. And Winfrith for his part proved himself keen to subsequently bring all his work under papal direction.

He was sent to Bavaria and Hesse, but on the way he learned that the political situation had improved in Frisia, since the Christian Carl Martel had become king of the Franks and had annexed it. Winfrith consequently turned aside to Frisia and aided the now aged St Willibrord who had been labouring there for over twenty years. Seeing Winfrith's worth, Willibrord wished to make him his successor to the bishopric of Utrecht, but Winfrith did not want to be so restricted, saying that his mandate from the pope was to preach throughout all of Germany. And so after their three fruitful years together he went to Hesse and Saxony, where God greatly blessed his labours with conversions.

Winfrith reported on his labours to Pope Gregory, who called him to Rome and, in 722 or 723, consecrated him a Regionary Bishop - that is, one unattached to a diocese. As though to further bind him to Rome, Gregory changed his English name to the Latin one of Boniface, and had him swear an oath of allegiance to the papal throne. Then, aided with a letter from Gregory requesting Carl Martel's protection and support, Boniface continued his labours in Hesse. Again many converted through his preaching.

The close relationship which developed between Boniface and Carl Martel proved to be a major factor in the foundation of the Carolingian dynasty which, in its turn, became a base for the growing temporal power of the papacy. Boniface's Christian influence on Carl also helps to explain the importance which the emperor gave to a decisive battle waged in 732, on the plain between Poitiers and Tours. When the king marched to halt the advance of the Saracen Moslem army, he realized that this was not only a battle to defend his Frankish kingdom, but a battle to decide if western Europe would remain Christian or become Moslem. After three days of pitched battle and terrible slaughter, he won and so stemmed the Moslem advance; had he not, the history of Europe doubtlessly would have been completely different.

In all his labours abroad Boniface retained a high regard for his old bishop Daniel of Winchester, and often sought his advice - although he did not

always follow it. In one of his letters Daniel counselled a moderate approach in his converse with the heathens, and suggested questions he could ask of them which would make self-evident the falsehood of their gods and their genealogies. We do not know how much Boniface followed this advice in his words, but in his actions he does seem to have a adopted a more combative approach. In Upper Hesse there was a very ancient oak called *Donnereiche* ('oak of thunder'), which was much venerated as sacred to the god *Thor*. Boniface promptly chopped it down and even used the wood to build a church. But because he suffered no retribution from their gods, many heathen turned to the faith. In due course other sacred trees and groves were cut down and the gods insulted by the Christians. The motivation behind such apparently drastic action was to show the heathen that no power resided in these things, that because the gods whom they feared did not exist, there was no divine retribution for destroying such 'holy sites'.

The mission prospered so much that Boniface was compelled to ask practical help from the Bishop of Winchester. Daniel obliged and sent books, relics, vestments and, most importantly, monks and nuns. New monasteries, schools and churches were established and staffed by these English monastics. Notable among these foundations are those of Amoneburg, , Frizlar, Ohrdruff and Altenburg. Among the English co-labourers in Boniface's mission were Saints Lull (from Malmesbury monastery), Eoban, Burchard of Wessex, Wigbert, the nuns Tecla, Lioba and Walburga from Wimborne convent (Dorset), and later, Winnebald and Willibald.

In 723 the new Pope Gregory III sent Boniface the *pallium*, which as the Primate of all Germany enabled him to consecrate bishops himself. Boniface subsequently established sees for Thuringia, Hesse, Franconia and later, for Nordgau.

In 738 he visited Rome, and there was made Legate of the Apostolic See in Germany, a powerful position both ecclesiastically and politically. On his return to the mission field he called a synod of all bishops in Germany. At the council he established three new sees in Bavaria[49]. He himself became archbishop of Mainz but with powers also to appoint Willibrord's successor at Utrecht.

Having organised things in Germany he turned his attentions to France, where Carl Martel's interference in ecclesiastical matters had led to many sees remaining vacant, or being filled with lay people, or even sold. In various synods between 742 and 747 he tried to address these problems. He also established the Benedictine rule as the standard monastic typikon for all Carolingian monasteries.

Nearing eighty years old, Boniface retired from his archiopiscopate and returned to Frisia. But even at this age he continued his missionary labours, by strengthening the faith in areas earlier evangelised, and pressing on into new territory in the north-east. It was there that he received his martyrdom, in 755 A.D. on June 5. Along with his co-labourers he was waiting for the arrival of a large number of newly baptised Frisians to give them confirmation, when a band of pagans fell upon them and slaughtered them all. His relics came to rest in the monastery of Fulda.

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[49] Bavaria was inhabited by Celts formerly subject to the Romans, but after their conquest a century earlier by the Franks, were ruled through governors.

The Ninth Century and King Alfred the Great

Whereas the eighth century was a golden age for England and its Church, things were quite different in the next century. Recalling the state of affairs when he came to the throne in 871, King Alfred complained that hardly anybody north or south of the Humber river could translate Latin. This may have been the exaggeration of a southerner not very aware of learning in Mercia, and of writing over twenty years after the events, but in essence it was not far from the truth. Allowing for the scarcity of literary sources in all this century, it also seems that organised monasticism virtually ceased. This collapse of learning and monasticism was primarily due to the Viking invasions, although as early as 734 Bede was already lamenting the shortage of teachers and the fact that many monastics were slackening the vigour of their life. Perhaps also, the exodus of monastics and teachers to the Continent would not have helped.

The first sign of foreboding came in 793 when Norwegian Vikings plundered Lindisfarne. The next year the same fate befell Jarrow. Raids continued for the next seventy years, including two severe attacks on Sheppey, in 835 and 854, and an over winter stay on Thanet in 850. Since both these sites are strategically situated at mouth of the Thames it was evident that the Vikings were intending to penetrate further inland. In surprise attacks they would sweep down onto coastal areas with their long boats. But being shallow, these boats also allowed the assailants to penetrate inland, up rivers. The suddenness and violence of these onslaughts was unnerving. Furthermore, unlike previous raiders these Vikings did not only plunder but also destroyed by fire what they did not take. Monasteries and churches were a special target for rapine because of their precious liturgical objects.

In 865 a great Danish army landed in East Anglia, but this time it was evident that they had come not just to raid and withdraw, but to conquer and settle. And they proved so swift in their purpose that by 878 the great army occupied eastern Mercia, present-day Yorkshire and East Anglia.

These seafaring Vikings were also creating havoc throughout all Europe - Britain's problem was not unique. The Swedish Vikings concentrated on invasion through the Polish and Russian rivers, and settled to create the Russian state. The Norwegian Vikings mainly attacked the northern coasts and Ireland and Scotland, with others coming down to southern England and Normandy. The Danes, besides spreading into much of Mercia and East Anglia, also attacked France on her coast and up her northern rivers.

Had it not been for one man, who began his rule at the age of twenty-three, all of Britain probably would have become a Danish land. In 871 this remarkable King Alfred ascended the throne of Wessex, the only English domain entirely independent of the Danes. Against all odds, in the battle of Edington he defeated the Danes and so stemmed their advance. The army's Danish leader Guthrum along some of his chief men agreed to be baptised, and then withdrew from Wessex.

Later, Alfred was able to consolidate western Mercia, Wessex, Sussex and Kent as Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms. The rest of England including Northumbria was Danelaw, that is, territory under Danish law and rule. (After capturing York, the chief town of Northumbria in 867, the Danish army had

established an Englishman, Egbert, as tributary king of Northumbria. Although they then withdrew for the meantime to Mercia, as a tributary Northumbria was still considered part of the Danelaw.)

Alfred was far-sighted in the organisation of his land and army. He established many laws, which encouraged people to obey their lords but which also legislated to protect the weak against the powerful. He developed a system of fortifications so that every village had a stronghold near enough for the people to retreat to in times of danger. While he had half the male peasantry in his armies at any one time he had the other half remain behind to work the land. This system was half the secret of his sustained military successes, for it avoided the problem of armies dissolving themselves so the peasant soldiers could return home to work their abandoned fields. Among his other achievements he even began a navy in an attempt to challenge the Vikings at sea.

With such ability and success it is not surprising that, in the words of *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, after he had regained London from the Danes in 886 "all the English people submitted to Alfred except those who were under the power of the Danes". To be sure, some previous rulers had also been recognised as overlords over all the English kingdoms, but this tended to be chiefly on the basis of their military force. It seems that in Alfred's case people felt they had a ruler who had their interests at heart, that besides processing military prowess he wanted to improve the life of his subjects. Alfred was not only a lawgiver and successful military man for he also sought to rebuild his kingdom from its spiritual and educational ruins. He founded for example a monastery on the Isle of Athelney in Somerset and a convent in Shaftesbury. Athelney was probably chosen by Alfred as a form of thanksgiving to God, because it was from there as a base that he made his successful skirmishes against the Danish armies, and so, against all odds, reversed the tides against the invading Danes. The low state of monasticism in England is confirmed by the fact that Athelney had to be equipped with an abbot from the Continent, a Saxon named John, and that most of its monks were taken from Gaul. This monastery does not seem to have taken root however. Both the desolate site and the austere abbot created discontent, and some of the monks conspired to kill him; he barely escaped with his life. But the Shaftesbury convent prospered, and continued to become especially influential in the tenth century.

Both for his own learning and to establish a palace school, Alfred gathered around himself a small group of learned clerics and monastics, seven of whom we know by name. Four were from Mercia, and three were foreigners. Plegmund was a priest (later made Archbishop of Canterbury), Werfreth was bishop of Worcester, Werwulf was a member of his household, and the fourth, Athelstan was a priest. The other three were the learned monk Grimbald, from the Frank monastery of St Bertin, the Saxon John mentioned above, and the priest Asser from St David's in Wales. Asser became a close friend of the king, and later wrote his biography. That all four English scholars were from Mercia is explained by the fact that Western Mercia had not been greatly disrupted by Viking forces and so managed some continuity in learning.

Alfred felt strongly that his people should be able to read famous Latin works in their own English language, and so he translated some himself,

including Gregory the Great's *Cura Pastoralis* (a description of a bishop's pastoral responsibilities), Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* and Augustine of Hippo's *Soliloquies.* These were no mean achievements, considering that he could not read his own English language before he was twelve, and that he began learning Latin only when he was about forty*.*

Alfred's achievements by the time of his death in 899 put him on a par with the greatest of European rulers. On the basis of all these labours, Alfred has long been associated with the beginnings of the English kingdom, its navy and its literature.

As we have seen, Alfred had tried to revive monastic discipline, but with only limited effect. During his reign and for about fifty years afterwards the dominant form of religious life was societies of canons, that is, of clergy living in rather loose communities, free to possess property, and sometimes even to live apart in their own houses. Their main function was not so much corporate prayer and community life as the service of churches for laymen - either Minsters or the so-called 'lesser churches' which were usually founded by lay noblemen. The obedience and poverty central to the traditional monastic life were not much in evidence. This idiorhythmic life was sanctioned by a rule of life which St Chrodegang of Metz (d. 766) had penned for the canons of his cathedral. Although his monastery of Gorze was a force for the reformation of monastic life among the Franks, it was his more relaxed rule for canons which was in reality most popular. Charlemagne was to ordain that all canons follow either Benedict's rule or Chrodegang's, and the greater ease of the latter's proved more attractive. The Rule spread to England as well as to Italy and Germany. Countless English abbeys, including Jarrow, Ripon and Malmesbury, which had formerly led a strict monastic life of obedience and poverty were, through the ninth and into the tenth centuries, occupied by canons who by and large led a secular and undisciplined life.

On the Continent things were no better. In 909 a great council of Frankish bishops gathered at Trosly near Soissons and recorded their despair at the situation: "...Monks, canons, nuns, lack their rightful rulers, are subject, contrary to all law of the Church, to prelates not of their body, and thus are brought to dire need, to sin and to confusion....Now in our monasteries laymen live as lords and masters, presiding over religious life and conversation as though they were professed abbots; their monks give themselves to greed and luxury indecent even to godly layfolk."[50]

Although monasticism among men was at a very low ebb in the ninth century and the first quarter of the tenth, it was not so bad among women. Alfred's convent foundation at Shaftesbury continued through, and after, Athelstan's reign (924-39). Wilton nunnery was probably a ninth century foundation, and was certainly in existence in Athelstan's reign, and Nuns' Minster in Winchester was founded by Alfred's widow, Ealhswith in the beginning of the ninth century.

A major factor in the debasement of monastic life was the power that secular founders and their successors - royal or noble - tended to retain over their foundations. This and other factors were to be dealt with only in the tenth century, to which we shall now turn our attention.

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[50] *St Dunstan of Canterbury*, E.S. Duckett, London 1955; p.447.

Tenth Century and Monastic Revival

While English monastic revival did not begin until about 940, when St Dunstan re-established the Benedictine Rule, on the Continent it began in 910 through the foundation of the monastery of Cluny in France. From its beginnings Cluny followed a strict form of the Benedictine Rule as devised by St Benedict of Aniane (750-821). A major difference in this newer adapted rule was the emphasis given to teaching and writing, the manual work being undertaken by serfs attached to lands given to the monasteries. This betokened a lamentable growth in the temporal power of monasteries as major landlords and also a growing emphasis on academic work rather than inner prayer. These paved the way for a major paradigm shift which had far reaching effects on future monastic and social life in Europe. It effectively paved the way for the universities, which were symptomatic of and reinforced the tendency for rationalism to usurp the role of the spiritual intellect, heart, or *nous* as it is called in Greek.

Another important facet of the Cluniac reform was that it ensured that Cluny and the houses under its leadership (which were many) were completely free from any interference from the founders, be they local bishop, noble or royalty, and were subject only to the pope. Effectively the only abbot in Cluniac monasteries was that of Cluny, abbots of daughter communities being accountable to him, chiefly via a yearly council held at the mother house. Although the Cluniac Rule was essentially Benedictine, the reformers replaced the manual work prescribed by the St Benedict of Nursia's Rule with increased hours of offices.

The outcome of the Cluniac reform was twofold. On the one hand it did channel existing monks and attract new monks into a disciplined, truly communal life centred on prayer and obedience. On the other hand the reforms' new system of centralisation around the mother house of Cluny, and via it, on the pope, meant that papal power was vastly extended. Soon this became so great that it posed a real threat to secular powers.

But to return to England. In the reigns of Alfred's son, Edward the Elder (reigning 899-925) and his son, Athelstan (925-39) the border encompassing the English kingdoms was more or less established, and corresponds roughly that of present-day England. The relative peace that ensued for the second half of the tenth century was the setting for the monastic revival in southern England, East Anglia and the Midlands, led by St Dunstan of Canterbury. Although his reform shared the Cluniac return to a Benedictine rule, it depended on the support of the king rather than the pope to protect monasteries from interference from local lords; in this respect, the king was to do for the English monasteries what the pope did for Continental Cluniac houses.

Saint Dunstan of Canterbury (c. 909-88)

Dunstan was born about 909 in Somerset, near the ancient Christian site of Glastonbury. His parents, Heorstan and Cynethryth, were nobles and related to the reigning king Edward the Elder. They were devout, and often took the difficult journey through the marshes to celebrate church feasts at the nearby abbey of Glastonbury. Dunstan began his schooling at Glastonbury, which at the time was no longer a monastery but a school staffed by canons. He was tonsured there, although things were so

idiorhythmic that this did not mean that he then began to live a monastic life proper.

At the age of about thirteen he spent some time in the household of his uncle Athelm, the Archbishop of Canterbury. While there he was introduced to the new king Athelstan, who had just received the throne in 924. On Athelm's death in 926 Dunstan went to the king's court.[51] It is probably during this time he became skilled in tapestry, metalwork, painting, drawing, poetry and music. Later in life as a church reformer this led him to encourage monks and clergy to practice some such skill. His time at court was providential for his future role in another way, as a counsellor to kings. The young Dunstan became acquainted at this time with the politics of the day through first-hand contact with English and the numerous Continental visitors to Athelstan's court.

But the gifted yet retiring Dunstan excited the envy of fellow nobles at court, and they spread rumours that this bookish fellow was secretly practising magic. He was consequently ejected from the court, and even beaten up by his detractors. This was about the year 935.

The next few months he spent at Glastonbury and at Winchester at the house of Bishop Aelfheah (also known as Alphege). The bishop had established at his residence what he could of a strict monastic life, but he wanted more widespread reform. It was he who besought Dunstan to dedicate himself to the restoration of the traditional Benedictine rule at Glastonbury. The young Dunstan, hitherto used to a freer life, and that at court, did not take to the suggestion at first. However, a serious illness changed his mind, and in 936 he settled as a semi-hermit in Glastonbury in a cell built apart, against the abbey walls. He received help and encouragement from Aelfheah, but also from a devout relative and widow, Lady Aethelflaed who lived nearby. During this time he was also ordained priest by the bishop.

In 939 Athelstan was killed in battle and succeeded by Edmund, who promptly recalled Dunstan to court. But in 940 the same fate as before befell him, and slander caused the king to cast him out of court. But within a few days, through a miraculous deliverance while out hunting, the king repented and placed him as abbot of Glastonbury, and promised to supply whatever was needed for its material needs.

For about fourteen years Dunstan gradually established a stricter communal life at Glastonbury, and extended its buildings. Although close to King Edmund and his successor Eadred (946-55) as their counsellor and supporter he resisted their entreaties to accept the bishopric of Crediton.

In 955 Eadred died and was succeeded by his fifteen-year-old son Eadwig. Dunstan's enemies again orchestrated his exile, only this time he fled to the Netherlands, to Ghent. He stayed in the monastery of St Peter's, which in about 941 together with its twin foundation of St Bavo and other houses had been restored to a strict rule of life by St Gerard along with. In the months which he spent there Dunstan conversed with its abbot Womar and studied the ritual and typikon used in the revived monasteries on the Continent.

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[51] Some authorities say that he returned to Glastonbury abbey but often went to stay at the court, especially when it was at Cheddar, so near Glastonbury.

Dunstan's term of exile therefore proved to be providential, for his experience at St Peter's was of great help in his future work as restorer of monastic life in England.

In 957 Dunstan was recalled from exile by the new king Edgar "the Peaceful", and was promptly made bishop of Worcester, then, in 959, was somewhat uncanonically made simultaneous bishop of London . As if this was not promotion enough finally in 960, was consecrated archbishop of Canterbury.

Until his death in 988 Dunstan worked closely with kings in reforming the church in general and monasteries in particular. He was involved directly with the reform of the monasteries of Glastonbury, Malmesbury, Bath, Athelney, Muchelney and Westminster. Laws were enacted enjoining the payment of church tithes, which helped to establish and support more parish priests and the poor and the upkeep of churches. As counsellor to the royal court we can be sure that many of the laws enacted under Edgar's long and fruitful reign were inspired by Dunstan. He revised the service of coronation, and many of these additions remain in the present rite. As we have seen , he himself was skilled in numerous crafts, and he encouraged workshops in his monasteries and enjoined parish priests to learn a craft.

The crystallisation of his reforming work however is what is known as the *Regularis Concordia,* or to give it its full title in English translation, *The Monastic Agreement of the Monks and Nuns of the English Nation.*[52] Besides St Dunstan himself, the inspiration behind this document was his two fellow-workers, St Oswald (d. 992), Bishop of Worcester, and Aethelwold, Bishop of Winchester; in fact the final writing of it is probably the work of Aethelwold and not Dunstan. To these reformers a certain flexibility and freedom had always been important, but they also felt that in the face of the growing number of restored abbeys and monastics, some sort of common pattern or order was needed. They therefore asked King Edgar to call a council which could deliberate and agree upon such a document.

The council met in Winchester around the year 970. A multitude of bishops, abbots and abbesses from England gathered, along with monks from St Peter's in Ghent and Fleury in France. After long deliberation they drew up the *Concordia.* It covered all aspects of daily monastic life, chiefly the following: how to do the daily church services according to the day's place in the yearly liturgical cycle; fasting; private prayer; work; the administration of the sacraments such as confession; the discipline of the communal life; hours for reading, work, crafts; the guarding of silence and remoteness from the world.

In general outline a day within the month of October is prescribed by the *Concordia* as follows (the routine varied throughout the year, but the main features remained the same). The monks rose at 2.00 in the morning. After a period of prescribed silent prayers in church, the child novices entered and there followed services until about 7.00. On leaving church there followed half an hour for spiritual reading, and then again in church there was the Third Hour and the first or Morrow Mass. Daily Chapter followed (the equivalent of

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[52] Ed. and trans. by Dom Thomas Symons, 1953. Based on the rule, Eleanor Duckett provides a helpful description of an average monastic day in her book *Saint Dunstan of Canterbury* (London, 1955); pp.160-183. The timetables for all the seasons of the year are given in Dom David Knowles's *Monastic Order in England,* 1949; pp 714f; pp 450f.

Synaxi in the eastern tradition). There followed two hours of work, and then the sixth hour, the Conventual Sung Mass and Ninth Hour (daily communion was encouraged). When this ended, at about 2.00 p.m., there followed refectory, the only meal of the day. Then there was work until about 5.00, Vespers, a drink of something in refectory, spiritual reading, Compline, and then, a little after 6.00 p.m. the monks retired to rest in the common dormitory.

Notable features of the Rule compared to earlier typikons are the increased numbers of hours in church, the many prayers offered for the English Royalty and the reposed, and the shift in emphasis from manual labour to intellectual work. Fasting was not as vigorous as eastern traditions, although no meat was eaten, fats were excluded in Advent but not milk and eggs (although, as in the eastern tradition, these also were excluded in Great Lent).

Though followed by many houses, this typikon was not slavishly applied by all subsequent abbots and abbesses of England; for example in about 1005 Aelfic, a disciple and friend of Aethelwold himself, supplied the monks of his Eynsham monastery only with extracts of the rule. The *Concordia's* influence was however deep, and until the Norman conquest many Anglo-Saxon glosses were made to the texts of it in order to better understand its implications. Being as it is a conscious and corporate attempt to apply general monastic principles to English monasteries, albeit a thousand years ago, contemporary monastics in the West would surely benefit from studying this work.

Although active to the very end, towards the close of his life Dunstan tended to spend less time visiting and more at his monastery in Canterbury. On May 19, 988, just two days after giving three sermons on Ascension Day, he reposed in the Lord.

The English renaissance of Benedictine life was the fruit of three influences: Aelfheah's initiative in Winchester, continued by Dunstan in Glastonbury; Berno and Odo's foundation of Cluny and its offshoot at Fleury; and the labours of St Gerard of Brogne and John of Gorze in the Netherlands. The Flemish influence was conveyed to England by Dunstan because of his stay there while in exile. As we have seen, the Cluniac and Gorze inspired movements on the Continent had in common a return to the Benedictine rule as interpreted by Benedictine of Aniane. The Gorze monastery and those Flemish monasteries inspired by it differed from the Cluniac movement in three important respects. Firstly, their life was more austere and ascetic. (Its founder, St John had begun his monastic life with an ascetic hermit named Humbert at Verdun, and later lived with an even more ascetic hermit, Lambert, in the wilderness forests of Argonne.) Secondly, "daughter" monasteries of Brogne and Gorze retained their independence, having their own abbot, whereas all Cluny's dependencies were subject to Cluny's abbot. Thirdly, Gorze monasteries remained subject to the local bishop and not directly to the Pope, as was the case with Cluniac houses. In these respects the Flemish houses followed the more ancient Orthodox Church's tradition, except perhaps in the degree of control the bishops exercised over the interior life of the monasteries.

The effect of the Cluniac movement on the English revival was less than that from the Netherlands, but it was nonetheless an important influence. An

obvious contribution is evident in those Cluniac disciplines and customs incorporated into the *Regularis Concordia.* St Oswald was probably the major conduit of Cluny influence in England, since he had been educated at Fleury, and invited to England people like Abbo of Fleury. We also know that an early supporter of the monastic renewal, Oda, Archbishop of Canterbury from 940 to 958, received the Benedictine habit at Fleury.

The legacy of the reform was strong, for the vigour of English monasticism continued through the period of Danish rule up to the Norman conquest. Despite the assaults of the Danes, new monasteries were founded after Dunstan's death, such as Eynsham in Oxfordshire, founded by Aethelmaer. Much literary work was undertaken in order to strengthen the faith of the clergy, monks and people. The priest monk Aelfric for example ably translated the Book of Genesis and other parts of the Old Testament into the vernacular Old English. He also wrote, in English, two books called *Catholic Homilies,* a sort of catechism "for the instruction of souls who cannot be taught save in their own language." We also know, from Continental sources, that in this time English preachers and teachers went overseas as missionaries to Sweden, Norway and Denmark.

But from 980 Vikings started raiding and sacking again. In 991 a well-organised army led by Olaf Tryggvason, the future king of Norway, defeated the English at Maldon. The purpose of this and subsequent attacks up until 1014 was not however to settle, but to extract tribute money, called Danegeld. Vast sums were handed over by the English king Aethelred (48,000 pounds of silver in 1012 alone), but again and again the Danes broke their word and returned to sack towns, churches and monasteries. In 1011 Canterbury itself was besieged and taken 'by deceit': "There man might see misery where there had been bliss" writes the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, "in the wretched town from which Christianity first came to us, and joy before God and the world."

Eleventh Century

In 1016 the Danish king Cnut defeated King Edmund 'Ironside' and, until 1035, ruled as king of all England - both the resident the Danes and the English - as well as Denmark itself. Foreign ruler as he was, and only aged 23, Cnut nonetheless restored the people's confidence in their country and king. He promised to be faithful to English law, and even to follow the Christian way. He gave lands and gifts to churches and monasteries, went on pilgrimage to Rome, and established a code of civil and ecclesiastical law. His common sense humility is shown in the tradition that he had himself seated on a beach and then commanded the unobliging waves to retreat in order to show his flattering noblemen that even a king must acknowledge that there are limits to his power.

The next invasion and conquest came from the Normans. After winning the famous Battle of Hastings in 1066 William the duke of Normandy[53] rapidly went on to conquer all England. In 1075 he was crowned king. Although at his coronation he swore to honour the 'good and ancient laws' of

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[53] Normandy was a fusion of Viking and French people. In 911 a portion of northern France was given to the Vikings by Charles the Simple, in an attempt to create a buffer zone against further Viking invasion. These Vikings became Christian, intermarried with the native French, and soon became one of the most powerful Frankish dukedoms.

the Anglo-Saxon kings, which in a sense he did, he nevertheless also imposed heavy taxation, compelled loyalty to the crown by giving land to his supporters, and controlled the power of barons by strictly licensing the building of castles.

William's desire to retain royal control extended to the Church. With the help of his Italian friend, the lawyer Archbishop Lanfranc of Canterbury, he ensured that no papal commands and no excommunications of royal officials were valid without royal approval. Indeed, no pope was recognised by the English Church at all without the king's approval. The king also appointed bishops and abbots and kept control over them by incorporating them into his feudal system of officials. But the monopoly William desired was not only organisational: the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* tells us that in 1070 "the king allowed all the monasteries in England to be plundered". Writing in the twelfth century William of Poitiers wrote that "a Greek or Arab visitor would have been carried away by delight" at the sight of the Norman treasures plundered from English churches.

William wished to control the Church for political ends, but neither could he abide in it what he considered moral laxness. He encouraged the reforms of the Cluniac monasteries and the holding of general synods, replaced with foreigners those Anglo-Saxon bishops and abbots whom he thought were slack in discipline, generously endowed churches and monasteries, and enforced the clerical celibacy which he and the Continental Church thought was proper.

If we turn from William's changes in church government and consider statistics alone, it must be admitted that the extent of the Church in England at the time of the Doomsday Book (1084-86) is impressive. In his book *The Hallowing of England* (1994, Norfolk) Father Andrew Phillips gives the following summary. With some one thousand monastics spread among 35 monasteries and 9 convents, and a population estimated at 1.5 million, we have a proportion of 1:1,500 monastics to non-monastics. And this was a low figure compared to earlier times - in Bede's time there were 600 monks in Wearmouth alone. Norwich had about 5,000 people at the time of the Doomsday accounting and, going by archaeological finds alone, there were at least 49 churches to serve them. Norfolk had 1,300 parishes at the time. At Bury St Edmunds the proportion of clergy to homes was 1:11!

English Emigrants to Byzantium

From the Orthodox point of view neither of the two options open to the English Church after the Norman invasion was agreeable: control by the king or control by a papacy increasingly intent on centralising everything around itself. General social and economic discontent among the natives naturally followed in the wake of William's favouritism to his Norman friends. Emigration of some degree was inevitable.[54] It has been estimated that within two decades of the conquest about one in a hundred left England. Scotland, Sweden, Scandinavia, Flanders, France and Italy were all recipients of the emigrants, although Denmark seems to have been the most popular. Connections were even forged as far east as Russia. Perhaps the most

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[54] See Stenton F.M. "English families and the Norman Conquest" in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 1944 (Vol. XXVI); pp. 3-7.

conspicuous instance of this is Gytha, the daughter of Harold II who was the king of England defeated in 1066. After the battle she fled to Denmark and thence to Kiev, Russia. At Chernigov she married the future Grand-Prince of Kiev, Vladimir Monomach on April 1074. This Vladimir was half-Greek, and was the grandson of St Anne of Novgorod. To add to the east-west connections, St Anne had been baptised by a monk and missionary of Glastonbury, St Sigrid of Sweden.[55]

But what is perhaps the most interesting emigration, and indeed a sizeable one, was that to Constantinople. The emigrants included a high percentage of nobles. The fact that this movement continued from the 1070's into the middle of the twelfth century suggests that it happened with the approval of the Norman kings of England; it was doubtless a tidy means of freeing themselves of a discontented and therefore potentially rebellious ruling class.

Perhaps the most important of these emigrations to Constantinople, for there were phases in the movement, happened in 1075.[56] In that year a fleet of 350 ships (or 235 according to another source) left England for 'Micklegarth', the Great City; its commander was Siward (or Sigurd) Earl of Gloucester. Two other earls and eight high-ranking nobles were with him. A conservative estimate puts the total numbers at around 10,000. According to records on their arrival they found the City under siege from the Turks. They relieved the populace of the attackers, and out of gratitude the Emperor Alexis offered places for the immigrants in the city and places for men in the army. Accounts say that 4,300 chose to settle in the City. At some stage these sent priests to Hungary to be consecrated bishops. The reason for this was that the English wished to continue using their Latin rite rather than the Greek rite, and Hungary was both on good terms with Constantinople and also used the Latin rite. The English who became soldiers in the Byzantine army proved themselves of such worth that they entered the Imperial household and were accepted into the Emperor's bodyguard.

Until at least 1361 there was a church in the City named Panagia Varangiotissa, the name suggesting that it may have been founded by an English person. On a more certain note, we know that a 'ver sanctus', a holy man, named Coleman founded a basilica in the City and dedicated it to St Nicholas and St Augustine; he had been educated at St Augustine's in Canterbury. He had icons painted of the protectors and placed that of Nicholas on the north side of the church and of Augustine on the south side. Augustine's had an inscription in Greek reading 'St Augustine, Apostle of the English'.[57] Apparently Coleman had married a "well-born and rich" Greek woman. We are told that "the basilica in memory of Augustine and his icon were to the English exiles as a comforting sister of their own mother, their

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[55] Fr. Andrew Phillips, *Orthodox Christianity and the English Tradition* (Norfolk, 1995); p.254.

[56] This and the following facts are taken from an unpublished essay, *Rome, Canterbury and Constantinople: The Beginning and the End of the Old English Church,* by Andrew Phillips (1988, Paris). Among his sources are: Shepard, Jonathan, "The English and Byzantium: a Study in their role in the Byzantine Army in the later eleventh century" in *Traditio* 29 (1973), pp 53-92; Nicol D.M., "Byzantium and England" in *Balkan Studies* 15 (1974) pp. 179-203; Vasiliev A.A. "The Anglo-Saxon Immigration to Byzantium", *Seminarium Kondakovianum* ix, (Prague, 1937).

[57] See Janin *La Géographie Ecclésiastique de l'Empire Byzantine,* Vol. 3, Paris 1969.

native land; there they often prayed, and there, foreigners and orphans, they took pleasure in addressing their mild patron."[58]

Those who chose not to settle in the City were given permission by the Emperor to recolonise lands formerly held by the Empire. Consequently the fleet sailed further north and to the east "for six days". "At the beginning of the Scythian country" they drove out the inhabitants of a land called Domapia, renamed it New England, and resettled the once Byzantine towns. Moreover they renamed them after English towns, including York and London. There is not universal agreement among scholars where this New England was, but evidence points to the sea of Azov region. The sea of Azov is referred to in a twelfth century Syriac map as the 'Varang' Sea, the Sea of the Varangians. 'Varangian' was the name originally used by the Byzantines for the Nordic peoples, some of whom had formed the elite troops who came to be Emperors' bodyguard. As we have seen, the bodyguard came to include many English, so much so that by the twelfth century the word 'Varangian' specifically meant the English.[59] Maps from the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries variously name a town in this region as 'Londia', 'Londin' and 'Londina'. Another is called 'Susaco', which possibly means 'Saxon'.[60]

There are numerous other references to English living within the Byzantine empire. We know for example that English soldiers sustained heavy losses fighting for the Byzantines against the Normans at Dyrrachium (Durazzo) in 1081. Emperor Alexis granted land to English on the Gulf of Nicomedia for them to build a fortified town. Between 1101 and 1116 a Lincoln man named Ulfric came from Constantinople to recruit soldiers for the Byzantine army. Again, English soldiers fought in defence of the city against the Crusader attack in 1204; a contemporary French writer, Robert of Clair, mentions that these English had their own priests. On a more homely note, literary sources note that in the mid-fourteenth century the descendants of the English exiles would greet the Emperor at his Christmas banquet in their native Anglo-Saxon tongue.

It is unknown what happened to these Anglo-Saxon settlements after the 1453 conquest of Constantinople by the Turks. Probably those in the Turkish regions merged into the Greek population, and the New England settlement on the northern coast of the Black Sea intermarried with Slavs.

Wales

What was happening with the Church in Wales from 600 until the Norman invasion of Wales in 1093? Unfortunately there is not enough detailed contemporary literature to give a clear picture of Church life in this period. In this article we can only give a rudimentary sketch from what is known.

In contrast to Ireland where bishops tended to be subject to the abbot of their monastery, in Wales the bishop remained the foremost authority. In Welsh Laws the top ecclesiastical court was the bishop. Recent research into the eight century *Book of Lichfield* and the twelfth century *Book of Llandaff* has suggested that in south Wales the diocesan sees established in Roman

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[58] From Fr. A. Phillips, *Rome, Canterbury and Constantinople, ibid.* p. 23.

[59] See Dawkins R.M. "The later history of the Varangian Guard - Some Notes" in *Journal of Roman Studies* XXXVII (1947); p.45.

[60] See Shepard, Jonathan, "Another New England? - Anglo-Saxon Settlement on the Black Sea" in *Byzantine Studies* 1,i, (Pittsburg, 1974) pp. 18-39

times continued unbroken .[61] Although monasticism was certainly a major factor in Welsh church life, especially in the sixth and seventh centuries, it does not appear to have reached the proportions of Irish monasticism. Although there did exist some large monasteries (according to Bede, in the early seventh century Bangor-is-coed had over 2,400 monks) these were probably few in number. Certainly Welsh monks did not have the impact on Europe as did the Irish and English monks. This was largely due to the isolationist position they adopted with regard to the Roman mission under Augustine (we recall that it was not until 768 A.D. that the last Welsh churches adopted the Continental dating of Easter).

The fate of larger monastic communities as distinct from isolated hermits or small communities was influenced by the temporal order of things, especially pirate raids and the outcome of battles between warlords. A brief survey of these vicissitudes is therefore relevant to our subject. As we have seen, the unsuccessful negotiations between Augustine of Canterbury and the Celtic Christians resulted in a conflict over Roman versus Celtic customs. This led, until the late eighth century, to a period of relative isolation for the Welsh Britons, despite the gradual conversion of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. In the face of this conversion, the conflict of Christian Britons versus pagan Saxons changed, at least for a while, to orthodox versus heretic, with both sides considering themselves orthodox. We recall how St Aldhelm complained of the fact that British Christians refused to eat with him. Conversely, English did not for some time accept consecrations by British bishops as valid.

Perhaps in the minds of both British and English kings this ecclesiastical divide justified their warring with each other. Firstly the British had to contend with attacks from Christian Northumbrian kingdoms, and then from the Mercian kingdom. It was not until the end of the eighth century that the border between the two people was more or less settled. This was delineated by a dyke constructed by King Offa of Mercia (757-96), a remarkable 149 mile-long earth wall and ditch which still bears his name.

Although the English Church was certainly affected by all this fighting it nonetheless managed to flourish, deriving much of its vigour from the Continent and from Irish monastics. In the seventh and first half of the eight century the Britons by contrast were not so connected with the other Christians of the Isles and the Continent - their more insular stance is reflected in their being the last to accept the Roman method for calculating Easter. It must however be remembered that the Welsh were not the only Britons, for at that time they considered themselves as one people with their fellow Britons in Strathclyde, Cornwall and Brittany.

Although a degree of border warfare did continue after the construction of Offa's Dyke, the relative stability which ensued in Wales led to a growing desire among the Welsh to record their old traditions. It proved to be a fruitful time for literature. Traditions hitherto known only in memorised verbal form began to be written down in the Old Welsh language. No doubt Nennius of Gwynedd was an early influence in this zeal to chronicle, when in the eighth or ninth century he gathered his miscellany of historical snippets: "I have made a heap of all I found" he confessed.

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[61] K. Hughes, O'Donnell Lecture (Oxford 1975).

But besides chronicles much new material was written in Welsh from this time; our contemporary interest in Celtic spirituality is fuelled in part by English translations of Old Welsh poems and hymns written in these centuries.[62] That medieval Welsh monks wrote to each other in their own language contrasts with Continental convention, where Latin was the accepted mode. Indeed, it is a characteristic of medieval Celtic, and perhaps particularly Welsh Christianity, that so much emphasis is given to the writing and hearing of poetry. A ninth or tenth century poem from *The Book of Carmarthen* includes among its list of practices for pious people the 'listening to the songs of clear-speaking poets.'[63] Another important feature of medieval Christian Welsh, and Celtic poetry in general, is its strong affirmation of the goodness of the material creation. The following extracts of a poem in Old Welsh of about the ninth century illustrate this:

> Almighty Creator, it is you who have made
> the land and the sea...
>
> The world cannot comprehend in song bright and melodious,
> even though the grass and trees should sing,
> all your wonders, O true Lord!...
>
> Purely, humbly, in skilful verse,
> I should love to give praise to the Trinity,
> according to the greatness of his power.[64]

Concurrent with this emergence of indigenous literature in the late eighth century was a greater openness to foreign influences. As is often the case it was an enemy, the marauding Vikings, which compelled the British to co-operate both among themselves and with their previous adversaries the English. This was particularly the case during the reign of Alfred's contemporary, King Rhodri of Gwynedd. Under him nearly all of Wales ceased their civil wars and united, and managed to gain many victories against the Vikings. It was a short-lived union however, for after his death his kingdom was divided among his sons and rivalry broke out again. Welsh princes ended up taking advantage of the new links with the English by soliciting their help to war against fellow Welsh rivals. One such civil dispute led the Welsh scholar Asser to go to Alfred's court to seeking military aid. In the event Alfred sought to benefit from his erudition and asked that he spend half of each year at his court to help him restore learning to his country.

Rhodri's pattern of rise and fall was repeated by King Hywel Dda, who ruled from 918 to 952. Except for part of the south-east, he came to rule all of Wales. By paying allegiance to the English king Edward and then Athelstan he safeguarded his authority. He also imitated the English example of centralisation by codifying the Welsh laws and issuing coins, which bore his name. But as with king Rhodri his death led to the disintegration of the empire.

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[62] A good selection of these can be found in translation in *Celtic Christian Spirituality*, Oliver Davies and Fiona Bowie (London, 1995)

[63] Quoted Davies and Bowie (*ibid.* page 12)

[64] In Davies and Bowie, *ibid.* page 27

In the late tenth century Wales, as with England and Ireland, suffered renewed and yet more vigorous assault from Vikings. The monastery of St David's alone was plundered four times between A.D. 982 and 989. Some of these Vikings not only plundered but also settled; many Welsh headlands retain their Scandinavian names from this period, such as Caldey, Bardsey and Priestholm.

The Britons' next enemies were the Normans. Having conquered England in 1066 and consolidated their rule there, in 1093 the Normans attacked and subdued Wales. However, the Welsh princes of the more mountainous northern and western regions soon retaliated and regained their independence, while the Normans retained the more fertile crescent of the south and east.

In the lands they did retain, the Norman lords swiftly centralised the Church and brought it under their control. They broke up the traditional Celtic *clasau* or mother monasteries, and gave the endowments of these communities to abbeys in Normandy or England. By the mid-twelfth century they had ensured that the four remaining bishops of Wales - of Bangor, St Asaph, St David's and Llandaff - all swore allegiance to the Archbishop of Canterbury. They also replaced the monastic centres and more localised arrangements of the Welsh with the centralised organisation common to Rome, a system of parishes, deaneries and archdeaconries. The traditional Welsh *Clasau* were replaced with the monastic orders prevalent on the Continent. Of these the Cistercian order became particularly popular. Ironically some of these communities, notably Strata Florida, became instrumental in preserving a Welsh identity, something the conquerors had not intended. Many *Clasau* chose to adopt the Augustinian Rule - the three much respected communities of Bardsey Island , Penmon and Beggelert were refounded as houses for Augustinian Canons. The Augustinian Rule was flexible, allowing for a reclusive life or for a more active pastoral life. Perhaps it was precisely this flexibility which made it attractive to the Britons.

We have seen how very soon after its conversion England had an archbishopric. Wales however did not have such until after the Norman conquest, that is, at least five centuries after its conversion. Before this there had been bishops or sees more influential than others,[65] but they do not seem to have held a permanent authority over other sees in the same way that the Anglo-Saxon archbishops did. Why was this so? Episcopal sees on the Continent were situated in cities, and their order in the hierarchy corresponded, by and large, to the relative secular importance of these cities, at least at the time of their establishment. But cities did not exist in post-Roman Wales; the Celts were a tribal people and had resisted attempts by the Romans to urbanise. Wales therefore, as with Ireland, lacked the temporal infrastructure for a hierarchical system along Roman lines.

In other respects also, even after they adopted the Roman dating of Pascha, Welsh Christians retained a considerable independence from Roman influence. The extent of this is evident in the reaction of Norman churchmen to the customs which they found that the Welsh still observed - in particular married clergy (including bishops), laymen holding office as abbots, and these abbacies and other ecclesiastical appointments being handed on from father

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[65] For example, Asser calls Nobis, Bishop of St David's, an "archbishop".

to son. The Normans considered all these as signs of decadence and proof that vigorous reformation was required. Rome had prescribed celibacy for all the higher clergy in the fifth century, and Gaul was following this custom at least by the next century, when we know bishops would separate from their wives from the time of their ordination. For the eastern Churches however, married priests were, and are still, quite acceptable, and even married bishops were a custom in the early centuries of the Church. So the Normans to regard married clergy as inherently decadent, albeit understandable in the light of their own tradition, was not entirely fair. And perhaps even the inheritance of bishoprics, although obviously open to abuse, was not necessarily an inherently corrupt practice for that culture and age. Few people apart from the clergy and their children were literate or understood Latin, which was the language of the church services. Consequently the son of a bishop, trained and educated from childhood, would easily have been among the most educationally qualified for the ministry. And besides this virtually all other specialist vocations in Celtic life were hereditary, from blacksmith to bard. Lay abbots were however a clearly decadent phenomenon, indicating that the Welsh church was in need of at least some tightening of discipline.

The centralising reform of the Normans did not entirely smother the independent Celtic spirit. The new rulers favoured the communal life of the Continental orders, but the twelfth century writer Giraldus Cambrensis suggests that in his time the erimitical life was still flourishing. He writes in his *Description of Wales* that 'nowhere are hermits and anchorites to be found who practise greater abstinence and lead a more spiritual life'(I.18).[66]

In the final analysis however, although a certain degree of indigenous spirituality did survive after the Norman occupation, Wales by and large was by it gathered into the changes then beginning to sweep through the Continent - the extended powers of the papacy, scholasticism, massive monastic orders, and later, the humanist Renaissance.

Ireland

After St Columba it is not possible to restrict the story of the Irish Church to Ireland, for its vigorous spiritual life burst the banks and spread not only to Britain but far into Europe.

In general terms we can say that there are five phases in the Orthodox period of the Irish Church: the establishment of the Church from the late fourth century up until the early sixth century; in the sixth and seventh centuries the burgeoning of monastic life, missionary monks, scholars and *peregrini*; toward the end of the seventh century a certain relaxation of standards, at least in comparison to the high standards of previous generations; then, beginning in the eighth century, the indigenous reform movement of the *Céli Dé-Culdee,* or *Culdees*. Church life in the ninth and the tenth centuries is greatly affected by the Viking invasions, when major monasteries and churches were frequently plundered and the monks and clergy slaughtered. It is commonly held that the golden age of Irish Christianity ended with this destruction wrought by the Norsemen. This is so, but the gold probably changed more to silver than to iron, for monasteries, missionary activities and schools continued, albeit on a reduced scale.

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[66] Taken from Sian Victory's *The Celtic Church in Wales,* London 1977, p 62.

Roman Usages Adopted

We have already sketched the story of the Church in Ireland up to 600, so let us take up our narrative from there. The golden age of Irish monasticism was still in its full vigour. We have already outlined the life of that great saint Columbanus who in the beginning of the century pioneered the Celtic monastic movement of voluntary exile to the Continent. This coincided with the immigration to England of Augustine and his missionaries from the Roman Church. As we have seen there subsequently arose conflicts in Britain over differences in Latin and Celtic customs; the rallying standard for those resisting the Roman traditions was the name of the Irish St Columba. To what extent did this conflict affect Ireland itself?

Although the differences in customs did create tensions in Ireland, monastic vigour continued throughout the 600's. St Colman of Lindisfarne (d. 676) for example founded a monastery at Innisboffin, an island off Connemara, and soon after another at Mayo, which was still flourishing nine hundred years later. The story of these two foundations is interesting. Colman had refused to accept the ruling in favour of Roman customs at the Synod of Whitby, and departed to Iona and thence back to Ireland. With him was an unspecified number of Irish monks and about thirty English. It was for all these that he established Innisboffin. Not long afterwards the English complained that they were being taken advantage of by their Irish brethren, who were in the habit of wondering off during summer and leaving the English monks to harvest. Bishop Colman consequently bought land for a new foundation at Mayo, and established the English monks there. This monastery became known as Mayo of the Saxons.

Southern Ireland (Munster) yielded to Roman customs relatively quickly, by 650. The southern region of Ulster, and the influential monasteries of St Columba took longer. By stages their bishops and monasteries acquiesced, the last being Iona which consented to the Roman dating of Pascha in 716 under the abbacy of St Egbert (d. 729).[67]

This difference in attitude to Roman customs between north and south was due largely to their respective geographies; the south was conveniently placed for abundant marine intercourse with southern England and the Continent, especially from the ports of Cork, Waterford and Wexford. Pilgrimages to Rome and to Roman churches in Gaul were therefore more common than for the northerners. The magnificent edifices which Irish saw must have impressed them; certainly when Pope Honorius wrote to the Munstermen in 634 enjoining them to conform, they were not so unwilling and follow suit with such a splendid city. He exhorted them "not to think their small number placed in the utmost border of the earth wiser than all the ancient and modern churches of Christ throughout the world." St Laserian (d. 639), abbot and perhaps bishop of Old Leighlin, was the first to attempt the change. But at the synod which he called for this purpose he was defeated by the famed and holy St Fintan, abbot of Taghmona, a firm adherent of Columban ways.

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[67] Some authorities however say that at Iona the actual celebration of Pascha according to Roman dating did not occur until the day of Egbert's repose, in 729 (David Farmer in *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints*, Oxford, 1992; p. 153), while others say the conformation with Rome was not until 767 (W.D. Simpson in *The Historical Columba,* Edinburgh, 1963; page 48).

Nevertheless, despite Fintan's influence by 650 all churches of the southern province had adopted Roman usages.

There is an extant letter written by St Cummian to Segienus, the abbot of Iona, which is interesting to us not just because of its subject, but because of the high level of learning which it reflects. Although Cummian had been trained in the Columban monastery of Durrow, he had joined the Roman party and was trying to convince Segienus to follow suit on the dating of Pascha. The breadth of his reading is evident in the authorities he refers to. After an exegesis of Exodus, he cites the teachings of Jerome, Origen, Augustine, Cyprian of Carthage, Cyril of Jerusalem, Pachomius (the Egyptian founder of communal monasticism), and Gregory the Great. He discusses the calendars of the Macedonians, Egyptians and the Hebrews. He compares various church councils including those of Nicea and Arles, and refers to earlier Irish saints, including Patrick, Ailbe of Emly, Kieran of Clonmacnois and Brendan of Clonfert.

Ireland conforming to Roman liturgical customs did not however entail subjugation to Rome; the Irish Church continued as before in its ecclesiastical independence, with no formal Roman supremacy implied.

So much for the controversies of the period. What of the monastic life, mission, and church life?

St Aidan of Lindisfarne (d. 651)

St Aidan is the umbilical cord between the Irish and the English Church. The British had no interest in evangelising the English, because they had been conquered by them and driven to the extremities of their homeland. But the Irish had no such history to embitter them, and so were willing when the king of Northumbria, St Oswald, asked for missionaries from the Irish foundation of Iona, in Scotland. The first monk they sent soon returned, disgusted with the ways of the English and convinced that they were too uncouth to learn. St. Aidan who was subsequently sent proved to be greatly fruitful on account of his holiness, gentleness and wisdom.

St Aidan founded a monastery on the Island of Lindisfarne, or Holy Island. From there he went out to preach throughout northern Northumbria or Bernicia. At Holy Island Aidan established a school for English boys, with a mind to developing an indigenous mission as soon as possible. He was known for his love of poverty and generosity, giving whatever he had to the poor or to redeem English slaves. On one occasion he gave to a beggar an expensive horse which Oswald's successor, king Oswin, had recently compelled him to accept as a gift, for use on his long preaching journeys. He encouraged lay people to fast until the ninth hour on Wednesdays and Fridays.[68] God supported his mission among the pagan Anglo-Saxons by many miracles, some of which Bede describes in his *History*. During Lent he retreated for prayer to a barren little island called Farne, where Cuthbert was to spend much of the last period of his life and die.

Soon after the death of the king Oswin and sixteen fruitful years in the episcopate St Aidan reposed and was buried at Lindisfarne. Some of his relics were taken to Ireland by St Colman after the Synod of Whitby.

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[68] H. Patrick Montague claims that it was Aidan who introduced into the Irish language the words Ceadaon (first fast) for Wednesday and dia hAoine (the main fast) for Friday (see *The Saints and Martyrs of Ireland,* Buckinghamshire, 1981; page 33).

St Fursa(Fursey) d. 650

Fursey is an excellent example of an Irish pilgrim for Christ. After many years as a monk in Ireland Fursa could no longer endure the many crowds that flocked around him because of his preaching and reputation, and so about 631 he went with some companions to East Anglia. King Sigesbert received him well there, and gave him freedom to preach. Bede tells us that by his example and preaching many converted and the believers strengthened. He later founded a monastery on land given him by the king, probably at Burgh Castle, near Yarmouth.

It was at this time that he had a series of visions which are related in a Life of Fursa, written by Bede's time. He had fallen ill and twice his soul was taken from his body into heaven. Bede relates some of the things he saw and which the angels told him.[69] It is interesting that, according to Sir Francis Palgrave in his *History of Normandy and England*, these visions were probably the inspiration behind Dante's *Inferno.*

After some years his desire to be free of all outward concerns led St Fursa to hand over the care of the monastery to his brother Foillan and two priests, and to live with his brother Ultan in greater solitude and ascetic struggles. After a year heathen attacks brought such disturbances to the area that on Sigesburt's death Fursa departed for Gaul. With the patronage of King Clovis and his chamberlain Earconwald he there founded a monastery at Lagny-sur-Marne. Soon afterwards fell ill and died.

Earconwald placed his body in the portico of a church which he was building on his estate at Peronne. His body was later found to be incorrupt and many miracles were wrought through them. Peronne subsequently became an important place of pilgrimage in France, and soon came to be called *Perrona Scottorum.;* he was widely venerated throughout Gaul.

Viking Attacks on Ireland from the Ninth to Eleventh centuries

As with Britain, Viking invasions had a great affect on Church life in Ireland. The Norsemen wrought havoc for three centuries, especially in plundering and sacking monasteries. The very uncertainty and suddenness of these raids cast an oppressive atmosphere of dread over the people. A writer of Munster, in the south, gives a vivid account:

> ...immense floods and countless sea-vomitings of ships and boats and fleets so that there was not a harbour nor a land-port nor a dun nor a fortress nor a fastness in all Munster without floods of Danes and pirates...they ravaged her chieftainries and her privileged churches and her sanctuaries; and they rent her shrines and her reliquaries and her books...

From a more personal vantage a monastic poet wrote:

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[69] See Bede's *History (ibid.)* III.19

> Harsh and cruel the wind this night;
> Turning and tossing the sea's locks white.
> On a night like this I gain some peace:
> Proud Vikings will only sail calm seas.[70]

These advances by the Danes can be broadly divided into three phases. The period from 795 till about 850 was for purposes of plunder. The second from 850-950 was for settlement, and the third, from 950 to 1100, was for political conquest. The first fleets arrived in Ireland around 837, and established permanent bases. From 875 they made settlements. Until 915 there was relative peace, but there followed a century of renewed pillaging and devastation. This only ceased in 1014 with the battle of Clontarf in Dublin, when the Munster king Brian Boru defeated the Norse and so broke the force of their military rule.

A major factor initiating these invasions of the Christian Isles by pagan Danes was, ironically, the Christian king Charlemagne. He had ravaged Northern Germany and Saxony in an attempt to convert the people by force. Many survivors fled into Denmark and Scandinavia, and carried with them a hatred for the Christian faith which presented such a violent face; Charlemagne had for example beheaded 4,500 Saxons who had opposed his 'missionary' military campaign. It is hardly surprising that for the Saxons there was no distinction between peace-loving Christians and the military faith of Charlmagne. They conveyed this spirit of hostility against Christianity to their pagan Danish and Scandinavian hosts, who had virtually the same pagan religion as their own. This in part explains the particular aggression which the Danish and Scandinavian Vikings showed against the monasteries and churches of the Isles, although the attraction of the valuables they contained is of course another major factor.

The Danish warlord Turgesius, also called Ragnar Lodbrok, was a major anti-Christian aggressor. This Viking leader was among the first to establish military bases in Ireland for long enough to try and replace Christianity with paganism. In the time from his arrival in 831 and his death in 845 he conquered a greater part of Ireland and wherever possible established pagan centres. The Irish annals tell us that three times in one month he attacked Armagh, the ecclesiastical centre of northern Ireland. He expelled its bishop, Forannan, established the worship of the pagan god Thor on the site of the great monastery, and made himself its high priest. Foranna fled to the south, only to be captured there by Turgesius's forces in 845. These went on to sack numerous other monasteries, including Clonfert (founded by St Brendan), Lorrha (founded by St Rodan), and Terryglas. Paganism pierced the heart of western Ireland when in 842 Turgesius's wife Ota, a Pythoness, desecrated the Great Church of the newly conquered Clonmacnois, and upon its alter uttered her oracles.

Most likely it was because of the danger of plunder by Vikings that from the ninth century the Irish redirected their artistic energies from metalwork and illuminated manuscripts into high stone crosses. These came to be filled

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[70] Translation from *The Celts*, Frank Delaney (London, 1989); p. 61.

with figurative relief carvings which include besides the crucifixion subjects such as, Noah, the sacrifice of Isaac, Daniel in the lions' den, the apostles, a revered bishop. Some such as the High Cross of Monasterboice reach heights as much as eighteen feet.

Another consequence of the invasions are the famed Round Towers. From twenty to forty metres tall, these cyclindrical stone towers were multi-purpose, and acted as lookouts, sanctuaries from attackers, belfry, and no doubt as symbols, somewhat like a church spire. When attackers were spotted, the monks and surrounding folk taking their treasures with them would by ladder enter the tower doors situated high above ground.

The Nordic invasions had another major result - towns. Wherever they gained foothold the invaders erected towns, especially at strategic seaports - Waterford, Wexford and Dublin are notable examples. Not only did these serve as bases for raiding (Dublin was the base for all raiding in the Irish Sea) but later also assisted commercial sea trade. With such towns the Norse, like Romans in Britain, introduced a form of urbanisation to Ireland.

Although metalwork was of course still needed and therefore produced over these three centuries, its quality is markedly lower in the ninth and tenth centuries. A revival of the art occurs from the eleventh century: St Patrick's Bell Shrine of about the year 1100 and the beautiful Cross of Cong from the middle of the twelfth century testify to this.

Ireland and the East

The iconoclasm which plagued Byzantium in the eight and ninth centuries (726-780 and 815-843) led numerous Eastern clergy to flee to Ireland. The Litany of Ængus the Culdee[71] expressly mentions some of these. Their presence must have boosted the desire of Irish monk scholars to learn Greek. We know that numerous Irish scholars knew the Greek language, which was something very rare in Western Europe at the time. The abbot of the famed Clonard monastery about the year 660, Aileran, wrote for example a work on the mystical meanings of the names of the Lord's ancestors. Aileran's etymological exegesis shows that he had knowledge of Greek, Hebrew and Latin. An Irish missionary to Salzburg and its first bishop,Virgil by name, was also well acquainted with the Alexandrian school of mathematics and geography. His learning led him to teach that the world was a sphere, and that there was therefor an antipodes. Apparently through a misinterpretation of Aileran's teaching in this matter, the Pope excommunicated him for teaching that there existed another inhabited world within this earth. The Neoplatonist John Scotus Erigena (died *c.*877) translated among other writings the work of the pseudo-Dionysius from Greek into Latin. *The Book of Armagh* rather unusually has the Lord's Prayer in Latin but with Greek characters. There are also archaeological finds, like a tombstone from Glendalough which bears a bilingual inscription, in Greek and Irish. Interestingly, in 986 in Toul in France Irish monks joined with Greek clergy in a Liturgy of the Greek rite.[72]

There was movement West to East as well. There exists a work on geography written about 825 by an Irish monk Dicuil, probably from

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[71] *Transactions of the Royal Irish Academy,* W. Stokes (Irish MSS Series, 1880), mentioned by G.T. Stokes in *Ireland and the Celtic Church,* G.T. Stokes (London, 1882); page 212.

[72] G.T. Stokes *ibid., p. 219.*

Clonmacnois, called *Liber de Mensura orbis terrae.* He gives accurate information about a canal which Hadrian had made connecting the Nile to Suez. He tells us that he gained this information through a monk named Fidelis. This Fidelis had made a pilgrimage to the Holy Places with laymen and priests from Ireland and passed through Egypt on the way. The accuracy of Dicuil's description of the canal, as well as the measurements he gives of the Pyramids affirm the veracity of this pilgrimage.

Incidentally, Dicuil also describes Iceland from accounts given by Irish monks who had lived or visited there. Only thirty years earlier he had been told by some Irishmen who had stayed there from February 1st until August 1st that the sun hardly set in summer. They added that this meant that they had plenty of time to remove their lice! Irish monks had been there from the eight century. When in 874 Danes came to settle in Iceland they related that they found "Irish books, bells and crosiers."

Irish Schools

We have often mentioned that many English and Continentals benefited from learning in Irish monastic schools. What form did these schools take? The modern university concept of a centre of learning set apart from a church or monastery is probably traceable to the school of Charlemagne, although it was the scholastics in the eleventh and twelfth centuries who really developed the system. The Irish schools were of a different type, less institutionalised and more centred around individual teachers, usually monks. Is seems to have been common, if not the norm, for a student to go from monastery to monastery, teacher to teacher, learning from each what they particularly excelled in. Bede tell us that around the 660's there were many English nobles and lesser folk in Ireland "either to pursue religious studies or to lead a life of stricter discipline. Some of these soon devoted themselves to the monastic life, while others preferred to travel, studying under various teachers in turn. The Irish welcomed them all kindly, and without asking payment, provided them with daily food, books, and instruction."[73] Most Irish monasteries did not have substantial buildings - they were many in number but not large, and usually of materials such as wattle. It was therefore common to have lessons in the open air: in his *Life of Columba* Adamnan tells us that the saint saw a murder while he was studying under a tree with his master Gemman, at the Clonard monastery school. Amidst such informality the schools did have a degree of organisation. From Alcuin's epistle to Colcu of Clonmacnois[74] we know that there was usually a chief lecturer. There were also specialists or professors of various branches of learning, including poetry, law and history. There was also a steward in charge of the temporal affairs. Perhaps the modern centres closest to this old Irish system of learning are Oxford and Cambridge, with their emphasis on tutorials.

Eighth Century Ireland and the Culdees

Eighth century Ireland has not left us with sufficient written records to give us a detailed picture of its church life. However, what is known suggests a certain weakening of the church in the first part of the century, not least

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[73] Bede's *History,* II.27
[74] *Sylloge,* ep.xviii.

because of the destruction wrought by warring kingdoms. In this respect as in others it was not dissimilar to England's situation. Toward the end of the century Nordic invaders added to the warfare, although their incursions into Britain did cause many Irish monks to return to Ireland, which no doubt strengthened the spiritual life there.

What is of greatest interest in the eighth century however is the emergence of the monastic movement known as the *Culdees (or Célí Dé)* which means 'servants/friends of God'. It was essentially a return to the radical, ascetic ideal of earlier monastics. This inspired a wealth of spiritual poetry as well, especially among hermits. The famed Stowe Missal is also a fruit of this movement, and is among our chief sources for a knowledge of early liturgical traditions. The Culdee reform spread from Munster, in the south, but made its centre in Dublin. Its effects also reached the west of Britain. Among the most influential of the Culdees are St Maelrúain founder of Tallaght, and St Dublittir of Finglas.[75]

St Maelruain (d. 792) was the most influential figure of the Culdees, although now little is known of him. His name means 'disciple of Ruadan', and so it is likely that he came from Ruadan's monastery of Lorrha in Northwest Tipperary, near the famous monastery of Terryglas. It is possible that he himself wrote some extant works, but certainly his Tallaght monastery and disciples produced the important *Martyrology of Tallaght*, the *Martyrology of Oengus*, and the *Stowe Missal*. Tallaght had a great influence while it existed. Sadly, this was not very long, since the Norse established the centre of their activities only five miles from the monastery, at Dublin. Frequent raids soon forced the monks to abandon the monastery.

What were the salient features of the Culdee movement? To an extent it is a parallel of the reform initiated by St Dunstan in England and Cluny on the Continent in that written rules were the prime instrument of reform. Like those movements the Culdees give much emphasis to communal life and worship, and encouraged stability within one's monastery (thus discouraging pilgrimage and voluntary exile) and celibacy for all clergy.

Culdee writings are however distinctive in the degree and type of the asceticism which they encourage, and the stress on the relationship with ones spiritual father, for those in the world as well as for monastics: "Any priest who takes upon his conscience the care of a church, also assumes the duty of giving spiritual direction to all the subjects of the church - men, boys, women and girls. Anyone therefore, who refuses to be led by his spiritual father, anyone who is neither a friend of God nor man, is to be refused communion..."[76] Ascetic practices for monks included 'cross vigils', that is, standing with arms stretched out while praying; vigils while standing in cold water; prostrations; and of course, fasting. Flagellation is also mentioned in some rules! It would be interesting to trace the origins of this practice, which as far as I know has not been a practice in other Orthodox traditions. Reading of the Psalter was given great importance. St Maelruain's practice in private vigil was to recite the entire Psalter, "every alternate fifty psalms standing or sitting in turn."[77]

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[75] A good collection of writings from this period is to be found in *The Celtic Monk*, translated and annotated by Uinseann Ó Maidín OCR (Michigan, 1996).

[76] "The Rule of the Culdees", transl. by Uinseann Ó Maidín (*ibid.*), p.94.

[77] "The Rule of Tallaght", par. 36; tr. Uinseann Ó Maidín (*ibid.*), p. 109.

A perusal of the various Culdee rules and writings shows that in their essential teachings they are in the same monastic tradition as their eastern brethren. A few examples suffice to illustrate:

> "Mael Dithruib asked Maelruain how he should conduct himself. 'I advice you to remain always in the place where you normally dwell. Have nothing to do with the affairs of the world...stay at home in prayer, meditating on your reading, and giving instruction, should there be anyone who desires such of you.' "[78]

> "No flesh meat was eaten in Tallaght during Maelruain's lifetime..."[79] [He also prohibited beer, the alcohol available to the Celts, saying that he did not wish his monks to have 'anything that brings about forgetfulness of God', although this does not seem to have been the common custom among the Culdees.]

> "Carry out everything with permission, and without hesitation or delay; never repay evil for evil while you live in this decaying body of clay / Show humility and joy towards friend and stranger alike, and homage, obedience, and fealty towards every person / Live in absolute poverty, being neither niggardly nor unjust, waiting for your reward by the relics [*or* graves] of the saints...Let us keep in mind the day of death, something common to all / It is a commendable practice joyfully to accept tribulations and to be patient with them at all times, mindful of the folk of heaven."[80]

There are likewise numerous liturgical details which correspond to eastern practices. The following are some instances: making the sign of the cross with the right hand[81]; not passing in front of the altar (i.e. the Holy Table)[82]; not kneeling on Sundays (only bending the knee according to the Rule of Carthage)[83].

Ireland of the eight century was divided into the five kingdoms of Ulster, Munster, Leinster, Conaught, and Meath. These divisions greatly influenced the ecclesiastical divisions of the land. From the time of Niall of the Nine Hostages, who selected it as the domain of the King of All Ireland, the kingdom of Meath took precedence over the other principalities, and likewise its bishop held higher rank than others of Ireland.[84] But these major kingdoms were divided into yet smaller units of tribes. The result was that civil strife was interminable.

The temptation to plunder was aggravated by the fact that the Irish were then a pastoral people rather than agricultural. In summer the shepherds moved their animals into the highlands and lived in makeshift booths. In winter although more substantial coverings were made for man and beast

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[78] *ibid.* par. 12, *ibid.,* page 103.

[79] *ibid.* par. 40, p. 111

[80] "The Rule of Carthage: *the duties of a monk*" par. 7-9,14, 15; *ibid.*, p.68

[81] "The Rule of Tallaght", par. 6, page 102.

[82] *ibid.*, par. 16.

[83] "The Rule of Carthage: *the duties of the Celi De*", par. 4, *ibid.*, p.69.

[84] G. T. Stokes, *Ireland and the Celtic Church;* p.192-3

they were still cheap and quick to make, and therefore abandoned readily enough. Consequently the owners were at any time ready to go off on plundering expeditions. That skirmishes were an accepted part of national life is evident in such laws as that found in *The Book of Rights,* stating that it was the privilege of the King of Cashel or Munster to burn Northern Leinster and to plunder the cattle of Croghan in the season 'when the cuckoo sings'!

Apparently Christian tribes would not necessarily spare monasteries and churches in such raids. Clonmacnois, Kildare, Clonard and Armagh all suffered as much from Christian Irish as from pagan Vikings. In the early ninth century, to take one example, the king of Munster , named Phelim, plundered most of the holy places and Ulster and killed monks and clergy. A little later he similarly treated Clonmacnois and Durrow, then stormed Kildare. What is more this king was also an abbot and bishop.

There was another factor in much of this fighting apart from greed - the absence of effective laws. The only law of Ireland was the ancient Brehon code. In essence it said that crimes are committed by individuals against individuals, and justice was therefore in the hands of the offended. Local lords had no part in arranging punishment. Admittedly there was a Brehon class of hereditary judges who decided on amounts if payment was to be in money and not revenge. But they had no power of enforcement. This code remained the operational law of Ireland until the seventeenth century.

Despite the social unrest of this century, it is in this period that some of the greatest liturgical works are produced, particularly illuminated manuscripts and church plate. The workmanship of the metalwork far supersedes Byzantine works of the period and equals the best of what they produced late. We have for example the Ardagh chalice (*c.*700), the Derrynaflan chalice (late eight or early ninth century), and in the non-liturgical field, the Hunterston brooch of late seventh or early eighth century and the Tarah brooch of early eighth century. All of these are of exceptionally detailed work in silver and gold. Irish craftsmen also produced masterpieces outside their native country, notably the Lindisfarne Gospels which were probably written on that island sometime between 698 and 721.

Perhaps the climax of Irish illuminated manuscripts is the Book of Kells, probably begun at the end of the century. The weight of present scholarship supports the view that this was begun at Iona, or perhaps Lindisfarne, but then to avoid Viking raids was moved for completion to the Columban monastery of Kells shortly before 800. Although figurative work was always extremely abstract in Celtic art, their graphic designs are of the most minute detail, "the work of angels" as one admirer put it.