EIGHTH CENTURY CHRISTIANITY AFTER BEDE AND BONIFACE:

The English church united under Roman obedience and Roman observance strengthened its hold over the country. It was centered in the proprietary churches and proprietary monasteries on the estates of king and large landowners. Often there were double monasteries—a monastery for men and a nunnerly for women. Both ministered to the surrounding population. Sometimes the leading spirit was an abbess such as Hilda of Whitby, Etheldreda of Ely, and Milburg of Wenlock—women of great ability and saintliness. York followed Jarrow as the great center of learning. From York came Alcuin, the leading scholar in the court of Charlemagne.

WHOLESALE DESTRUCTION BY THE DANES: In 787 three strange ships were sighted off the coast of England. They were the first of the Danes. The sheriff not knowing who they were rode out to meet them; the Danes slew him. The Danes kept coming year after year until the typical prayer was "From the fury of the Northmen, O Lord deliver us." The Danes were ferocious raiders, howling like wild wolves and gnashing their teeth on their iron swords. Their names symbolize their ferocity: Erik Blod-Ax, Harold Bluetooth, Thorkill the Skull-Splitter. Churches and monasteries were destroyed. King Alfred in the preface to his translation of Gregory’s Pastoral Care declares that the Danes had destroyed all precious things and had caused all learning and education to disappear. The time of Charlemagne and his sons was a dark time in England.

The Dane Ragnar spread destruction far and wide until defeated and captured in Northumbria by the Saxon king who put him in a den of snakes. In the saga he sang of his welcome to the hall of Woden by bright maids, of drinking the mellow ale and ended "laughingly I die." His sons came for revenge. King Egbert of Wessex was barely able to drive back the invaders. In 871, Ethelred, his older son, was killed battling the Danes. The younger son, Alfred, defeated the Danes and became king of Wessex.

ALFRED AS KING (871-899): Alfred became king at twenty-two. He was well educated. Twice he had visited Rome. He had learned to read and write—an exceptional accomplishment for a Saxon layman. Alfred had little time for culture until the Peace of Wedmore (878). Successful in battle he forced the Danes to retire from Wessex and established the boundary between Wessex and Danelaw. The Danish king soon became a Christian. Alfred united the English people under the West Saxon crown.

As the Carolingian renaissance was dying Alfred brought on a smaller scale an important renaissance to England. He accomplished important military and administrative reforms, establishing fortifications and building a navy. He reformed the laws and the courts.

Alfred gathered at his court men of learning. In his schools both English and Latin were taught. He ordered all well-born youths to be taught both languages. He put a great premium on knowledge. He urged all free men to learn to read and write well. Alfred put his scholars to work translating Scripture and the church fathers for his people. He personally translated Gregory’s Pastoral Care, Bede’s Ecclesiastical History, Cassiodorus’ Universal History, and Boethius’ Consolation of Philosophy. Where Alfred disagreed with Boethius he made the translation express his own faith. He translated portions of Scripture—later a famous Psalter was known as Alfred’s Psalter.
Among the great lines written by Alfred were these: "He that will have eternal riches let him build the house of his mind on the foot-stone of lowliness, not on the highest hill where the raging winds of trouble blow or the rain of measureless anxiety." "A man will not be the better because he hath a well-born father, if he himself is naught. The only thing which is good in noble descent is this—that it makes men ashamed of being worse than their elders." "To give money to a school is to give to God."

One of the great works begun in Alfred's renaissance was the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.

THE CAROLINGIAN RENAISSANCE AFTER CHARLEMAGNE

THE DECLINE OF CHARLEMAGNE'S EMPIRE:

Charlemagne divided his empire among his heirs and feudalism again spread.

Rivalries weakened France and the empire.

The Investiture Controversy between the pope and the rulers continued.

The Northmen invade and settle in France.

MISSIONARY WORK OF THE CAROLINGIAN RENAISSANCE:

Ludger the apostle to Saxony in the time of Charlemagne.

Corbie Nova, founded the year after Charlemagne's death, became the training station for missionaries to the north countries.

Ansgar, the "Apostle to the North Peoples": Ansgar trained at Corbie. He preached two years in Denmark and a year and a half in Sweden. He persuaded Louis the Pious to make Hamburg a mission base. In 829 he went to Rome and Pope Gregory IV appointed him archbishop. Ansgar won the friendship of Horik (Erick) of Denmark. In 853 Ansgar won King Olaf of Sweden.

SCHOLARSHIP AND LEARNING: The renaissance continued long after the decay of the empire.

The Cathedrals and monasteries continued to grow as centers of learning with great pride in their libraries. Great emphasis was put on securing copies of the Church Fathers. The scholars turned out the chain (catenae) commentaries, wrote histories, produced poetry, and even made available some of the classical pagan writers.

The Carolingian script called "cursive" or "minuscule" replaced the old uncial form of writing.

John Scotus Eriugena (810-877) the most original of the Carolingian scholars. His most famous works were his De Divisione Naturae and his De Predestinatione. He was suspected of heresy on several points. He was accused of pantheism. He was condemned for not citing the church fathers as authority. He made reason the final authority. He believed that the punishment of sin is an inner necessity rather than being imposed from without. He was condemned by synods at Valence (855) and Langres (859).

THE GREAT DOCTRINAL CONTROVERSYES OF THE CAROLINGIAN RENAISSANCE

THE ADOPTIONIST CONTROVERSY: Migetius, the modalist, vs. Elipandus of Toledo and Felix of Urgel (Adoptionists). Councils of Ratisbon (792), Regensburg (794) and Frankfort (794) condemn the Spanish heresies.

THE FILOQUE CONTROVERSY (the procession of the Holy Spirit): Council at Aachen in 809.

THE PREDEPOSITION CONTROVERSY: Gottschalk of Corbie vs. Rabanus Marus of Fulda. Council of Mayence (848); Council of Chiersy led by Archbishop Hincmar; Council of Valence (853) and Langres (859). John Scotus Eriugena attacked predestination.

THE PATURITION OF THE VIRGIN MARY: Ratramnus of Corbie and Radbertus of Corbie.

THE LORD'S SUPPER: Paschasius Radbertus of Corbie and his tract, "On the Body and Blood of the nort (844)." Rabanus Maurus of Fulda and Ratramnus of Corbie. Haimo of Halberstadt in 853 used the term "transubstantiate."

THE IMAGE CONTROVERSY: Charles the Great had been offended at not being invited to the Seventh Ecumenical Council (Nicaea II of 787). Ordered his theologians to examine the results of the council. Council of Frankfort in 792 declared the Seventh Council had erred. Irene broke off the wedding agreements.