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The Roman Mission to Anglo-Saxon England: Augustine to Whitby (597-663)

Sean E. Niestrath

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An Abstract of a Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Graduate School

Abilene Christian University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an investigation of the Roman mission to evangelize Anglo-Saxon England. The mission was commissioned by Pope Gregory the Great and charged to a monk named Augustine. In this study the reasons for sending the Roman mission and why it succeeded in bringing the resulting English church under the influence of the Roman faith will be identified.

There are several literary documents which survive concerning the Roman Mission. They are in the form of letters, lives of saints, and histories. Two key sources for our research are Bede's Ecclesiastical History and letters written by Gregory the Great which have been preserved. There is also archaeological evidence which aids in understanding some of the written material. I have surveyed the written material and read various interpretations. For understanding how the archaeological evidence relates to the topic, I have visited some sites and read the work of those more qualified to interpret it.

This study confirms the crucial role played by Gregory and Augustine in establishing the English church. It was Augustine, with the power of Rome and the wisdom of Gregory behind him, which made the all-important breakthrough into the Anglo-Saxon royal houses. We also

conclude that the existing political and social structure in Anglo-Saxon England made the spread of the Christian faith possible once a foothold had been gained. Finally, the organization and strength of the Roman church which Augustine brought with him was to bring the English church into the Roman fold.

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This thesis, directed and approved by the candidate's committee, has been accepted by the Graduate Council of Abilene Christian University in Partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS

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INTRODUCTION

"There is a story told by the faithful that, before he [Gregory] became Pope, there came to Rome certain people of our nation, fair-skinned and light-haired. When he heard of their arrival ... he received them and asked what race they belonged to. They answered, 'The people we belong to are called Angles.' 'Angels of God,' he replied. Then he asked further, 'What is the name of the king of that people?' They said, 'Aelli,' whereupon he said, 'Alleluia, God's praise must be heard there.' Then he asked the name of their own tribe, to which they answered, 'Deire,' and he replied, 'They shall flee from the wrath of God to the faith.'"[1] Following the conversation with the two English boys, Gregory appealed to the pope, Benedict I (575-579), to be sent to their nation saying, "It would be a wretched thing for hell to be filled

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[1] The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great by an Anonymous Monk of Whitby, text, translation, and notes by Bertram Colgrave (University of Kansas Press, 1968; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), chapter 9. The story of the the two youths meeting with Gregory is well known. These famous puns of Gregory have a legendary sound to them. They are recorded by Bede as well who tells us that they are part of oral tradition. Venerable Bede, Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum, in Baeda Opera Historica with an English Translation by J. E. King, vols. I and II, nos. 246 and 248, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1930; reprint, Vol. I, 1979, Vol. II, 1976), 2.1. (Cited H. E.)

with such lovely vessels."[2] Gregory was first given permission to go, but after three days' journey, he was recalled to Rome, eventually to become pope.[3] He never forgot the young lads he had met and soon set about the task of sending missionaries to England. A monk from Gregory's monastery in Rome by the name of Augustine was chosen along with about 40 other monks. They arrived on the Isle of Thanet in Kent in A. D. 597. They were in pagan lands.

Augustine and his men began their work and soon converted many in the kingdom of Kent. Aethelbert, the king of Kent, whose wife, Bertha, was a Christian and daughter of King Charibert of Paris, was eventually baptized. The king also enjoyed a position of power over surrounding kingdoms which helped spread the Christian faith beyond the borders of Kent.

Meanwhile, another wave of missionary activity had impact in the north of England. Monks from Ireland established monasteries and made converts. The Irish missionaries did not recognize the authority of the pope, and computed the date of Easter differently from the Roman church. These differences were settled at Whitby in 664, by which time Christianity was established in nearly all of England, led by English clergy, and united under Rome.

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[2] Earliest Life of Gregory, chapter 10.

[3] Ibid.; H. E. 2.1

It is the purpose of this study to investigate the mission initiated by Pope Gregory the Great and executed by Augustine. One will establish the role of Gregory's motivation and guidance. One will demonstrate that though there were traces of Christianity still alive in the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, it was the work of the Gregorian missionaries which converted the English kings to Christianity, making conversion of the masses possible. One will illustrate the key role that political factors played in the conversion of the English. One will show the role played by the type of monsasticism and the Latin language and liturgy which Augustine brought with him, and that it was this mission which gave the church in England its earlier ecclesiatical shape.

CHAPTER 1

BEDE'S HISTORIA ECCLESIASTICA

Any study of the conversion of the English to Christianity must begin with Venerable Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation.[1] His work has been much criticized, and some have even questioned Bede's integrity in recent years, but it is still the cornerstone for the study of the English conversion.[2] For this reason,

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[1] In H. E. 5.24, Bede gives us a bibliography of his writings, and a brief autobiographical sketch of his life. This leaves us with the impression that he saw this work as the culmination of years of study. One also learns that Bede was primarily a student of the Scriptures. He wrote more than fifty books of commentary, as well as biographies, a martyrology, a book of hymns, a book of orthography, of epigrams, of the nature of things and times, and a book on the art of poetry.

[2] One refers to Dom Suso Bretcher, Die Quellen zur Angelsachsenmission Gregors des Grossen: eine historiographische Studie (Beiträge zur Geschichte des altem Mönchtums und des Benediktinerordens, Heft 22), Münster, 1941. His work called into question the authenticity of the responses of Gregory to Augustine's questions (H.E. 1.27) and suggested that Bede suppressed or distorted new evidence which came to him while he was composing his history. Bretcher's arguments are confronted in Margaret Deanesly and Paul Grosjean, "The Canterbury Edition of the Answers of pope Gregory I to St. Augustine," Journal of Ecclesiastical History 10, (1959): 1-43 and R. A. Markus, "The Chronology of the Gregorian Mission to England: Bede's Narrative and Gregory's Correspondence," Journal of Ecclesiatical History 14 (1963): 16-30. It is likely that Bede was near completion of his work when fresh material was presented to him, which may account for some of the chronological problems in his work, rather than any intentional deception on his part. There is not enough

Bede is the primary source for this study, and his outline is basic to the tracing of the mission to the English.

There are certain letters of pope Gregory the Great which are relevant for this thesis. It has been the practice of those who have studied this area to use Bede's chronology and standard by which other sources are compared. In the past decade, the trend has been to use a more balanced approach. This does not diminish the importance of Bede, rather it gives the proper place to other sources such as the letters of Gregory. This will be demonstrated when we discuss the consecration of Augustine as bishop.

For all his objectiveness (which is remarkable for a historian of his era), Bede still writes from a particular perspective. Since we are using his basic framework, it may be useful to look at Bede's motivation for writing his History, what sources he used, and suggest how these might have influenced the outcome of his work.[3]

Bede hides little from us, and to determine motivation and sources we need look no further than the work itself. In it, he indicates his objectives and motivation. He tells us in the preface that the church at

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evidence to conclude with Bretcher that Bede's Roman and Saxon bias led him to be dishonest with the data presented to him. The relevant chronological problems are discussed later in this study.

[3]A good recent treatment of Bede with a quality bibliography is Benedicta Ward, The Venerable Bede (Guilford, U. K.: Biddles Ltd., 1990)

Canterbury sent with Nothelm, bishop of London, records and material from Canterbury, the letters of Gregory and other material from Canterbury, the letters of Gregory and other material from Rome, and presumably material from the church at London. Bede informs us that the mover behind all this was one Albinus, abbot of St. Augustine's abbey in Canterbury, who encouraged Bede to write his history.[4]

The work concludes with a list of the bishops throughout England and a statement about the unity of the church with the exception of the Britons who had "set themselves wrongfully and of lewd manner against the appointed Easter of the whole catholic church."[5] It is here that we get another clue about Bede's motivation, part of which may have come from Canterbury. The work is not simply about the Anglo-Saxons coming to be Christians; it is rather about the coming and triumph of Roman Christianity. Bede wanted to show that unity had been achieved through papal authority.[6]

Bede suggested that he is not interested in the negative aspects of history.

> For whether an history shall contain good things concerning good men, the careful hearer is there-by stirred up and provoked to follow after well-doing; or

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[4] H. E. Preface.

[5] H. E. 5.23. After the Synod of Whitby, Colman and those who followed him returned to Iona without accepting the Roman Easter. H. E. 3.26.

[6] Henry Mayr-Harting, The Coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England, 3d ed. (University Park, Penn.: Pennsylvania University Press, 1991), 43.

> whether it shall report evil things concerning froward men, the devout and well-disposed hearer or reader none the less, by flyings that is evil and noisesome to his soul, is himself moved thereby more earnestly to follow after the things he knoweth to be good and acceptable to God.[7]

There were no doubt some evil things done by many of the characters in his story, but they were either ignored or reduced to insignificance. This editing leads one to a third motivation for writing.

One of Bede's major purposes was to demonstrate the proper role of a Christian king. He emphasised the relationship between Christianity and success. When a king did what was right he was rewarded; when he reverted to paganism or sinned in another way, he was punished.[8] It is possible that much effort was devoted to showing "how the needs of kings could best be fulfilled and where their true interests lay."[9]

Bede's work is so masterfully produced that one might not be aware of the patchy quality of his sources. With some exceptions, Bede was largely dependant upon oral tradition for his work. It is possible that he simply sent

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[7] H. E., Preface.

[8] Cenwalh, king of Wessex is a good example. For refusing to "receive the true faith," he was deposed from his kingdom, and for putting away his wife to marry another he was defeated by Penda (his first wife's brother) in battle and forced to live in exile in the kingdom of the East English for three years. While there he received the true faith and was restored to his earthly kingdom. H. E., 3.5.

[9] J. Campbell, "Bede," in Latin Historians ed. by T. A. Dorey, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966), 168.

for information from the various kingdoms. He lists his sources in the preface, and from it one gathers that Canterbury responded well; the East Anglians and the West Saxons sent local material from some areas and none from others while the Mercians apparently did not reply at all. The information which was received came from specific churches or monasteries, which would have the effect of making it very local.[10] Bede says of Northumbrian sources he did not have only one source, "... but by relation of innumerable faithful witnesses which might know and remember the same, besides all that by my own experience I might know."[11] The fact that he had local traditions from people he knew might explain why nearly all of the miracle stories come in the Northumbrian accounts.

Bede's motivation, objectives, and the nature of his sources are bound to have some effect on the finished product. One's interest here is how the principal literary source might affect the picture of Augustine and his mission to England. Also, the impact that the Celtic missionaries had in the North before the Roman contingent arrived in Kent must not be forgotten. It was not Bede's intention to ignore these men; in fact, he commends the likes of Columba and Aidan for their work, but because of

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[10] D. P. Kirby, "Bede's Native Sources for the Historia Ecclesiastica." Bulletin of the John Rylands Library, Manchester 48 (1966): 342.

[11] H. E. Preface.

the nature of the sources one does not know just how much some of them accomplished. For example, Aidan and Cuthbert both had connections with Lindisfarne, yet it appears that Cuthbert's fame eclipsed that of Aidan by Bede's day, for he states that his only information about Aidan was from those who knew him.[12]

An important example of Bede's acceptance of some oral tradition is found in the story of Edwin's vision and subsequent meeting with Paulinus. Bede, writing within a year or two of 731, tells the story in a matter-of-fact way.[13] In The Life of Gregory, written between 704 and 714,[14] the author makes the statement, "for often the account of any event which happened long ago and in distant lands and which was put into shape in later times, reaches the ears of different people in different forms," when recounting the same story.[15] Here is an example of how oral tradition can pass from being doubted to being fully accepted in a matter of a few years.[16]

It is also worth noting the amount of space given to the sources from Canterbury in the preface. It is a clear emphasis on Bede's part, and the History might be affected by the wish of Canterbury to make it useful for its own

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[12] H. E. 3.17. [13] H. E. 5.24.

[14] Bertram Colgrave, Introduction to Earliest Life of Gregory the Great, 45-49.

[15] Earliest Life of Gregory, ch. 16.

[16] H. E. 2.12. See Kirby, 344-45.

present needs.[17]

For Bede, the true faith was the faith of the Church at Rome. His history demonstrates the triumph of the true faith in the terms that he chooses. One must be aware of his assumptions and how they might affect his conclusions concerning the conversion of the English. There are three things to keep in mind here. First, he is typically hard on the British who, from his perspective, were unrepentant. Second, even though some of the more colorful characters in his work are Irish missionsaries, he downplays their role in the conversion of the north. This, however, probably says as much about his sources as about himself. Third, God is on the side of the Romans and Anglo-Saxons. It is important to remember that Bede's work is basically a salvation history from the point of view of a Saxon monk.

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[17] J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, "Gregory of Tours and Bede: Their Views on the Personal Qualities of Kings," Frühmittelalterliche Studien 2 (1968): 38.

CHAPTER 2

FROM ROMAN BRITANNIA TO ANGLO-SAXON KINGDOMS

This "true faith," as Bede saw it, was brought to the English by Augustine, but there were lingering traces of Christianity from an earlier time. There were even some churches still standing when Augustine arrived in Canterbury. Christianity first came to England during the Roman occupation. Archaelogical evidence of Christianity in Roman times is plentiful. The history of the years between the Roman withdrawal early in the fifth century to the time of Augustine's arrival is important for understanding the political climate in which Christianity was introduced to the Anglo-Saxons. The political situation in Kent when Augustine arrived was ideal and played a key part in the success of the mission. Here is a brief review of this history and political climate.

From literature one knows that there were English representatives at Arles in 314. Bede records the martyrdom of St. Alban whose shrine had survived until the time of Bede in 731.[1] The ascetic moral teacher Pelagius is another well-known Christian figure who lived in England

[1] Bede places the martyrdom of St. Alban during the Diocletian persecution, but this is not certain. See W. Levison, "St. Alban and St. Albans," Antiquity 15 (1941): 337-59; cf. John Morris, "The Date of St. Alban," Hertfordshire Archaeology 1 (1969): 1-8.

during the Roman occupation.[2] Christianity had once been relatively strong in Britian, yet by the time of Augustine's arrival, Eastern Britain could be described as pagan.[3] The obvious reasons for this were the decline of Roman power and the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons.

The exit of the old imperial power and advent of new ruling peoples brought about significant social and political changes which impacted Christianity. The exit of Roman power from Britain did not occur suddenly. It is more likely that the army was slowly weakened by a series of crises in the empire. Soldiers were taken to support Magnus Maximus in 383, by Stilicho to fight Alaric in 401, and by Constantine III to protect Gaul in 407. A letter of the emperor Honorius in 410 written to the cities of Bruttium tells them to guard themselves. This has long been considered a key date by historians and archaeologists for Rome making a break with Britain. It has recently been

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[2] Bede also records a King Lucius of the Britons who wrote to bishop Eleutherus of Rome to request baptism in 156. Bede is the earliest authority for this story. It is likely that the letter came from archives in Rome which Nothelm accessed to gather information for Bede. The letter was from Lucius, king of Eddessa, whose citadel was Birtha (Britium). It is not difficult to see how this could be confused with Britannia. J. E. King, Baeda Opera Historica, vol. I (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1930; reprint, 1979): 29.

[3] For more on continuity of Christianity in Roman Britain as relates to our topic, see W. H. C. Frend, "Ecclesia Britannica: Prelude or Dead End?", Journal of Ecclesiastical History 30, April 1979; p. 129-144; cf. Kenneth S. Painter, "Recent Discoveries in Britain," in Actes, XIe Congress d'Archeologie Chretienne, 3, ed. N. Duval (1989), 2031-2071.

suggested that the letter was not addressed to Britain but to an area in southern Italy.[4] One possibility is that the Roman army was eventually withdrawn completely, but many retired soldiers and certainly Roman civilians would have stayed. Just because there were Romans still living and perhaps even ruling in some areas of Britain, does not mean that Romano-British culture necessarily survived. Also, its disappearance need not assume a catastrophic invasion.[5] Thus, the decline of Roman influence was not sudden but rather more gradual. The memory of unity under the Roman empire was alive more than 300 years later in the time of Bede.[6]

When and how the Anglo-Saxons arrived is shrouded in the mist of legend. However, three dates emerge from literary sources for the permanent Saxon occupation of Britain. The earliest, A.D. 428, is recorded in Nennius's Historia Brittonum, but he also offers other dates which are not accurate. Although it is probably too early for the invaders to have become dominant, this early date may refer to raiding parties or early settlers and not the

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[4]Peter Drewett, David Rudling, and Mark Gardiner, The Southeast to AD 1000 (London: Longman Group, U. K., 1988), p. 248-49.

[5]D. J. V. Fisher, The Anglo-Saxon Age c. 400-1042 in A History of England in Eleven Volumes, ed. by W. N. Medlicott, vol. 3, (London: The Longman Group, U. K. 1973): 49.

[6]Margaret Deanesly, "Roman Traditionalist Influence Among the Anglo-Saxons," English Historical Review 58, (1943): 132-133.

permanent occupation of the island.[7] Another date is 441-2 given by the Gallic Chronicle of 452. It is recorded, "The 18th year of Theodosius II the provinces of Britain ... are brought under dominion of the Saxons."[8] Both Bede and the Anglo Saxon Chronicle offer the year 449. They record that Vortigern, king of the Britons, invited the Saxons, as Bede says, "... to beat off the cruel and continual assaults of the northern nations." He tells us that the first leaders of the "strangers" were Hengist and Horsa.[9] Bede uses language indicating that he is relying upon oral tradition rather than upon more reliable sources which he could check. It is likely that the composer of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and Historia Brittonum relied upon the same

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[7]Nennius, British History and the Welsh Annals, edited and translated by John Morris, (Old Woking, Surrey: Unwin Bros., Ltd., 1980), part 66; and Hodgkin, History of the Anglo-Saxons, 66-67.

[8]For a recent discussion of the accuracy of the Gallic Chronicle, see Stephen Muhlberger, The Fifth Century Chroniclers: Prosper, Hydatius, and the Gallic Chronicler of 452, (Meksham, Wiltshire: Redwood Press Ltd., 1990), 146-152.

[9]H.E. 1. 24-25; cf. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (trans. with an introduction by G. N. Garmonsway [London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1953; reprint 1965]), 12-13. There are problems with the story of Hengist and Horsa as recorded in Bede. When tracing Aethelbert's geneology, he records "Now the said Aethelberht was son of Irminric, whose father was Octa, whose father was Eric called also Oisc, of whon the kings of the Kentishment are wont to be called Oiscings. This Eric's father's name was Hengist, who with Oisc his son ... first entered Britain." H. E., 2.5. For a fuller discussion, see Nicolas Brooks, "The Creation and Early Structure of the Kingdom of Kent," in The Origins of the Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms, ed. by Steven Bassett, (London: Leicester University Press, 1989): 58-64.

traditions. To say that the permanent occupation began about ten years either side of 450 is a reasonable conclusion.

The coming of the new inhabitants as the ruling class naturally brought changes in society and religion. One of the most significant changes in the structure of society was a move from the urban setting of Roman culture to the rural setting of the Anglo-Saxon culture. Indeed, King Aethelbert of Kent is the only Saxon King to have his main palace in or near a town. In this sense, it is likely that the Britons were more like the Saxons than the Romans. The likelihood of paganism surviving in the countryside and the decline in urban society brought on by the newcomers would have made it difficult for Christianity to survive.

The basic difficulty facing the survival of Christianity was its social structure. Christianity arrived in Britain via the Romans. Since Roman society was urban, Christianity in England was organized around cities and towns, making it urban in nature as well. Evidence of rural Christianity in Roman Britain is limited to villas and cemetery chapels.[10]

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[10]There is evidence of churches in the towns and cities of Roman Britain. Those located outside population centers are only associated with cemeteries. House churches have been located at rural Roman villas at Lullingstone, Kent and Frampton and Hinton St. Mary, Dorset. This emphasises that the Roman presence was important to Christianity. As one will see later, paganism remained strong in the countryside, and even in the towns Christianity was a minority religion. The cemetery at Poundbury, west of Roman Dorchester, indicates the

Paganism survived among the peasants of Eastern Britain, and with the decline of urban society and the coming of the Angles and Saxons, it would not have taken long for paganism to become once again the dominant religious influence upon society.[11] Even before the Saxon occupation, the "hallelujah" victory of Germanus in about 429 indicates the mixed picture developing in Britain. The Britons, who were no longer under the protection of Rome, sought the help of bishops to defend against the invading Saxons and Redshanks. This indicates that the Roman church was still considered by them to be a potent force. Yet, the entire British army was in need of baptism before the battle. Following their baptism, the Britons marched, and upon meeting their enemies, the bishops shouted "hallelujah" three times, echoed by the army. The Saxons and Redshanks fled in terror.[12] The evidence at Poundbury indicates that Christianity was a minority religion. It indicates also that those who would have made up this army,

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Christian population there was about 25%. Some have expressed the view that recent evidence supports continuity of Christianity in England from Roman to Anglo-Saxon times. See K. S. Painter, "Recent Discoveries in Britain," in Actes XIe Congress d'Archeologie Chretienne 3, edited by N. Duval (1989), 2031-2037; and K. S. Painter, "Architecture," TMs [photocopy], 1-2, personal library.

[11]Martin Henig, Religion in Roman Britain (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1984), 225.

[12]H. E., 1.20; R. G. Collingwood and J. N. L. Myers, Roman Britain and the English Settlements (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1937), 435; cf. Ian Wood, "The End of Roman Britain: Continental Evidence and Parallels," in Gildas: New Approaches, ed. Michael Lapidge and David

probably from the small villages and countryside, were not Christians. The decline of urban society might also be seen later in the difficulty Augustine faced establishing his see in London.[13] Gregory in Rome would have expected London to be the center for the English church, since at Rome's last contact with Britain London was the major city. He was not to know that the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms were divided along the natural geographic boundaries of the island, and that London was initially out of reach of Augustine. It was in the kingdom of the East Saxons.

During the first fifty years of the fifth century, there was a progression from Christian Roman Britain to pagan Anglo-Saxon England. About the turn of the fifth century, Roman influence and the structure of the Roman church began to break down. By about 450, enough Angles, Saxons, and Jutes had arrived to challenge for and gain power. The picture, however, was not entirely bleak.

A brief look at three notable figures of this time helps to understand the situation. The first of these is Germanus. From The Life of St. Germanus, one can note

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Dumville (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1984), 11-12. The battle took place near Mold, Flintshire, according to Welsh tradition. There have been doubts raised concerning the historicity of this event rising from the biblical parallel with the account of Joshua's victory at Jericho. The argument states that the life of Germanus is an allegory, which employs a historical setting, and it is not intended as an accurate account of events.

[13] Collingwood and Meyers, Roman Britain, 437.

three circumstances shortly after the Romans' decline as the first immigrants were making inroads. (1) A Gallic bishop could travel with relative ease from Gaul to Southern Britain and cooperate with the British clergy. (2) Though troubled by invaders and heresy, Britain was a place in which Romano-Britons could live in relative safety. (3) In 480, when the Life was written, the author thought of Britain as a wealthy island.[14] Another clue can be gleaned from the Confession of St. Patrick. The matter of fact inclusion of slavery and raids gives a clearer picture of the unsettled nature of life than St. Germanus's biographer would have known.[15] The third figure is King Arthur.[16] The Saxons apparently made steady headway until

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[14] Hodgkin, History of the Anglo-Saxons, 62.

[15] Ibid., 64.

[16] Arthur's historicity is clouded by the legend which grew around him in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The twelve battles are recorded only by Nennius in his Historia Brittonum, and the battle of 'Badon Hill' is recorded by both Nennius and Gildas, although Gildas does not mention any names. The historicity of Arthur then is tied to the historical reliability of these two early chroniclers, who were obviously writing with their own objectives in mind. That they are not reliable on some points is not disputed, but beneath that there must be some fact of history. It is not likely that they created something from nothing. Through all the shadow, it seems that someone named Arthur did exist, although his title of 'king' was probably based on merit and not birth. More likely he was a general or chieftan. Gildas and Nennius recorded the battle because it was of local interest. Something halted the advance of the invading Saxons about the time Arthur is said to live. See Robert H. Fletcher, The Arthurian Material in the Chronicles, (New York: Burt Franklin, 1906, first published as [Harvard] Notes and Studies in Philology and Literature, vol. X, Boston, 1906), 1-30; E. K. Chambers, Arthur of Britain, (Sidgwick &

the "twelve battles of King Arthur," climaxed by the "siege of Mons Badonicus" about A.D. 500. This halted the advance and perhaps brought a short time of peace for the next forty years or so.[17] Some Britons who had not fled to the west by this time would have been killed, but more were probably absorbed by the invaders.[18]

What can be said about invasions by the Angles and Saxons and their impact can be summarized by four statements. First, they generally came in small raiding parties, with an occasional landing of more substance. Second, they were an agrarian society who adapted to their environment. Third, their religion was pagan. Fourth, they had an economy which made towns unnecessary.

As significant as these changes in society were, it was the political structure of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms in general and the position of the Kingdom of Kent in particular that were to prove useful to the mission led by Augustine. Kent, under King Aethelbert, was in a favorable position to be approached by a Christian mission. About 200 years after the Romans first brought these barbarians to Britain to aid them in battle, and 150 years after the

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Jackson Ltd., 1927, reprint ed. Cambridge: Speculum Historiale, 1964), 12-13, 168-204; cf. Richard Barber, King Arthur in Legend and History (Ipswich: The Boydell Press, 1973, reprinted 1974), 11-24.

[17] Collingwood and Meyers, Roman Britain and the English Settlements, p. 320.

[18] Hodgkin, History of the Anglo-Saxons, 174-177.

arrival of Hengist and Horsa, the Angles, Saxons, Jutes, Frisians, and Danes had formed themselves into what we know in history as the kingdoms of the Anglo-Saxons.

On a simplified map one finds the kingdoms of Kent, the South Saxons (hence the modern county Sussex), the East Saxons (Essex), the West Saxons (Wessex) in the South, the kingdoms of Mercia, the Middle Angles (Leicestershire), the East Angles, and Lindsey (Lincolnshire) in the Midlands, the kingdom of the Hwicce (around Gloucestershire) in the west, and Northumbria (the kingdoms of Deira and Bernicia) north of the River Humber. The status of the leadership of Northumbria fluctuated as did the existence of smaller kingdoms such as the Isle of Wight (off the south coast). Over time all these kingdoms eventually melted into Mercia, Northumbria, and Wessex. In the time of King Alfred, the Wessex dynasty became the ruler of all English peoples.[19]

The kingdoms were separated more by geography than by any specific political boundary. They organized as tribes or confederations of tribes, and their eventual leaders often came on the scene some time after there was already a good density of population in an area.[20] Even so, from as early as the arrival of Aelle in Sussex certain of these kings exerted influence beyond the immediate borders of

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[19] According to the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, Alfred was consecrated king by Pope Leo in 854. He became king of Wessex upon the death of his brother King Ethelred in 871. King Alfred died in 901.

[20] Mayr-Harting, Coming of Christianity, p. 17.

their kingdoms.[21] It was this extension of power, and its movement from one kingdom to another, which both advanced and inhibited the spread of Christianity.

Some kings extended their influence enough to be called bretwalda or "ruler of Britain." One first meets the term bretwalda in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. Bede recorded the first seven "rulers of Britain" when he recorded the death of Aethelbert. According to his list, Aethelbert was the third of the rulers of Britain. The concept of the bretwalda and Aethelbert's bretwaldship is important in understanding the success of the Roman mission.[22]

In order to be a bretwalda, one must first be a king. To the Anglo-Saxons, royal lineage meant being

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[21] H. E. 2.5; Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, date 827; Margaret Deanesly, "Roman Traditionalist Influence Among the Anglo-Saxons," English Historical Review 58, (1943): 132-33.

[22] The term "brytenwealda" first appears in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle of 827. The exact meaning is not clear. Bret is a only a syllable but stands for "Britain"; or "Britons," wealda means "ruler." It could mean "ruler of Britons," but it makes no sense that an Anglo-Saxon king would use such a title. Bede's description is "king of the English nation." He uses the term "imperium" which probably means war leadership, to territorial dominion. "Brytenwealda" was probably a word used in the local vernacular by laymen and soldiers. It is roughly equivalent to the word "imperator" which was used by Latin writers of the day (9th century). The late appearance in the written material does not preclude it from being a word in use as early as the time of Aelle; a form of it was used to describe the imperium of Augustus. H. E. 2.5; Margaret Deanesly, "Roman Traditionanlist Influence,": 130; Steven Fanning, "Bede, Imperium, and the Bretwaldas," Speculum 66 (1991): 1-26; Eric John, Orbis Britannia, (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1966), 6-11.

descended from the Anglo-Saxon god, Woden. The early kings were chosen more for their ability in battle, so it is likely that they constructed suitable genealogies at an early date.[23] In order to exert supremacy, it was necessary to have the strongest army, and a strong army had to be paid well. Aethelbert's contacts with the continent allowed him to attract the best warriors with the promise of riches from abroad, and thus gain the title bretwalda.[24]

It does seem strange that such a title be used so early when clearly Britain was no longer the political unit it had been under Roman rule. The answer lies in the desire to be seen as the successor to the Romans as the master of a province as a single political unit.[25] Aelle of Sussex was probably staking his claim to the Roman province of Britain. The kings that followed who extended their influence over a broad reach of Anglo-Saxon England would claim the title of bretwalda.

The fact that King Aethelbert was, at the time of Augustine's arrival, a bretwalda is of no little importance. Two aspects of the political situation in Kent in the late sixth century bear on our topic. The first is

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[23]The earliest written genealogies are from the eigth century, but there is evidence that the tradition was already an old one by then. See Mayr-Harting p. 18 and F. M. Stenton, "Lindsey and Its Kings" in Essays in History Presented to R. L. Poole, ed. H. W. C. Davis (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1927), 137.

[24]Mayr-Harting, The Coming of Christianity, 18.

[25]Deanesley, "Roman Influence," 133-134.

the nature of the kingship of Aethelbert, and the second is Kent's ties with the continent.

Aethelbert was a bretwalda, but there is also evidence to suggest that he was not the sole king of Kent. There was a tradition of joint kingship in Kent from the time of Hengist and Horsa.[26] Bede tells us that Kent was divided into two bishoprics in 604, only seven years after the arrival of Augustine.[27] This early division is not the normal pattern of each kingdom being provided with one bishopric in the early years. The fact of two dioceses can be connected to the dual kingship. It appears that the ecclesiastical division was made to accommodate an existing political one. This does not mean that the kings were of equal rank.[28] The operational bases for the kings were Rochester and Canterbury, the senior partner being based at Canterbury.[29] The implication here is that Aethelbert, the senior partner, set Augustine up in Canterbury and that see was to remain important as Christianity spread to the rest of England.[30]

The importance of Kent's ties with the continent cannot be overemphasised. The trading position of Kent

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[26] The point has been well made by Barbara Yorke, "Joint Kingship in Kent c. 560 to 785," Archeologia Cantiana 89 (1983): 3.

[27] H. E., 2.3.

[28] A. E. Yorke, "Joint Kingship," p. 15.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid., 14; H. E., 1.25.

with Gaul would have aided Aethelbert in becoming the powerful king he was. The archeological evidence supports Kent's trading advantage and strength. First, there is an abrupt break in pottery evidence in Kent at about the time of Aethelbert's rise to power in 560. The growing wealth and development of the kingdom may have caused pottery to be forced almost completely out of use.[31] Frankish designed bottle-vases for storing liquid have been found, which replaced Anglo-Saxon wares. Second, continental jewelry has been found. The most notable piece of jewelry is the Kingston brooch, which is another reason to believe that Kent was prosperous during the reign of Aethelberht.[32] Third, hoards of continental coins have been discovered in Kent which date as early as 530.[33] Their use in Kent was probably medallic rather than monetary, but their existence

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[31]J. N. L. Myres, Anglo-Saxon Pottery and the Settlement of England, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 110.

[32]Ronald Jessup, Anglo-Saxon Jewellery (London: Faber & Faber, 1950), p. 115-116, and 120-21. Another date for the brooch was suggested by T. D. Kendrick, but it met with little approval. See T. D. Kendrick, Anglo-Saxon Art to A. D. 900 (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1938), 69-70; cf. E. T. Leeds, Early Anglo-Saxon Art and Archaeology: The Rhind Lectures Delivered in Edinburgh, 1935 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936), 41-58. Yet, Kendrick's argument that another piece of jewelry, the Wilton cross, came from the Christian Franks before the time of Augustine met with more approval. That a piece of Christian jewelry could arrive in Norfolk about the time of Augustine may relate to the conversion and relapse of King Redwald of East Anglia. H. E., 2.15.

[33]J. P. C. Kent, "From Roman Britain to Saxon England" in Anglo-Saxon Coins: Studies presented to F. M. Stenton on the occasion of his 80th birthday, 17 May, 1960.

adds to the weight of evidence that Kent was in a prime position for a mission from Rome. Kent was powerful, wealthy, and had open communication with the continent.

But perhaps the most important tie that Kent had with the continent was her queen -- she was Bertha daughter of King Charibert of France. She was a Christian and married Aethelbert under the condition that she be allowed to keep her faith. She took with her a chaplain, Luidhard, to give her guidance in things Christian.[34]

Ed. by R. H. M. Dolley, (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1960), 8. For a list of coin hoards see Mark Blackburn and Hugh Pagan, "A Revised Check-List of Coin Hoards from the British Isles, c. 500-1100," in Anglo-Saxon Monetary History: Essays in Memory of Michael Dolley, Ed. by M. A. S. Blackburn (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1986), 292. Four hoards have been found in Kent dating from 530 to 620 in Chatham Lines, Canterbury, Favesham, and Sarre, chronologically. Kent suggests that the Canterbury hoard was not for monetary use but rather medallic.

[34]H. E. 1.25.

CHAPTER 3

DID CHRISTIANITY SURVIVE IN ENGLAND?

The social and political changes which occurred in the two centuries before Augustine's arrival had left Christianity nearly extinct in England,[1] but they also paved the way for the Gregorian monks to begin their mission. Augustine arrived in a pagan social and political milieu, but one which was not unfamiliar with Christianity. There were Christian influences at work which both helped and hindered Augustine. These influences tend to be minimized by Bede, who was writing from the standpoint of Rome via Canterbury.

The first of these influences came from the British Christians who were still living among the Anglo-Saxon settlers. As mentioned above, the evidence for paganism surviving and even thriving in the countryside is especially strong. But there is evidence of Christianity in England up until the arrival of Augustine. It is unlikely, however, that the native Britons who were Christians would have been in a position to convert the Anglo-Saxons. One writer says concerning the Britons that, "It was a consolation to them to think that the invaders

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[1] W. H. C. Frend, "Ecclesia Britannica," 142-144.

who had stolen their lands and slain their clergy were heading straight for hell-fire and an eternity of punishment."[2] Although there is no proof for this statement, one could see it as a possiblity in some areas. What is known is that even though the church of the Britons apparently survived in Wales and Cornwall, they made no noticeable attempt to evangelize their conquerors. In any event, from a king's perspective, it would be foolish to give up the gods who helped you conquer a people for the god of the people conquered. It was Augustine and his entourage, who could call on the power and influence of Rome, that lifted this stigma attached to Christianity.

The following circumstances pointed to the survival of Christianity in England until the time of Augustine. In Wessex, some Britons were not subdued until 658, and it is possible that British churches were simply absorbed into the West Saxon Church.[3] Penda, king of Mecia (626-655), had on the whole a relationship of friendship and alliance with the Christian Welsh on his western frontier.[4] There were areas north and northwest of London which were British controlled until just a few years before 597. It is possible that this area included St. Alban's. This shrine was maintained as a place of pilgrimage until the time of

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[2] Hodgkin, History of the Anglo-Saxons, 250.

[3] James Campbell, Essays in Anglo-Saxon History (London: The Hambledon Press, 1986), 72.

[4] Mayr-Harting, Coming of Christianity, 118-120.

Bede. It is therefore possible that when King Saeberht of Essex (c. 600 - c. 617) was converted he already had a Christian shrine in his kingdom.[5] This evidence need not undermine the fact that the Britons did little to evangelize their conquerors. The question of continuity of Christianity from the time of the Romans until Augustine's arrival is one which is open to debate. There is simply not enough evidence to come down firmly on one side or the other.

A second influence came via Irish missionaries led by Columba (521-597) who founded a monastery on Iona, off the coast of Scotland. The Celtic church has left little evidence about itself for the sixty years between the death of Patrick (461) and the work of Columba (521-597). However, it is certain that it did not conform to a diocesan form of government. The monastary was the center of the Irish church, and the Abbot's rule was supreme. There was no centralized government, which fitted the Irish political structure of chieftains.[6] In this regard, the Celtic church better fitted Anglo-Saxon culture than did the Roman church. Columba had already converted the Picts who lived north of the kingdom of Northumbria. This Celtic influence eventually reached into Northumbria about the

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[5] H. E. 1.7; and Campbell, Essays, 72.

[6] Clare E. Stancliffe, "Kings and Conversion: Some Comparisons between the Roman Mission to England and Patrick's to Ireland," Frühmittelalterliche Studien 14 (1981): 60-64.

same time that Augustine, and his monks were making headway in the south. Since there had been little or no direct contact between Rome and the Celtic church for more than a century, there would be no reason to suspect that Augustine would have known about the efforts being made in the north.

The relationship of the Celts and Franks is important here. The Irish missionary Columbanus went to Burgundy in 590, where he founded the monasteries of Luxeuil and Annegray and stayed until he was expelled by Theuderic II. He eventually made his way to Lombardy and founded Bobbio in 612. His influence no doubt caused change in the church in Gaul. Through the influence of Columbanus, there were Irishmen in Gaul and likely Franks in Ireland.[7]

There is ample evidence that the church in Gaul was in a bad state. Simony was rampant and Gregory wanted to convene a synod to root the evil out. Augustine would have been travelling through Gaul while Columbanus was founding houses in Burgundy. In a circular letter to the bishops of Gaul Gregory deals at length with the problem of simony.[8] In another letter Gregory addresses Brunichild, Queen of

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[7] Campbell, Essays, 56-57.

[8] Gregory the Great, The Book of Pastoral Rule and Selected Epistles, translated, with introduction, notes, and indices by James Barmby, vols. XII and XIII in A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, 2d ser., eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, reprint ed., 1983), Epistles, 9.106. Those addressed are Syagrius of Autun, Etherius of Lyons, Virgilius of Arles, and Desiderius of Vienne.

the Franks, expressing his concern about the practice of simony in her kingdom. This letter is of interest as well because Gregory sends a pallium to Syagrius, bishop of Autun, and commends him for showing, "... himself exceedingly devoted with regard to the mission which has been sent, under God, to the nation of the Angli...."[9]

It is not known how much Gregory knew of the activities of Columbanus and the Irish monks before sending Augustine. There is no firm indication that he knew of him, but a firm conclusion cannot be drawn based on lack of evidence. It is known that Columbanus defended the Celtic Easter practice at a synod in Gaul in 602/3, and that he wrote a letter to Gregory to the same end, supposedly four years prior.[10] This does tell one that there was communication between the Celtic churches located to the north of the Anglo-Saxons and Gaul. There is also evidence that the Celtic churches were influenced more by the Eastern

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[9]Greg. Ep. 9.109

[10]Greg. Ep. 9.127, and note. This letter was added to the collection of Gregory's Epistles by the Benedictines in the seventeenth century. It is assigned by them to the years A. D. 598-99. There is no surviving reply of Gregory, and perhaps there never was one. In another letter to Pope Boniface IV Columbanus writes, "Once and again Satan hindered the bearers of our letters written formerly to pope Gregory of good memory, which are subjoined below." He addresses the pope with respect but shows no indication of submitting to his authority. He in fact says that if Gregory should not accept the assumed teaching of Jerome on the matter of Easter he would be considered a heretic by all the Celtic churches. Columbanus never submitted to the Roman Easter. See also W. H. C. Frend, The Rise of Christianity (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 880-81.

church than by Rome. The Celtic monasteries, art forms, and pottery were all influenced by the Mediterranean, and the cut of the tonsure for monks and the date of Easter were from Africa.[11] Adomnan records in his Life of Columba that there were two English monks at the monastery on Iona before Columba's death in 597.[12]

A third factor was the relationship between the Franks and the Saxons. This has already been pointed out in the political and economic context, but there was likely a great deal of similarity between the two peoples culturally as well. Augstine took Frankish translators with him because the languages were similar enough to allow communication. One writer has suggested that the two cultures may be described more along the lines of a continuum than two completely separate cultures.[13] Bede states that the bishop Luidhard was sent with Bertha to Kent "to help her in matters of faith."[14]

It should now be evident that even though the

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[11] H. E., 3.25; Greg. Epis., 9.127; Frend, Rise of Christianity, 880-81; see also Leslie Alcock, Arthur's Britain: History and Archaeology AD 367-634 (London: The Penguin Press, 1971; reprint, 1972), 201-204. Columbanus and Colman argue for Celtic Easter by using the calculations of Anatolius of Alexandria.

[12] Adamnan, The Life of Columba Columb-Kille - A. D. 521-597. (newly translated from the Latin with notes and illustrations by Wentworth Huyshe [London: George Routledge & Sons, Ltd., 1906]) III.10, 22. Their names were Pilua and Generus. Generus was the community's baker. See Campbell, Essays, 70.

[13] Campbell, Essays, 54-55.

[14] H. E. 1.25.

Anglo-Saxons were pagan, they did have contact with Christian influences. However, what they saw did not impress them enough to make a change. Those among the population who would have professed Christianity would have stuggled to maintain a visible existance at best, and it is probable that there was sycrenism with pagan worship.

The mixed messages of history concerning the state of Christianity in Britain after Rome withdrew need not be confusing or surprising. Given the curious juxtaposition of the remnants of Roman society and Christianity alongside the invaders, who for a while avoided the established centers of population, the evidence for both continuity of and disturbance of Christianity should be expected. One need only look to Eastern Europe in the second half of the twentieth century to see that evidence of such a state of affairs as this can exist side by side.

When Augustine arrived in Kent, he arrived in pagan lands. The memory of Rome may not have entirely died, but the break had been made. Roman Britain had given way to the early stirrings of Saxon England. Christianity may have been returning to a familiar geographic location, but the ground to be broken was not. Still, this was a pagan land which had renewed its contacts with Christian Europe in terms of communication, trade, and the marriage of royal houses. These factors were to work in the mission's favor, and they likely influenced Augustine to begin in Kent the evangelisation of Anglo-Saxon England.

CHAPTER 4

GREGORY'S MOTIVATION FOR AN ENGLISH MISSION

There can be little doubt that the life of the mission was Gregory's. He commissioned it, encouraged his monks to follow through with what they had started, guided the early life of the church by his responses to Augustines's questions, and gave the church in England its ecclesiastical shape.[1] But, why Gregory chose to send the mission to England is open to debate. It is possible that his motive was simply missionary zeal, but there may have been other factors as to why he chose the English as the outlet for that zeal.

Gregory was born of Roman parents, Gordianus and Sylvia. The anonymous Life of Gregory says of him that "he was noble in the eyes of the law but nobler still in heart in the sight of God...."[2] He lived for a time in a monastery where he was influenced in his spiritual life by the hermits and monasteries of Syria and Egypt. His family was wealthy, and he used his estate to open a monastery outside Rome which he himself entered. He was devoted to a life of contemplation, prayer, and study. He had knowledge of St. Benedict converting the pagans, and he emphasized

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[1] H. E.. 1.23, 27, 29.

[2] Earliest Life of Gregory, ch. 1.

that the monastic life should bear fruit in action.[3]

His missionary zeal was quite remarkable considering the difficulties he faced in Rome. It is truly amazing that the mission was sent at all. Rome was a city which was suffering. The year before Gregory became pope the River Tiber flooded and a plague scourged the city. The land around Rome was marshy and infertile, and there was a chronic shortage of food. The city was slum-ridden. The Lombards also flowed into Italy in 598, and the Romans lived in constant fear of attack from them.[4] Gregory stopped work on his Homilies on Ezekiel because he could not continue.

> On all sides we are surrounded by swords, on all sides we go in imminent fear of death. Some men return to us with their hands cut off, others have been captured or killed. I am forced now to hold my tongue from expounding because my soul is weary of this life. None should ask me to persevere in holy eloquence because my hope is turned to mourning and my organ to the voice of tears. Homilies on Ezekiel [5]

In spite of the difficulties, he did send the mission and is given credit for converting the English even though he never set foot in their land. In the Life of Gregory the Great, he is called the teacher and master of the

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[3] Earliest Life of Gregory, ch. 1.; H. E. 2.1; The Book of Pontiffs [Liber Pontificalis], trans. with introduction by Raymond Davis, in Translated Texts for Historians; Latin Series V (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1989), 61-62.

[4] Mayr-Harting, The Coming of Christianity, 55.

[5] Gregory the Great, Homilies on Ezekiel, P. L. 76. col. 1072; quoted in Henry Mayr-Harting, The Coming of Christianity, 55.

English nation.[6] Bede devotes a long chapter to the life of Gregory. He places it out of chronological sequence so that it stands prominantly at the beginning of the second book. He says, "... because by his diligence he converted our nation, that is the English, from the power of Satan to the faith of Christ..." [7]

A discussion of Gregory's motivation for sending the mission must begin with the story as it is recounted to us by the monk at Whitby and by Bede. The Whitby account is given in the first paragraph of this paper. The chapter following the encounter with the English boys in the Whitby account tells us that Gregory pleaded with Pope Benedict to send him to England saying, "It would be a wretched thing for hell to be filled with such lovely vessels." On hearing this, the Pope gave his permission and Gregory was allowed to leave. The people of Rome protested, "You have offended Peter, you have destroyed Rome, you have sent Gregory away." After three days the Pope sent messengers to recall Gregory to Rome.[8] Bede introduces his similar account of the story as, "the tradition of our elders has brought unto our knowledge concerning the blessed Gregory," and concludes, "This much according to the report which we have heard from days of old we have thought fitting to put

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[6] Earliest Life of Gregory, chs. 3, 5.

[7] H. E., 2.1

[8] Earliest Life of Gregory, ch. 10.

in the History of our Church."[9] The two accounts are different enough that it is unlikely that they come from a common literary source. Bede's use of the word tradition indicates that the account was one that had been passed around orally in slightly different versions.

That Gregory's interest was aroused by contact with slave boys from England is strengthened by a letter of 595 to Candidus, a presbyter of the patrimony of Gaul. In the letter, Candidus is instructed to use his money to buy "English boys of about seventeen or eighteen years of age, who may profit by being given to God in monasteries."[10] If Gregory's first encounter was with Deirian slaves in Rome during the papacy of Benedict I, it would have been fifteen to twenty years before this letter was written to Candidus. Nevertheless, the possibility of such an event is supported by this letter. The fact that Gregory requests specifically English boys indicates his interest in them.

Two of Gregory's letters state that it was the desire of the "Angli" to become Christian. They are addressed to Theodoric and Theodebert and to Brunichild, all Frankish royalty. There is no reason to doubt the sincerety of his remarks, but to tell the Franks he was invited by the

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[9] H. E., 2.1

[10] Greg. Epis. 6.7. The boys were apparently to be sent to Rome. The currency in Gaul could not be spent in Italy so Gregory wanted the money to "... be expended profitably in its own locality."

"Angli" would have certainly been good politics.[11]

There could have been other reasons why Gregory chose the Anglo-Saxons. Gregory was still living in the days of the Roman empire, even if it was an empire in decline past help. Since he was from Rome, his geography would have been shaped by the empire. He may have seen an opportunity to reclaim for Rome a lost part of the empire through Christianity. It would have been a military impossibility at this time. Another secondary motive for choosing the English may have been the fact that they were completely unchristian. They were not Arian heretics as many of the barbarian tribes were. He may also have received word that Aethelbert in Kent was an over-king and had created enough political stability to make a mission possible.[12]

There is a fourth possibility which would take into account the overall situation in Gaul and the relationship of the peoples there. Gregory may have seen an opportunity to sort out the church in Gaul and evangelize their neighbors as well. One has already noted that the Celtic church was having some impact in Gaul through the work of Columbanus, and that it had more contact with the church in the East than with Rome. While the Celts were communicating and trading with the people of Southern and Eastern Mediterranean, the people of Southeastern Britain were

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[11] Greg. Epis., 6.58, 59.

[12] Mayr-Harting, The Coming of Christianity, 60.

nearly cut off from any commmuncation outside those that bordered their kingdoms, including Gaul across the channel. It may have been the fratricidal struggles of the descendants of Clovis which led to problems with the church in Gaul. These struggles no doubt would have hindered communication in that part of the world. For Gregory, then, the best way to take control of the situation without deposing those in higher positions (which may have been difficult anyway) was to send someone to the region who would answer directly to him. Augustine would be useful in contacting the Celtic church and the non-Roman bishops in Britain.[13] The Anglo-Saxons offered him the perfect opportunity. He had already written letters expressing his displeasure with the simony which was running riot in the Gallic churches.[14] By sending Augustine he could accomplish several things at once. None of this diminishes Gregory's pastoral concern for the English. If anything it shows that he was concerned with the church in the whole region.[15]

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[13] H. E., 1.27. Question 7 is the relevant one.

[14] Greg. Epis., 9.106-110.

[15] Campbell, Essays, 64-66. Campbell points to the possibility of the success of the mission as being part of a wider movement encompassing England, Gaul, and parts of the Anglo-Saxon homelands. He suggests that Bede misdirects our attention to Rome, or at least overemphasises Rome and diminishes other factors.

CHAPTER 5

SENDING THE MISSION: AUGUSTINE'S JOURNEY

The Whitby account gives us this information about the sending of the mission.

> Not long afterwards the Pope (Benedict) died and, as we have already said, Gregory was elected to the pontificate. With as little delay as possible he sent here Augustine, Mellitus, and Laurentius, men of honored memory, together with others, having consecrated Augustine as bishop. Mellitus is said to have been consecrated here by Augustine and Laurentius by Mellitus.[1]

Bede states that Gregory sent, "... Augustine and other more monks fearing the Lord ... to preach ... to the English."[2] It was unusual that a band of monks should be sent as missionaries. They were not sent to establish a monastic house but to convert the English. There were apparently no secular clergy with them. They were, in fact,

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[1] Earliest Life of Gregory, ch. 11. This brief account has some chronological problems. The first is the indication that Gregory was made Pope after Benedict. Between Benedict and Gregory, Pelagius II was Pope 579-590. Gregory spent about seven years in Constantinople during this time, and from 585-590 he was at his monastery. Gregory became Pope in 590, so it was still six years before he sent Augustine and company. The second problem is the indication that Augustine, Mellitus, and Laurentius (Laurence) were all sent at the same time. Correspondence from Gregory indicates that Laurence was sent to Rome for more helpers with one Peter the monk, and Mellitus was in the group that was sent later. See Greg. Epis., 10.64, 76. These and other relevant letters are dated June and July, 601. cf. Book of Pontifs, 61.

[2] H. E., 1.23

initially sent without an abbot. Augustine was only made abbot when the mission faltered en route and he returned to Rome for instructions, to be sent back with letters from Gregory.

There are good reasons why Gregory should send monks of his own monastery[3] instead of clergy. The clergy of Rome were possibly not so willing to undertake such a long and dangerous journey. Typical clergy would also be accustomed to having a flock to tend to. There was no flock waiting for them in England. Monks, on the other hand, were trained in a life of contemplation and solitude. In other words, they were better trained to deal with the difficulties inherent in the task of converting a nation such as the English.[4] Since Gregory was sending monks of his own monastery, they were answerable directly to their abbot, Augustine, and he was answerable directly to Gregory. If Gregory wanted to do more than just convert the English, as suggested earlier, he would need such an advocate as Augustine to ensure the faithfulness of the English church. As history shows, the monastic life which Augustine brought with him was to have a profound effect on the English church.

Very little is known of those who made up the

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[3]Augustine was provost of the monastery of St. Andrew. Gregory built it on the Coelian hill in Rome.

[4]Margaret Deanesly, Augustine of Canterbury (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, Ltd., 1964), 20-22.

original group. Bede only names Augustine. The Whitby account names three, but Mellitus did not arrive until 601. It is possible that some of the monks were Anglian slave boys which had been brought to Rome for the purpose of being sent back.[5] Bede records that after they had travelled part of the way they were, "stricken with sluggish cowardice ... (and thought it better) ... to return home again than to go to that barbarous, savage, and unbelieving nation whose language even they knew not ...."[6] They sent Augustine back to Rome to request that they not have to continue. Gregory replied by making Augustine their abbot and sending back with him letters commending them to various bishops and royalty along the way.[7] He sent to them also a personal letter which begins,

> For so much as better it were never to begin a good work, than after this is once begun to go from it again in the inward thought, you must needs, my beloved sons, now fulfil the good work which by the help of God you

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[5] Ibid., 24. Although this is possible, it does not make sense in light of Bede's comment that the monks did not know the language.

[6] H. E., 1.23 "Part way" was somewhere in Provence. It is possible that they had stopped at the monastery at Lerins. This is supported by a letter to Stephen, who was described as "abbati de monasterio quod est Lirino." In the letter, Gregory commends his hospitality and thanks him for gifts that he had received from him. See Deanesly, Augustine, 24; Greg. Epis., 6.56, and note.

[7] There are eight letters in all in which Augustine is mentioned in most of them as the bearer. They are to bishops in Marseilles, Tours?, Arles, Vienne, Autun, and Aix. There is a letter to the Abbot Stephen of Lerins, one to a Patrician (a governor of a province under a Frankish king) named Arigius, one to Theodoric and Theodebert, kings of the Franks, and one to Brunichild, Queen of the Franks.

have taken into hand.[8]

By making Augustine their abbot, Gregory had given him the authority he perhaps needed to keep the group moving toward their goal. One assumes that his route passed through the places to which the letters were written. There is no extant record of letters to bishops north of Autun. Augustine probably took Roman roads to Paris and then followed the existing trade routes to the port of Quentavic before crossing to England.[9]

According to Bede, Augustine, along with about forty others, landed on the Island of Thanet with Frankish interpreters to aid in communication.[10] Augustine sent a message to the Aethelbert,

> ... that he came from Rome, and that he brought him very good tidings, which promised that such as did obey him, should have without any doubt everlasting joys in heaven and a kingdom without end with the living and true God.[11]

Augustine's argument and appeal to power persuaded the king to give orders for the visitors to be looked after and that they should wait on the Island until he came to them.

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[8]Greg. Epis., 6.51; H. E., 1.23. The date of this letter is August 10, 596.

[9]Deanesly, Augustine, 29

[10]Where Augustine landed is uncertain, but there is little reason to doubt that is was somewhere on the Island of Thanet. It may or may not be where the commemorative cross now stands. The traditional arguments are reviewed by Harold F. Bing, "St Augustine of Canterbury and the Saxon Church in Kent," Archaeologia Cantiana 62 (1949): 114-115.

[11]H. E., 1.25

After some days, Aethelbert arrived and agreed to hear them outside, unsure of their message or intent. He dared not invite them into a building or a house due to his belief that if they were magicians they might overwhelm him with their power. But "... they came not armed with the force of the devil but with the strength of God."[12] They sat down and Augustine preached to him. Aethelbert was not immediately convinced, but he did receive them and gave them lodging in his capital city of Canterbury. And thus began the conversion of the English nation.

Augustine's chances of a favorable response were better than he might have expected. Aethelbert already had a Christian princess, Bertha, and it is not likely that Charibert (Bertha's father) would allow her to marry a complete barbarian. Bertha was allowed a priest, Luidhard, to instruct her, and she used St. Martin's church as her private chapel. Also, the fact that Augustine came from Rome would have impressed the king. Aethelbert may have seen political advantages to strengthening ties with the Mediterranian world, and Augustine had come directly from Rome with its learning and language.

One of the major questions about Augustine concerns the time and place of his consecration as bishop. The Whitby Life says that Gregory consecrated him bishop.[13] This is unlikely since the letters sent back with Augustine

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[12] H. E., 1.25. [13] Earliest Life of Gregory, ch. 11

after the false start indicate he was still only a prior. However, the report may have been the current tradition, which could explain Bede's note that Gregory had appointed him to be made bishop there if the missionaries were received by the English.[14]

Bede recorded Augustine's consecration after Aethelbert's baptism. He was not sure of the date except that it was before 601, and he says that it was done by Etherius, archbishop of Arles.[15] There are two letters which would have led Bede to the conclusion that the consecration took place in Arles. The first was to Etherius in 596, and the second was to Vergilius in 601, both addressed as bishops of Arles.[16] The fact that Etherius was not bishop of Arles but of Lyons does not alter Bede's reasoning here. In both letters, the bishop is asked to aid Augustine and the mission to the English in whatever ways possible. In Gregory's responses to Augustine's questions in 601, he is encouraged to work closely with the bishop of Arles in matters of discipline.[17] Given the information he had at his disposal,

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[14] H. E., 1.23.

[15] H. E., 1.27. Vergilius was the archbishop of Arles.

[16] H. E., 1.24, 28; Greg. Epis., 6.53, 55. Nothelm was sent to Rome to gather information, and apparently there was an error made in the transcription of Bede's copy. In Greg. Epis., the first letter is addressed correctly to Vergilius.

[17] H. E., 1.27; Greg. Epis., 11.64. This is the response to question seven concerning Augustine's

from Bede's perspective, Arles was the logical choice.

Bede's account has long been the accepted view, and lack of firm evidence prevents making a case strong enough to displace it. It has much to commmend it, chiefly that it is the Canterbury tradition.[18] But, in this case Bede may be supplying the tradition rather than recording it. The Whitby Life of Gregory tells us that Gregory appointed him bishop.[19] The truth probably lay somewhere in the middle, with Augustine being consecrated bishop on the way.[20] Gregory, wrote to Eulogius, bishop of Alexandria,

> ... for while the nation of the Angli, placed in a corner of the world, remained up to this time misbelieving in the worship of stocks and stones, I determined, ... to send ... a monk of my monastery for the purpose of preaching. And he, having with my leave been made bishop by the bishops of Germany, proceeded, with their aid also, to the end of the world to (the Angli).[21]

Here one must decide whether to use Bede's account as the focus and view the Gregorian correspondence in light of it,

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relationship with the bishops of Gaul and the Britons. The same question and response is numbered nine in the Gregorian Epistles.

[18]Deanesly, Augustine, 40; cf. H. E., 1.23, 27. If Bede did get his information from the Canterbury tradition, it is unusual that he did not say so as he does when using other oral or traditional sources.

[19]Earliest Life of Gregory, ch. 11. It has been suggested that Bede's original account of these events was much closer to the Whitby life than the final composition which we now have. See Dom Paul Meyvaert, Bede and Gregory the Great: Jarrow Lecture, 1964 (Jarrow-on-Tyne: by H. Saxby, St. Paul's Rectory [n.d.]), 8-13.

[20]Meyvaert, Bede and Gregory, 12-13.

[21]Greg. Epis., 8.30.

or whether to accept the evidence from Gregory and view Bede in its light.[22] It is hard to imagine that Bede would have not used such a valuable clue in the puzzle of Augustine's consecration. It is also unlikely that if he did have it he would have seen Arles as being in Germany. To be fair, the phrase "bishops of Germany" is troublesome, but at the very least it places the event in northern Gaul. A letter addressed to Brunichild, Queen of the Franks, dated October, 597, calls Augustine "our brother and fellow-bishop."[23] The problem this second letter presents to the traditional view is that it means Augustine must arrive in 597, and return to Arles to be consecrated by October the same year. The value of these letters is that they indicate what Gregory intended and expected. He intended for Augustine to be consecrated on the way, and he expected Augustine to be bishop by the time Brunichild received the letter.

To have Augustine consecrated on the way by the

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[22] Two articles written in response to Bretcher, Die Quellen, which has the effect of moving our center away from Bede and toward Gregory, address this problem. Margaret Deanesly and Paul Grosjean, "The Canterbury Edition of the Answers of pope Gregory I to St. Augustine," Journal of Ecclesiastical History 10 (1959): 1-49 and R. A. Markus, "The Chronology of the Gregorian Mission to England: Bede's Narrative and Gregory's Correspondence." Journal of Ecclesiastical History 14 (1963): 16-30.

[23] Greg. Epis., 9.11. Those that hold the traditional view say that there was time for Augustine to arrive in England and after his positive reception, return to Arles. Deanesly, Augustine, 39-40; cf. Markus, "Chronology": 25-26. Gregory was mistaken to refer to Augustine as bishop in this letter.

"German bishops" would have aided Gregory's cause by winning the support of those bishops who were nearest to Augustine. Gregory now had an advocate in England who was the bishop of the "bishops of Britain," who had made a positive move toward those closest geographically, and who was on equal footing with Arles to aid in correcting the problems in the church there.[24]

One must, however, conclude that the matter is one of the mysteries which still eludes us. Bede did not answer these questions, except that he guessed on the place of Augustine's consecration, and one cannot be sure he was wrong.[25] Whether or not Augustine was bishop at the time, one does know that not many days after he landed on Thanet, he found himself in the old Roman city of Durovernum, or as it was known then, Cantwaraburh.

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[24] Arles was the primary city of the whole of Gaul after the capital was removed from Trier. Some therefore argue that Augustine would have gone there for consecration. Deanesly, Augustine, 40. However, it could be that Gregory would have wanted to avoid such an occasion to prevent Arles having a pretext for superiority.

[25] Peter Hunter Blair, The World of Bede (London: Secker & Warburg, 1970), 75.

CHAPTER 6

AUGUSTINE AT CANTERBURY - 1

Augustine had left a Rome which was well past its zenith, but the state of Rome would not have prepared him for what he saw upon his arrival at the Kentish king's capital. Durovernum Cantiacorum was a city in transition. It had decayed and its Roman streets were nearly lost. Canterbury was emerging. Its name Cantwaraburh meant "fortress of the Kent people."[1]

Canterbury was never completely deserted, but it was by this time sparsely populated. Archaeological evidence shows a buildup of humus in much of the city which dates to the fifth and sixth centuries.[2] The Saxon huts which were built within the city walls bear no relation to the layout of the Roman roads, except that some used their hard, rammed gravel as floors for dwellings.[3] The new inhabitants simply left the stone structures of the Romans to decay, while building their own wooden ones for their own use. This evidence suggests a virtual economic collapse

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[1] Nicholas Brooks, The Early History of the Church of Canterbury: Christ Church from 597 to 1066, (Leicester: University Press, 1984), 22.

[2] Drewett, et al., 247-48.

[3] Deanesly, Augustine, 38.

of the town, which is what one would expect given the social organization of the Saxons in general.

Augustine and his men were given a lodging and were allowed to preach in the city that they, "may win unto the faith of your religion with your preaching as many as you may."[4] Bede says that they then, "began to follow the apostolical life of the primitive Church."[5] The first church they used was one that existed east of the city which was built "of ancient time in honor St. Martin, made while the Romans were yet dwelling in Britain."[6] It was this church that was used until the baptism of Aethelbert, at which time they were given permission to build or restore other churches.

Their efforts met with early success. Some became Christian because they were impressed by the simplicity of the monks' life and the doctrine which they taught, but the breakthrough came when the king himself was baptized. Bede records that Aethelbert

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[4] H. E., 1.25.

[5] H. E., 1.26.

[6] Ibid. St. Martin died in 397; it was not yet customary to name churches after any saints but apostles or martyrs whose bodies lay in a church. Martin was the first West European saint who had churches dedicated to his name. Tours is called after him because that is where he is buried. Martin was the patron saint of Paris. It is likely that Luidhard restored and dedicated this church in Martin's name by laying a relic brought from Paris. This is the first Roman church identified by Bede. He tells us of another one which became the seat for Augustine's see, Christ Church. A third one not mentioned by Bede was discovered in the 1950's. The modern church of St. Peter

> ... being much delighted with the purity of the holy men's life and likewise with their sweet promises which to be true they had proved by the showing also of many miracles....[7]

After his conversion, the king did not force others to become Christians, but the influence of the king certainly had its impact upon the kingdom, and beyond.

There are two questions which are raised at this point. The first concerns the type of life the monks lived that would have impressed the king. Christianity first came to Britain in Roman times naturally along the Roman roads with Christians who happened to be going there to trade or settle. It would have come with soldiers, with administrators, and perhaps some converted Jews, and all were part of a recognized political structure (the Roman Empire). There were a number of church buildings erected and sees were set up, but there were also a number of house churches. When Christianity arrived this time, it came by a band of monks who spoke a strange language and who had come not to do business, but solely to convert the people they found.

They were monks, but they were monks who had not gone out to establish a monastery. They had been given a commission by the pope. The solution which Augustine offered was predictable but unusual. He combined the

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lies at an angle to the medieval and modern roads, but parallel to a Roman street, which suggests continuity with an original Roman building. See Deanesly, Augustine, 36-37.

[7] H. E., 1.26.

contemplative life of the monastery with the secular duties of the clergy. The English monastery or "minster" was the result. The distinction between "minster" and "monastery" is a false one during the seventh century.[8]

The form the church took in Anglo-Saxon England was the monastery. After being given permission to build and restore churches, Augustine restored a Roman church and dedicated it as Christ Church. Near to it he built a monastery. It was here that early English monasticism differed from that on the continent. It grew up alongside and in aid of the church and was the primary means of its spread.[9] Monasticism on the continent and in Africa, even among the Celts, was a means of escape from wordly duties; evangelism was not necessary because the houses were founded in Christian lands. In England, the Bishops established monastic houses and worked closely with those they did not establish. The conflicts between powerful monastic houses and diocesan bishops which occurred on the

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[8]These early monasteries fashioned after the kind of Augustine have left their mark on the church in England. There are many minsters in England which have not been associated with a monastery for centuries. When a monastic community left a minster, they would have provided a priest to minister to the church that was left. The laymen of the area, usually a city, would continue to call the church "the minster" since it was the most important part of the monastery from their point of view. See Patrick Sims-Williams, Religion and Literature in Western England 600-800, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England, 3, eds. Simons Keynes and Michael Lapidge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 115-116; Fisher, The Anglo-Saxon Age, 94-95.

[9]Sims-Williams, Religion and Literature, 138-141.

continent were not a problem at this time in England.[10]

Augustine's early community was one made up of monks, some of whom he was able to raise to the priestly office. There is no record that they were ever transferred to clerical duties as a group. Laurence the priest and Peter the monk were sent back to Rome with questions from Augustine.[11] That they also requested more help is an indication of the lack of monks who could be raised to clerical status.[12] Augustine's monastic community was one which was effectively founded by a bishop and grew out of the need to reconcile the advantages of communal living with the commission they had to provide for the spiritual welfare of those around them.[13]

Although it was not to be seen until years after Augustine's death, this is the first major lasting impact that he had upon the English church. It proved to be one of the keys in converting the English countryside. But before that could happen in Anglo-Saxon times, the kings must first be converted.

The second question concerns the baptism of Aethelbert. Once again Bede's account is deceptively clear. This is due once again to a lack of detailed

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[10]Sims-Williams, Religion and Literature, 138-141. Monastic and episcopal interests were the same for the infant English church, unlike the continent.

[11] H. E., 1.27

[12]Deanesly, Augustine, 41-42.

[13] Fisher, The Anglo-Saxon Age, 94.

information. If Bede did not know, it was not his practice to guess. He does record the baptism before Augustine's consecration. This would place the baptism in the year 597.[14] In the same letter of Gregory to Eulogius which informs one of instructions given about Augustine's consecration, he says that more than ten thousand English had been baptized at Christmas.[15] The fact that no reference is made to the king is unfortunate. Although it is unlikely that so many would have been converted before the king became Christian, one does not know for certain that he had been baptized by this time.

Two other letters of Gregory make reference to Aethelbert concerning his spiritual growth. They are both traditionally dated 601, which means that they would have arrived with the second group of missionaries in that year. The difficulty with this information is that they seem to contradict each other. One of the letters is to Bertha in which she is encouraged to,

> ... proceed, with the cooperation of divine grace, as to be able to make reparation with increase for what has been neglected. Wherefore strengthen ... the mind of your glorious husband in love of the Christian faith; let your solicitude infuse into him increase of love for God, and so kindle his heart even for the fullest conversion of the nation....[16]

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[14] C. F. Routledge, "The Baptism of Ethelbert," Archaeologia Cantiana 21 (1895): 157-160. The traditional date is Whitsunday (Pentecost), 597.

[15] Greg. Epis., 8.30

[16] Ibid., 11.28, note. This letter along with another one to Augustine that is recorded in an edited version by

Bede does not record this letter. One cannot tell if he did not have it, or if he left it out because of this fuzzy statement. This could have been written as an admonition to the queen to convert her husband, which she had neglected to do. Or it could simply be an encouragement for her to aid in his development as a Christian king.

The second letter is clearer, and in it Gregory writes as though he were addressing a Christian king. He encourages him to model himself after the Christian emperor Constantine and calls him his son.[17] The evidence points to Aethelbert's baptism as being sometime after Augustine's arrival and before the messages were sent to Rome that prompted the replies sent in 601.

The place of his baptism is also not certain. Bede indicates that it was at St. Martin's.[18] Indeed that is the only functioning church we know of before his baptism.

Bede, in which he is encouraged not to be puffed up on account of his miracles, may have been written at an earlier date. One suggestion is that they were written at about the same time as the letter to Eulogius of Alexandria (Sept., 598). The argument is based on the tone of the letters to Augustine and Eulogius, and the fact that the one to Bertha indicates that Aethelbert had not yet been baptized. This, of course, requires at least one more trip to and from Rome than Bede's account leads us to believe. Needless to say there are more questions than answers concering the chronlogy of this phase of the mission.

[17] Greg. Epis., 11.66; H. E., 1.32. This letter arrived with another to Augustine concerning episcopal sees in Britain. This is another indication that the mission was considered on firm enough footing to establish a bishop in England. What could ensure that except the baptism of the king?

[18] H. E., 1.26.

There has been no baptistry found there to date. A late Roman shallow tank such as found in many parts of Britain must have been used. It was a transitional form of baptistry between the Roman stone baths and the medieval fonts raised on pillars.[19]

Aethelbert was the first of the Anglo-Saxon kings to become a Christian, and he was a bretwalda, who had dominion as far as the river Humber. Augustine was able to set this most important precedent. Other kings would soon follow.

Augustine was still in a strange land with strange customs. He was also the only bishop of the English. Given his situation he sent back to Rome good news concerning the conversion of the English, and confirmation of his consecration as bishop. He also sent with his messengers a series of questions concerning the church of the English.[20]

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[19]Deanesly, Augustine, 40.

[20]H. E., 1.27.

CHAPTER 7

AUGUSTINE AT CANTERBURY - 2

The answers to Augustine's questions addressed to Gregory the Great did not arrive until 601. Assuming the questions were dispatched to Rome after Aethelbert's baptism in 597 or 598, the answers were delayed by at least three years. The delay could have been caused by the Lombard invasion in Italy and Gregory's poor health.[1] Along with the answers, a second group of missionaries was sent. Four are named by Bede: Mellitus, Justus, Paulinus, and Rufianus.[2] Bede's source for three of these names is not known. Mellitus is the only one mentioned in Gregory's Letters or in the Lives of the Popes. One knows that Mellitus accompanied the second group because Gregory wrote a letter to him while he was on his way.[3] One can only assume he was not with the first group because he is not mentioned by Bede as carrying news back to Rome of the initial success. It is possible that Bede heard the other

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[1]Harold F. Bing, "St. Augustine and the Saxon Church in Kent," Archaeoligia Cantiana 62 (1949): 112.

[2]H. E., 1.29.

[3]H. E., 1.30. The content of the letter gives instructions to Augustine and the others on how they ought to handle pagan temples. They were to remove the idols, consecrate the building with holy water, and use it as a place to worship the true, living God.

names from the Canterbury tradition and placed them in the second group, lacking evidence that they were in the first.[4]

Bede says at this point,

> And without delay he (Augustine) received fitting answer to his inquisition; which also we thought good to put into this our History.[5]

From here Bede simply inserts Gregory's letter in answer to Augustine's nine questions.[6] On the whole, they give an

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[4]Blair, World of Bede, 73-74. The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great lists Augustine, Mellitus, and Laurence, probably because they were the first three archbishops of Canterbury. Earliest Life of Gregory, ch. 11.

[5]H. E., 1.27; Blair, World of Bede, 72-76. The statement "without delay" is problematic here. It has caused some to question Bede's accuracy at this point. By this time we are able to recognize that Bede did a masterful job of weaving his story together from a wide variety of sources. It has been recognized for some time that Bede may have been near completion of his work when he was presented with some more relevant material. There are about thirty relevant letters in Gregory's Letters, Bede uses only eight. In this section of Bede's history (1.22-33) concerning the initiation and early years of the mission (to the point of the second group's arrival), two-thirds of the account are direct quotations from letters. There are no quotations at all in chapters 25-26 and 33. There is a case for saying that these three chapters are the Canterbury tradition of the story. In general, it should not be discounted. St. Martin's survives, Luidhard's coins have been found, and the tombs of the archbishop's have been located. It is possible that Bede left his original story intact and chose relevant parts of the letters to insert into his History.

The result is a mixture of two perspectives. The Gregorian material was contemporary with events, looking forward. The Canterbury tradition was looking back, remembering selectively those events which were of later relevance.

[6]H. E., 1.27; Greg. Epis. 11.64. The Gregorian account has the same content, but they are in answer to eleven questions. The integrity of these anwers has been called into question from time to time. Deanesly and Grosjean defend the answers as genuine. There is some doubt about the second part of question five (Bede's

insight into the challenges which Augustine faced in the early years of the mission. They tell one that Augustine struggled with fair distribution of gifts given to the church, with differing customs among churches of different nations, with theft from the Church, with marriage and incest laws which were different in Anglo-Saxon culture, with a lack of other bishops nearby and his relationship to those who were closest (Gallic and British), with the cleanliness of women during childbearing, and their monthly cycle and sexual relations of men and women as they may affect the holy communion.

Two of these questions are of interest at this point. The first is question six, which asks,

> If the bishops are so far apart from the other that they cannot conveniently assemble together, whether one may be ordained a bishop without the presence of other bishop?[7]

The answer Gregory gives results in Augustine having the authority to appoint bishops without others being present. This was really the only workable solution. The British bishops were certainly not going to cooperate, and the Gallic bishops had shown little interest in the mission except that some of them aided Augustine in his journey.

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reckoning), "And is it lawful to be joined together in wedlock with a stepmother or a brother's wife?" This may have been a later addition to deal with Eadbald's (Aethelberht's son) marriage to his stepmother in 616-17. Even this answer is in accordance with Gregorian teaching and need not be dismissed as unreliable. Deanesly and Grosjean, "The Canterbury Edition," 42-43.

[7] H. E., 1.27

Along with this authority and the extra help there were sent,

> ... holy vessels and altarcloths, ornaments for churches and apparel for the priests or clergy, relics too of the holy apostles and martyrs as well as many books. [8]

Gregory also sent a pall and a letter giving instruction concerning the ecclesiastical structure Gregory had planned for the English church.

This plan, the structure it brought with it, and the work of Augustine's succesors were to give the English church its ecclesiastical structure which has continued until today. Augustine was to ordain twelve bishops, to be under his jurisdiction. The pall was to be passed on to the bishop of London, and he was to be "consecrated of his own synod." There was also to be a bishop appointed at York, who was likewise to appoint twelve. The senior of the two was to be the one who had been longest in his post.[9]

Gregory's structure struggled from the beginning. The first difficulty lay in establishing a firm see at London.[10] Mellitus was appointed the first bishop of London

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[8] H. E., 1.29

[9] Ibid.

[10] cf. Blair, The World of Bede, 62. It would be possible for Gregory to learn that the two provincial cities in Britain were London and York, and that there were bishops there in times past, but there is no hint that he regarded the mission as the winning back of a lost province. Blair argues that the letter concerning London and York implies that Augustine was exercising his episcopal functions in London. Gregory expected him to remain there and establish London as the principal see in

in 604, the year of Augustine's death. Augustine appointed Laurence to be bishop of Canterbury in the same year.[11] Mellitus ran afoul of the king of the East Saxons in London and was forced to leave. The see remained vacant until 653, by which time Canterbury was firmly established. The authority never transferred from Canterbury to London.

The second difficulty relates to the social structure. It was hard to establish metropolitan sees where there were no cities. This was especially true in the north of England. Paulinus was not appointed bishop of York until 625, and the see remained vacant for over thirty years after he fled back to Kent.[12]

The third difficulty was one of geography and population distribution. There were already 12 dioceses in the south by 737 when Leicester was added, just two years after the archbishopric at York became permanent in 735. There remained 24 dioceses in England until the time of the reformation, but 20 were in Canterbury and only four were in York.[13] There was also a great rivalry between

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the south. It is possible that Gregory got his information about London and York from Augustine via the letters sent with Peter and Laurence to Rome. The implication is that Augustine was in London or planning to go there. London is the only place Gregory associated with Augustine.

[11] H. E., 2.3, 4

[12] H. E., 2.9, 10; Rosalind M. T. Hill, "The Northumbrian Church," Church Quarterly Review 164 (1963): 164.

[13] Bing, "Augustine of Canterbury," 122.

Canterbury and York, which led to bitter disputes that were not settled until the twelfth century in Rome. It was then that the title given to York was Primate of England, and to Canterbury, Primate of all England.[14]

Even with these difficulties, the general outline of Gregory's plan is remains even today. It was this structure and authority brought from Rome by Augustine that played a significant role in the Christianization of England.

The second question of importance here is number seven. "How ought we to deal with the bishops of the provinces of France and Britain?" To which Gregory replied,

> We give thee none authority over the bishops of France; ... whom we must not in the least degree deprive of the authority he (the bishop of Arles) hath obtained. ... But as for all the bishops of the Britains, we commit them unto the charge of your brotherhood, that the unlearned may be instructed, the weak ... be strengthened, the froward corrected by authority.[15]

This question and reply lets one know that Augustine had at least heard of the British church, and it is possible that he had met some of its bishops by now. It does not inform one as to whether or not he knew of their existence before he landed in Kent. Gregory's response is insightful in another way. He recognized the authority of the bishop of Arles, even though the church in Gaul had serious problems. He does not, however, recognize the

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[14] Bing, "Augustine of Canterbury," 122.

[15] H. E., 1.27

authority of the British bishops, who had been around for nearly as long as the bishops of France. This is an indication that ties between Rome and the British churches had been severed.

Nor did the British bishops recognize the authority of Rome. Augustine's attempt to gain the support of the British bishops was an utter failure. There are some very clear reasons for this failure. As discussed earlier, there were significant differences in Roman and Celtic culture and Christianity, and British Christianity was like that of Ireland. It was tribal and monastic, with no centers in towns. There were instead simply "llans" or holy places named for a region or a founder. All monks were clergy, and there was no other distinctive clerical class. There was no central church government, no diocesan structure, and no hierarchy beyond the monastery. Augustine was expecting them to move from this to accepting hierarchy from him and from Rome.[16]

Aethelbert helped Augustine to arrange a meeting with the bishops of Britain. There was a place called Augustine's oak in Bede's day where the meeting presumably took place.[17] The objective from Augustine's point of view was, "to persuade them to be at catholic peace with him,

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[16] Deanesly, Augustine, 80-88.

[17] H. E., 2.2, and note. Bede locates the place as, "being in the borders of the Hwiccas and West Saxons." Aust on the river Severn has been suggested.

and to undertake the common labor of preaching the Gospel to the nations...." [18] Argument failed to convince the British, and it was only by healing a blind Englishman that Augustine was able to convince those present to convene another meeting with more British present. They were not disposed to giving up their autonomy and practices after one meeting with this suspicious churchman from the enemy's camp.

Those who were to go to meet Augustine again asked advice from a wise man. The advice is recorded in Bede.

> If he (Augustine) be a man of God, follow him! ... (If he) with his company come first to the place of the synod, and if, when you approach near, he arises courteously to you, then, knowing that he is the servant of Christ, hear him obediently! But if he despise you nor will ... rise at your presence, though you are more in number, let him likewise be despised by you![19]

At the next meeting when the bishops approached Augustine, he remained seated. The synod was doomed for the lack of one gesture of courtesy. Augustine was simply acting with the authority he had been given. He did not know of the advice given to the British, nor would he have understood their reluctance to join the "custom of the universal Church." He diplomatically compromised except,

> ... to celebrate Easter in its due time; to accomplish the ministry of baptism, by which we are born again to God, according to the manner of the holy Roman and apostolic Church, and to preach ... to the English nation. [20]

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[18] H. E., 2.2. [19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid. The difference between the baptism customs is not known.

They answered that they would do nothing he asked.

At this point Augustine pronounced judgement upon them by saying that if they would not preach to the English, they would be killed by them. Bede tells us of a great slaughter of 1,200 monks at the battle of Chester by king Aethelfrith of Northumbria.[21] Bede shows little remorse and sees this as God's divine judgement on a heretical people.[22]

This tragic failure would not be made right until the arrival of Theodore of Tarsus at Canterbury in 668. It is said that Theodore was the first archbishop of Canterbury to whom all the English churches submitted.

Augustine's failure with the British bishops did not impede the progress of the church in Kent and the surrounding kingdoms. After Aethelberht's baptism, Augustine built a monastery not far from the city and alongside it a church dedicated to Peter and Paul. Peter the monk was appointed its first abbot but drowned soon after on a journey to Gaul and was buried at Boulogne. The monastery and church were not completed until 613, and it fell to Laurence to consecrate them.[23] Augustine also recovered an old Roman church and moved his see to it, calling it Christ Church. This is the site of the current Cathedral and grounds, which constitute one-sixth of the

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[21] H. E., 2.2 [22] H. E., 4.2

[23] H. E., 1.33. Deanesly, Augustine, 57

land within the Roman city walls.[24]

With the conversion of Aethelbert, the surrounding kingdoms soon followed his example. The early success of Christianity in the southeast was almost entirely due to his will and the political power he weilded. In addition to Christ Church and St. Augustine's monastery, Aethelbert granted lands in Rochester and built the church of St. Andrew. Justus was consecrated the first bishop there in 604.[25]

In the same year, Aethelbert's nephew, Sabert, king of the East Saxons, under the influence of his more powerful uncle to the southeast, accepted the Christian faith. A see was established at London and Mellitus was consecrated as bishop.[26]

Redwald of East Anglia also accepted Christianity at some point, but he soon relapsed to paganism with the encouragement of his wife. There were surely political implications involved in this case. Redwald would have accepted Christianity only because of Aethelbert's superiority. In Aethelbert's waning years, Redwald was

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[24] Brooks, Church of Canterbury, 50-51. It may be that the word "recovered" indicates that the old Roman church was being used for pagan worship and was thus recovered for the Christian faith.

[25] H. E., 2.3; Yorke, "Kingship": 1-19. The establishment of two sees in the same kingdom at such an early date has led some to believe that Rochester was the prinicpal city for a second Kentish sub-king.

[26] H. E., 2.3.

becoming the next bretwalda. What better way to show his strength than to turn away from the god of his former master and return to his old religion.[27]

In the same year, 604, Augustine died and was buried outside the unfinished church of Sts. Peter and Paul. Before his death he appointed Laurence to be archbishop. Bede records the following epitaph at the tomb of Augustine.

> Here lies in rest the lord Augustine, first archbishop of Canterbury, who aforetime sent hither of the blessed Gregory, bishop of the city of Rome, and strenghtened of God by working of miracles, won over Aethelberht the king and his people from the worship of idols to the faith of Christ, and so fulfilling in peace the days of his office he died the 26th of May in the reign of the same king.[28]

With these early developments, a start had been made to convert the English to the Roman faith. Gregory had initiated and directed the mission. Augustine had brought with him the teaching, organization, and authority of Rome. Most of the work was still to be done, but what Gregory and Augustine initiated in Kent was followed through by the second group of missionaries. Augustine had established a beachhead and overcome some of the most troublesome obstacles.

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[27] H. E., 2.5, 15.

[28] H. E., 2.3.

CHAPTER 8

FROM AUGUSTINE TO WHITBY, 664

The fate of Christianity was not as certain from the seventh-century perspective as it seems to us today. Indeed the shape of England itself was uncertain at this time. The seventh and eighth centuries saw the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms merge into Wessex, Mercia, and Northumbria, eventually to be dominated by the dynasty of Wessex under King Alfred the Great in the 870's. One will trace the advance of Christianity in seven of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms from the death of Augustine in 604 until the synod of Whitby in 664. It is our contention that the mission begun by Gregory and Augustine could rightly be called a success at the conclusion of this meeting.

Kent

Aethelbert reigned in Kent until his death in 616. Bede records it as twenty-one years after the arrival of Augustine, and indicates that he reigned for 56 years.[1]

[1] H. E., 2.5. A reign of 56 years at this point in Anglo-Saxon history has led some to think that Bede refers here to Aethelbert's age when he died, not his reign. Fifty-six years is fifteen years longer than the next longest Anglo-Saxon ruler (Aethelbald of Mercia, 716-57) and third longest of any English ruler. Only George III (1760-1820) and Victoria (1837-1901) are longer. Gregory of

Aethelbert failed to convert his son, Eadbald, who took his father's second wife as his queen and quickly plunged Kent back into paganism.

The situation soon became desperate. Mellitus had been expelled from London in the East Saxon kingdom and met with his counterparts in Kent. The three decided to flee to Gaul where they could serve the Lord in freedom. Mellitus and Justus, bishop of Rochester, left rather than live without any profit amongst the barbarians.[2] Bede says that the very night before his planned departure Laurence had a vision of the apostle Peter, which left his body scourged. The bishop showed his marks to the king, and when the latter learned they were for his salvation, he became afraid. He immediately renounced idolotry, dissolved the illegal marriage with his stepmother, and was baptized. He also called back Mellitus and Justus who had been in France for the better part of a year. Justus returned to Rochester, but Mellitus was not allowed by the East Saxons to return to London. Eadbald was not as powerful as his father and did not hold sway over the East

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Tours, a contemporary to Aethelbert, says of him in his History that he was "the son of a certain king in Kent" at the time of his marriage to Bertha between 575-581. This description does not fit one who is already sitting on the throne. An alternative chronology to Bede's is suggested for Aethelbert as: born, 560-62, married to Bertha c. 580, became king of Kent c. 580-93, became bretwalda 593-97, Augustine arrived 597, died 616-18. See Brooks, "Kingdom of Kent," 66-67.

[2] H. E., 2.5.

Saxon kingdom.[3]

Earconbert began his reign after his father's death in 640. Christianity became the dominant religion in Kent during his time. He was the first of the English kings to prohibit idol worship and have them destroyed. He also passed laws to punish those who ignored the prohibition.[4]

There were also important developments at Christ Church during this time. The first four archbishops of Canterbury, Augustine (597-605), Laurence (605-619), Mellitus (619-624), and Justus (624-627), are all named as being sent by Gregory to England. The fifth, Honorius, was consecrated in Licoln and served from 627-653.[5] That he was consecrated in Lincoln, in Lindsey, indicates that the church by this time was making gains there. The sixth archbishop was Deusdedit of the West Saxons, the first English archbishop of Canterbury.[6] He held the see during the synod of Whitby (655-667).

Essex (East Saxons)

The same difficulty of passing on the faith from one generation of royalty to the next caused a relapse in Essex

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[3] H. E., 2.6. [4] H. E., 3.8 [5] H. E., 2.16, 17

[6] H. E., 3.20. Deusdedit is a Latin name and was probably assumed upon consecration. He was the first and last Anglo-Saxon archbishop of Canterbury to take a Latin name. After him Theodore the Greek was archbishop, the last foreign archbishop. From then the archbishops kept their Anglo-Saxon names; Bertwald, Tatwin, Nothelm. See Deanesly, Augustine, 111-12.

after the death of Saebert, as had occurred in Kent after Aethelbert. Saebert had three sons, none of whom were Christian. After their father's death, they requested the holy communion of Mellitus, bishop of London. Mellitus refused them because they had not been baptized and offered them the chance. They replied that they had no need of it and expelled Mellitus from London, at which point we find the bishop returning to Kent and eventually to France. Bede records with some relish that these three sons of Saebert were killed in battle with the West Saxons.[7]

Mellitus was recalled by Eadbald of Kent, but he was not allowed by the East Saxons to return to London. The people of Essex were unconverted and without a bishop until the time of king Sigbert the Good and the bishop/missionary from Lindisfarne, Cedd.

These two personalities bring us into contact with the seventh bretwalda, Oswy of Nothumbria, and with the role that the Celtic missionaries played in the conversion of the English. It is no accident that Sigbert was converted during one of his visits to Northumbria at the height of the Christian Oswy's power. There was a type of Godfather-

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[7] H. E., 2.5. Bede calls them Gewissas (Geuissae), which is more accurate. The West Saxon kingdom's origins are blurred. By 686 there was a recognizable kingdom of Wessex, which was made up of Saxons, Jutes of the formerly independent Hampshire (more accurately the Solent) and the Isle of Wight, and a good number of Britons who were absorbed. See Barbara Yorke, "The Jutes of Hampshire and Wight and the origins of Wessex," in The Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms, 94-96.

Godson relationship between the two, not to mention considerations of power and stability that Oswy may have had in mind.[8]

Christianity had now been absent in the East Saxon kingdom for more than three decades and there was no bishop. Oswy approached Finan, the bishop at Lindisfarne, to provide teachers for the newly converted king and his people. The one consecrated bishop of the East Angles was Cedd, who built a monastery at the Roman site of Othona (Bradwell-on-Sea). In this we see the strength of both Northumbria and Lindisfarne. Canterbury and Kent had nothing to do with this new introduction of Christianity into Essex. In the Celtic tradition, Cedd was made bishop of a people and not of a place. He was a bishop-monk and would not have considered himself part of Rome's episcopal government. He answered to his abbot Finan and not to Canterbury. His monastery at Bradwell, as the one at Lindisfarne, only served as a base of operation.[9] One shall meet Cedd later at Whitby.

Northumbria [10]

It was in Kent that Christianity was able to get a toehold in England, but it was from Northumbria that the

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[8] H. E., 3.23; Mayr-Harting, The Coming of Christianity, 100.

[9] H. E., 3.22, 23; Mayr-Harting, 100.

[10] D. P. Kirby, "Bede and Northumbrian Chronology,"

English were converted. Kent did, however, take Christianity to Northumbria in the person of Paulinus, one of Augustine's companions. In 625 Edwin, king of Northumbria, married Ethelberga, daughter of King Aethelbert of Kent, and Paulinus was consecrated and sent with her to be her bishop.[11] Two years later Paulinus debated with the pagan priests of Edwin and convinced them and Edwin that the Christian faith was more powerful and more profitable than their own. Edwin was baptized at York on Easter in 627.[12] Paulinus was then given a free hand to preach in all of Northumbria. Edwin also used his power as bretwalda to spread Christianity in other parts of England. Paulinus himself went to Lindsey and converted the reeve of Lincoln.[13]

The baptism at York and the see granted to Paulinus there was to prove pivotal. York was the place chosen by Gregory (at the advice of Augustine?) to set the second metropolitan see in England. Pope Honorius sent a letter to Edwin which confirmed York's status as a see of equal standing with Canterbury.[14] Gregory's plan was pushed

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English Historical Review 78 (1963): 514-527. It is likely that many of Bede's dates for Northumbria are not correct. Most are off only by a year or two. Our concern here is not of exact chronology, but the flow of Christianity through Northumbria. Bede's chronology will serve for our purposes here. The date of 664 for Whitby is not questioned.

[11] H. E., 2.9.

[12] H. E., 2.13, 14.

[13] H. E., 2.16.

[14] H. E., 2.27.

forward. Unfortunately, Edwin never received the letter. He was killed in battle against Cadwallon, king of the Britons (Gwynnedd), and Penda, king of Mercia, in 633, and the letter did not arrrive until the following year. Nevertheless, the letter of Honorius stood as recognizing York as the metropolitan see of the North.[15]

After Edwin's death, Cadwallon and Penda were ruthless. The situation deteriorated so that Paulinus fled by ship back to Kent with Ethelberga.[16] Christianity was not annihilated, due in great part to the work of James the Deacon, who was left behind at York. But he was not a bishop, and the see at York remained vacant until 664.

As far as the royal houses of Northumbria are concerned, it was Roman Christianity which was first introduced and spread. But, it was to be Celtic Christianity which became more established there and spread to other kingdoms. Edwin's successors, Eanfrid in Bernicia, and Osric in Deira, were of the house of Aethelfrith of Bernicia. They had been sent into exile for protection after Edwin of Deira defeated Aethelfrith in battle. Both of these relapsed into idolatry and were soon killed by Cadwallon, who ruled for a short time as a conqueror.[17]

Their successor, Oswald, had also taken refuge among

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[15]Deanesly, Augustine, 115.

[16]H. E., 2.20. [17]H. E., 3.1.

the Scots and while there learned about Christianity. He was able to overthrow Cadwallon and reunite Northumbria. When he asked for a bishop, he did not turn to Canterbury or to York (York was in Deira); he turned to the Scots, who sent him Aidan. He chose Lindisfarne to build a monastery in 635. From there he worked as bishop of Northumbria.[18] It was Celtic Christianity which was to leave its mark on the Northumbrian church and evangelize this vast, sparsely populated part of England. The choice of Lindisfarne (and later other equally remote sites) as the principal see was in keeping with Celtic tradition. As mentioned in the discussion concerning Cedd, the authority of the church rested with the leaders of religious houses, not bishops at metropolitan sees. Archaeological evidence confirms that Celtic art and architectural forms remained dominant in the north even under Anglo-Saxon rule.[19] The Celtic bishops continued to style themselves after the wandering monk. This was to help in overcoming the geographical obstacle which Roman ecclesiastical structure was ill equipped to handle. Aidan and Lindisfarne were to prove very important in the Christianizing of England.

It was a later king and a later bishop that were to see that England was brought under the umbrella of Roman rather than Celtic Christianity. Oswy was king in Northumbria after Oswald, and he was the last of the

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[18] H. E., 3.1, 2. [19] Hill, "Northumbrian Church," 161.

Bretwaldas in Bede's list. Oswy had a Kentish and therefore Roman connection. In 643 Oswy married Eanfled, Eadwin's daughter, who had been raised in Kent. The difficulty now encountered was that the king and queen were celebrating Easter on different days. There were no doubt Christians who had been converted by either Paulinus or James the Deacon who still observed Roman custom, and others who had been converted by Aidan who observed Celtic custom. Bede makes much of the Easter question, but it must not have been that important to the king; it took twenty years for the storm to break.[20]

The bishop who brought the storm was Wilfrid, who entered the monastery at Lindisfarne at the age of fourteen. According to Bede, he studied and at his own request asked to be sent to Rome to learn about the Roman custom. He approached the queen (from Kent), and she sent him to her cousin Erconbert, king of Kent.[21] Again the Kentish and Roman connection would prove decisive. For now one can say that Northumbria had received Christianity, even if there were two forms of it.

East Anglia

King Redwald of East Anglia received the faith while under the influence of Aethelbert of Kent. It was not long

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[20] H. E., 3.5, 15; Mayr-Harting, Coming of Christianity, 105.

[21] H. E., 3.29.

after that he returned to idolotry, more likely for political rather than religious reasons. Redwald was bretwalda for a short while after Aethelbert. It is likely that the Sutton Hoo ship burial found near Ipswich in Suffolk was a monument to him. If so it would be easy to see how he could be bretwalda. What is found there indicates wealth and trade with other peoples bordering the North Sea.[22]

That contact also included Burgundy in France, for it was from there that Christianity came to East Anglia to stay. Sighbert the Learned was living in exile in Burgundy for his own safety. His brother Earpwald succeeded Redwald to the kingdom and was a Christian, but he was soon killed.[23] Bede states that it was three years later that Sigbert came to East Anglia. He had been raised as a Christian while in exile and requested that Felix of Burgundy come with him to be bishop for his people. Felix then approached Honorius, archbishop of Canterbury, and a see was set for Felix at Dunwich in 631. In East Anglia, it was Canterbury which held sway, yet politically Kent was of less importance than Northumbria.

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[22] Martin Carver, "Kingship and Material Culture in Early Anglo-Saxon East Anglia," in The Origins of Anglo-Saxon England, 150-51.

[23] H. E., 2.15; 3.17.

Mercia

Mercia was the last of the major Anglo-Saxon kingdoms to become Christian. The pagan king Penda wreaked havoc in Northumbria with Cadwallon of Gwynnedd. He killed the Christian king Oswald there. He did even more damage to the house of the Christian kings in East Anglia. He killed Sigbert, who had retired to a monastery, and his brother Egric, and their successor Anna.[24]

It was once again political interest which brought Christianity to Mercia. Peada, son of Penda, wished to marry the daughter of Oswy, king of Northumbria. He was told that he could not marry the king's daughter unless he first became a Christian. He was convinced by his brother-in-law, Alchfrid, and became Christian.[25] He was given four bishops, Cedd, Adda, Betti, and Diuma to instruct him and was given rule over the Middle Angles. A see was set at Lichfield in 656 with Diuma as bishop there.[26]

Penda was to live for two more years but did not forbid the teaching of the Christian religion, although he never became a Christian himself. After Penda's death on the battlefield, Oswy held control over Mercia. The church in Mercia was to struggle, but with the conversion of Peada and the bretwaldship of Oswy it was there permanently.

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[24] H. E., 2.17.

[25] H. E. 3.21. His brother-in-law was Alchfrid, who was married to Cyneburg, Penda's daughter.

[26] Ibid.

Wessex

As suggested earlier, the designation of Wessex for the time before 686 is premature, but it will serve here. Wessex like many of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms received the faith, then relapsed briefly before taking Christianity on permanently. Bede records that the Gewissas received the faith during the reign of Cynegils (611- c. 640) by the preaching of Birinus. Birinus was a missionary sent by Pope Honorius from Rome. Oswald of Northumbria was present at his baptism and took on as Godson the same man whose daughter was to be his wife. A see was set in Dorchester (Oxfordshire).[27] In Wessex then we have Roman influence as well as the political pressure from Northumbria playing a role.

As in other cases, the relapse occurred when the first Christian king died. In this case, Cynegils' son Cenwahl rejected the faith of his father. He divorced his wife, daughter of Penda. Penda was not one to offend in this way. Cenwahl was soon defeated in battle and fled for his life to East Anglia, where he sought protection under Anna. While there he was converted to Christianity and his kingdom was restored to him.[28]

The West Saxon kingdom continued to expand and eventually carried Christianity into Hampshire and the Isle of Wight. This changing geography caused the see at

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[27] H. E., 3.7. [28] Ibid.

Dorchester to be moved to Winchester, from where bishop Daniel, Bede's source for this area, originated.[29]

Of the other Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms there is little information. Lindsey is mentioned in the discussion of Nothumbria. The South Saxons (Sussex) remained isolated for many years due to the geography. They were eventually absorbed by the West Saxons and thus converted. One has already mentioned Hampshire and Wight as being conquered by Wessex as well.[30] The Hwiccas and Magonsaetan are not even mentioned by Bede. It is not unlikely that they were converted by their British neighbors to the West.[31]

The Synod of Whitby was the final stroke which ensured that England was to be a part of the church of Rome. By 664 England had been evangelized and Christianity was in every major Anglo-Saxon kingdom for good.[32]

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[29] Barbara Yorke, "The Jutes of Hampshire and Wight and the origins of Wessex," in The Origins of the Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms, 95-96.

[30] When the Saxons, known as the Gewiccas, merged with or conquered the Jutes of Hampshire, is unknown. It appears that even in Bede's day, Daniel seemed to accord some autonomy to Jutes on the mainland and on the Isle of Wight. We do know that Caedwalla of Wessex conquered the Isle of Wight in 686, and it was then that the Christianization of the Island began. See Yorke, "The Jutes of Hampshire," 86-90.

[31] For Western England see Kate Pretty, "Defining the Magonsaete," in The Origins of the Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms, pp. 171-183; Patrick Sims-Williams, Religion and Literature in Western England 600-800, pp. 16-53.

[32] Bede tells us that Wilfrid went to the South Saxons in 678 to preach and he converted them. H. E., 4.13; See Martin Welch, "The Kingdom of the South Saxons: the Origins," in The Origins of the Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms,

75-83. The conversion of Surrey was also late but the story is unknown to us. Even the political integrity of the kingdom is unsure. Bede mentions it in connection with a monastery of Wynfrid at Chertsey. H. E., 4.6; See John Blair, "Frithuwold's Kingdom and the Origins of Surrey," in The Origins of the Anglo-Saxon Kings. 97-107.

CHAPTER 9

WHITBY - THE ENGLISH CHURCH UNITED UNDER ROME

The synod of Whitby is one of the most famous events in the history of the English church. The main issue discussed concerned the observance of the Easter festival. The Jewish passover was on the fourteenth day of Nisan, the first lunar month of the Jewish year. The council of Nicaea condemned all those who celebrated Easter on 14 Nisan regardless of whether it fell on a Sunday or not. It concluded that Easter must be celebrated on a Sunday, but it did not say if 14 Nisan should be avoided if it did fall on a Sunday. The Roman church had adopted a calendar which avoided 14 Nisan, the Celtic church had not. Therefore, the Celtic church did celebrate Easter on 14 Nisan if it fell on a Sunday (14-20), the Roman church did not (15-21).

Bede mentions the Easter question in his History several times, probably an overemphasis on his part. During the previous sixty years, the Roman and Irish bishops and monks had worked together to take Christianity to the English. They used different methods, and they did not recognize the authority of each other, but there is little evidence of open dispute between the two groups. A notable exception is Augustine's altercation with the

British bishops, but they were British and not Irish.[1] One gets the impression that those who lived after Whitby were more concerned with this problem than those who were directly involved in it.

The real motivation for the synod was political. Oswy's son Alfrith was the mover behind the gathering. He was a sub-king (under his father) over Deira or a part of it. He had observed the Irish Easter from youth until he came into contact with Wilfrid. Wilfrid taught him the Roman observance and he followed it. Alfrith had given a monastery at Ripon to monks who kept the Celtic tradition, but afterward he dismissed the monks and gave the house to Wilfrid instead.[2]

It is hard to imagine those in attendance on either side wanting to stir up trouble. Alfrith was surely more interested in how he might use the gathering to his political advantage rather than wanting the truth to prevail. The synod was mainly a Northumbrian event, another chapter in the age-old battle between Bernicia and Deira, and which king would rule both. Alfrith might have had in mind to depose Colman and replace him with a bishop closer to him than to his father. This would have the effect of weakening his father's hold on Bernicia. His plan was thwarted when Oswy jumped sides and accepted the Roman Easter himself. The only option which remained was

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[1] H. E., 2.2. [2] H. E., 3.25.

open rebellion, something Alfrith was not willing to risk.[3]

Even if the synod was called under false pretense, it did serve an important function in the history of the English Church. The problem addressed was a real one, which would have needed a solution sooner or later. The speech reported by Bede was probably inserted for effect, but it did bring to light the real heart of the matter for those on the Irish side. They would not abandon the teachings of Columba.[4] From Wilfrid's side, one gets the idea that he was dealing with a matter of doctrine. It may be that Colman's view was one of being allowed to follow custom, not a matter of doctrine.[5]

The decision made by Oswy was in favor of the Roman observance. Cedd, who had acted as interpreter, accepted the decision and returned to his see amongst the East Saxons. Colman returned to Iona with those others who did not accept the decision. Alfrith was not heard from again.[6]

Whitby was in many ways a watershed for the church in England. All Englishmen would now keep one Easter, and the issue of authority had been settled. The plan for metropolitan sees at London (Canterbury) and York could now be pursued. The work begun by Augustine could now be seen

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[3]Mayr-Harting, Coming of Christianity, 107-108.

[4]H. E., 3.25.

[5]Mayr-Harting, Coming of Christianity, 109.

[6]H. E., 3.26.

as completed.

The accomplishments of those who took Christianity to the English is staggering. By 630 Christianity was firmly established in just one kingdom. By 660 it was established permanently in all but one. In 644 there were no English bishops, but by 678 all were English except for Theodore, the archbishop.[7]

The reason Whitby succeeded in uniting the English church where Augustine had earlier failed (with the British bishops) is due to one factorr. Augustine had been dealing only with religious leaders. They had nothing to gain by submitting to Augustine. Whitby, on the other hand, was a political event, called and decided by the king. At Whitby political considerations and the stability of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms was at stake. Afterward there was the political will to enforce the decision. Colman and his followers did not accept the decision and were obliged to return to Scotland.[8]

CONCLUSION

The aim of this paper was to show the importance of Augustine in the conversion of the English. It is obvious that the bulk of the work was done after his death. It is equally obvious that the Irish missionaries played a significant role in the conversion process, especially in the North. However it was Augustine's work and connection

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[7] Campbell, Essays, 16

[8] Deanesly, Augustine, 113.

with Rome that were to have the most visible impact. His role was crucial in three critical areas: conversion of the royalty, the type of monasticism he brought, and Latin language and liturgy. One cannot deny that his role was crucial, if not in the work he did, then in what he brought with him and the precedents he set.

Whatever state Christianity was in when Augustine arrived and whatever work was done by the Irish missionaries in the North, the conversion of the royal houses of the Anglo-Saxons began with Augustine. It was Augustine who converted Aethelbert of Kent, and through his family Christianity moved into Bernicia and Deira, later kingdoms of bretwaldas. Augustine set in motion the conversion of the Anglo-Saxon kings.

There are four key factors which played a role in persuading them to accept Christianity.[9] Augustine is not responsible for all of them, but he made them all possible. First and foremost there was argument. If Augustine had not initially presented a good case, the mission would have failed before it had begun. Appeals were made to Aethelbert's love of power and glory, and a promise of, "a kingdom without end with the true and living God."[10] Argument was to win Edwin of Northumbria as well.

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[9] Campbell, Essays, 72-79. His essay presents five factors. We have used a revised list of four factors which more closely fit our time.

[10] H. E., 1.25.

He rose to the stature of bretwalda and accepted Christianity at the same time. Paulinus said to him that God rewards his followers with such gifts and debated with Edwin's pagan priests explaining the mysteries of life in a way which they could not.[11] Oswy exposed the stupidity of idol worship to Sigbert, king of Essex, and converted him.[12]

A second factor in the conversion of the royal houses was the consideration of power. It is here that Augustine showed his skill in how to cause change. He went straight for the top, not just of the kingdom, but of the whole of Anglo-Saxon England. Aethelbert's role in converting, at least initially, the kings of Essex and East Anglia has been shown. Once Christianity entered into the equation of power and politics, it never left the scene. Christianity was used by kings as a means of demonstrating their power; Aethelbert expanding Christianity; Redwald casting it off; Edwin (Aethelbert's son-in-law) securing the baptism of Earpwald (Edwin's successor); and the kings of Northumbria, Oswald and Oswy, persuading the kings of Wessex, Essex, and the Middle Angles.

A third factor which relates to the second was the Godfather-Godson relationship. This is expressed in the work of the Northumbrian kings in the conversion of Cynegils of Wessex, with Oswald present, and Sigbert of

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[11] H. E., 2.9, 13.

[12] H. E., 3.23.

Essex and Peada of the Middle Angles, who were baptized in Northumbria under the supervision of Oswy.

The fourth factor which worked in favor of Christianity was its novelty appeal. New religions create curiosity, and Christianity's coming to Anglo-Saxon England was no exception. It is possible that Aethelbert received the initial Roman party, in part, out of curiosity. His request that they meet in the open air as a precaution against magic indicates he was certainly not sure of them or of what power they brought with them. The curiosity factor is demonstrated even more clearly in a negative aspect when Mellitus refused to give the "little white loaf" to the pagan sons of Saeberht of Essex, the event which precipitated the expulsion of Mellitus from London.[13]

Augustine also brought with him the monastic life (vita monachica).[14] The English monastery (minster) played a key role in the conversion of the Anglo-Saxon people. The Irish also had many monsasteries, and they were missionary as well. But for the Irish the monastic life remained primary. They moved into new monasteries at the request of kings to be bishops for the kings. Their duties as wandering missionaries were a productive side effect. For the Roman missionaries, initially, the monastic life was sought to prepare them for their missionary work. It

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[13]H. E. 2.5.

[14]Deanesly, Augustine, 94-100.

is tempting to say that the Romans went into population centers, while the Irish avoided them, but that would not be accurate. It is probable that monasteries were the functional towns of the early Anglo-Saxon period, with the possible exception of Kent. It would be more accurate to say that the Irish deliberately chose remote sites, and the Romans chose those nearer to the centers of the kingdoms.[15]

The monastery played an important role in dispensing the Latin liturgy, learning, and sacraments which Augustine brought with him. The Latin learning reconnected England with Rome and was to play a decisive role in the English church's eventually becoming part of the Roman hierarchy. It was in the monastery that Christianity survived during the years when the outcome was still unsure. It is true Christianity was in more or less all the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms permanently, but that had only been achieved in the lifetime of those who were at the gathering at Whitby.[16]

The learning which Augustine brought with him was to have another profound effect on the life of the English.

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[15]John Blair, "Anglo-Saxon minsters: a Topographical Review," in Pastoral Care Before the Parish eds. John Blair and Richard Sharpe (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1992), 227-231; Alan Macquarrie, "Early Christian Religious Houses in Scotland: Foundation and Function," in Pastoral Care, 112-13.

[16]Peter Hunter Blair, "Whitby as a Centre of Learning in the Seventh Century," in Learning and Literature in Anglo-Saxon England: Studies Presented to Peter Clemoes on the Occasion of his Sixty-fifth Birthday, Edited by Michael Lapidge and Helmutt Gneuss, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 3-32.

One has not mentioned the impact of the mission on the legal system of the Anglo-Saxons. The first recorded laws of any English king are those of Aethelbert, and some of them deal with clergy and church property.[17]

One has attempted to demonstrate in this study the importance of Augustine of Canterbury and Gregory the Great in the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons. This was accomplished by converting the most important of the kings at the time to the Christian faith, by instructions from Gregory on Augustine's relationship with other bishops and ecclesiatical structure, by the learning brought from Rome, and the monastic life initiated in Canterbury. All of these were to stuggle and it would not be right to say that Augustine saw any of them to completion. He died even before the first monastery was completed. Yet he did unleash all these forces to be carried on by those who came after him. It was the vision of Gregory and the initial work of Augustine which ultimately gave the church in England its practice, its learning, its tradition, and its ecclesiastical structure.

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[17] F. L. Attenborough, The Laws of the Earliest English Kings, (Cambridge: University Press, 1922), 4-5.

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