

Church History
Lesson 20 - Christianity In the British Isles

1. Introduction - The Importance of Christianity in the British Isles

- 1.1. Interestingly, as you noticed, Gonzales has very little information on the early history of Christianity in the British Isles. This is likely because he wants to focus on sections and segments of the church that have sometimes been overlooked, and so the segment received less attention than normal.
- 1.2. However, I think this topic is important for several reasons:
 - 1.2.1. The background of our own country was heavily influenced by Christianity in the British Isles, so its beginnings would be of personal importance to us.
 - 1.2.2. The Christianity that developed from the British Isles was part of a great missionary movement that has spread Christianity to much of the globe, so it is of great interest.
 - 1.2.3. The Christians from the British Isles were very important in keeping and passing on the Scriptures and other writings of the ancient world as darkness continued to descend upon large segments of Europe during the Middle Ages.
- 1.3. There are a number of other good books which I have used in the past and for preparing for this lesson
 - 1.3.1. The Spreading Flame - FF Bruce - A history of the early church from its beginning through the conversion of the English. Bruce was a great scholar of the 20th Century, mainly noted for his work in writing commentaries.
 - 1.3.2. How the Irish Saved Civilization - Thomas Cahill - A history of how the Irish church was important in saving the riches of antiquity through to the rise of Medieval Europe and the Renaissance. One of several volumes on the history of the West. (Note: Cahill is liberal in his understandings of Christianity, but his work is a fascinating and fun read.)

2. Early Christianity in the British Isles

- 2.1. Although we do not know much about the early origins of Christianity in Britain, we do know that Christianity had arrived in Britain before 200 AD. The faith had taken root enough there that three bishops from Britain attended the council of Arles in 314. In fact, it was at this council that the bishops learned the way to date Easter, which they took back to Britain. (However, this method was revised at the council of Nicea in 325, but since no Bishops from Britain were in attendance they did not learn of the new way to date Easter - which led to conflict years later.)
 - 2.1.1. According to Tertullian (Against the Jews 7), there were Christians among the Britons by the end of the second century. Three British bishops were at the Council of Arles in 314, where they learned the way to date Easter. When the method was revised at Nicaea in 325, however, the new dating did not reach Britain, and the difference became a point of conflict when the new method was introduced later by Roman missionaries. Ferguson, location 6827
- 2.2. We also know that the first martyr in Britain was Alban who was apparently martyred at Verulam (now referred to as St. Albans) either during the Decian or Diocletian persecutions.
- 2.3. The earliest Christian in Britain seem to have been mainly Roman citizens who were land owners. However, it may be that it had penetrated among the poor as well, and there is just insufficient archaeological evidence. However, Christianity seems to

have remained mainly among the Roman Britons rather than spreading much to the tribes living on the islands.

2.3.1. Archaeological finds associate Christianity in Britain in the fourth century mainly with Roman land-owners, but any poorer Christians would not have left material remains. Ferguson, location 6830

2.4. However, the situation was changed drastically as the Western Roman Empire began to collapse. In order to shore up defenses on the continent, Roman troops were withdrawn from Britain in 402, leaving Britain largely open to successive waves of invaders, both from the island, but also from across the waves as well. This eventually led to a situation similar to that on the continent - the invaders were not initially Christian, but the conquered people's were. However, it appears that the Christians in England were not particularly eager to share their faith with their invaders. Thus, the situation continued where a small number of Roman Britons were Christians, as they were invaded by increasing numbers of pagan Irish, Picts, Angles, Saxons, and Jutes.

2.4.1.1. The withdrawal of Roman troops from Britain in 402 and the invasions of Angles, Saxons, and Jutes brought a recrudescence of paganism, now in its Germanic form, to Britain. The British Christians, not eager to see their Anglo-Saxon conquerors again in Paradise, showed no concern to take the gospel to them. Ferguson, location 6839

2.5. We also know of one other famous British "Christian" from this time - the heretical monk Pelagius. This famous adversary of Augustine was from Britain.

2.6. Eventually many raiders from Ireland also began to conduct raids on the British Romans. It was during one of these raids that a young Roman Briton named Patricius was taken off as a slave. It is to his story we must now turn.

3. The Rise of Celtic Christianity - Patrick

3.1. Patrick (389–461) was born to a Christian family in northwest England. His father was a deacon in the church, and his grandfather was a cleric as well. Patrick, who was also known by his British name of Succat, apparently had never personally embraced the faith. But when he was 16 he was carried off in a raid, which obviously threw his entire life into turmoil. It was during his captivity that Patrick says he embraced the faith and became a true Christian.

3.1.1. Among the captives was Patrick. So Ireland's patron saint was not Irish! He had been reared a Christian. His father was a deacon, but Patrick's religion sat lightly until, as a swineherd, he prayed ardently for his freedom. His conversion dates from this captivity. Shelley, location 2970

3.1.2. Patrick (389–461) was the "apostle of Ireland." Born into a Christian family in northwest England, he was seized as a youth by pirates and sold in Ireland. Ferguson, location 6834

3.2. During his captivity, Patrick apparently was often alone as a shepherd, serving a man named Miliucc. Life as a captive shepherd was fraught with loneliness, danger, and deprivation, and to combat this Patrick developed a strong life of prayer. During his sixth year of captivity, he was alone watching sheep and engaged in prayer. Apparently as he drifted off to sleep, he heard a voice tell him "Your hungers are rewarded; you are going home. Look your ship is ready." Patrick thus took off for the coast. He had to walk about 200 miles, across territory he had never seen, to

- reach the coast. Amazingly, the runaway slave was not stopped or captured, and when he arrived at an inlet near the coast, he saw a ship! Furthermore, the ship was planning to depart soon for the continent with a load of Irish hounds.
- 3.3. However, Patrick still had to get aboard the ship. Somehow, he actually had money for the passage (he does not tell us how). However, the captain initially refused him passage. Patrick knew the captain recognized he was a runaway slave, and so he was in great danger. However, as Patrick walked away quickly, some of the sailors called to him to come back - the ship would take him!
 - 3.4. When the ship landed on the continent, it had apparently been recently ravaged by one of the Germanic invasions. As the sailors wandered through the devastated country, there were no people - or provisions. Eventually the Captain taunted Patrick as to why Patrick's all powerful Christian God will not provide them with food. Patrick told them if they would turn to Christ, and ask Him, food would be provided. Some of the sailors apparently agreed and prayed with Patrick. As they did so, herd of pigs appeared on the horizon, stampeding towards them. This event shows the character that would dominate Patrick's ministry in Ireland - bold faith in God's power.
 - 3.5. After about two months, Patrick left the crew of the ship and eventually took up the life of a monk at a monastery on the island of St. Honorat. Here he was grounded further in the faith. Eventually however, he made it back to Britain, where he found some relatives, who took Patrick into their home and begged him to never leave again.
 - 3.6. However, one night a few years later Patrick had a dream. He recounts it as follows: "I saw a man coming, as it were from Ireland. His name was Victoricus, and he carried many letters, and he gave me one of them. I read the heading: 'The Voice of the Irish'. As I began the letter, I imagined in that moment that I heard the voice of those very people who were near the wood of Focult, which is beside the western sea—and they cried out, as with one voice: 'We appeal to you, holy servant boy, to come and walk among us.'" Patrick said "Their cry pierced my heart so I could read no more, and I awoke."
 - 3.7. However, Patrick did not immediately return to Ireland. Instead he went to the church at Auxerre to study the Christian faith. Patrick was soon ordained as a deacon. However, in 431 the Bishop in England sent, not Patrick, but a man named Palladius to be the bishop of Ireland. However, Palladius died within one or two years, and so Patrick finally received his hearts desire and was sent to Ireland as a bishop.
 - 3.8. However, Patrick did not go with the intent of merely strengthening the small bands of Irish Christians. He longed to reach out to every quarter of Ireland with the Gospel. Thus, after spending a little time with the Christians where he landed, he headed up to Ulster to begin reaching out to the Irish kings. There were many lower kings, all of who vowed allegiance to the "high king" who at the time of Patrick's arrival was Laoghaire (Leary) who ruled from Tara. The Druid's (who were the religious leaders in Ireland at the time) were surely against this new missionary. In fact, it is said that they had a old prophecy about the coming of one to bring a new religion - and Patrick seemed the embodiment of the prophecy. It read "Across the sea will come [Adze](#)-head, crazed in the head, his cloak with hole for the head, his stick bent in the head. He will chant impieties from a table in the front of his house; all his people will answer: "so be it, so be it."

- 3.9.** However, the high king allowed Patrick to preach, and some of the kings and important families converted, and even began to support Patrick in his work. Furthermore, many people began to respond to Patrick's preaching, and he wrote that he baptized thousands. He saw many women from wealthy important families convert, and many of these became nuns - often in the face of great family opposition. Furthermore, Patrick refused to accept the gifts of kings (a normal practice in Ireland, but one he feared would bring him into a reputation of laboring for money). This combined with the other issues and especially the opposition of the Druids, made life difficult and sometimes precarious for Patrick.
- 3.10.** It is hard to know the full details of Patrick's labor (many myths such as he chased all the snakes from Ireland have accrued to his legend), but we do know that few people have so firmly altered the course of a nation in such a short time.
- 3.11.** It is also known that Patrick remained a firm enemy of slavery and raiding - for obvious reasons. In this struggle he was incredibly successful, so that during his lifetime or shortly after, the slave trade had come to a halt, and other forms of violence had been greatly reduced. However, this often brought him into conflict with "Christian" from Britain, who were now raiding the peaceful Irish to take slaves! The British - many of whom were still 'Roman - looked down on the Irish as brutes - and Patrick was so identified with them that he was viewed the same way. This led to unfounded rumors and stories of the corruption of Patrick among them - all of which was a great source of grief to Patrick.
- 3.12.** The ancient prayer known as "The Breastplate" is attributed to Patrick. It is doubtful that the actual prayer came from his pen, but it breathes his spirit, and that of the Celtic form of Christianity he founded:

I bind unto myself today
 The strong Name of the Trinity,
 By invocation of the same,
 The Three in One and One in Three.

I bind this day to me for ever.
 By power of faith, Christ's incarnation;
 His baptism in the Jordan river;
 His death on Cross for my salvation;
 His bursting from the spiced tomb;
 His riding up the heavenly way;
 His coming at the day of doom;*
 I bind unto myself today.

I bind unto myself the power
 Of the great love of the cherubim;
 The sweet 'well done' in judgment hour,
 The service of the seraphim,
 Confessors' faith, Apostles' word,
 The Patriarchs' prayers, the Prophets' scrolls,
 All good deeds done unto the Lord,
 And purity of virgin souls.

I bind unto myself today
The virtues of the starlit heaven,
The glorious sun's life-giving ray,
The whiteness of the moon at even,
The flashing of the lightning free,
The whirling wind's tempestuous shocks,
The stable earth, the deep salt sea,
Around the old eternal rocks.

I bind unto myself today
The power of God to hold and lead,
His eye to watch, His might to stay,
His ear to hearken to my need.
The wisdom of my God to teach,
His hand to guide, His shield to ward,
The word of God to give me speech,
His heavenly host to be my guard.

Against the demon snares of sin,
The vice that gives temptation force,
The natural lusts that war within,
The hostile men that mar my course;
Or few or many, far or nigh,
In every place and in all hours,
Against their fierce hostility,

I bind to me these holy powers.
Against all Satan's spells and wiles,
Against false words of heresy,
Against the knowledge that defiles,
Against the heart's idolatry,
Against the wizard's evil craft,
Against the death wound and the burning,
The choking wave and the poisoned shaft,
Protect me, Christ, till Thy returning.

Christ be with me, Christ within me,
Christ behind me, Christ before me,
Christ beside me, Christ to win me,
Christ to comfort and restore me.
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,
Christ in hearts of all that love me,
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.

I bind unto myself the Name,
The strong Name of the Trinity;
By invocation of the same.

The Three in One, and One in Three,
Of Whom all nature hath creation,
Eternal Father, Spirit, Word:
Praise to the Lord of my salvation,
Salvation is of Christ the Lord.

- 3.13.** The traits of the Celtic Christianity founded by Patrick include the following (all taken from Ferguson, except number 6):
 - 3.13.1.** It valued and cultivated the monastic life
 - 3.13.2.** It was built on the idea of clan, and thus the abbot was more important than the bishop
 - 3.13.3.** It was fueled by missionary zeal
 - 3.13.4.** It had a strong doctrine of penance
 - 3.13.5.** It had its own date for Easter, its own unique form of tonsure for monks (front of head shaved from ear to ear - 0adapted sometime after Patrick's death), and its own unique liturgy (which was in Latin - but the preaching was done in Gaelic).
 - 3.13.6.** Finally, it had a strong connection to creation (as may be seen in the breastplate prayer, and the legend that Patrick used the clover to explain the Trinity).

4. The Growth of Celtic Christianity - Columba, Iona and Missionary Monks

- 4.1.** The next major figure in Celtic Christianity after Patrick was Columba (521-597), who is also known by his Irish name Columcille (of Colm Cille - 'church dove'). Columba was from a kingly family in Ireland. As a young man was a promising student in the school of Finnian, located at the Clonard Monastery. This monastery was one of the great centers of learning in Europe at the time, some saying that the average number of students studying there at one time was about 3,000. Columba then travelled and worked.
- 4.2.** Eventually Columba visited the tomb of St. Martin of Tours (whose monastic ideas were sweeping Europe at the time), and then returned to Ireland and began founding monasteries with a passion. It is said that by the time he turned 41 he had already found 41 monasteries.
- 4.3.** During this time, around 560, Finnian returned from a trip with a copy of the Gospel's from Jerome's Vulgate. Columba, who was visiting the school at the time, apparently made a copy of this (or possibly of a beautiful Psalter), which he intended to keep for a personal copy. Finnian caught him in the act, and this brought him into dispute with Finnian, who declared Columba had no right to the copy. The dispute eventually made it all the way to the High King, Diarmaid, who ruled in favor of Finnian saying "To every cow belongs her calf, and to every book, its copy." Columba returned the copy under protest, and predicted this would lead to troubles.
- 4.4.** Shortly thereafter, the High King apparently grabbed a follower of Columba and put him to death - a violation of the rule of sanctuary for monks. Columba led an uprising against the high king and there was a major battle in 561 at a place called Culdreimhe. Columba's forces won a decisive victory, and apparently took back the copy of the confiscated book - but many people blamed Columba for the battle. Some felt so strongly that the battle was Columba's fault that he was actually excommunicated at a synod. This decision was almost immediately reversed, but

Columba decided to leave Ireland. Some traditions say that when he did this he vowed he would not return to Ireland until he had won as many souls as had died in the battle - about 3,000!

- 4.5. Columba thus went to the island of Iona (off the western coast of Scotland) and founded a monastery and Christian community. He remained there for most of the remaining 34 years of his life. This community had immense influence, and Iona still serves as a Christian retreat and place of pilgrimage to this day.
 - 4.5.1. Columba was educated at the monastery at Clonard in Ireland under Finnian. In 563 the island of Iona off the southwest coast of Scotland became the center of his missionary activity and the spiritual center from which Celtic Christianity spread in Scotland and northern England. From Iona, Aidan was to go to Lindisfarne and missionize Northumbria (635) at the invitation of its king Oswald. Ferguson, location 6860
 - 4.5.2. The Irish then began sending missionaries to other countries, most notably to Scotland. The most famous of these missionaries was Columba, who settled on the small island of Iona with twelve companions, probably in A.D. 563. The monastery that they founded there became a center of missions to Scotland, where there soon were several other houses patterned after the Iona community. - Gonzales, location 4753
- 4.6. It appears that all of this had a profound effect on the hot blooded and fiery Columba. His passions were no longer used for fighting physical battles but for taking the Gospel to new lands. Since Scotland was the closest country, Columba began to attempt work among the Picts who inhabited Scotland. Though some of the Picts had already become Christians prior to Columba's time, most had not. But apparently the effect of the godly lives and preaching of Columba and his companions had a profound effect on the Picts, and many of them began to embrace Christianity.
- 4.7. Around this same time, others such as St. Brendan, also labored to reach out to new lands with the Gospel. Brendan was even rumored to have travelled across the Atlantic so far did some of his voyages take him. Regardless of the element of legend, this much was clear: the Celtic Christians had a fiery missionary zeal.
- 4.8. In the mid 570's the king died and Columba was given a vision that he was to anoint Aidan as king. Apparently Aidan was not his personal choice and he tried to disobey, was was disciplined by God and eventually anointed Aidan at Iona. This is the first time we see a Christian King being anointed in the British isles.
- 4.9. As we have seen above, Columba loved books, especially the Scripture. Furthermore, he loved ornate, beautiful things, so he began the tradition in his monasteries of making beautiful copies of Scripture. Thus, we find that it is the Celtic monasteries who give us some of the oldest illuminated manuscripts of Scripture we have. Among these are the Book of Kells (sometimes called the Book of Columba) and the Lindisfarne Gospels. And it is because of this activity that Thomas Cahill entitled his history of this period "How the Irish Saved Civilization."

(Descriptions of the following graphics from illuminated manuscripts)

Opening page of the Gospel of John from the Book of Kells

Christ enthroned from the Book of Kells

Opening genealogy of Matthew's Gospel from the Lindisfarne Gospels

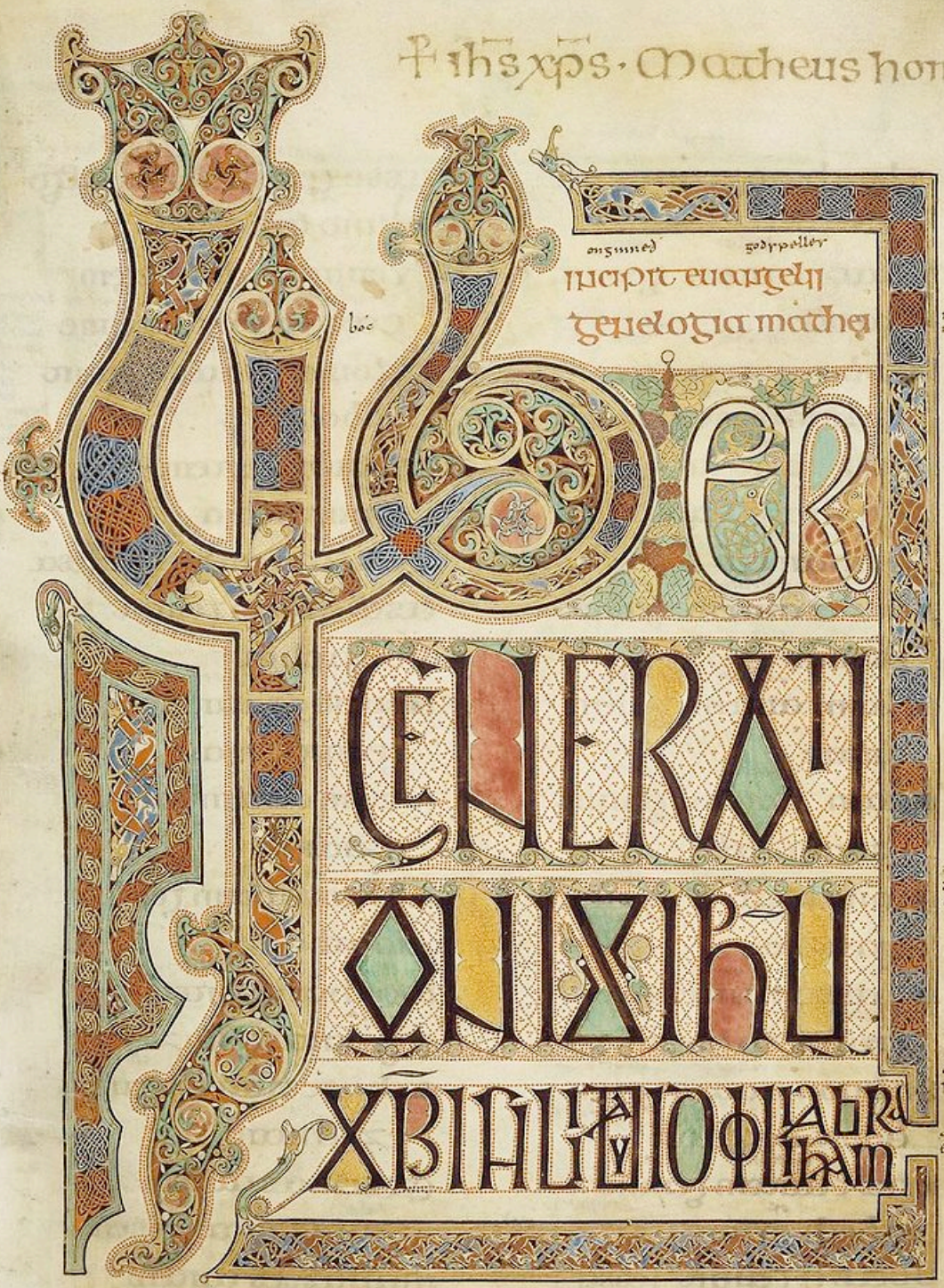
A page with the symbols for the four Gospels from the Books of Kells

A page from the Gospel of John in the Book of Kells





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INCIPIT EUANGELII
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5. Roman Missions To Britain

- 5.1. In the same year that Columba died on Iona (597), a missionary named Augustine landed in the British Isles. His mission was to re-evangelize the British. Rome had finally remembered her long lost children in the British Isles.
- 5.2. Augustine and his party had been sent to England by Pope Gregory the Great. Legend states that Gregory had seen some British boys in the slave market and inquired what land they came from. When told they were Angles, he said it was a good name for they resembled the angels of heaven and should be joint-heirs with the angels in heaven. The conversation supposedly continued with Gregory making puns all the while - all of which were intended to say that the Gospel must be taken to England. True or not, Gregory reached out to an old friend, Augustine, who was part of the monastery where Gregory had been.
 - 5.2.1. Gregory was interested in the land of the Angles, and he may have considered going there as a missionary. He became pope in 590, and nine years later sent a mission to the Angles, under the leadership of Augustine, a monk from the same monastery to which Gregory had belonged. - Gonzales, location 4770
 - 5.2.2. Whatever the origin of his interest in England, a century after the conversion of Clovis to Catholic Christianity, Pope Gregory in 596 dispatched Augustine and forty other monks to England. Ferguson, location 6881
 - 5.2.3. The initiative for the conversion of the English came from Rome. In 596 Pope Gregory the Great (596 –04) sent a party of Benedictine monks to distant and barbaric England under the leadership of Augustine—another St. Augustine, who would become known as St. Augustine of Canterbury. Shelley, location 3026
- 5.3. Augustine landed in the territory of Ethelbert, King of Kent. This was one of a dozen or so kingdoms ruled by the Anglo-Saxon invaders. Ethelbert, who had a Christian wife named Bertha who was from the Christian Frankish royal family in Paris, agreed to let Augustine preach as long as they did not try to coerce conversions. Within the year, Ethelbert himself was baptized. Augustine set up the center of his work at Canterbury - which is the center of English/Anglican Christianity to this day. Thus, he is known as Augustine of Canterbury to distinguish him from his more famous namesake Saint Augustine (of Hippo).
 - 5.3.1. Finally they arrived at the kingdom of Kent, whose king, Ethelbert, was married to a Christian. At first they did not have much success. But eventually Ethelbert himself was converted, and increasing numbers of his subjects followed suit. Augustine then became the first archbishop of Canterbury (the capital of Kent). One by one, the various kingdoms became Christian, and Canterbury became the ecclesiastical capital for all of England. - Gonzales, location 4773
 - 5.3.2. Ethelbert permitted them to stay in his realm if they did not use coercion in making converts. He himself was baptized in 597. The center of Augustine's work was Canterbury, so he is distinguished from his more famous namesake by the designation Augustine of Canterbury. Ferguson, location 6884
 - 5.3.3. Augustine and his monks began their ministry in Kent, one of the twelve areas controlled by the Anglo-Saxon invaders of England. Under the favor of Queen Bertha, another of those Christian queens eager to convert a pagan husband, Augustine secured a hearing from King Ethelbert, but only out of doors, where

Augustine would be less able to exercise his magical powers. Shelley, location 3029

- 5.3.4.** The king was so persuaded by Augustine that he granted land for the foundation of a monastery at Canterbury, ever after to be the seat of the English religious leader. Gregory appointed Augustine the first archbishop of Canterbury. Shelley, location 3032
- 5.4.** From Canterbury the faith soon began to spread to the other kingdoms within England itself, and due to the godly lives of the missionaries, the lack of coercion, and the acceptance of the royal families, it met with great success. The kingdoms of England were being converted to the Christian faith.
- 5.5.** However, the original people of England, who had been dispossessed by the Anglo-Saxon invaders had clung to their Christian faith - and its distinct set of practices. This group did not particularly want to make peace with their Anglo-Saxon invaders - they simply wanted them to leave! However, they eventually sat down at a meeting with Augustine, who began by pointing out the things the British Christians were doing wrong. However, they did agree to a further meeting with him to discuss these matters. On their way to this second meeting, the British/Welsh delegation consulted an aged hermit for advice. He told them if Gregory was humble like Christ and rose to greet them, they should listen to him. But if not, they should ignore him. Unfortunately, when the delegation arrived Augustine remained seated. Nothing he said could avail after that point, so the British/Welsh church remained separated from the new church among the Anglo-Saxons. In fact, this breach was not finally resolved until 1188!
 - 5.5.1.** When Roman missionaries came to England at the end of the sixth century, there were already three expressions of Christianity in the British Isles: (1) old Romano-British Christians, pushed back to Wales and Cornwall; (2) Irish Christians, representing a purified and intensified form of Christianity introduced by Patrick; and (3) Iro-Scottish Christians, who came from Ireland to Scotland. The term "Celtic Christianity" is sometimes applied to all three, and sometimes only to the Irish form that also spread to Scotland and northern England. Ferguson, location 6842
 - 5.5.2.** Augustine moved about 602 or 603 to meet with the British bishops. A holy man had told the bishops that if the Romans came in humility they were to be welcomed as men of God, but if they came in pride they were to be rejected. In keeping with his status as archbishop and representative of Rome, Augustine remained seated when the British bishops approached. They accepted this as a sign that they should refuse his demands. Ferguson, location 6896
 - 5.5.3.** Augustine's position was that the British Christians should accept the Roman dating of Easter, administer baptism according to the Roman Rite, and join with him in evangelizing the English. The failure of this meeting led to a century of conflict between Celtic and Anglo-Roman Christianity. The failure of the British Christians to evangelize their English invaders proved especially disastrous to their future. Ferguson, location 6899
- 5.6.** Augustine continued his work among the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. When he died in 601, the work continued. Unfortunately there were setbacks, especially after Ethelbert died in 616 and the Christian King of Essex died shortly after - and both

- men were replaced by pagans. However, Christianity had established its presence among the Anglo-Saxons, and it never lost this again.
- 5.7.** However, long after the death of Augustine, the Anglo-Saxon English church came into greater contact and conflict with the Celtic Scotch-Irish church. The two groups existed with their differences for a while, but it came to a head around 660 in the Kingdom of Northumbria. King Oswy of Northumbria grew up a Celtic Christian, but his wife Ethelburga followed the Roman practices of the English church. Because these differences included different dates for Easter, it often happened that one was observing the Lenten fast while the other was observing the post-Easter time of feasting! To resolve this controversy, a synod was called at Whitby in 663/4.
- 5.7.1.** In Northumbria, we are told that this conflict became serious, for the king followed Scotch-Irish tradition, and the queen held to the Roman one. Since the date for Easter differed, one of them was fasting while the other was feasting. In order to solve the difficulties, a synod was held at Whitby in 663. - Gonzales, location 4777
- 5.7.2.** The missionaries who followed Augustine worked further north. By the time of King Oswy, in the late seventh century, the two missionary thrusts converged, Celtic followers of Columba working toward the south and those of Augustine toward the north. Oswy's queen was from the south and followed the Roman practices, but Oswy had received his Christian beliefs from the north and observed the Celtic way. Among the points of dispute was the date for Easter. When the King had ended Lent and was keeping Easter, the Queen and her household were still fasting—enough to ruin any family's Easter! Shelley, location 3034
- 5.7.3.** King Oswy of Northumbria grew up a Celtic Christian. He was being pressed hard by Penda, but won a crucial battle over him in 655. Oswy's wife, the daughter of Ethelburga, was a Roman Christian, and he called a council in 664 to consider the differences between Celtic and Roman Christianity. It met at Whitby in the double monastery for men and women founded and led by the remarkable abbess Hilda, who patronized Caedmon, the first known poet in the English language. The spokesman for the Roman side was the monk Wilfrid of York; for the Celtic side, Colman, successor of Aidan at Lindisfarne. (The most intense form of Christianity on each side was monkish.) Ferguson, location 6909
- 5.8.** The differences between the Celtic and English churches was not only over things like the dates of Easter, and the proper form of tonsure to be worn by monks - there were also cultural differences lying beneath the surface. Thus, the synod went back and forth, until Wilfrid, speaking for the English/Roman church stated that Peter had the keys of the kingdom of heaven. When the Celtic Christians agreed that this was true, Osby decided he would side with the Roman church so as to not offend Peter! Thus, the Roman dates and practices came to be accepted by the Celtic church - though under the surface there were still big differences.
- 5.8.1.** Behind the debate over the date of Easter and the proper tonsure for monks, there were more significant cultural differences, so the considerable learning was compromised by sharp acrimony. Ferguson, location 6916
- 5.8.2.** At the Synod of Whitby in 664, Oswy brought the matter to a decision. The Celtic advocate appealed to the authority of Columba, the Romans to that of Peter, to whom Christ gave the keys. "Is that really so? Does Peter guard the

gates to heaven?" Oswy asked the Celtic defender. He, of course, agreed. Oswy promptly resolved to take no chances of alienating the doorkeeper of heaven! He agreed to follow Roman practices. After Whitby the British Isles moved relentlessly into the orbit of Rome. Shelley, location 3038

5.8.3. "Is it true what your opponents say, that St. Peter has the keys to the Kingdom?" "Certainly," they answered. "Then there is no need for further debate. I shall obey Peter. Otherwise, when I arrive at heaven he might close the doors on me and keep me out." As a result, the synod of Whitby decided in favor of the European tradition, and against the Scotch-Irish. - Gonzales, location 4782

5.8.4. The outcome was finally settled by Wilfrid's remark that Peter possessed the keys of the kingdom of heaven, to which Colman agreed. Oswy would take no chances on offending Peter and decided in favor of the customs of Peter's successor instead of those of Columba. Thereafter Roman Christianity prevailed in England for centuries. Ferguson, Ferguson, location 6918

Other works to consult on this period in the history of the Church:

The Spreading Flame by FF Bruce - covers early Christianity from the times of the New Testament to the conversion of the English. It devotes six full chapters (almost 75 pages) to this period of church history, and gives the best overview of the entire period we discussed.

How the Irish Saved Civilization by Thomas Cahill - this is volume 1 in a multi-volume series on the pillars of modern Western Civilization. Cahill embellishes at times and definitely comes from a more liberal approach to the faith, but his story is very detailed and interesting. It deals almost entirely with the Celtic church in this period.

Next Class: The Eastern Empire, The Eastern Orthodox Church, and the Rise of Islam

Date: Saturday, June 25

Reading: Chapter 27 - Eastern Christianity (and also the last few pages of Chapter 26 - "The Arab Conquests")