

OVERVIEW OF CHURCH HISTORY IN 36 ILLUSTRATED LECTURES

LECTURE 13 - EVANGELISM IN THE WEST; 'CHRISTIAN' EUROPE BY 1386

We'll start with a prayer from the period to be studied.

Lord, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ your Son, grant me that love which knows no end, so that my lamp may know no quenching, may burn for me, and may give light to others. Christ our Saviour, kindle our lamps, that they may shine continually, so that our darkness may be enlightened, and the world's darkness may be driven from us. Enrich my lantern with your light, I pray you, Jesus mine, to whom is the glory unto ages of ages. Amen.

(Columbanus (540-615), an Irish pioneer missionary in Brittany, France and North Italy.)

The rest of this page is an outline of this lecture. Evangelism from the Eastern Church, eastward and northward from Constantinople, will be sketched in the next Lecture, 14.

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In preparation, read Cairns, 121-124, 171-175, 187-190, 193; Lion 228-240; Vos, 52-54.

1. INTRODUCTION

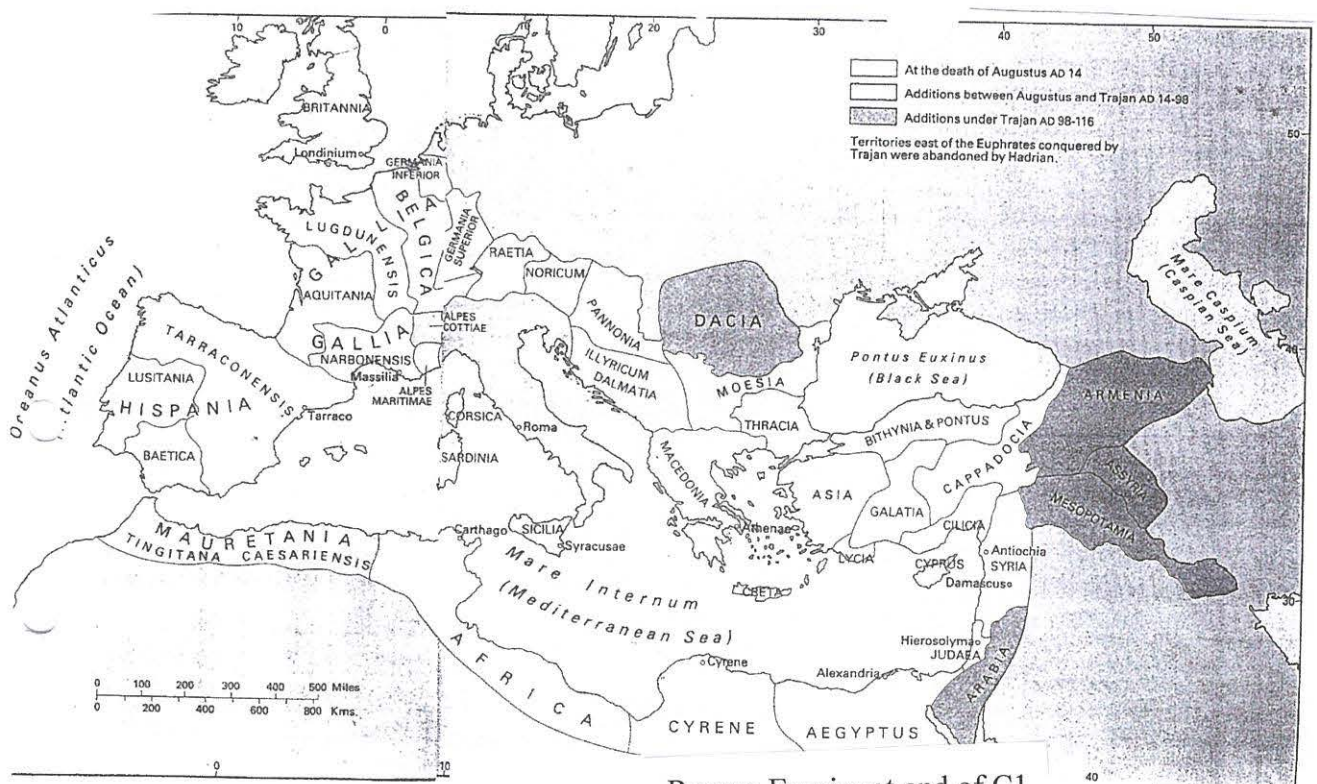
This lecture looks at evangelism northward and westward from Rome, all the way to Iceland, which resulted in 'Christian' Europe by the year 1386 – 'Christian' in quotations because nowadays we consider a country Christian if the State clearly supports Christian values and people acknowledge them. That's not how it was seen from the C4 to the C16. If a ruler accepted Christianity for himself, his people chose (or were told to choose) to be at least nominal Christians. The reason for this is explained at page 14. It is in that sense that we will see how and why Europe described itself as 'Christian' by 1386.

Did the Apostle Paul visit Spain? Romans 15:23, 'I plan to go to Spain' and 15:28 'I will go to Spain and visit you (the church at Rome) on the way'. Three years after he wrote that, Paul arrived in Rome, not on his way to Spain but under arrest, in the Spring of the year 60. Luke closed the book of Acts after Paul had been held there for two years, awaiting trial. He was martyred there, perhaps in the year 65. If he was acquitted at his trial and released (suggested in Lecture 1 at page 16), he had two or more years in which to fulfil his wish to visit Spain. Whether he did is much debated – type 'Did Paul reach Spain?' into Google.

1.1 The Great Commission

The Early Church didn't see the Great Commission which concludes Matthew's Gospel – 'Go and teach all nations, baptising them (in the name of the Trinity)' – as applicable to those outside the Roman Empire – see the map below. The Romans called those outside the Empire 'barbarians', because they couldn't understand their language – it sounded to them like 'ba-ba-ba'; because they couldn't understand them, the early Church was indifferent to them – there was no mission strategy, no church planting outside the Empire.

However, if heretics were exiled outside the Empire, in order to keep the Church within the Empire pure, they preached their version of Christianity, sometimes very successfully, as we'll see. So we'll look first at evangelism to the West within the Empire and then, later, see who took the gospel to the tribes outside the Empire.



1.2 Two fictional claims

Before going on, we should be aware of two claims that are made, today, about the very early days of the Church in the West, before the death of Paul c65.

First, that Joseph of Arimathea (who gave his tomb for the Lord's burial) and twelve companions set out from Jerusalem, bringing with them the Holy Grail (the cup used at the Last Supper), and settled at Glastonbury in England (that's where a music festival is now held every summer). The claim was invented by twelfth-century monks at Glastonbury, to get public sympathy and money to rebuild the monastery after a disastrous fire in 1183. The monastery is open to the public today, and it's worth a visit, but only for its medieval importance.

Secondly, as we saw in our first Lecture, at page 18, it is claimed that the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela, in northwest Spain, was built over the grave of the Apostle James, the brother of John. For the reasons outlined there, that may not be credible.

2. EARLY CHRISTIANITY IN BRITAIN

Hanks, *Great Christians*, has a comprehensive overview at 55-84.

2.1 Roman occupation

In the year 50, the Roman army expanded its occupation of (what we call) south-east England and built garrisons at Colchester, Lincoln and Gloucester. Twenty years later they conquered North Wales, and advanced into what is now Scotland. They might have conquered the whole of Scotland, but the troops were needed to meet pressure on the Danube frontier, so the Romans withdrew to a line from the Tyne to the Solway and Hadrian built a seventy-mile stone wall, completed c120, which became the northern limit of the Roman Empire. Ireland was never part of the Roman Empire, and it is debatable whether the Romans were ever there at all. For its evangelism, see 3.1 below.

2.2 Legends

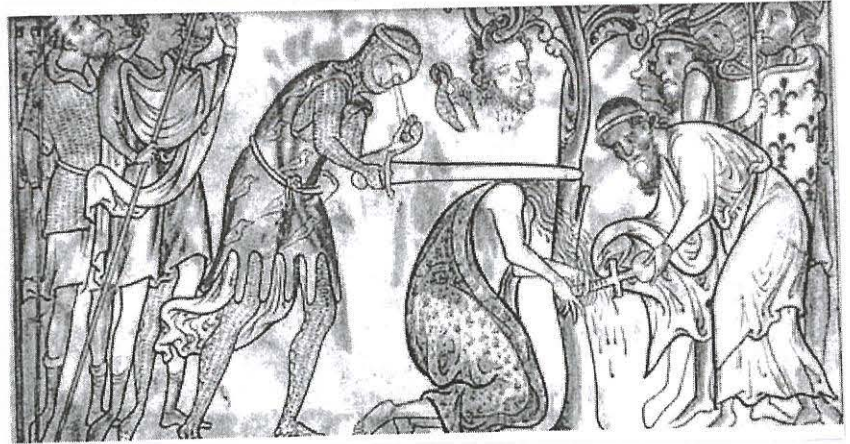
No one knows how or when Christianity first came to Britain. One surmise is that there were Christians in the army of occupation, soldiers and administrators. Another conjecture is traders from Gaul, because Britain had a thriving trade with mainland Europe. We don't know, so imaginative stories go round – for example that Pudens, mentioned in 2 Tim. 4:21, is the same Pudens as a Roman poet who married a British girl and settled here.

2.3 Tertullian, Origen and Eusebius

The first extant reference to Christianity in Britain is c208, when Tertullian (? do you remember him, lecture 5) wrote with triumphant if exaggerated rhetoric about 'parts of Britain, inaccessible to the Romans, which have already been conquered by Christ.' Thirty years later Origen (? remember him, at Alexandria, Lecture 3) wrote that Britain was among the places where Christians could be found and so did Eusebius. He was Constantine's 'spin-doctor', and he spun quite a few good lines to show Constantine in a favourable light, but even allowing for that, all three of these references are vague and obviously are hearsay.

2.4 St. Alban

The first Christian in Britain whose name we know is Alban, martyred either c250 or c304 – there were major persecution in both of those years, as we saw in lecture 7. Alban was a Roman soldier, who gave shelter to a Christian priest fleeing from persecutors. While Alban hid the priest, he was converted to Christ. When soldiers came to arrest the priest, Alban dressed in the priest's cloak, and gave himself up. He was condemned to death, and martyred on the hill where the church of St. Alban's now stands, north of London. Shortly after Alban, three other Christians – one a bishop – were put to death on the same hillside. We have the names of two other martyrs at about the same time, in Gwent, in Wales, but persecution seems to have been neither severe nor lasting. Then, as we saw in lecture 7, persecution of Christians by the Romans ceased in 313.



2.5 Two snapshots, 313 and 359

Apart from those just mentioned, we know almost nothing about Christianity in Britain until 313. There must have been some organization, because when the emperor Constantine convened a Council at Arles in Gaul in 313, to discuss a controversy about the break-away group known as Donatists (? remember them, Lecture 9), three British bishops attended, from York, London, and Colchester, accompanied by a presbyter and a deacon. We have names for all of them.

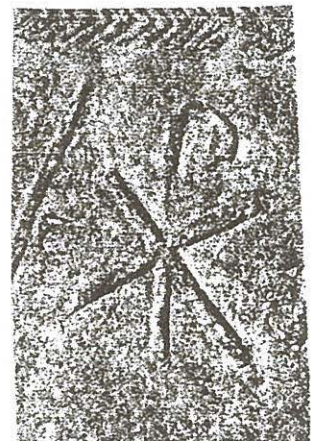
The organisation of the Church in Britain was doubtless similar to that of Gaul, which we do know about, and by the end of the C4, every walled city in Britain (all fifteen of them) possessed a church and a bishop.

The next snapshot is in 359, when three British bishops attended a Council at Rimini in Italy; they were so poor that they had to claim their travelling expenses from the imperial treasury - all the other bishops attending refused to do this, in order to preserve their independence.

Native British Christians were generally poor, but there were Christians among richer Roman traders, as archaeologists have found Christian symbols, such as *Chi-Rho* sign (Lecture 7) on pavements that adorned their opulent villas.

Two examples here of the *Chi-Rho* symbol found in villas in Roman Britain.

The next page illustrates the weakness of early British Christianity. The Lecture Notes continue on page 6.



Weakness of C5 British Christianity

In 429, British bishops were conscious of their own deficiencies in leadership, and so they invited two bishops from France to come to their aid - Germanus, Bishop of Auxerre (bishop, 418-48) and Lupus, Bishop of Troyes (427-79). Germanus had been a soldier before becoming a bishop and he had lost nothing of his flair for commanding men. Finding the British timid and lacking self-confidence, he put new life and courage into British Christians; he not only strengthened their faith and orthodoxy – combating Pelagianism (lecture 9 and Topic 9) – but he also led them against some invading Picts and Saxons. He organised an ambush near Mold (in modern Cheshire) and when his men rushed at the enemy shouting, ‘Alleluia, Alleluia,’ the Picts fled.

On left, Germanus;

on right, Lupus



2.6 Scotland and Ninian (c360-c432)

What we call Scotland was, as far as we know, untouched by the gospel until a missionary-bishop known as Ninian arrived late in the C4 - while Roman legions still occupied Britain up to Hadrian's Wall. Son of a Christian king in Cumbria, he made a pilgrimage to Rome in his teens and stayed there for some years to study the Scriptures. He was consecrated a bishop in c393 and was sent to minister to his own people.

From his base in (present-day) Galloway - the first known Christian settlement north of Hadrian's Wall - Ninian evangelised all the way up the east coast of Scotland, and many 'abandoned the error of idolatry ... and accepted the true Faith'. Ninian worked in Scotland for over thirty years and was buried in beside the White House (see the description beside the photograph). Christianity was then snuffed out in much of what we call Scotland by the events we'll look at next, under 2.7.



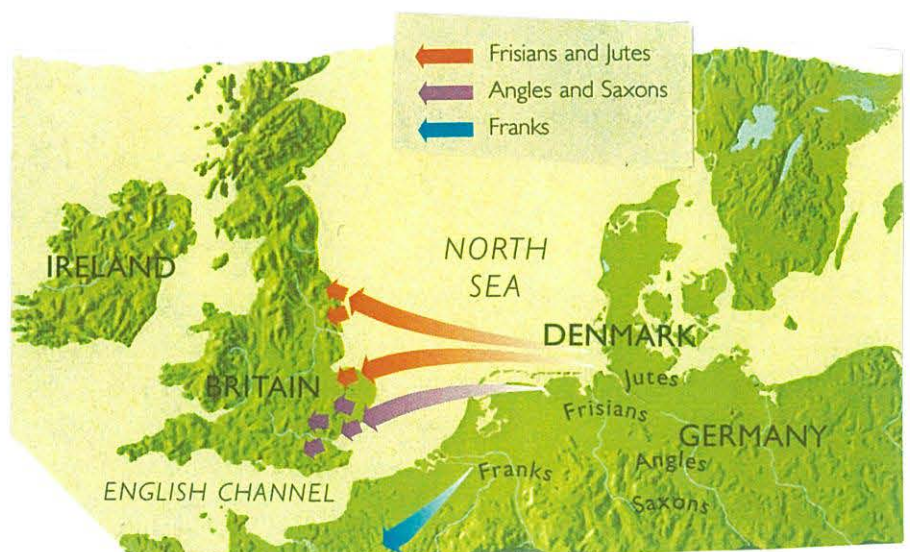
The present-day remains of the cathedral and priory (monastery) built in 1128 on the site of Ninian's 397 small stone church, which he whitewashed so that it was the most conspicuous building in the district. It became known as *Candida Casa* (Latin = White House), which was translated by the local Picts as *Hwit Aerne*, hence Whithorn. The 1128 building fell into disrepair after the Reformation in 1560.

2.7 Anglo-Saxon invasions

Rome ruled Britain for nearly 400 years - from 43 until troops were withdrawn from Britain in 410 to defend the heart of the Roman Empire from invading barbarians. This left a power-vacuum vacuum in Britain, into which poured pagan Angles and Saxons and Jutes and Danes from mainland Europe and Picts from north of Hadrian's Wall. (This map doesn't show the Picts.) British people managed to repel them at first, and the Church in Britain seems to have remained intact until the middle of the C5. However, the invading pagans then increasingly overran most of (modern) England.

The Celts were pushed steadily westwards by the invaders, and settled among the Cornish tors, the mountains of Wales and Strathclyde - see the map of this on the next page. This led to the 'Celtic fringe'. The pagan invaders destroyed the Church in the areas where they settled, killing priests, hacking crosses to pieces and destroying sacred vessels. Little is

heard of the Christian faith in Britain for the next 150 years - its place was taken by the heathenism which the conquering Jutes, Angles and Saxons brought with them. We still



use the names of their gods, Tiu the Dark god, Tiu's Day, Woden the War god, Woden's Day, Thor the Thunder god, Thor's Day.

However, the Church survived in the Celtic fringes, cut off from the rest of Christendom. Bishops held synods, and monasteries preserved learning but for the next hundred years the Celtic Church made no attempt to convert the invading Angles and Saxons. For missionary zeal, we must look to Ireland.

3. CONVERSION OF SOME BARBARIAN TRIBES

3.1 Ireland - Patrick (390-461) - Apostle of Irish - Hanks, *Great Christians*, 63-67

Ireland deserves special mention, because, as mentioned at 2.1, it was never part of the Roman Empire. Christianity was probably introduced into Ireland during the C4, but evidence is slight – perhaps brought by immigrants and traders from Britain and the Continent. The story really starts with Patrick. While Ninian was at work in Galloway, Patrick was growing up on the west coast of England. His family were Roman citizens and Christians and Patrick was a believer. In 405 Irish raiders landed on the coast and carried off young men into slavery - among them Patrick, aged sixteen. He was taken to Ireland, where he was kept in captivity as a swineherd in Connaught, but after six years he escaped to Gaul and contacted a monastery at Auxerre. While undergoing training, he decided to return to the places of his captivity, to preach the gospel to the men among whom he had lived. He was consecrated by the bishop of Auxerre for work in Ireland, and he went there in 432, twenty years after escaping from his slavery.

For the next thirty years Patrick travelled widely in Ireland and made many converts, baptising them by the thousand and ordaining clergy everywhere. There were few towns or cities in Ireland at that time, so Patrick founded monasteries instead of churches, and this became the chief feature of the Irish Church - some of them with several thousand monks. From these monasteries, missionaries went out with the message of Christ. One of the best known is Columba, whom we'll look at next.

3.2 Columba in Scotland (Hanks, *Great Christians*, 61-63.) (Lion, 202)

One of the Irish monks, Columba, had a vision for Scotland and sailed with twelve companions to the little island of Iona, off Mull, in 563. As we saw, the Celtic Church had survived, isolated, on the western fringe of what we call Scotland, but for other parts of the country Columba had to start from scratch in bringing the gospel to the wild Picts and other tribes, who had reverted to paganism in the 120 years after Ninian's death. Columba's missionary strategy was to contact kings and other key figures in Scotland, with the result that they were converted and much of the west of Scotland became a Christian country. Contrast this peaceful approach with the aggressive methods employed by Boniface and Clovis, described on the next two pages.



TRIBE	DATE OF CONVERSION	KEY MISSIONARIES AND RULERS
GOTHS	c.340	Ulfilas (Arian)
	c.720	Boniface (Wynfrith) (Catholic) Fritzlar
PICTS	c.400	Ninian
IRISH	c.435	Patrick
FRANKS	c.496	Clovis
SCOTS	c.563	Columba
ANGLES AND SAXONS	c.600	Augustine of Canterbury Ethelbert
FRISIANS	c.690	Willibrord

3.3 Boniface in Germany and Clovis in France

The Goths lived north of the Danube, outside the Roman Empire. Remember that when Christians deemed to be heretical in their views were exiled, they didn't sulk but (very commendably) evangelised in the areas to which they had been banished. Ulfilas had been converted through exiled Arians, about the age of 30 - see the date in the chart above; after training, by the Arians, he translated large parts of the Bible into their language, and in 376 he led the mass conversion of the Gothic people, north of and outside the Empire, to Arian Christianity.

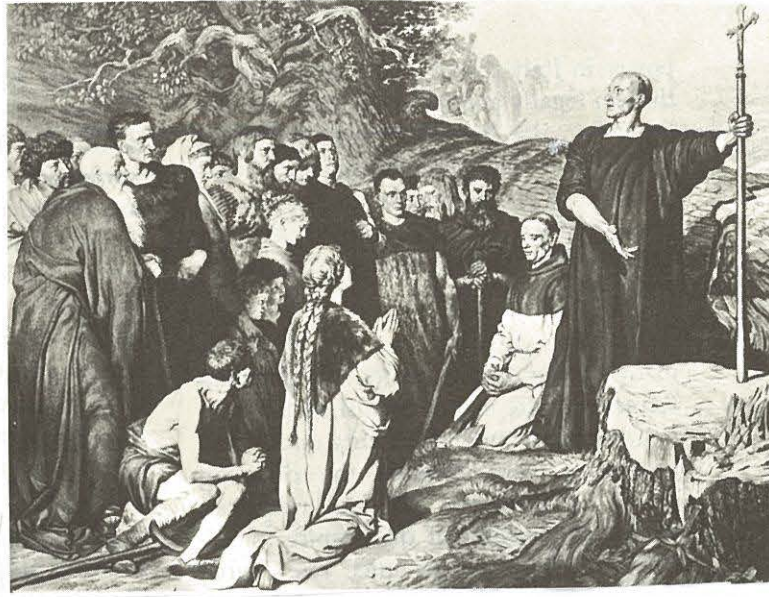
The next name on the chart is Boniface. This is jumping on 400 years, but we'll complete the story of the Goths, and then come back to earlier times in other areas. The remarkable story of Boniface's work is set out on the next page. However, to add one touching gesture - Boniface took seriously Christ's washing his disciples' feet, so when he received a present, as bishops did, he wrote a letter of thanks and wrapped it in a towel, from a seemingly inexhaustible linen cupboard, to remind the donor that Christianity meant service, giving not taking. More to be found at Hanks, *Great Christians*, 76-80.

The second section of the chart is the Picts, in what we call Scotland; we've already looked at Ninian's work, and also at the next section, Patrick in Ireland.

The next section, the Franks and Clovis, illustrates the pattern of some (not all) evangelism at that time. Generally, the choice of religion was for the king to make; if he decided to become a Catholic Christian, his people were expected to follow. Clovis was king of a pagan tribe in Gaul. His wife was a Christian, and four years after he married her, he said that if her God gave him victory in battle over a neighbouring tribe, he would accept Christ. He won and so issued a decree: 'Know that those who do not present themselves with me at the river tomorrow for baptism will incur my displeasure.' As he was a violent man, it would have been unwise not to be there. (Lion, 194, 229-30)

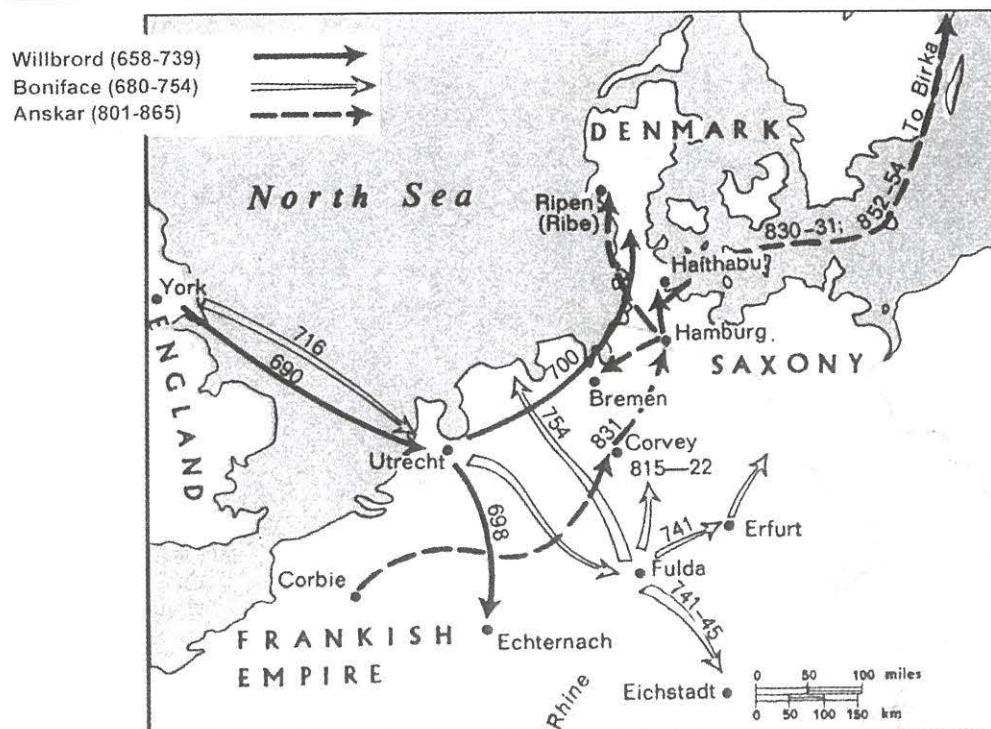
Pages 9 and 10 are 'stand-alone' and the next heading is 3.4, on page 11.

Boniface stands by the fallen oak tree which the Germans had regarded as sacred to Thor.

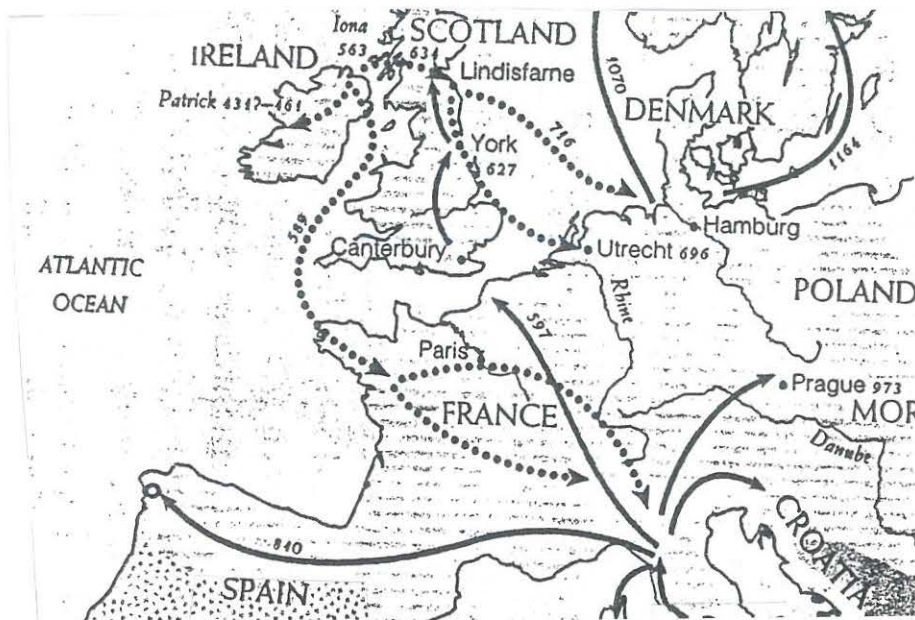
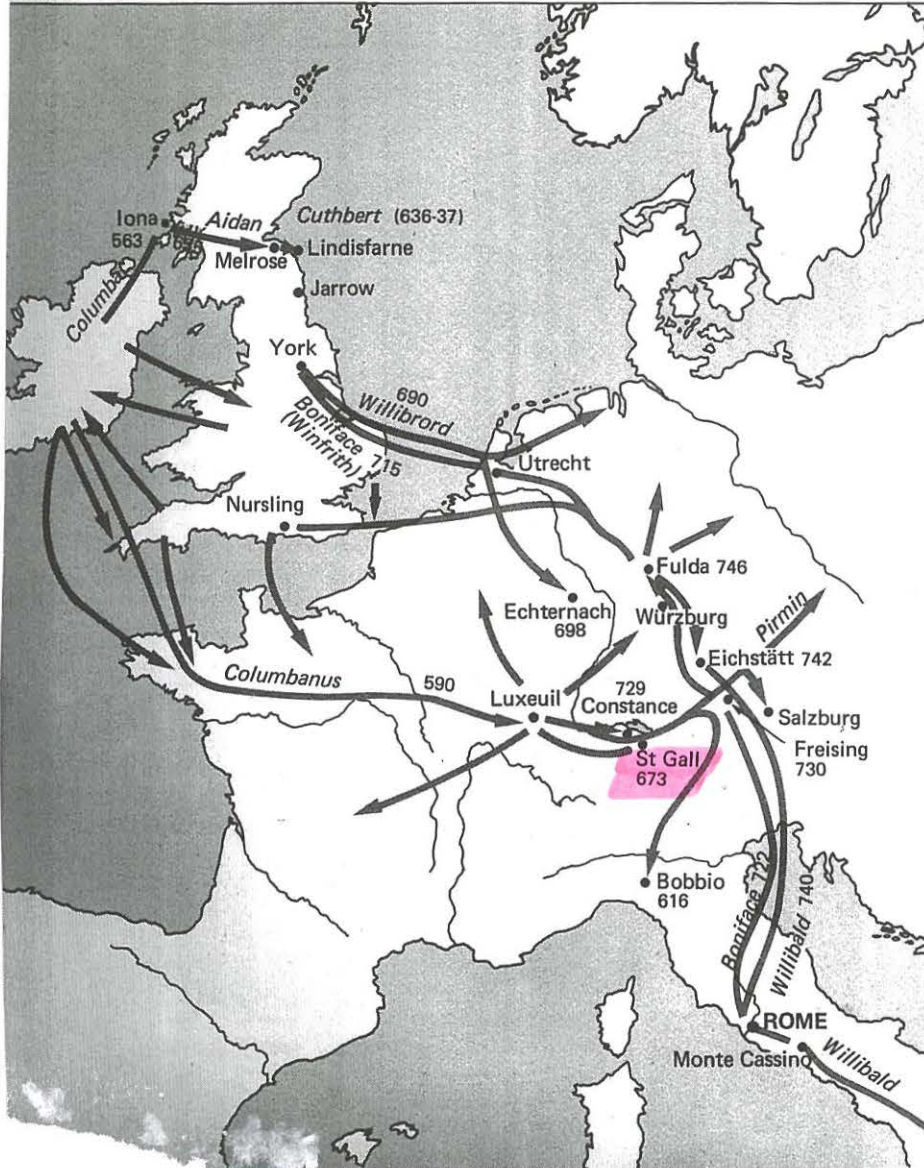


Boniface was born in Crediton (modern Devon) in 680 into a Saxon family. After many years of study in local monasteries, he was ordained a priest at the age of thirty. For many years he had felt called to missionary work and the Church appointed him, at the age of thirty-six, 'to preach to the heathen east of the Rhine'. On his arrival in Hesse, he found that the local people (pagans) believed a giant oak tree called the 'oak of Thor' was sacred to their gods. To prove that the pagan gods were false, Boniface publicly announced in advance that he would cut down the sacred tree and so destroy their gods. In front of a large crowd, he felled the oak with an axe and it crashed to the ground, where its branches lay in the shape of a cross. When the god did not strike him down, the pagans realized that their gods were false and converted to Christianity. He built a chapel from its wood, dedicated to Saint Peter, and in the place of other statues of pagan gods, he built churches and monasteries

An embellishment of the story is that in its descent, sections of the oak crushed every other tree around except a single small fir tree, which Boniface preserved, and that this is the origin of decorating fir trees for Christmas.



Monastic missions before Charlemagne The grey lines show the radiation of Celtic monasticism, chiefly between 560 and 670, to the Western Isles, Northumbria, Wales, Cornwall, west and central Gaul, Switzerland, south Germany and north Italy. The purple lines show the missionary radiation of Anglo-Saxon monks, chiefly between 690 and 760, to the Netherlands and west Germany, with the journeys of Boniface and Willibald to Rome.



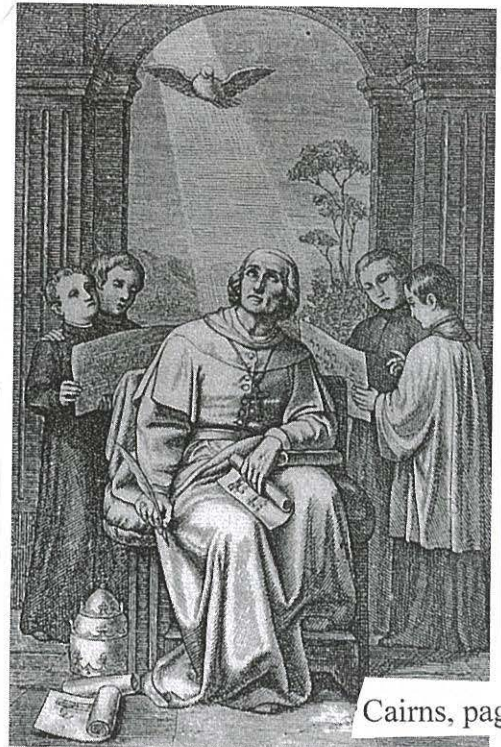
3.4 Pope Gregory 1 (590-604)

- (a) recovered lands lost to barbarians
- (b) brought Arians into orthodox Church
- (c) evangelised new territory.

(Cairns, 160-2; Lion, 230-1; Vos, 52-4; Lane 84-86)

Hanks, *Great Events*, 101-8

Gregory's deep interest in missionary work is shown by the fine story that Bede told in his history. According to the story, when Gregory was told that the fair-haired, blue-eyed boys up for sale as slaves in Rome were Angles, he said that they were not "Angles" but "angels." When told that they were from Deiri (Yorkshire), he decided that they must be delivered from the wrath (*de ira*) of God by missionary work.² He therefore commissioned the monk Augustine, who must not be confused with Augustine of Hippo, to go to Britain and give the message of the gospel to the British.



Cairns, page 162

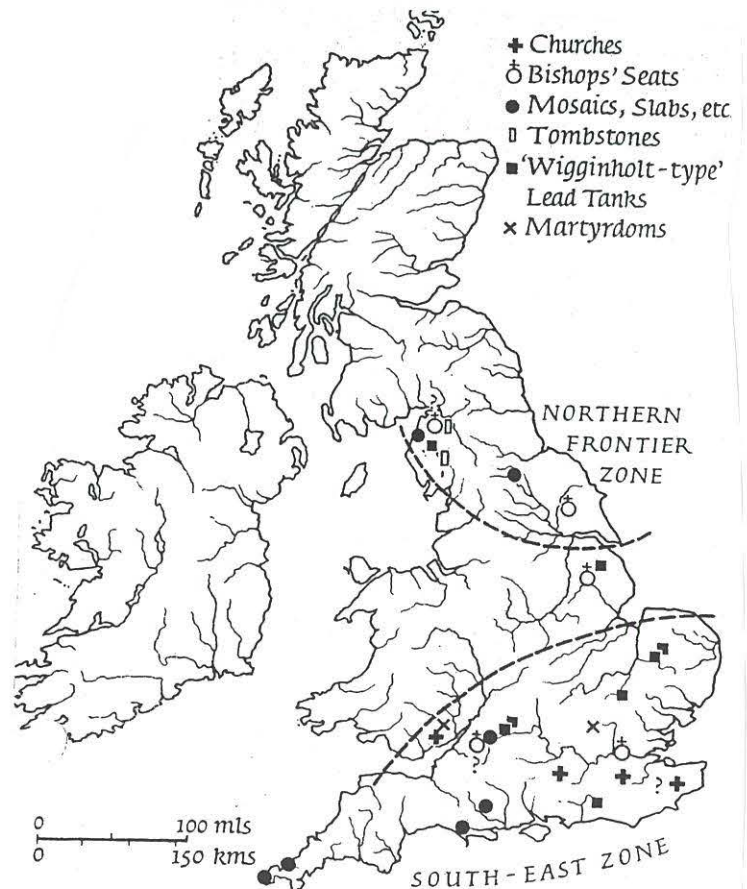
Gregory the Great. This pope was so highly respected as a teacher in the Western church that he is always portrayed with a dove, representing the Holy Spirit, communicating divine truth.

3.5 England

Augustine was tasked with bringing both the Gospel and papal rule back to a country that had been de-christianised for 150 years by the Anglo-Saxon invasions. He landed in Kent in England in 597, and Ethelbert, king of Kent, who had a French wife, who was a Christian, was persuaded by his wife and by Augustine to be baptized. That meant all his subjects accepted Christianity, and came under the authority of the Pope and became members of the Catholic Church.

Meantime, the Celtic Church, which had been isolated on the fringe of Britain for 100 years, and which had developed its distinctive ways, had begun aggressive evangelism southward via Iona and Lindisfarne. These two streams, one from Rome via Augustine, moving northwards to bring England under papal rule, and other from the Celtic Church, had different ethos and different religious observances - the most notable being date on which Easter was celebrated. The issue came to head in 663, when King Oswy of Northumbria, brought up in the Celtic Church, realized that next year he would celebrate Easter while his wife, who had been brought up in Roman ways, would still be observing Lent. As he put it, 'I will be feasting while you are fasting.'

A Synod was therefore called at Whitby in Yorkshire in 664, to resolve the issue.



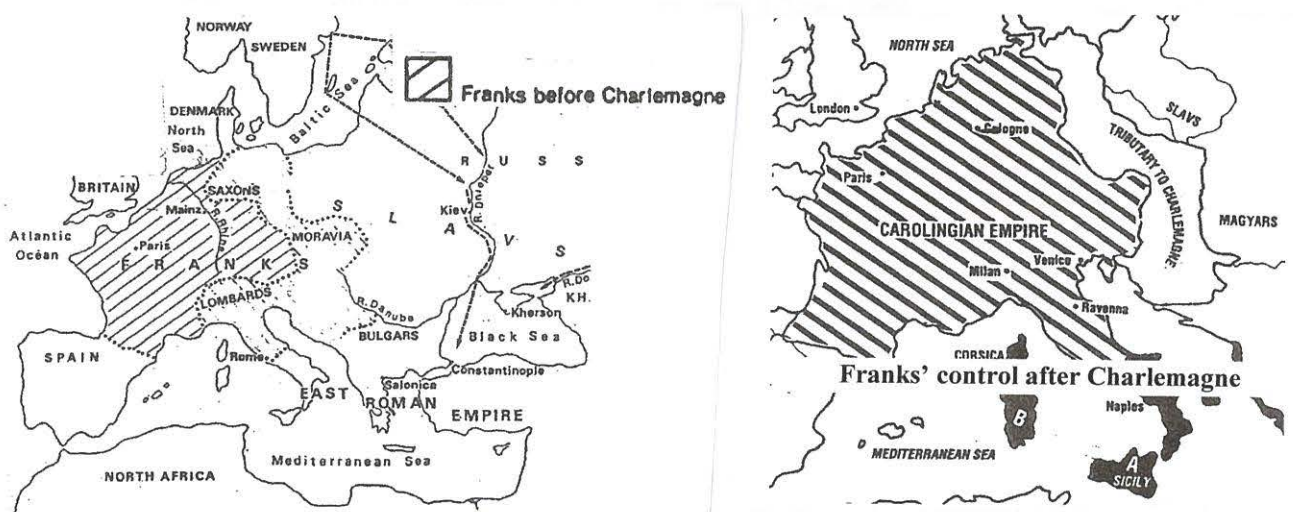
TOPIC - THE SYNOD OF WHITBY (IN MODERN YORKSHIRE) IN 663 - was taken at this point in the Lecture; here, it is printed at the end of the Notes for this Lecture.

The Synod decided to follow Rome rather than Columba. All Britain was now back in mainstream Catholic Christianity, with the hallmarks of the Catholic Church as we know it today - the sacrifice of the Mass and the adoration of Mary, making the sign of the cross, private confession of sin followed by penance required by a priest, and the use of vestments by priests. As we saw in Lecture 11, the Roman Church now addressed the Bishop of Rome as 'Pope' and following the Synod of Whitby, the Celtic Church did so.

4. 800 to 1000 - CHARLESMAGNE, VIKINGS AND MAGYARS

4.1 Charlemagne and the Holy Roman Empire (Cairns, 179-83, 189; Lion, 239-41) 'Charlemagne' = Charles + Latin *magnus* 'the Great'

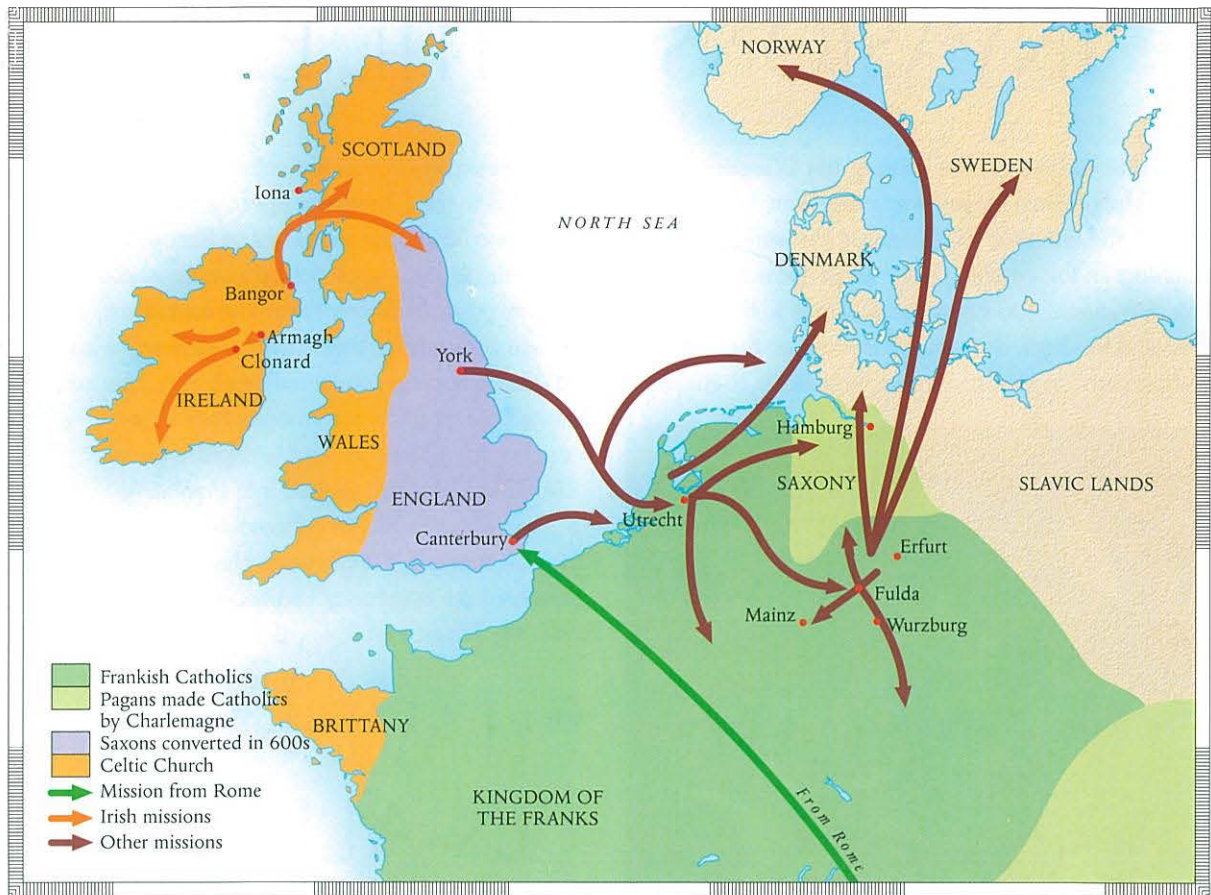
Remember from Lecture 11 and Topic 11, how Charlemagne expanded his Empire and imposed Christianity on conquered areas- 'be baptised or executed'. He created the huge and secure Holy Roman Empire over most of what we call Europe.



Remember also how his three grandsons broke the Empire into three pieces in 843. Two pagan groups took advantage of the resulting vacuum, Vikings from Scandinavia in the North, who came by boat, and Slavs and Hungarians from the East, who came on horseback – see the map on the next page. Since churches and monasteries were often the wealthiest places in the community, they were prime targets; when the invaders looted Church property, they showed no respect for Christianity, burning churches and monasteries, killing priests and monks, raping nuns. Throughout the later C9 and all through the C10, they overran and devastated much of what we call Europe. It seemed at the time that Christianity as a religion would not survive in Europe.

Viking invasions (map on the next page)

Seeing the comparative wealth of mid and southern Europe, pagan Norsemen, called Vikings ('pirates') developed the art of shipbuilding to the point where, by 830, they could sail ships, sixty or seventy feet long, carrying eighty men, to every seacoast and navigable river in Europe, looting, burning and killing. They went through Europe's rivers, via Russia, and attacked Constantinople. They sacked Paris in 845, then Bordeaux and Seville. In Spain, they looted the Christian shrine of Santiago de Compostela (? remember it, Lecture 1), went through the Straits of Gibraltar, and attacked Mediterranean civilization.



MISSIONARY ACTIVITY IN WESTERN EUROPE

Pope Gregory's policy of evangelization was one of the most significant factors in the conversion of western Europe during this

period, beginning with the dispatch of Augustine to England. The map shows major missions from the sixth to the eleventh century.

Iceland

In many countries, if the leader decided to convert to Christianity, he made everyone else (say that they) followed. Iceland did it in an unusual way.

The Norsemen who settled there from 870 developed one of the most cultured and democratic societies in the Western world. When missionaries came from Norway with the Christian message, some Icelanders accepted it and others did not; it looked as if there might be a religious civil war. However, the democratic traditions of Icelandic culture prevailed and the nation agreed to submit the decision to one of their wisest men. After a long period of meditation, he reported back that the new faith in Christ was better than the old paganism. This decision was accepted by all, and the Icelandic parliament made Christianity the national religion in the year 1000.

The chieftain of a district in which is a spectacular waterfall demonstrated his new allegiance publicly by throwing all his statues of Norse gods into the waterfall – 12 metres high and 30 metres wide. Until then, it had been known as the godafoss (Icelandic: 'waterfall of the gods', small 'g'), but now it was the Godafoss, the waterfall of the one true God, capital 'G')

Why, in democratic Iceland, could the two religions not have lived together peacefully? No-one in the Middle Ages could imagine a society with two or more religions. People saw religion as the 'glue' that held society together. Therefore every society - even a democratic one - could have only one faith. Democracy did not guarantee religious toleration; it only ensured that a society would make a democratic decision about which faith the whole society would practise.

5. 'Christian' Europe (Cairns, 193)

5.1 Baptism of Grand Duke Jogaila of Lithuania in 1386

By 1386, there was only one area of what we now call Europe that was not nominally 'Christian' – Lithuania, which was much bigger than the present state of Lithuania on the Baltic – much of yellow Slavic Lands on the map below.

What happened next is an illustration of how, humanly speaking, personal and political decisions, nothing to do with religious conviction, can radically change Church life in a nation. How far do we see the hand of God in it?



Jogaila (c1362–1434), the king of Lithuania, had brought up as a pagan. His mother wanted him to marry one of the daughters of the Russian royal family, but to do this, Russia required him to convert to Orthodox Eastern Christianity. For purely political reasons - love didn't come into it - Jogaila preferred an alliance with the Polish royal family, to strengthen his influence there. The Polish royal family were Christians, said that if he was to marry a Polish princess, he would have to become a Catholic Christian.

Jogaila was therefore baptised in Kraków in Poland in 1386, and married his princess and reigned for 48 years. The picture is of his coronation. His conversion meant that his court and noblemen had to say that they had too were now Christians, and there were mass baptisms in Lithuanian rivers. Lithuania was now officially a Catholic Christian country, although paganism remained strong among the peasants. The whole of Europe (as we know it) was now, at least nominally, with the exception of small Jewish communities, a completely Christian continent.

THE CRUSADES IN THE NORTH

After 1150, the last pagan lands in Europe were Finland, Prussia (mostly in modern Poland), Lithuania, and Livonia (roughly speaking, modern Latvia and Estonia). By 1329, crusaders had conquered all but Lithuania, which remained outside the fold until 1386. After conquest and forced conversion, missionary bishops encouraged the gradual growth of genuine faith.



OVERVIEW OF CHURCH HISTORY IN 36 ILLUSTRATED LECTURES

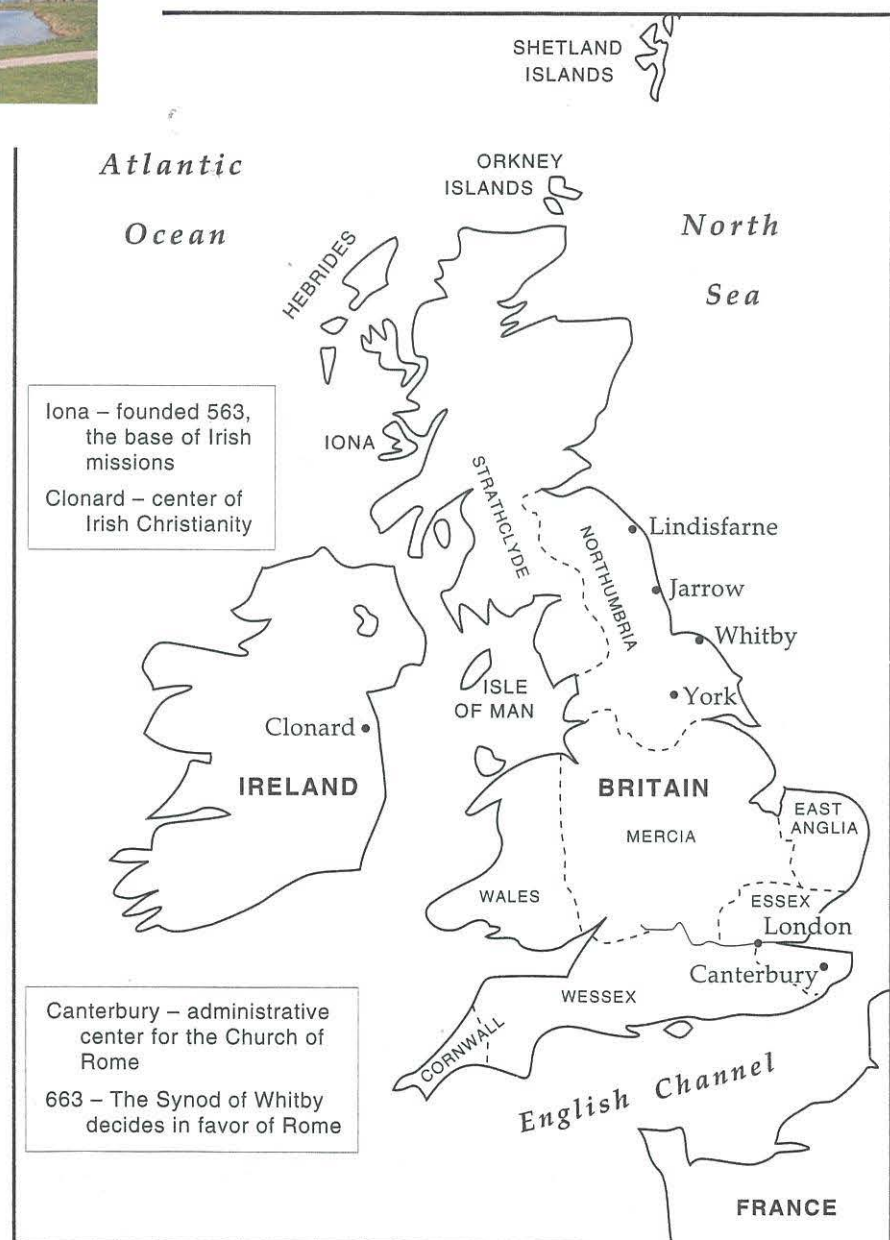
TOPIC FOR LECTURE 13 – SYNOD OF WHITBY 663

Please tell us why this Council was called, what took place at it, and what lasting consequences its decisions have had for the Western Church.

Cairns, 172; Lion, 232; Vos, 54; Hanks, *Great Events*, 107-8.



Monastery where Synod was held was near ruins of present abbey on headland at Whitby. Present ruins are from an abbey built in 1070s. When Synod was held, it was known as Streanoeshalch (Bay of the Beacon), but later became known by its present name of Whitby.



THE CONFLICT BETWEEN IRISH AND ROMAN CHRISTIANITY IN THE SIXTH AND SEVENTH CENTURIES