



Who do you think you are? Thinking Like a Christian April-June 2020

1st May. Why you don't worship Woden:

How England became Christian

1. How the English became Christian

1 Thessalonians 1:9; Colossians 1:13.

This is the state of all Britain at the present time, in about the 285th year from the coming of the English into Britain, but in the 731st year of the Lord's Incarnation. May the earth rejoice in His everlasting reign, may Britain exult in His faith, and may many islands be glad and sing praises in honour of his holiness.

(Bede, 'The Ecclesiastical History of the English People')

Britain – Two remote islands in the far north – has become Christian. Bede, on the very edge of the civilized world, is the man who chronicled it.

Anno Domini

AD 410

Patrick

Columba to the Scots. Iona 563.

Early 7th C: Bernician King, Oswald, asked Iona to send a mission to preach in his Kingdom. Aidan. Lindisfarne.

Pope Gregory the Great. 597: Augustine sent to evangelise the Angles in Kent.

Aethelbert and Bertha

Edwin, King of Northumbria

Paulinus

We have therefore taken care in this present letter to exhort your majesty with every feeling of deep affection that, abhorring idols and their worship, spurning the follies of the temples, and the deceitful flatteries of augury, you may believe in God the Father Almighty, His Son Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit; and that as a believer, being freed from the bonds of captivity to the Devil, you may through the helping power of the holy and undivided Trinity be a partaker of eternal life. ... for how can they have any power to give help to anyone that are made out of corruptible matter by the hands of your inferiors and subjects? They are things to which you have given a lifeless imitation of limbs by the use of human artifice. Unless they are moved by you they cannot walk, but are fixed in one place like a stone. They are so made that they have no intelligence and, oblivious in insensibility, they have gained no power to do either harm or good. Indeed we cannot honestly think by what deception of mind you follow and worship those gods to whom you have yourself given the likeness of a body.

- Letter of Pope Boniface to King Edwin (Bede)

Edwin held a council on accepting or rejecting Christianity. Probably in York...

Exercise: Edwin's Council!

Divide into two groups and argue the pros and cons of accepting Christianity.

Pagans: These are the gods we've always worshipped

 Our gods defeated the Christians when we invaded a few years ago... why change now?

 And all these strange new laws, rules, morals...

 Who is going to make the crops grow if we don't sacrifice to Woden?

Christians: *What might you argue against these points?*

Edwin Baptised 627.

→ The basic dynamic of idolatry vs. Christianity. The idea of 'no religion' is nonsense. You've got to serve somebody.

Psalm 135:15-18; Romans 1:21-25

How Christianity should confront idolatry.

2. The men who spread the message: Monks and Bishops

Patrick, Columba, Aidan.

Cuthbert. Died 687. Northern Britain's holy man.

→ Monasticism. Of vast importance in evangelising pagan lands *after* the conversion of Constantine (not really before).

James 4:4

- Very good aspects. Total devotion to the Holy Trinity is what discipleship is all about.
- Bear in mind the horrible immorality of the pagan nations
- But very problematic. This is not a form of devotion which God asks for!
- God uses us despite our (often terrible) imperfections

3. Control vs. Compromise: Roman vs. Celtic Christianity

664 Synod of Whitby. Date of Easter. Clash between the Celtic and the Roman churches.

Major issues:

- Genuine desire for *authentic, original* Christianity
- Notice inseparability in Roman minds between the one catholic church and the one catholic truth. And assumption that this means the authority of the bishop of Rome.
- Celtic Christians didn't see this. To them it looked like illegitimate control of Christ's gospel.
- But to Roman Christians Celtic Christianity looked like dangerous compromise with paganism! (! *think* that's what the tonsure is all about)
- Both were right in criticisms of the other... the Romans were more right at the time, but many of the celtic fears would prove well-founded in the long run.

4. Christianity and England: Christ and the King

793:

monks took Cuthbert's remains away and wandered around for 7 years keeping them safe!

Viking raids. 793-880.

850, fleet of 350 ships captured Canterbury and London.

Alfred the Great.

Exercise: Putting the Great into Alfred!

You have just become King of Wessex and defeated Guthrum. You want your kingdom to be Christian. Brainstorm: what kind of things would you like to change? What would you focus on? Come up with all the ideas you can!

Danelaw.

→ Christianity inseparable from civilisation.

Colossians 1:13-14

Philippians 2:9-11

Christ's Lordship means nothing if it is not Lordship over nations. These Christian brothers could not have comprehended how many modern Christians think that God has nothing to do with politics! Christ is Lord – which means Lord of lords, King of kings.

There simply is no basis for just government other than the recognition and worship of the one true God.

Church and state: notice who is telling whom what they should do! (but nevertheless remain separate institutions).

Why Aethelstan is giving a book to St. Cuthbert...