



# ORTHODOX ENGLAND

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and the Isles of the Saints*

*An excerpt from the Old English Poem  
'Christ'*

*The Decline of England 12:  
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Editor: Fr Andrew Phillips.

Art Work: Edmund (Odygn).

Address: Seekings House, Garfield Road, Felixstowe, Suffolk IP11 7PU, England.

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## Editorial: THE SAINTS OF THE ISLES AND THE ISLES OF THE SAINTS

A Talk Given at the Greek Orthodox Church in Southampton on Saturday 14 July 2012

### Introduction

**F**IRST of all, I thank you for the kind invitation today. I often seem to speak abroad, but only more rarely here.

Originally, the title given to me for this talk was 'Britain and the Undivided Church'. However, it is impossible to talk about 'Britain' in our field of interest without talking about Ireland. Therefore I will not speak of Britain, but of 'The Isles', meaning the British Isles and Ireland, even though, as you will see, it is difficult to talk about any aspect of the Isles without mentioning the rest of the Christian world. The second part of my talk was given the title 'The Undivided Church'. However, that phrase is theological nonsense. The Church as the Body of Christ can never be divided. Therefore, the title of my talk today is 'The Saints of the Isles and the Isles of the Saints'.

About twenty years ago I remember reading a newspaper article which gave me culture shock. It concerned a new Archbishop of Canterbury called George Carey. At that time he was being prepared for his first trip to the Vatican to see the Pope of Rome. His preparations included being taught how to make the sign of the cross. Great was my shock. How can an Archbishop not know how to make the sign of the cross, even if it is the new way, from left to right, and not the traditional way, from right to left? Our Orthodox three-year olds know how to make the sign of the cross and it is the first thing we teach adult catechumens before baptism.

I relate this story to explain to you Orthodox culture shock at the whole state of Christianity in these islands. Amazingly, there are still some who imagine that Christianity in these islands today is at the centre of worldwide Christianity. It is not. These islands are at the margins, on the periphery, a provincial province. 'Unsplendid isolation' is not a matter of pride, but of great regret. The centre of the Church is not in Canterbury, indeed it is nowhere in Europe and never has been. The centre of the Church is in Jerusalem, in Asia, for Christ Himself was in His human nature an Asian. Throughout history billions of other Christians have understood this, including, for example, a man called William Blake.

As to how these Isles came to be cut off from the wider currents of Christianity, so losing the sense of catholicity and falling into localism or 'phyletism', this is a question which does not concern us here. What concerns us is that this 'unsplendid isolation', indeed isolationism, was not always the case. Here are a few brief glimpses of what it was like before.

### 1. Romano-Celtic Christianity and Britain

Throughout this talk I will refuse to use the term 'Celtic' (Keltic) Christianity because the word Celtic has been so abused. In the 19th century it was used for self-justification by Puritans, who put forward the fantasy that the Celts were proto-Protestants. In the late twentieth century it was used by neo-pagan ecologists. They both overlooked the fact that there was no such thing as 'The Celtic Church'. There was only the Church among Celtic peoples and that Church used Latin in its services, it was hierarchical, believed in the priesthood, the episcopate, sacraments and practised an austere asceticism. Therefore, to describe it, I use the term 'Romano-Celtic'.

We should recall that the first converts to Christ were Jewish, followed by Greeks. In the West the first Church Fathers, like Sts Irenaeus and Justin Martyr were Greeks. The language of the Church of Rome was Greek until the end of the second century, when Latin first came into use. The very word 'pope' is Greek and means 'daddy'. It referred to all bishops until the eleventh century. The greatest Latin Fathers continued to be inspired by Greek, like St Ambrose, or else translated from Greek or lived in the Greek-speaking East, like St Jerome and St John Cassian. We recall how St Hilary of Poitiers was called 'the Athanasius of the West' and how St Athanasius came and lived in Trier, in what is now Germany, and there wrote his famous Life of St Antony.

I do not wish to speak of legends here, which concern the supposed presence in Roman Britain of certain legendary figures, rather I would speak of traditions which stretch back to the early centuries of the first millennium. The figures here are apostolic and international, who made use of the

providential infrastructure of the Roman Empire. First of all, there is the Holy Apostle Aristobulus of the Seventy who, according to those early sources evangelised in the west of Britain, and then there are the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, said by ancient, pre-medieval sources to have come to Roman London.

As regards the native saints of the Isles, we have, in the third or early fourth century, St Alban and Sts Julius and Aaron, whose feast it is today. One wonders if St Aaron was not Jewish. It is a Jewish name. Romano-British Christianity was alive in the towns and villas of Roman and, for a time, post-Roman Britannia. We know the plans of churches in Silchester and Colchester and we have found Christian mosaics and artefacts in many villa sites in what are now England and Wales. In all, there are no fewer than 68 towns and cities in this country today which have 'chester' or 'caster' in their names and they probably all had Romano-Celtic churches. Certainly, there were bishops in London and York, perhaps in Colchester, perhaps in other centres like Gloucester and Lincoln, for those bishops attended Church Councils in Arles and Rimini in the fourth century.

However, Christianity was certainly a minority, even elitist, religion that only concerned urban and villa life. After the Roman administration left Britain in 410, it left behind it a Christian Faith which was weak, even if reinforced by the mission in 429 of St Germanus of Auxerre, who reinvigorated Christian life here. St Germanus' influence is clear from the life of his disciple St Illtud, who taught St Gildas and influenced the monastery of St Cadoc.

Meanwhile, in the south-east of what is now England, Germanic peoples, collectively called 'Saxons', had been settling in numbers. By 450 Roman towns and country villas in the south-east, the strongholds of Christianity, had been more or less abandoned. With pressure from settlement in the east, what is now Wales became the centre of Roman learning. Wales was the real heir of Roman Britannia. This was helped by the spiritual renewal from St Germanus. Wales preserved Latin names like Constantine, Helen, Ambrose (Emrys), Dubricius, Justinian and Paul Aurelian. It was the red Roman dragon which became the national emblem of Wales and the country is called Cymru (Cambri) – the land of the fellow-countrymen.

Idealistically speaking, the native Christians of 'Britannia', now concentrated in and near Wales, were fighting for Christ against the pagan

Germanic settlers. The military officer Arthur who lived in the early sixth century, may have been one of them. However, the reality is that most of the British who did not leave with the Romans or emigrate to what is now Brittany were not Christians. They intermarried freely with the pagan settlers, as is made clear from the writings of the sixth-century Welsh St Gildas, who condemned the nominal, half-barbarous Christianity of sub-Roman Britain. This mass intermarriage is confirmed by contemporary English DNA, so strongly Celtic on the mother's line. The Romano-Celtic strongholds, above all in the west of present-day England, Wales and the area west of Hadrian's Wall, preserved some form of Christianity. Roman Christian villa and urban life continued. In Wales there was to come out of this Roman heritage the great figure of St David, by legend consecrated by the Patriarch of Jerusalem – a story perhaps not literally, but symbolically, true.

Roman civilization in northern Britain had increasingly become a Christian one, as during the fourth century Roman civil servants had been baptized. Here two names stand out. These are Patrick (Patricius) and Ninian. They were the apostles of the age. Both were Britons probably from the sub-Roman, Christian region, south-west of Hadrian's Wall and both were influenced by St Germanus of Auxerre. St Ninian († 450?) worked in Galloway and in what is now the southern Lowlands of Scotland, with his centre in Whithorn. He became the apostle of the southern Picts. Ninian had learned the faith in Rome. His stone church, dedicated to St Martin of Tours († 397), was in a place called in Latin '*Candida Casa*', in Old English 'Whithorn'. (St Martin himself was born in what is now Hungary, and lived in northern Italy before settling in Tours in what is now western France). As for St Patrick, we shall speak of him a little later.

## 2. Romano-Celtic Christianity and Ireland

One of the mysteries of history is how Ireland became Christian and not only acquired but then also preserved Latin learning, when it had all but disappeared in Western Europe. After all, the Romans had never invaded Ireland. However, from Roman coins and other vestiges found around the coasts of Ireland, it is clear that there were trading (as well as raiding) contacts, especially with Roman villas in what is now south Wales. It may not have been a case of 'Welsh' traders taking the Gospel to Ireland in the third or fourth centuries,

but the Irish taking it back themselves. They may have taken Roman-Celtic Christian culture back from Caerleon, the place of martyrdom of Sts Julius and Aaron, and from Roman Christian landed gentry in Gwent and Glamorgan to Ireland. Some say that St Declan of Ardmore, the first to bring Christianity to the Waterford area in the first half of the fifth century, had been instructed in Wales. Certainly the school of St Illtud on Caldey Island must have had considerable influence in Ireland.

The south of Ireland is claimed to have been the first area of Ireland to receive Christianity, but not from Wales. In the south of Ireland, they have found early Mediterranean pottery and glass from Christian Egypt. Indeed, sherds of Egyptian pottery from about this period have also been found at Tintagel in Cornwall. And if pottery had arrived, why not also Christianity and monasticism? Was not Ireland for long the only place in Western Europe outside Italy where there was knowledge of Greek? The later record of St Angus the Culdee says that a group of seven monks came to Ireland from Egypt directly. Only this can explain the Egyptian-type illustrations of the Book of Kells and the Egyptian bindings of Gospel books recently found in Irish bogs. This provincial Egyptian style was later taken to Iona and from there to England, where the style can be seen quite clearly in the Lindisfarne Gospels or in the Gospels of St Chad. And from there this style was then taken to the Continent.

We also know that other refugees crossed the seas from south-west Gaul and made their way to southern Ireland. They brought their Latin learning with them, as is recorded early in the fifth century. The links of Ireland with Spain are also clear. The Spanish Orosius speaks of a city in Galicia (a Celtic name), in north-west Spain, which had a direct relationship with Ireland. An Irish design of the period called the marigold design must have reached Ireland from Spain or else from southern France. (Later, there would be a Celtic emigration to Galicia, with the 'Welsh' founding the monastery of Santa Maria de Bretonia in Galicia).

By this time a number of Christian loan-words had appeared in Irish, the words for 'Christian', 'church' and 'priest'. The word for bishop had not yet appeared. This first Irish Christianity, existing before St Patrick, seems to have spread through the south and east of Ireland and knowledge of it must have reached Gaul and then Rome. This knowledge must lie behind the episcopal mission of Bishop Palladius, sent to Ireland by the saintly

Pope Celestine († 432). Most likely the former deacon of Bishop Germanus of Auxerre, Bp Palladius came to work in Ireland with those 'already believing in Christ'. He probably came to Ireland from south-west Wales; tradition says that he landed in south-east Ireland in 431. Three other bishops from Gaul came with him or soon after. Their names are also associated with the south-east and midlands of Ireland and south-west Wales.

It is now that we must mention the next mission to Ireland, that of the Romano-Celtic Patrick (c. 385 – c. 461), who, we believe, came from northern Britain, perhaps under the influence of St Ninian. In any case, Patrick's home seems to have been just south of Hadrian's Wall. Brought up as a Christian, his grandfather a priest, his father a deacon and with the Roman name of 'Patricius', in 432 he took classic Romano-Celtic Christianity, renewed from Gaul, to Ireland. That Patrick had been instructed in Auxerre under Bishop Germanus, by whom he was ordained, seems highly likely. St Patrick's importance is clear inasmuch as he, and not those who had gone before him, came to be thought of as the Apostle of Ireland.

His mission, sent after the repose or departure of Bishop Palladius, converted the north and east of Ireland, with its centre at Armagh. Certainly, Bishop Patrick went where none had gone before him. The (Christian) dove was indeed greater than the (Roman) eagle. There is no doubt that his mission was later much influenced by the ascetic movement from Egypt, for after St Patrick Armagh became a great monastic centre. In the early fifth century monastic influences from Egypt had poured into southern Gaul, and from there into Ireland. These came from the Desert Fathers of Egypt and Palestine, and it was their influence which shaped St Martin of Tours († 397) and St John Cassian († 433).

St Martin became extremely popular in Ireland and his life was translated in *The Book of Armagh* and reached Ireland before 460. This was not a one-way movement. In the mid-fourth century the first Bishop of Toul in eastern France was an Irishman called Mansuetus († c. 350). It is known that one of the earliest, greatest and most learned Abbots of Lerins in southern Gaul was a 'Briton', Faustus. It seems likely that this centre, where lived the Church Father St Vincent of Lerins, was a major source of inspiration for the Irish liturgy and monastic life. Two other British bishops are

recorded from this period, Fastidius (c. 425) and Riocatus (c. 475).

The essentially Egyptian ascetic movement took deep root in southern Gaul and spread north to Tours on the River Loire. From its mouth at Nantes, Ireland is a sea journey away and Irish ships were often reported there. Seeking the desert, islands, caves and hills, Ireland and anywhere else that had not been affected by the Roman Empire (the Channel Islands, the Isles of Scilly, Cornwall, parts of Wales and Scotland) would have made ideal destinations for these ascetics. Eventually, these 'papar' (fathers) would be drawn to the Orkneys, to the Shetlands, in about the year 700 to the Faeroes, and certainly by the early ninth century, Iceland, and perhaps even further afield, to North America.

There also seem to have been direct contacts with the North African and Mediterranean world and southern Ireland. Many sites in Ireland have the prefixes Disert (desert) and Teampall (temple). The word 'desert' is directly linked with the east. The 'deserts' predominate in the south of Ireland. Egyptian monastic influence can also be seen in the physical layout of monasteries, fasting, other ascetic practices and the importance of Saturday night vigil services.

It is interesting to see the fusion of all these influences from Romano-Celtic Wales, Gaul, Spain, North Africa, Egypt, the 'East' and from St Ninian's Whithorn and from St Patrick, in central Ireland. Here were created the great Irish monasteries of the sixth and seventh centuries, of St Enda of Aran (✚ c. 530) and, above all, of St Finnian of Clonard (✚ 549), called 'the Teacher of the Saints of Ireland'. They merged the learning of St Patrick, the influence of St Ninian and that of the Romano-Celtic Sts Dubricius, Cadoc, Gildas, David and especially Illtud in Wales with currents from Egypt and Gaul. Thus, in Ireland austerity was combined with learning. And the spiritual descendants of these pioneers spread from there.

If the main characteristic of monasticism in the east is the desert, in the west it is the island. No more suitable place for ascetics can be found than this archipelago of Isles – in Celtic languages – Ynys, Inch and Inish. It can be seen above all in the Irish or Irish-inspired who populated them, whether on Aran and Inishmore (St Enda), Inishmurray (St Laserian), Scattery (St Senan), Inishbofin (St Colman), Skellig Michael, the Isle of Man (St Maughold), Iona (Sts Columba and Adamnan), Rona (St Ronan), Barra (St Finbar), the Flannan Islands (St Flannan), Inch Cailleach

(St Kentigerna), Inch Kenneth (St Kenneth), Inch Murrin (St Mirin), Bardsey (St Cadfan), Caldey (St Dyfrig), Barry Island (St Barrog), Ynys Seiriol (St Seiriol), Bass Rock (St Baldred), Lindisfarne (Holy Island) and Inner Farnes (Sts Aidan and Cuthbert) and many others. Hence the title of this talk.

### 3. Romano-Celtic Christianity and Scotland

Iona of my heart,  
Iona of my love,  
Instead of monks' voices  
Shall be the lowing of cattle;  
But before the world shall come to an end  
Iona shall be as it was.

*Prophecy of St Columba*

In the year 563 St Columba arrived on Iona with twelve disciples, all his kinsmen. It was 12 May, Pentecost Eve, the eve of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the future Scotland. What can we say of these Irish Christian missionaries, who actually gave their name, 'Scoti', to Scotland, formerly Caledonia? What can we say of St Columba, the first patron saint of Scotland before the Apostle Andrew? What can we say of him whom St Bridget prophesied as 'a great tree overshadowing both Ireland and Scotland'? He was the Enlightener of the North and, through St Aidan and Lindisfarne and many other disciples, the Enlightener of nearly half of England.

Meals at Iona were of the simplest. Wednesdays and Fridays were the regular fast days, though the rule was relaxed between Easter and Pentecost. In Lent the fast was kept till the evening of every day except Sunday. While porridge was the chief food, meal and flour were also baked into loaves. The monks used sealskins for coverings and their oil for light. For fuel the monks cut peat. They slept on heather or bracken, covered by a sheet and blanket. They slept with their cassocks on, for they had to rise at dead of night to go to services. Their pillow was generally of wood, though in the case of Columba it was of stone: a small granite stone found near where he was buried has always been regarded as his pillow.

The brothers lived arduous lives: they did the services day and night, they did farm work, as well as travelling on missions for the Saint by land and by sea, and they copied the Scriptures. The characters and designs used by these early scribes, today wrongly thought of as 'Celtic', were probably of

Eastern origin and had come to Ireland from Ravenna through Gaul. Though early Irish manuscripts have features peculiar to Ireland, similar interlacings are also found in early Italian churches. These interlacings symbolise life and immortality, having neither beginning nor end. It is believed by many that *The Book of Kells* was written on Iona.

St Columba said: 'If you wish to know the Creator, understand Creation'. St Columba asked St Dicuill: 'Why do you always smile? The answer was: 'Because no one can take God from me'. Once when he was visiting a monastery on the island of Eigg, he met two monks who each claimed to be a better preacher than the other. 'Stretch out your right hands towards Heaven', said Columba. The monks did as he told them and the Saint spoke: 'One of you is slightly taller than the other, but neither can come anywhere within reach of the white cloud floating above us. To your knees, monks! Pray for each other and for the people, and then both of you will reach higher than the clouds'.

St Columba travelled all over Scotland. He is said to have founded one hundred churches 'which the wave frequents', that is on the coast and on the isles. He and his disciples found their way into the wildest glens, as well as to the farthest isles of the ocean. Wherever they went, settlements were established on the pattern of the monastery of Iona and from each of these centres the monks went out to preach the Gospel:

Crossing corries, crossing forests,  
Crossing valleys long and wild,  
The fair white Mary still uphold me,  
The Shepherd Jesus be my shield.

#### 4. Romano-Celtic Christianity and England

In about 449 a pagan Celtic, or 'British', leader invited closely-related Saxons, Angles and Jutes as mercenaries to Britain. In this he merely continued a Roman policy, whereby many soldiers stationed in Britain had been Germanic mercenaries and had long ago settled here. In this way, they had given the name 'the Saxon Shore' to the southern and eastern coasts of what is now England. When the new mercenaries could not be paid, they decided to remain in the south and east of Britain, where already lived their kindred. Given the quarrels between the mainly pagan Celtic tribes, the invaders soon established their own pagan kingdoms in what would be called England,

intermarrying with the native British, or Celtic, women.

According to the Venerable Bede, Pope Gregory of Rome, the former papal ambassador to New Rome (later called Constantinople), was the first to be inspired to enlighten the so-called 'Anglo-Saxons', that is, the pagan English. Denied his apostolic, missionary dream when he was appointed Pope, Gregory appointed the Italian Abbot Augustine and 40 companions to carry out this mission which arrived here in 597, with cross and icon of the Saviour. It was through this mission that Augustine converted the English High King, Ethelbert of Kent, who provided the Roman missionaries with the freedom to spread the light of Christ.

It was indeed Kings, for example, Sts Oswald, Oswin, Edwin and their families, queens, princes and princesses, who did so much to spread Christianity throughout England in the seventh century. This time was looked back on as a Golden Age. This Conversion of England was an international operation, launched from Italy and from Irish Scotland. It would be a mistake to see the Christianisation of this Anglo-Celtic archipelago outside the context of the rest of Europe, Asia and Africa, east and west, north and south. As we have seen, one of the great inspirations of the Irish Church was Egypt. As we know, St Augustine was Italian and St Columba was Irish. Of other great saints of England (not 'English saints'), St Birinus was a Lombard, St Felix was a Burgundian, St Theodore was a Greek and St Adrian was an African. There is no room for narrow nationalism in the Church.

Mediterranean influences were not only those of Sts Augustine, Justus, Mellitus and Benedict of Wearmouth, who carried back from Rome great amounts of manuscripts, icons and relics. It was by the late seventh century, thanks largely to the Greek Archbishop of Canterbury St Theodore of Tarsus († 690), a friend of St Maximus the Confessor, that the term 'English' started to have its contemporary use, uniting under its name the nearly forgotten pagan terms of Angles, Saxons and Jutes. It was only on this basis that saints like Wilfrid of York and Bede the Venerable could conceive of the English Church and People.

Celtic influences came to Northern England, or Northumbria, through St Aidan († 651) and Lindisfarne, then to the Midlands, East Anglia and Essex through Sts Chad and Cedd and from the west St Aldhelm. In the North there is the

outstanding Anglo-Celtic hermit-bishop St Cuthbert († 687). His pectoral cross has as its central embellishment a shell from the Indian Ocean and it is tinted with *lapis lazuli*, a local imitation of the real thing from the foothills of the Himalayas in Afghanistan. It was the Irish and Irish-trained English missionaries like St Aidan and St Cuthbert, whose lives of holiness provided a bridge of reconciliation on a practical level between English and Celt

Here we should not overlook the influence of royal female saints like Sts Ebbe, Hild and Audrey. All of them are linked with coasts and islands. Here again we can speak of the Isles of the Saints and of Saints of the Isles. Indeed, much of the history of this Golden Age concerns monastic sites situated on islands, like St Cuthbert and the saints of Fame or St Herbert on Derwentwater, on peninsulas and headlands, like St Ebbe, St Hild or St Beg at St Bees, or in coastal Roman forts, such as St Fursey in Norfolk, St Felix in Dunwich and St Botolph in Iken in Suffolk, and St Cedd in Essex. Even inland, saints worked on islands, such as St Audrey in the Isle of Ely, nearby her St Huna and St Guthlac of Crowland, the English St Antony.

In the late seventh and early eighth centuries the missionary impulse from Ireland spread among the English, whether they were instructed in England or in Ireland. Thus, we have St Willibrord, an Englishman trained in Ireland, who became the Apostle of the Frisians, and St Boniface († 754), who from Crediton in Devon went to Nursling and sailed from Southampton to become the Apostle of the German Lands. It was St Boniface who was blessed by the Greek Pope of Rome, St Zacharias, and did so much to restore right Christian practice in corrupted Western Europe. (How about doing it again?). Together with him came a host of other missionaries, especially from the south and the west, from Tetbury, from Wimborne and from Hampshire.

When the Danish Vikings attacked northern England and Lindisfarne at the end of the eighth century, the faithful saw it as a punishment for their sins, the end of the Golden Age. Indeed, by 867, the pagan Danes had come to dominate the north and east of England, the area of Danish law. Faithful Christian leaders continued to defend English lands in the face of ongoing assaults by the Danes. St Edmund, king and martyr of East Anglia, was martyred in Suffolk in 869. However, it was not until 878 that King Alfred 'the Great' of Wessex began the reconquest of England by baptizing the

Danes. And where did he start from? From an island, from the Isle of Athelney ...

The great and pious King Alfred recognised the importance of connecting his own Law Code to the ancient Law given to Moses. Alfred's attention was directed both to temporal reforms and spiritual ones. Alfred alone is called 'the Great' and some have seen in him a saint. He it was who sent alms to India and collected travellers' tales from the Baltic and the White Sea in the Arctic. The ninth-century victories and reforms of King Alfred the Great of Wessex firmly cemented English identity. They would lead to the Silver Age of the great English monastic renaissance of the tenth century and its many saints, who included St Edward the Martyr († 978) and his spiritual mentor St Dunstan of Canterbury († 988), as well as St Oswald of Worcester and St Ethelwold of Winchester.

At this time English Church architecture developed considerably under the influence of those who had accompanied the Empress Theophano, by origin a princess from Constantinople, and virtual ruler of North-Western Europe at the time. As William Morris wrote in his book *Gothic Architecture*, 'The native English style derived from Byzantium through Italy and Germany'. This has been confirmed by the studies of academics such as David Talbot-Rice and Veronica Ortenburg. Churches then certainly looked very different from today's bland and iconoclastic Protestant churches, with their empty and colourless white internal walls and their unplastered external walls, picked clean of white plaster by Victorian vandals.

By the beginning of the eleventh century England, and indeed all these Isles, had fallen under the sway of Scandinavia, as we see from the life of the martyred Archbishop of Canterbury, St Alphege. These Scandinavian Kings were succeeded by the half-Norman (that is half-Scandinavian) King Edward in 1042. His death was followed by the final Viking attack and the English defeat of 1066. Most of the English nobility and senior clergy were either massacred or else dispossessed. Some headed for exile in New Rome, or Constantinople as it was later called. Only King Harold Godwinsson's daughter, Gytha, headed for Russia and married into the Royal House there, her son, Yuri Harold Dolgoruki, founding Moscow.



### Conclusion

Nearly forty years ago the late academic Fr John Meyendorff wrote in his book 'Byzantine (sic) Theology' that, 'the German-oriented papacy of the eleventh century was definitely no longer attuned to conciliarity'. This statement, couched in the ultra-cautious terms of the scholar, still based on the declarations of Orthodox bishops of the period, remains true today.

It might be said that in the eleventh century, spiritually self-isolated from the roots and heartland of Christianity in the East, the Western world entered its own unique 'Gothic' period, which in many ways it did not leave until its recent

mass de-Christianisation and repaganisation. It is not by chance, for instance, that the 'iconic' Houses of Parliament in London, though built not so long ago, were constructed in the Gothic style, a style quite unknown to the Orthodox Tradition.

It was perhaps in unconscious reference to the isolation of Western Europe that many centuries later the Anglican cleric John Donne wrote that, 'No man is an island entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main unto himself'. It could also be said that no nation is a nation entire of itself - and that includes island-nations.

*Thank you for listening.*

## From the Righteous: FROM THE OLD ENGLISH POEM 'CHRIST'.

**B**Y the grace of the Spirit, the glory of the servants of God was revealed after the Ascension of the Eternal Lord. Concerning this, Solomon, the son of David, a man most accomplished in verse, a ruler of nations, sang in spiritual riddles and spoke these words: 'It shall be made known that the King of the angels, the Lord strong in his powers, will come leaping upon the mountain and bounding upon the high uplands, He will garland the hills and heights with His glory; He will redeem the world, all those who dwell on earth, by that glorious leap. The first leap was when he descended into a Virgin, an unblemished Maiden, and there took on human form, free from sins, which came to be a comfort to all who dwell on earth. The second leap was the birth of the Child when He was in the manger, swaddled in garments in the form of a baby, the Majesty of all majesties. The third leap was the heavenly King's bound when He, the Father, the comforting Spirit, mounted upon the Cross. The fourth leap was into the tomb, safe in the sepulchre, when He left the

tree. The fifth leap was when He humiliated the band of those in hell in long torment and enchained within the king, the evil mouthpiece of the fiends, in fiery fetters, where he still lies, fastened with shackles in prison, pinioned by his sins. The sixth leap was the Holy One's hope-giving bound when He ascended to the heavens into his home of old. Then, in that holy hour, the throng of angels was enraptured with happy jubilation. They witnessed heaven's Majesty, the Sovereign of princes, reach His home, the gleaming mansions. The Prince's movements to and fro became thereafter a constant delight to the blessed inhabitants of that city. Thus here on earth God's eternal Son sprang in leaps over the high hillsides, valiant across the mountains. So must we too bound in leaps in the thoughts of our heart from strength to strength and strive after glorious things, that we may ascend by holy works to the highest heaven where there is joy and bliss and the virtuous company of the servants of God.

## The Decline of England: 12. HENRY II: STYLE *VERSUS* SUBSTANCE

By Eadmund

**T**HE red-haired and extremely energetic young man who succeeded to the English throne in October 1154 was the son of the Empress Matilda, and on his father's side was descended from the Counts of Anjou. He waited almost two

months before coming to England, making the crossing of the Channel on the night of 7/8 December, the vigil of the feast of the Conception of the Virgin Mary, and then waited until Sunday 19th December, the fourth Sunday in Advent, to be crowned. The symbolism of this was

obvious: the coronation which had taken place on the same liturgical day of 1135 had been a mistake, and was now being re-enacted nineteen years later with the rightful claimant, rather than a usurper. In the same way he showed marked reverence for the tomb of his grandfather, whilst Stephen's resting place was effectively ignored. Here was the fulfilment of the prophecy, allegedly made by King Edward III<sup>1</sup>, that the green tree of England would only flourish again once the split parts of its trunk were rejoined. As the first ruler since 1066 who could truthfully claim that the blood of Ælfred flowed in his veins, Henry did as much as possible to emphasize his own kinship with Edward III, while King Stephen and King Harold Godwinsson were to be quietly air-brushed from history. However this great founder of a new dynasty of Plantagenets on the English throne could only speak Latin and French, although we are assured that he could understand 'all the languages used from the French Sea<sup>2</sup> to the river Jordan'. He could also actually write his own name which, in the new age of universal aristocratic illiteracy, earned him the nickname '*Beauclerc*'. In the 1160s, hurling abuse at a visitor whom he accused of being the son of a priest<sup>3</sup>, he was more than a little disconcerted when this visitor replied that he was no more the son of a priest than Henry himself was the son of a king! Henry had the same, deep-seated insecurity as his predecessors, fuelled by the knowledge that he held the throne only through might, not right.

### Style over Substance

In fact Henry II was a triumph of style over substance, and his real nature soon became apparent, even to his contemporaries. His court, divorced from the real life of the country, now became even more a theatrical stage, thronged by posers and subject to very strict rules. Access to his person was increasingly restricted. Deference and formality began to govern such matters as the serving of his meals – some being invited to speak or dine with him while others were only permitted to admire him from a distance; and there was now a system whereby English earls now witnessed the King's charters according to a strict order of precedence and political favour. In the royal palaces, private apartments for the King were set aside from the more public buildings. This sort of regulation even pervaded the hunting field, where the hunt was carried on according to carefully prescribed rules, and the world of falcons and falconry became governed by a new formality, with parti-



*A contemporary image of Henry II*

cular birds being assigned to particular levels of society – an eagle for an emperor or king, down to a 'kestrel for a knave'.

Behind the scenes, however, Henry's personal character was rather different. Bernard of Clairvaux is said to have proclaimed of Henry, whilst the latter was still a boy, 'From the Devil he came and to the Devil he will surely go.' There was a legend (not discouraged by Henry and his sons) that the counts of Anjou were descended from a she-Devil, Melusine, who was part woman, part dragon, and who vanished one day in a puff of smoke when forced to attend Mass. He maintained a whole harem of mistresses long before as well as during his marriage to Eleanor of Aquitaine, by whom he fathered a large number of bastards, and like Henry I he often cuckolded members of his court. He enjoyed sexual liaisons with Rosamund Clifford, Rosamund's aunt, Ida of Hainault, and also with Ida's own daughter, by whom he fathered not only a future royal chancellor and Archbishop of York, but also the future Earl of Salisbury. He had made off with Eleanor of Aquitaine while she was still married to Louis VII and an acrimonious divorce ensued in order that she could marry him.



*Eleanor of Aquitaine*

During her previous marriage there were rumours that she had committed incest with her uncle, and also slept with Henry's father Geoffrey of Anjou. Henry's uncertain temper soon became widely known. When having a tantrum, he would thrash about, becoming incapable of speech, and end up chewing the rushes on the floor.

### The 'Canonization' of King Eadweard III

King Eadweard had never done anything particularly saintly in his life, his most passionate desire being hunting. His wife far outdid him in her charitable gifts, and of the two of them she would have made the better candidate for Canonization. There is no verifiable evidence that he ever touched anyone for what later became known as 'The King's Evil'. The miracles, alleged to have happened at his tomb, were few in number and not recorded until 1138! By fifteen years after Eadweard's death, the monks were no longer absolutely sure of the whereabouts of his tomb, a fact that indicates that there was hardly a press of eager pilgrims beating a path to it. After a complete lack of interest, the situation began to change under Henry I, who had been born in England and married Edith, the daughter of Margaret of Scotland. One Osbert, who came from Clare in Suffolk and was a monk of Westminster, took up Eadweard's cause in an effort to achieve recognition for the Abbey. A number of charters were

forged detailing large bequests by Eadweard to the Abbey, and material concerning him was 'collected', a polite euphemism for fabricated, such as the vision of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus. A popular cult having been fanned into existence, Osbert decided, with King Stephen's backing, to petition the Pope to grant Eadweard canonization<sup>4</sup>. The accompanying letters were lukewarm, however, and in 1139 the Pope had little political reason to do favours for King Stephen, who some men said was a perjured usurper. On the advice of his cardinals he decided to postpone action on the matter.

In the following twenty years, the movement flagged: no further miracles were reported, and there was no geographical expansion of the cult. However in 1159 there was a schism in the Papacy, and it was the kings who had to decide which candidate they would recognize. Henry II recognized Alexander III, and Abbot Laurence of Westminster, probably seizing the opportunity, organized a national petition, and collated all the available documents, which were welcomed by the King, flushed with the part that he was playing in European diplomacy and international affairs. The Pope duly considered and was pleased to issue the decree that Eadweard should be canonized, repaying his political debt to Henry with a most appropriate and welcome gift. The exact spiritual status of any deceased person is and must always remain a mystery. However the canonization of someone is supposed to acknowledge a revealed holiness. All I can say is that Eadweard never displayed those qualities in his life: they were artificially embroidered after his death, so that the 'Saint' who was canonized bore little resemblance to anyone who had actually existed. His canonization was enacted by a Pope whose qualifications are suspect and it was made for political reasons totally unconnected with Eadweard himself.

The tomb was opened and the body found to be incorrupt. It was translated into a new shrine in full public view in the church, the King helping to carry it through the cloisters at the opening of a great council at Westminster. Henry now had an antecessor who was declared to be a saint and to be able to work miracles such a holy monarchy must be especially fitted to rule the English church. But the council ended with the King in need of such a boost, for he was at serious odds with his primate, Archbishop Thomas.

## Thomas Becket

Henry II, as we have seen, was a libertine, and in Thomas he found a likeminded companion. Thomas was essentially a nobody: the son of an insignificant merchant; his nickname 'Becket' meant 'Beaky' or 'Big-nose'. Despite his lack of education, Henry promoted him until, in the late 1150s, he was allowed to represent the King on an embassy to the French King in Paris, intended to advertise England's wealth. He continued to act as Henry's strong-arm man and enforcer, becoming chancellor in 1154, and it was this role that he was expected to repeat when the King had him elected to the Archbishopric of Canterbury in 1162<sup>5</sup>. As a direct result of the Norman Conquest of 1066 the church had been perverted from an other-worldly group with Christ at its head, into an alternative source of secular power, so it is hardly surprising that it was at odds with Henry, who as ruler of England exemplified the principal source of secular power, and furthermore one that wished to subdue the church and bend it to his will. He was determined on a draconian set of 'Constitutions', which in effect recognized the King's right to discipline the clergy via the secular courts, to limit the English Church's access to the Pope, and in short to place the secular authority above the spiritual: an horrific presentiment of the programme later to be adopted by Henry VIII and precisely the sort of thing that Thomas, as chancellor, had been notorious for advocating.

### The Kings Plans are Frustrated

However the Kings plan started to go horribly wrong. The upstart Thomas suddenly had a Damascus moment, repented of his previous misdeeds, resigned his office as Chancellor, and demanded the restoration to the church of lands sequestered by laymen, even those with close connections to the court. At the conference at Clarendon in January 1164 the King forced Thomas by threats to agree to the Constitutions and also to make the other Bishops agree, but Thomas was now determined to act the role of Archbishop, and immediately repudiated the Constitutions as something extracted only under compulsion, and therefore invalid. The other English bishops, already deeply suspicious of Thomas' sincerity, having been told by him at Clarendon to set their seals to the Constitutions, now found themselves deserted by the very man who had compelled them to bow to Royal tyranny. They immediately abandoned him in turn. George

Foliot, the bishop of London, a man of considerable learning who believed (probably correctly) that he should have succeeded to the Archbishopric, became his most bitter critic. At Northampton in October 1164, in what amounted to the first state trial in English history, Becket was ritually humiliated and ordered to render accounts for his previous service to the crown, probably with the intention of forcing him to resign from the Archbishopric. Instead, in a scene so melodramatic that even his fellow bishops suspected him of ham acting, Becket appeared before the King carrying his own cross before him, as a new Christ bound for crucifixion. He then fled in secret into exile, and for the next seven years made himself a great nuisance, sending letters (many of them written by John of Salisbury, who was a much better Latinist than Thomas would ever be) rehearsing his grievances in the most exalted language to the King, the Pope and anyone else who might afford him aid. He seems to have believed that the King was still his friend, albeit one whose friendship was temporarily withdrawn, but this was not Henry's view of the matter at all.

When Thomas had at last worn down not only Henry but also the Pope, some kind of reconciliation was at last effected; but Henry was reluctant to grant him even the kiss of peace. Then, when Thomas returned to England and proceeded to open exactly the same wounds that it had been agreed should be left to heal, refusing to lift the anathema he had pronounced against his fellow bishops, and excommunicating the royal bailiffs who had administered the Canterbury estates, Henry's patience finally snapped, and at his Christmas court in Normandy, he directed his fury chiefly at his own courtiers. 'What miserable drones and traitors have I nourished and promoted in my realm, who fail to serve their lord treated with such shameful contempt by a low born clerk!'<sup>6</sup>

### Thomas's martyrdom

Four knights: Reginald fitz Urse; William de Tracy; Richard Brito and Hugh de Moreville, three of them barons with histories of service to King Stephen, and therefore needing to curry favour with the new king, promptly left the court and somehow procuring a ship, sailed to England. About sunset on 29 December 1170, almost certainly fortified with drink and determined to prove their loyalty to the King, they burst into the precincts of Canterbury Cathedral with the intention

of arresting Archbishop Thomas and forcing him to stand trial at Henry's court. The Archbishop's clerks insisted that he should flee, and forced him bodily through the cloisters to the Cathedral, which they entered through a side door, which Becket insisted be left unlocked. The four knights pursued him into the Cathedral where the monks had just begun to chant Vespers. 'Where is Thomas Becket, traitor to King and Realm?' they demanded, hinting by the use of his nickname their social disdain. The archbishop replied in kind, calling Reginald fitz Urse a pimp, and physically resisting their attempts to bundle him out of the church. Reginald was the first to lose control, striking Thomas with his sword. William de Tracey struck next, then Richard Brito, whose sword shattered as it passed through Thomas' skull and smashed into the paving stones below. Hugh de Moreville was busy holding back the press of onlookers, who had gathered in the nave of the Cathedral to hear Vespers. A clerk attached to Hugh's household then scattered the Archbishop's brains with the point of his sword, crying as he did so, 'This one won't get up again. Let's get out of here!' Bellowing 'Reaux, Reaux!' ('King's men, Kings Men!') the four knights and their attendants then fled back through the deserted cloister, leaving the small altar where Thomas had been kneeling a shambles of brains, blood and fragments of bone.

### The Results of the Martyrdom

This terrible death of a troubled and troublesome hysteric shocked everyone, and transformed his *persona* into something that he could never have dreamt of achieving in life. The monks of Canterbury, who had bitterly disliked him, had elected him only because he was the king's friend, and been horrified when he had transformed himself into the King's worst enemy, seized the opportunity and began to manufacture relics on a vast scale, to sell to the pilgrims who flocked from all over Europe to visit the Cathedral and see the place where this terrible thing had occurred. Canterbury became very wealthy on the back of Thomas' death, and his symbols, the image of the four knights and the leaden ampoules in which the bloody water was sold, became more familiar than the *Opus Anglicanum*, (English wool), which was the country's main export, each one proclaiming the wickedness of Thomas' murderers and the culpability of Henry II. Within four years of Thomas' death and in the same year as his canonization, the greatest Baronial coalition ever raised



*Thomas Becket's martyrdom*

against an English king, including Henry's own wife and sons, the most powerful earls and barons of England and Normandy, the Count of Flanders and the Kings of Scotland and France together with all those whose grievances stretched back to the reign of Stephen united to drive Henry II from the throne. It was not wholly due to Thomas martyrdom, however. Henry's refusal to make a permanent division of his estates and failure to entrust any of his four surviving legitimate sons with any real authority had much to do with it.

### Henry's 'Reconciliation'

At this moment of crisis, Henry at last made a show of reconciliation with his dead servant. Arriving in Canterbury, he walked barefoot to the Cathedral and spent the night in tears and supplication before Becket's tomb, not even leaving the building for the normal bodily functions. The following morning he had himself beaten by every one of the monks. There were perhaps a hundred of them, but we do not know how thoroughly the beating was carried out. It was probably mitigated to symbolic rather than actual force, bearing in mind the person to whom it was

administered. He then rode back to London. A few nights later, as he lay dozing on his couch, a minstrel strumming a harp for his amusement, and another servant massaging his feet, news arrived that the King of Scots had been taken prisoner at Alnwick. Within a few months the great rebellion had collapsed.

After 1174, Henry did his best to associate himself with the tomb of Thomas Becket, posing as the chief sponsor of his cult. The four knights who had committed the murder were exiled to the Holy Land where they are said to have died as Templars or hermits, their own sons disinherited at the King's command, leaving only widows and daughters to succeed them. Henry had already made his peace with the Pope, promising the service of 200 knights in the Crusades, and vowing to serve himself. This was later commuted to the promise of founding four new monasteries in England. The large sums of money that Henry sent to recruit his 200 knights merely poisoned relations amongst the Crusaders in the east, leading the King of Jerusalem into a rash campaign that culminated in the Battle of Hattin and the fall of Jerusalem to Saladin, so to this extent Henry did not in fact help his cause. The four monasteries were established not from his own resources, but from lands seized back from the Queen, Eleanor of Aquitaine, whom he was to keep under house arrest for the rest of his life. She was sent away to Sarum, and occupied herself in devising the Sarum Rite, an elaborate series of services, prayers and intercessions mapped out according to the dimensions and physical arrangement of Sarum's old cathedral. The Sarum Rite became adopted after 1200 as the standard non-monastic liturgy for most of southern England. As far as the church was concerned, although in theory Thomas' death brought 'liberty', in practice Henry very soon resumed the tight control over it that Thomas had protested against: the only difference was that the King no longer advertised his supremacy in writing. It was hardly surprising that many of his contemporaries still doubted his sincerity.

#### Geoffrey of Monmouth and the History of the Kings of Britain

Henry II and his court were not the only shams to flourish at this time, indeed the court made the culture of the counterfeit respectable. Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain* became a bestseller, and poisoned the stream of history for ever after: indeed to credit it with the title of a

history rather than outright fiction is to give it a stature way beyond its deserts. It claims to rely on a very ancient Welsh book, lent to the author by Walter, the archdeacon of Oxford: a book with about as much substance as the *Red Book of Westmarch*<sup>7</sup>. It is full of moonshine, deriving the origins of Britain from the Trojan Brutus, fantastically adapting and remodelling such figures as Vortigern, Hengest and Horsa, Lear, Cymbeline, Arthur, Merlin and Old King Cole in a romantic nonsense that many people nevertheless swallowed as real history. It has perverted truth to this day, as can be seen by the many still half-believed legends of King Arthur and the popularity of such television series as *Merlin*, to the neglect of the real (and equally marvellous and exciting) stories of our English past. Shakespeare was to drink deeply from it, and give its fantasies, now clad in deathless prose, a new lease of life. Not everyone was taken in, however. William of Malmesbury was mystified by Geoffrey's claim to have discovered new and previously unknown sources, and William of Newburgh declared openly and indignantly that Geoffrey was a liar toadying to the cowardly Welsh.

#### Gerald of Wales and the Invasion of Ireland

This new emphasis on the mythical Welsh empire facilitated the emergence of such authors as Gerald of Wales. Gerald was the grandson of a Welsh princess, and his father was a Norman baron. He was mistrusted as a Norman in Wales, a Welshman in Normandy and as a Paris-trained intellectual in England, so he never achieved the status or rewards that he believed to be his due. He acted as a sort of semi-official court forger, tampering with correspondence and in the process supplying one of the chief justifications for the English invasion of Ireland, an event whose consequences are still very much with us. There is a genuine papal letter beginning '*Satis laudabiliter*' ('Praiseworthy enough') addressed to the King of France, congratulating him on his proposal for a joint expedition with Henry II against the Islamic powers in Spain, but politely refusing papal support. It seems that a similar letter '*Laudabiliter*' was sent to Henry II, praising Henry's proposals to invade Ireland but nonetheless cautioning against them. In Gerald's hands this was subtly changed, presenting the Irish expedition as a papally approved venture, and in 1127, in the aftermath of Thomas Becket's murder, Henry, perhaps attempting to insinuate himself further into the church's good books, landed at Waterford and spent nearly

six months campaigning in Ireland, claiming to act for the good of the Irish, and in particular for the reform and regulation of the 'unruly' (for this read Orthodox) Irish Church.

This arrogant assumption, doubtless based on his deep-seated feeling of insecurity, that the way in which one does things is the only way they ought to be done, is also shown in the fact that Henry II was the first English king known to have legislated against heresy. A group of foreign weavers denounced at Oxford in the 1160s and declared heretical by the church authorities, were handed over to the King's officers for punishment, branded on the face, and their houses and all their property ritually purified by burning. They themselves were expelled from the town to face starvation in the winter cold. After 1200 burning was to become the standard punishment for heresy. Previously it had been used to punish petty treason and the murder of a husband by his wife, and it is possible that the association between betrayal of one's lord and the betrayal of the Lord God explains this close connection. However until the late fifteenth century England was so over-governed that heresy had little chance to take root, and there were few 'holy bonfires'.

### Heraldry

Heraldry first made its appearance about this time, and with it the 'code of chivalry', an attempt to gentrify an illiterate 'nobility' whose only pastime other than hunting was to fight each other. Heraldry emerged from the practice of wearing some kind of token to distinguish particular groups within the *melée* or mock battle at the climax of a tournament. The badge of the Plantagenets was three leopards, which hereafter came to be imposed as the symbol of England, and still appear on the Royal coat of arms to this day<sup>8</sup>. Of course the Welsh and later the Irish were placed beyond the chivalric 'pale', a term derived from Henry II's conquests in Ireland and the establishment of the 'pale' of Dublin – a so-called 'civilized' colony amidst savage native barbarity. As enemies who raped women, murdered children and took no hostages (what actual difference was there between them and the Normans, who had done precisely the same thing in England less than a century before?) they were to be treated in their turn with savage and summary violence.

### Henry's Personal Fiefdom

Henry II had a huge personal fiefdom, which stretched from the southeastern corner of France to

beyond the Scottish border. It cannot truly be called an empire, for each province within his dominion was governed by its own laws and traditions, and Henry ceased to be a King when he left the shores of England, becoming a duke or a count or whatever was appropriate to the territory in which he was at the time, and in theory subject to the authority of the Capetian King of France. However Henry took Charlemagne (or the mythical king Arthur) as his example, and thought of himself as emperor in spirit if not in name. Under his rule the question was not so much whether the French King Louis VII would threaten Plantagenet lands, but whether the Plantagenets themselves might swallow up the whole of France. To that extent, London became an important city, as significant to the merchants of such regional capitals as La Rochelle, Cologne and Rouen, who by the 1170s maintained private harbours and halls for themselves there, as it was to the herring fishermen of Yarmouth or the wool farmers of Herefordshire. A contemporary, William fitz Stephen, describes the city as if it equalled or indeed excelled Imperial Rome. However all this too was an illusion. Henry's sons Richard and John between them contrived to lose most of their father's possessions, and by 1204, Normandy, Anjou, Maine, Touraine and the northern parts of Poitou were under Capetian rather than Plantagenet rule. Only Gascony and the far south, regions least visited and least governed by the Plantagenets, were still under their nominal control. Like a bright meteor, briefer even than the imperial system established by Charlemagne, Henry II's 'empire' returned to the darkness from whence it came.

### Conclusion

In 1189 Henry II passed on to whatever eternal place his tortured soul is destined to occupy, leaving two surviving sons, and we are left with the question as to what was real in the land he left behind, and what was illusory? The dynasty that he founded was real enough, and was to continue to provide England with monarchs (whom she could well have done without) until 1399. English rule over Gascony, won by his marriage to Eleanor of Aquitaine, was to last for three centuries. Ireland was supposedly 'won' for England, and Ulster still remains part of the United Kingdom, but one could say that, considering the problems that it was to pose to successive British governments, it has been more of a liability than an asset, and certainly the Irish church would have been much better off

without the interference that dragged it into a close relationship with the Pope. The palace that Henry refurbished at Westminster, and the new courts and administrative procedures there are still at the centre of British government and English law. Our present Royal Family are still imprisoned by the artificial privacy that Henry established, and although they have made efforts to break out of it, they have not even yet entirely succeeded in finding a reasonable balance between the withdrawn and the over familiar.

Having already lost her Church and consequently her soul, England also lost her history and a true sense of her national identity. The saintly King Edward the Confessor, a pious, bumbling fool, who was canonized in 1163, bore precious little resemblance to the flesh and blood Eadweard III of history, whose true character and nature has only recently been fully revealed to us by Frank Barlow, (*Edward the Confessor*, Yale University Press, 1997). But this only typifies the sort of change that came over this country at this time. One has the impression that folk lost sight of the wood, and concentrated only on the trees. Everything from the Bible to the natural world was examined minutely and in tedious detail: what was not known or understood was subjected to wild theories. During this process the whole of life was somehow mixed up: truth, whether religious (naturally the most important) or scientific, was either lost outright or hopelessly muddled up with fantastic theories, many of them self-evidently false, and demonstrably so by anyone who left his ivory tower for a moment and used his eyes and ears. This was, perhaps, a natural result of the Norman Conquest, a disorientation caused by the close rule of foreigners: a desire to escape from the dreary, hopeless, ever-present world of weary work with little or no possibility of reward, into a world of the imagination where anything was possible. This was perhaps symbolized by the new style of archi-

ture, which was beginning to make its appearance. The dim, glittering, exciting interiors of English churches had now gone for good, as had also the grim and terrible domination of the Norman churches with their weighty columns and barren philosophy. Now flying buttresses enabled the crude and massive stone walls of the Normans to be pierced with many dozens of windows, the light being diffused and gorgeously coloured by shards of stained glass, to cast bewildering, glowing patterns onto the walls; just as the simple truths preached by the English saints became mixed in a maze of philosophical theory. The tall spires that began to appear on church towers yearn towards heaven and a deity with whom all possibility of simple communication had been lost.

- 1 Nowadays commonly known as 'St Edward the Confessor'. As will be demonstrated shortly, Eadweard, whatever his real attributes, was neither a saint nor a prophet.
- 2 The French Sea = The English Channel
- 3 The new Roman Catholic religion had by this time, although opposed by long tradition, succeeded in forbidding priests both marriage and children.
- 4 Canonization had originally taken place on much less formal basis, the local bishop sanctioning the veneration of a saintly person in his diocese. However by this time the Pope had already seized the authority for having the final say.
- 5 The right of the monks of Canterbury to elect their own archbishop was still theoretically in existence, but had become honoured more in the breach than the observance under the Norman supremacy.
- 6 The familiar words 'Who will rid me of this troublesome priest' were apparently never uttered, and do not appear in any contemporary account.
- 7 For the benefit of those who are not Tolkien fans, it should be explained that *The Red Book of Westmarch* is the entirely fictional volume from which that author affected to derive all his stories of Middle Earth.
- 8 A little ironically they also appear as the badge of the English cricket and football teams.

## Orthodoxy Shines Through Western Myths (22)

### ENGLAND AND THE RESISTANCE TO ROMANESQUE ARCHITECTURE

**O**LDER Western scholarship on Church history is not generally of much use to Orthodox. Most of it is simply anti-Orthodox and therefore anti-authentic Christianity, even openly boasting of its 'Judeo-Christian' and not Christian civilisation. The anti-Orthodox

prejudices of such scholarship, when it mentions Orthodoxy at all, come simply from the fact that history is 'written by the winners', and even despite the First World War, up until the Second World War most Western scholars thought that the West had won.



It is different today, when the near-millennial crimes of the West are visible to all and nobody any longer listens to the voices of ecclesiastical institutions which moulded the last thousand years of Western history – they are clearly compromised. Interestingly, contemporary secular scholarship, which in its ignorance of Orthodoxy cannot in any way be accused of being pro-Orthodox, is an excellent source for Orthodox to understand what went wrong with the West. We can understand how, by renouncing the Orthodox Christian Faith in its anti-Trinitarian and anti-Christic *filioque* heresy, its former Church became a series of -isms, Catholicism, Protestantism, Lutheranism, Calvinism, Anglicanism etc, which have bred modern-day secularism and will eventually lead to the end of the world.

In the following article, the next in a series taken from various works of secular scholarship, we have selected extracts from *England and the Resistance to Romanesque Architecture* by the scholar Richard Gem, first published in 'Studies in Medieval History presented to R. Allen Brown' (1989). These extracts seem to illustrate abundantly the post-Orthodox deformations of Western culture which began with the spread of the new *filioque* culture behind the Papacy. Although ominously threatened for nearly three centuries before, under Charlemagne, these deformations were not definitively implemented until the eleventh century. The date of 1054 is thus seen to be symbolic of the very real spiritual fall which took place in Western Europe in the eleventh century. In the year 1000, the fall had by no means been certain. In 1054 it was. And it is that fall which has defined the subsequent history of not just Western Europe, but the whole world. But let the learned author speak:

pp. 132–33. Bishop Wulfstan of Worcester's Negative Views of Norman Architecture

Wulfstan of Worcester (1062–95), the sole Anglo-Saxon (*sic*) bishop to retain his see for a significant period after the Norman Conquest, undertook the rebuilding of his cathedral church in 1084 and by 1089 this was sufficiently far advanced to be brought into use. It was probably at this juncture that the Anglo-Saxon cathedral was demolished, occasioning Wulfstan's remarks which are reported by William of Malmesbury, on the authority of Prior Nicholas who was an eye-witness

'We wretched people have destroyed the work of saints so that we may provide praise

for ourselves. That age of most blessed men did not know how to build pretentious buildings, but they did know how to offer themselves to God under any sort of roof and how to attract their subordinates by their example. We on the other hand, neglecting our souls, strive to pile up stones'.

'We wretched people have destroyed the work of saints, pretentiously thinking that we can do better: but how much more eminent than us was St Oswald who built this church and how many holy men of religion have served God in it'.

The variation between the reporting of the words in William's two accounts leaves us in a little doubt as to precisely what was said, but the general sentiment is clear enough. In the first place Wulfstan lamented the destruction of the old building because it had been built by St Oswald and was a witness to his religious devotion as well as to that of succeeding generations of holy monks: that is, the old church might be regarded as a holy relic. Secondly, Wulfstan thought that the modern age was pretentious in thinking it could do better than previous generations of holy men. Thirdly Wulfstan seems also to have observed (though it is only in one account) that it was the holiness of a life lived in a monastic church that was of prime importance; that this could be done as well in a simple building as in an elaborate one; and indeed that too much attention paid to architecture might lead to the neglect of a holy life.

p. 133–34. Old English Holiness versus Arrogant Norman Colonialism

While there are grounds then for thinking that a late eleventh-century bishop might well have expressed views on simplicity of architecture being a fitting concomitant of the monastic life, there are more particular reasons for thinking that Wulfstan of Worcester specifically made some of the remarks attributed to him. The key idea here is the one about buildings meriting preservation because they are to be regarded as holy relics of the founders of the church. We do not have much other direct documentary support for the contention that this was a common Anglo-Saxon view, but the evidence of many Anglo-Saxon churches themselves points conclusively in this direction. At major churches such as the cathedral of Winchester and the abbeys of Glastonbury and Canterbury archaeological excavations have shown that the seventh- and eighth-century nuclei of the churches were retained right through to the

eleventh century, even when there had been considerable enlargements and extensions around the periphery. This is in marked contrast to contemporary Continental practice, where complete rebuilding was the norm when an enlargement of an earlier church was required. Wulfstan as an Anglo-Saxon would have been aware of this attitude, and uniquely well placed to have expressed it as late as the 1080s when he was the only surviving bishop of pre-Conquest appointment.

Wulfstan's Anglo-Saxon antecedents are of interest in another respect also. It has been argued above that by the 1080s Romanesque architecture had become a generally accepted language: but whereas this had been the case for perhaps half a century on much of the Continent, it had been true for little more than a decade in England. The first major Romanesque building in England had been Edward the Confessor's Westminster Abbey, begun probably in the 1050s, but it was only in the 1070s that the new style acquired real momentum, beginning with Lanfranc's Canterbury cathedral. Thus, while Wulfstan may indeed have come to the conclusion that a modest version of Romanesque was acceptable for the church of an observant monastic community, he was nonetheless in a position to have reached this view following an objective assessment of the Romanesque phenomenon as a whole. To him it was something new, and in radical contrast with the simpler pre-Romanesque architecture he had grown up with: was it a good thing? and was it appropriate for monks vowed to a holy and simple life-style? Perhaps he retained his reservations while going along with the current opinion of his fellow bishops.

The individuality of Wulfstan's views may be pointed up by comparing it with some contrasting views. Abbot Adelelm of Abingdon (1071–83), a former monk of Jumieges, set about gathering funds to rebuild the Anglo-Saxon abbey church which he had inherited, but he died before work could be started. The thirteenth-century author of the *de Abbatibus Abendoniae* records the tradition that Adelelm's death was a judgement upon him because 'by his smiling he detracted from St Æthelwold and his works, saying that the church of the rustic English ought not to stand but to be destroyed'. He could not comprehend the attitude that the old church was something sacred because of its association with St Æthelwold, nor could he accept its pre-Romanesque style. He saw things

only from the point of view of his background in the splendid Romanesque abbey church of Jumieges, and with colonialist disdain looked down upon what did not conform to this standard. Adelelm is almost the precise opposite of Wulfstan.

pp. 137. Pre-Schism Old English Architecture versus the New Schismatic Continental Style that began in the early eleventh century

... Thus at Glastonbury and at St Augustine's Abbey, Canterbury, Dunstan's monasteries saw no really lavish reconstruction: rather, the seventh- and eighth-century churches were retained with comparatively modest extensions made to them, while monastic domestic offices were constructed adjacent to them. Oswald's major monastery at Ramsey appears from documentary evidence to have been a simple building in conception (a cruciform plan with a probably unaisled nave); while if part of the surviving church at Cholsey belongs to his abbey there then the scale can be seen to have been modest also. The impression that is gained from a study of all the evidence is that the monastic reform movement in England was content with a conservative and modest architectural expression – and this was the legacy that it bequeathed to the early eleventh-century church, in which Wulfstan of Worcester was brought up.

On the Continent in contrast to England in the early eleventh century there was a new movement that was not content with the more conservative elements of a tenth-century legacy, but that created a new style of architecture: the Romanesque. Whereas there was a considerable regional variation in this architecture, such that it was hardly a single style at all, there are certain consistent features running through it. In the first place, there was a monumentality of scale that became the norm (rather than the exception as in the ninth and tenth centuries) such as Europe had not witnessed since the fourth century.

pp. 137–8. Cluny takes the lead in developing unOrthodox Church Architecture; in wanting a 'spiritual' architecture, it helped create a papocaesarist Superstate

At first sight it would certainly appear that the patrons of the new architecture were without distinction kings and nobles, bishops and abbots, and that indeed the religious orders played a major part in the propagation of Romanesque – one has only

to think of the role usually assigned to Cluny. On the other hand, it has already been suggested that within Romanesque architecture there could be distinctions between what was relatively more simple or more elaborate (e.g. Canterbury and Winchester) and, furthermore, it can be observed that it was the very excesses of Cluny that were one of the triggers in the search for a reformed monasticism that led to Cîteaux. In view of all this it would be facile and misleading to seek to classify Romanesque architecture as a unitary phenomenon vis-a-vis monastic ideology; nonetheless it is worth asking how the Cluniacs came to occupy the position they did – how what had been one of the strictest of the reformed monasteries in the tenth century had come by the end of the eleventh to build the most opulent church in Europe?

The Cluniacs were of course closely aligned with the papal reform movement of the eleventh century, which saw itself as having a mission to combat an unacceptable secularization of the Church. The strategy for this, however, lay less in returning to the evangelical precept that the Church was in the world but not of the world, and more in converting the Church into a centralized super-state that could command the obedience of

the kings of the world. Do we see something of the same notion in the, architecture of the great church of Cluny? That is, an expression of the concept that the Church should not aim to express an ideology of renunciation of the world through simplicity, but a domination of the world through magnificence – a domination that would, of course, be seen by exponents of this view as a domination by God through his representatives (rather than a domination by the representatives at the expense of God). Contemporaries would not have analysed the situation in such terms, they could not stand far enough back from the papacy to criticise its leading ideas in this way. But some at least could see that the great church of Cluny, whatever its artistic merits, was a *reductio ad absurdum* from a religious point of view insofar as it represented a total abandonment of the evangelical concepts of humility and simplicity. They went on, however, not to attribute the betrayal to the Church as a whole, but to exculpate the Church by blaming the monks whose duty it was to observe the evangelical precepts within and on behalf of the Church as a whole. The deduction was that monasticism must be reformed, and the resulting Cistercians were the supreme expression of this reform.

## QUESTIONS & ANSWERS



In 1900 the number of Orthodox in the world was 100 million; in 2000 it was 200 million. Other religions have seen at least a fourfold increase in numbers. Why has the increase in Orthodox been so small?

*B. C., London*

The main reason has been the genocide of Orthodox by atheists in the 20th century, whether by Turkish atheists, Communist atheists (10,000,000?) or Nazi atheists (27,000,000?) and the consumerist abortion holocaust that was especially severe under Communist atheists. This has had a knock-on effect. For example, it has been estimated that without the 1917 *coup d'etat* in Russia, the population of the Russian Empire would today be 600 million. The missing Orthodox are in heaven, not on earth; this world hates Orthodoxy because the prince of his world is Satan.



Is the name Amanda Orthodox?

*A. B., Ipswich*

Yes. Since the Greek Photinia becomes in Russian Svetlana, in Romanian Luminitsa and in English and French Clair, I think we could take Amanda as the translation of the Greek Agape and the Russian Lyubov, in other words, it is another form of the very rare English name Charity. So the feast day is on 17/30 September.



If you are hoping to open a church in Norwich, is there any chance of reopening a Russian Orthodox Church in Walsingham?

*L. K, Fakenham*

We open churches where there are Orthodox people and so a community need. There are only three large towns in Norfolk, the City of Norwich, Great Yarmouth and Kings Lynn. Priority must go to

them in that order. We do not open churches where there is no need. When Fr Mark was renting his railway station chapel in Walsingham, virtually all the people (and 20–25 easily filled the chapel!), came from outside the village. I thought at the time, in the 1970s and early 80s, that it would make more sense for a church to be in Norwich.



Why are some religious people so smug and self-satisfied?

*D. A., Manchester*

I think that this is clearly related to psychology, not to faith, since you can find such people in all faiths and of no faith. It concerns insecure people who want to find a black and white religion or system, which has 'all the truth' to the exclusion of all others. Of course, this does not exist – except in their imagination. For example, you can find Evangelicals who are convinced that they have already been 'saved'; they are very smug, especially since the rest of us are going to burn in hell! Then there are Roman Catholic Papists who will tell you that they are saved because they believe in the Pope and you therefore are damned! You can find it among Hindus and Muslims, especially converts, and you can find it too among 'triumphalist converts' to the Orthodox Church. But all this belongs to the realm of pathology, not religion, as you can find a lot of smugness among academics, politicians and atheists as well.



Is there some sort of division in England between Orthodox who venerate King Edward the Confessor as a saint and those who do not?

*G. L., Hamburg*

How very perceptive of you! Yes, it is true. There did not used to be so, because the 1054 date as the latest possible date for veneration was held to rigidly. However, now there seems to be such a division as the Church has been infiltrated by what I would call 'Halfodox'. I would say that in general the few English Orthodox who do venerate the Confessor are 'Establishment Orthodox', that is, those who put the British Establishment above the Church. And make no mistake, the half-Norman Edward, who built a Norman-style Westminster Abbey, had the first castles in England built by Frenchmen and promised the Kingdom to the Bastard, so causing the Invasion, was the very founder of the Establishment. He was a traitor to England and to the English – and therefore a bastion of the Establishment. To venerate this Papist saint is like being Russian and venerating

Kuntsevich and Bobola or being Serb and venerating Ante Pavelic.



From an Orthodox viewpoint, what are we to think of the often magnificent reredos behind many Catholic altars?

*V. B., Zuerich*

It is significant that these reredos, though often magnificent as you say, are positioned behind the altar tables. In Orthodox churches they would be in front of the altar-tables, in other words they would perform the role of iconostases. This means that Catholic churches are like Orthodox churches which have no altars or sanctuaries. I think that is highly symbolical in theological terms. This is even truer of Protestant churches, which, like Old Ritualist prayer rooms, have no altar at all. Their 'churches' end at the nave, symbolizing their lack of priesthood and lack of sacramental life. The mixture of 'feelgood', simplistic songs (hymns) and moralizing clericalist berating with the aim of making people feel guilty, is not worship.



Is it true that only olive oil may be used for church lamps?

*K. B., Norwich*

This is a convert story. According to convert idealism we should only use olive oil and pure beeswax candles and have hand-painted icons. The reality is that we often venerate mounted and machine-painted icons, use all sorts of vegetable and olive oil and tealights (as in the Russian Cathedral in Vienna) and we use part-paraffin candles. We live in the real world, not in the romantic world of convert dreams.



In the Russian Church there is a practice of a three-day fast before communion. However, if we are talking about communion on a Sunday, this would mean fasting on Saturday which is forbidden. I asked a Russian priest about it and he said that he does not observe this three-day fast. Isn't that hypocritical? I am confused.

*M. R., London*

Inside the Russian Church there is no confusion. Churched people, including therefore priests, do not observe such a three-day fast. (However, personally, like most others, I do avoid meat on Saturdays and eat modestly on that day). This custom was put into practice in Soviet times of persecution, when most Orthodox could only get to communion once a year and most did not or

could not observe the Wednesdays and Fridays and the four main fasts in the Church year. This three-day fast was a practice therefore for nominal Orthodox or for people who could not get to church, because there were so few churches. Churched Russian Orthodox do not observe this three-day fast because they already keep the Wednesdays and Fridays and the four main fasts. It is for us something of the past, or for the unChurched, who are just starting to come into contact with Church life.



Is it true that Russian Church music comes from the West?

*G. N., Cambridge*

I think there is some confusion here. What comes from the West is not the music itself, but polyphony (ultimately, four-part singing), which is quite different from the monophony that came to Russia from Constantinople and Bulgaria in the tenth century. This polyphony seems to have been introduced in the sixteenth century in areas near Poland.

This has been extremely providential, because Russian polyphonic melodies can be adapted to all sorts of languages around the world, including to modern Western languages (English, French, German, Spanish, Portuguese and Italian). This is not the case of the monophonic, so-called 'Byzantine' singing or chanting, which does not adapt. This I can confirm, having heard 'Byzantine' style singing on several occasions in both English and French; the words and stress patterns are twisted to the melodies incomprehensibly and they sound like a foreign language.



Spiritually, what is narcissism? And how do you deal with narcissists?

*S. P., Colchester*

Like all -isms narcissism involves pride. It is a spiritual disease and is recognized as a personality disorder by psychiatry (NPD), though until recently it was generally called *megalomania*. It has become particularly common in the last fifty years since fewer and fewer now have faith in anything outside themselves, which has resulted in today's narcissistic 'I love me society', with its Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, iPad, iPhone etc. Narcissism is pride, manifested as self-centredness and self-love. Self-love naturally involves self-delusion (*illusio*) because self-love is blindness to love of God and love of our neighbour and, paradoxically, blindness to authentic love of self. (Authentic love of self – to love oneself as God loves us, is non-

destructive and involves self-sacrifice and humility, unlike narcissistic love which is proud and therefore destructive). Narcissism really is the towering sin of Lucifer, the most beautiful of the angels who thought he was so beautiful that he was better than God.

The signs of narcissism are vanity, pompousness, feelings of superiority, jealousy, manipulation, emotional blackmail (including suicide), total lack of empathy, gratuitous insults, pathological lying, megalomania, always wanting to be the centre of attention (Look at me!), the inability to tolerate contradiction, which causes hysterical rage, the inability to speak well of others, and ultimately violence. In Church life you have to be very careful since a small number of converts (and clergy) are like this. They want to join the Orthodox Church in order to be different from others and then take control. One such narcissist can destroy a small parish.

They are particularly common among old calendarists and other sectarians, including no less sectarian intellectual-type new calendarists. Two of the most extreme examples I have met are a new calendarist bishop, famous for his pompousness, vanity and self-admiration, and an old calendarist bishop, who is notorious for his unpleasant character, gratuitous insults, humiliation of others and love of having his photo taken. How interesting that the extremes of Churchmanship attract such dodgy individuals. Outside the Church you find many narcissists among politicians, TV personalities, academics, intellectuals (they preen themselves on their intellectual abilities), actors, singers (the Diva syndrome), so-called 'celebrities' etc.

Narcissism is always destructive and indeed self-destructive, as we see with Lucifer who fell from the heights to the pit of hell. Narcissism always involves separation, sectarianism, division. St Paisius the Athonite said of narcissism: 'When the ego is bigger than God, it is always destructive'. We can see it in history with Alexander the Great, Nero, Arius, Nestorius, Pope Gregory VII, Napoleon, Hitler, Blair and a host of other heretics and dictators. All these figures are antichrists and were called such by history. Antichrist will be the biggest narcissist of all, apart from Satan himself. He will love himself and hate all others, being charming, indispensable and absolutely evil, observing the Satanic teaching of 'hate God and hate your neighbour as yourself'. His love of self will lead to his own destruction because such

perverted love of self is hatred for the Creator and Creation, that is for himself.

Flee narcissists, because they destroy everything in their path and they obsessively seek victims, wanting to make them feel guilty and intimidate them because narcissists are predatory. They also get worse with age. The only good thing is that if you are silent in their presence, not contradicting them, so resisting them, they will flee you first. If you contradict them, they will fly off into a rage. This is what all sectarians do – they flee the Church, always in a hysterical rage of destruction, slamming the doors behind them, which in fact always ends up as self-destruction. Arius is the classic case, which is why St Nicholas slapped him to try and bring him to his senses from his hysteria.



Why do some Western converts lapse?

*P. W., Colchester*

I am afraid that it is not some, but a majority. I am convinced that it is because most clergy receive prematurely without testing the converts' knowledge of reality, of real Orthodoxy first. I have heard of so many who were given *The Orthodox Church* to read and then were received. That is absurd? An intellectual's largely dry, rationalistic and feelingless guidebook to the Church of God! And the fact is that most converts received into the Church in Western countries lapse because they have built their houses on the sand of intellectual persuasions, not on the heart. Anyone who converts because they are attracted to the Church only intellectually will inevitably lapse since they do not have the love of God and the love of neighbour necessary to survive in Christian life. The heart, not the mind, is the seat of Christian life. Until this is understood the lapse rate will continue to be 75% +.



What is the Western Tradition?

*C. K., Manchester*

There is no such thing! This is a phrase used by heterodox to justify their errors and differences from the Church, that is, their differences with Orthodoxy. That is why they call us 'Eastern Orthodox', a name that is totally racist. For example, they will say that organs, pews, not giving the people the Blood of Christ, giving communion in the form of a biscuit, not allowing married men to become priests, the Pope and the filioque etc are all essential because they are part of 'the Western Tradition'. This is like saying that

we must be Arians because that is part of 'the Eastern Tradition'!

Heresy is heresy and it must be called such. Traditions in the West, as in the East, or anywhere else, are either Orthodox (= of the Church) or not. The 'Western Tradition' is a myth artificially evolved over the last millennium in order to justify errors and heresies which oppose the Church of God, which is neither Western, nor Eastern, nor anything else. Thus, part of this self-justification involves calling the Church Herself 'Eastern'! The phrase 'Western Tradition' is profoundly ethnocentric and arrogant, since it places deviance and heresy above the Universal Church.

The only context in which we may use such formulations is if we are celebrating the Liturgy in a Western language like English or venerating saints who lived in Western Europe. This is the sense in which I wrote my book *Orthodox Christianity and the English Tradition*, in other words traditions in England which are Orthodox because they have remained as part of the heritage from the first (= Orthodox) millennium.



Are you thinking of opening an Orthodox church in Huntingdon?

*J. C., Huntingdon*

At present I know of only one person who is Orthodox in Huntingdon – yourself! There needs to be a community of local practising Orthodox in order to open a church. There should be among them someone who can sing and a desire to contribute financially so that we can find our own premises (we always avoid celebrating in borrowed premises – that should only happen in extreme cases. Temporarily borrowed premises like C of E churches never make Orthodox churches where we can feel at home).

In reality, although I visit the faithful in Cambridgeshire, as well as Kent and Lincolnshire, I do concentrate on the three counties of Essex, Suffolk and Norfolk. Having said that, there is near you a small town called Godmanchester. I have always thought that there should be an Orthodox church in a place with such a theological name!



Is it true that Luther committed suicide?

*A. V., London*

I am no expert, but as I understand it after Luther's death, Catholic writers stated that he had committed suicide by hanging himself like Judas. As to the truth of such a statement I can say

nothing. Nevertheless, it is interesting that two later Germanic-Jewish writers, Marx and Freud, are both associated with suicide. Two of Marx's daughters and one son-in-law committed suicide and as for Freud, he asked for 'euthanasia', which was duly administered. (On the other hand, 'God is dead' Nietzsche became insane, which may have been a result of syphilis).



Why do Greek and Balkan clergy wear their headwear very high, above their brows, whereas Russian

clergy wear their headwear very low just above their eyebrows?

*M. M., Paris*

It can get very cold in Russia!



What do you think of Vassoula Ryden?

*U. T., Norwich*

She is a New Age fraud and cultist, whose hobby is having her photograph taken with senior clergy who do not know any better. I would most certainly not give her communion.

### ANNOUNCEMENT

A Memorial Service (Panikhida) for King Harold Godwinsson and his companions, who gave their lives attempting to combat the invasion of the tyrant William the Bastard of Normandy in AD 1066, will be held at Battle (Sandlake) in Sussex on 27th October 2016 civil calendar

(Prid 1d Oct x ind by the Englisck reckoning), exactly 950 years after the battle took place.

Precise details will be given in the next edition of *Orthodox England*, and also on the website of the Guild of St Edmund [<https://sites.google.com/site/guildofsteadmund>], meanwhile perhaps you would like to mark the date in your diaries



THE GUILD OF ST EDMUND



## THE ARISTOCRACY OF ENGLAND by John Hampden Junior, 1846

*Continued from the last issue*

HERE is nothing in the history of the world more atrocious than the career of (William the Conqueror) this Frenchified Dane, this bastard of pure blood. Even his coronation was a scene of horror and carnage. When a shout was made in Westminster Abbey as the crown was about to be put upon his head, his soldiers without suspecting some treachery, instantly set fire to the houses around. There arose a dreadful scene of massacre and plunder, the rapacious soldiers of the Conqueror, says the historian, giving but slight proofs of that superiority in civilization which has so generally been challenged for the Normans

The Conqueror was no sooner crowned than he began to put in action his great plan, that of parcelling out, as he had promised, the country to his followers. For this purpose, he for a while pretended great mildness towards the English, and declared that he would rule them with more indulgence and mercy than any of their former kings had done. By this means he disarmed the fears of the people; many of their great lords came

in and swore allegiance, instead of banding against him; and he employed this time in building fortresses, and making his position strong. His greedy followers, who did not enter into his far-stretching plots, were clamorous for immediate possessions. A huge army of monks and priests had flocked over after the army of conquest, and devoured him with demands for lands, abbeys, churches, and dignities. The artful Norman gratified them so far as to move the indignation of the ravaged people, and put them into a temper for an outbreak which might furnish them with an excuse for that wholesale and universal devastation and robbery which he planned. Having taken this step, he then withdrew to Normandy, there to show to his subjects the heaps of wealth which he and his followers had gathered in England; and taking along with him the most eminent of the English princes and nobles, to the pride of himself and nation with seeing them in a sort of splendid captivity in his train. Part of the affluent spoil, together with the banner of Harold taken in the battle of Hastings, he sent to the Pope, whose

spiritual arms had so much contributed to his success; and a vast amount of other riches was distributed amongst the monasteries and churches.

This was sufficient to spread the fire of emulation through the whole of the Continent, and insure him as great a crop of adventurers as the measures which he contemplated might demand. In the mean time he had not merely withdrawn as it were to lure the unwary English into the temptation to revolt, but he had left behind him his half-brother, Odo, bishop of Bayeaux, whom he made Earl of Hereford, a warrior-priest of a particularly haughty and unscrupulous character, as his viceroy, with a number of his barons as a council. These men, who, according to the Conqueror's plan, were to vex and insult the people to the pitch of desperation, seem to have done their work very effectually. They fleeced the natives without mercy. Their soldiers ranged far and wide, committing, without any restraint or check from their superiors, the most unheard-of outrages. They plundered the houses of all classes, high and low, and offered the grossest insults to the women. The sufferers cried for help and justice till, growing desperate, they formed conspiracies, vengeance in various parts on their oppressors. The Normans became dreadfully alarmed, and sent the most urgent entreaties to William to return. But the wily Conqueror lay still. He knew that he had with him all the English leaders who could alone enable the people to make successful head against him, and his cue was to allow the insurrections to become rife and general enough to afford a plea for that ample vengeance that he wished to take. That once arrived at, he passed over again to England, and soon commenced the general war of extermination and confiscation against his English subjects, which enabled him to make himself literally the conqueror of every yard of British ground, and to parcel it out amongst his Norman followers.

To trace at length this war of extermination would be to write a volume of the most unmitigated horrors which ever blacken the page of history. The spirit of the English rose with its ancient valour against their ruthless oppressors, and it required seven years of the most determined and bloody executions to crush them to passive obedience. To every quarter of the island he had successively to march his fierce army, and wherever he came he made a wilderness of the country. In the west England, in Wales, and on the east coast, where the brave Saxon Hereward, lord

of Born, made a gallant resistance till he was betrayed by the monks of Ely, William left lasting traces of desolating campaigns. But it was in the north of England, of especially in Yorkshire, Durham, and Northumberland, that most dreadful tempest of his fury fell. Thrice he traversed the regions with fire and sword, and once more committed them to the tender mercies of his brother Bishop Odo.

The descriptions of this laying waste of the north of England by all the old chroniclers, Norman and French as well as English, are most horrifying, at the same time that there is nothing in history more thoroughly proved. The Conqueror is said to have been hunting in the forest of Dean when news of disturbances in the north was brought to him, and on which he swore by the splendour of the Almighty, that he would exterminate the whole of the Northumbrians, and never lay his lance in rest till he had done the deed. The implacably Danish and savage nature of his mind is shown in this, that though it required time to march northward, and to put down all the disaffected people, he never departed from his diabolical purpose, but after he had enforced submission, he sent out his whole army in exterminating columns to scour the whole country, and destroy man and beast, town and tower, before them. This army of human fiends, of what an old Norman calls a host of 'Normans, Burgolouns, thieves, and felons', went on in a fury of carnage over all Northumberland, burning towns, villages, houses, and crops, and slaying men, women, children, and cattle, with indiscriminate rage. Monasteries and churches were laid in ashes; amongst them Jarrow, famous as the former residence of the venerable Bede. The monks and clergy of Durham fled for security to Holy Island. When the rumour of this terrible work of destruction spread, the minds of men were stunned as it were with the horror of it. From Durham to York, a space of sixty miles, the whole country was so thoroughly desolated that not an inhabited village remained, and William of Malmesbury, who wrote eighty years after this period, says, that fire and slaughter had made a vast wilderness there which remained to that day. From Durham north to Hexham, from the Wear to the Tyne, the remorseless Conqueror continued the same infernal process. *Orderic Vitalis* describes the '*feralis ocisio*,' the dismal slaughter, and says that more than a hundred thousand victims perished. 'It was a horrible spectacle,' says Roger Hoveden, 'to see on the high roads and public places, and at the doors of houses, human bodies eaten by the



worms, for there remained no one to cover them with a little earth.' To use the words of modern historians 'the fields in culture were burned, and the cattle and the corn in the barns carried off by the conquerors, who made a famine where they could not maintain themselves by the sword. This frightful scourge was felt in those parts, in the months that followed, with a severity never before experienced in England. After eating the flesh of dead horses which the Normans left behind them, the people of Yorkshire and Northumberland, driven to the last extremity, are said to have made many a loathsome repast on human flesh. Pestilence followed in the wake of famine, and as a completion to this picture of horror, we are informed that some of the English, to escape death by hunger, sold themselves, with their wives and children, as slaves to the Norman soldiery, who were well provided in their citadels and castles with corn and provisions purchased on the continent with gold and goods robbed from the English.'

But what William did here for vengeance he could do even for the sake of his amusement. The account of his creation of his New Forest in Hampshire is almost equally revolting. Here he depopulated a whole country and burned down the houses and farms of the innocent people to create a forest. The tract of country included in this hunting-ground was not less than ninety miles in circumference, and contained, according to his own Domesday-book, a hundred and eight places, manors, villages, or hamlets, which were laid waste. Six and thirty parish churches were destroyed, and the people driven out without any compensation. For the wanton guilt of his deeds here, the people attributed it as a judgment of heaven, that no less than three of his family were slain in this very forest, amongst the his son and successor, Rufus. Tradition, both here and in the north, has preserved amongst the people the dark fame of these horrors. In Yorkshire are yet said to be found on heaths and in woods which have never again been brought into cultivation, traces of the plough, and these are supposed to mark some of the lands this time laid waste.

The ruthless Conqueror now divided the whole country amongst his equally ruthless Norman followers. All lands gradually passed by confiscation into their possession – thus did the aristocracy of England acquire the bulk of the lands of the nation, which by the laws of primogeniture, and similar provisos, have been confined in their

class, till their worth, advancing with the wealth and civilization of the people, have enslaved the nation, and robbed the third estate of its share of the constitution.

He seized also the treasures of the Saxons which they had deposited for safety in religious houses, on the pretext they belonged to disaffected and rebellious subjects. His commissioners, say the chroniclers, 'who did their work hand in hand, were not even particular to make a distinction between such property and that which actually belonged to the churches themselves. They carried off too all title-deeds, charters, and the documents.' To such an extent was this system carried that Holinshed tells us, there came at last to be 'neither governor, bishop, nor abbot of the English nation.' To more able, or more unprincipled followers – to those in fact who had done this devil's work for him – his liberality was as boundless as his vengeance had been to the poor English. To one William de Garenne he gave in the wasted north twenty-eight villages; to William de Percy, more than eighty manors. The English were thrust down, or compelled to sell themselves into slavery. The state to which he reduced this country is vividly described by Holinshed. 'He nothing regarded the English nobility. They did now see themselves trodden underfoot, to be despised, and to be mocked on all sides, insomuch that many of them were constrained, as it were, for a further testimony of servitude and bondage, to shave their beards, to cut their hair, and to frame themselves, as well in apparel as in service and diet at their tables, after the Norman manner, very strange, and far differing from the ancient customs and old wages of their country. Others, utterly refusing to sustain such an intolerable yoke of thralldom as was daily laid upon them by the Normans, chose rather to leave all, both goods and lands, and after the manner of outlaws, get them to the woods with their wives, children, and servants, meaning from thenceforth to live upon the spoil of the country adjoining, and to take whatever came to hand. Whereupon it came to pass, within a while, that no man might tread in safety from his own house or town to his next neighbour; and every quiet and honest man's house became, as it were, a hold and fortress, furnished for defence with bows and arrows, bills, pole-axes, swords, clubs and staves, and other weapons; the doors being kept locked and strongly bolted in the night season, as it had been in time of war, and amongst public enemies. Prayers were said also by the master of the house, as though they had been in the midst of the seas in

some stormy tempest; and when the windows and doors should be shut in and closed, they used to say *Benedicite*, and others to answer *Dominus*, in like manner as the priest and his penitent were wont to do at confession in the church.

Such were the dreadful atrocities committed by this bastard Dane; such the dreadful condition to which he reduced the country; and when we bear in mind that the whole of this was wanton, or rather diabolically perpetrated cruelty, and that it was perfectly unnecessary, the people, as they had shown, being quite willing to submit themselves to kind treatment, an honest man would as soon claim descent from the devil as from this arch-villain. But then, there were the other hungry villains who conquered for him, and did this fiend's work for him, that must he satisfied; and when we thus behold the oceans of innocent blood, and the horrible crimes that these Franco-Danish wretches waded through, we come to a pretty good conception of the perverted ideas of ancestry, and of every principle of honour that can lead our aristocracy to pride themselves on such a descent.

But, as I have said, these marauders had not even the paltry distinction of being true Normans, or of the first great horde which effected the conquest. We find from his own secretary, *Orderic Vitalis*, that, after his desolation of the north of England, great numbers of his chiefs, at once weary with his continual demands on their exertions in slaughtering and destroying, and glutted with spoil beyond their utmost expectation, preferred returning to enjoy it in their own country in security, to having to defend it everlastingly here from the attacks of the outlawed, or yet unsubdued English. William was highly enraged at this desertion. He denounced these fugitives as cowards; he offered yet greater plunder to them to tempt their stay, but in vain; numbers hastened away to Normandy, amongst them Hugh de Grantmesnil, his own brother-in-law, whom he had created Earl of Norfolk, Humphrey Tilleuil, warden of Hastings Castle, and others on whom he had heaped honours and wealth without bounds. He confiscated again the estates which he had granted to, such men in this country, and again published his brilliant offers of honours and of plunder, to the adventurers of Europe; and these flocked over to him in swarms from all quarters of France, Germany, Italy, and Spain.

In the reign of Rufus, other causes thinned out this original Norman stock, without introducing

others. These men, having estates both in Normandy and England, were beside themselves at seeing one territory under Robert, the elder brother, and the other under William. They saw that they could not long hold these estates in both countries, if these countries became entirely separated. They therefore never rested till they had roused war between the two brothers, in which some took the side Robert, some of William. William prevailed, and all those barons who had opposed him fled, and their estates were confiscated. After that, a great conspiracy broke out against him amongst those barons who remained, at the head of which was Robert Mowbray, Earl of Northumberland, on whom had been bestowed no less than two hundred and eighty manors. In this conspiracy were found engaged numbers of the most wealthy, and powerful of his Norman nobles, as William, Count of Eu, his own relation; William of Alderic, his godfather; Hugh Earl of Shrewsbury; Odo, Earl of Holderness, and Walter de Lacy. These, according to the old chroniclers, were defeated and destroyed in various ways, or escaped in troops to the continent, and their estates here were confiscated. In the course of these transactions, vast numbers of these insurgent Normans fell in the field. Their treachery had compelled Rufus to lean for security on the English, and they well supported him.

On his death, his younger brother Henry, surnamed Beauclerc, who had again usurped the government from his elder brother, the easy, good-natured Robert, pursued the same policy, and this caused a still greater clearing out of the first race of Normans. Professing great regard for morals and decency, he drove out of the country the dissolute companions of Rufus. He pursued to the death, or out of the kingdom, all the barons who had asserted the cause of Robert of Normandy, amongst them the Earls of Surrey, Shrewsbury, and Lancaster, till, says the historian, 'one by one, nearly all the great nobles, the sons of the men who had achieved the conquest of England, were driven out of the land as traitors and outlaws, and their estates and honours were given to new men - to the obscure followers of the new court.'

What now becomes of all the boasts of high blood? of descent from those victorious Normans who won England at Hastings? Here we have the clear declaration of history that these, and the sons of these, had either gone out, or were driven out till scarcely one of them remained. But if the proud blood of the present day be not descended from

these first conquerors, as it appears evident enough that it is not, there is every reason to believe that it is descended from a much meaner but equally rapacious brood-thieves, parasites, low adventurers, and ruffians of all descriptions, which continued, at all possible opportunities, to stream over from the Continent for ages, and to slip into the service and the favouritism of a succession of the worst monarchs that ever sate on any throne. We find these muddy inundations on almost every page of our early history.

During the civil wars of Stephen and Matilda, swarms of these vile mercenaries had insinuated themselves; had seized on castles and lands; had become such intolerable nuisances that a contemporary notes the exultation which the people displayed when Henry ordered them to quit the kingdom in one day. 'We saw these Brabancons and Flemings cross the sea to return to the plough-tail, and become serfs after having been lords.' But though on this occasion a pretty good batch of these animals was got rid of, the process of their insinuation was continually going on. In the disordered reign of Richard Coeur de Lion and still more so in that of the detestable John, they swarm like beasts over the devoted island. Especially after the barons had compelled John to sign the Charter, did he send out and collect to his standard troops of such adventurers from France and Flanders. At the head of a host of these base fellows, Poictavins, Gascons, Flemings, Brabanters, &c., did this vile king traverse his kingdom, now here, now there, like a fury or murderer, burning, destroying, and plundering, as if in a foreign country which he doomed to destruction. The very names his leaders and companions strike one with horror. 'Falce without Bowels,' 'Manleon, the Bloody,' 'Walter Buch, the Murderer,' 'Sottim, the Merciless' and 'Godeschal, the Iron-hearted.' To such men were his subjects given up, who tortured them to make them show where they had concealed their property, burned down their villages and towns, and the horrid monarch himself often setting them example by burning the house where he had lodged with his own hands, when he quitted it the next morning. Yet to these fellows did he give the towns and lands of such nobles as they destroyed, and they became part of the aristocracy, and transmitters of the proud blood of the English nobility.

To rid themselves of this nuisance, the barons in opposition to John committed a worse error, and created a nuisance greater. They invited over Louis,

the son of the French king offering him the crown, and thus was the kingdom put in danger of becoming a province of France; and the strange spectacle was beheld of a French prince and army fighting on the fair soil of England. Happily, in the following reign, Louis was compelled to retire; but in the mean time many of his followers had got possession of castles and lands, and also became part and parcel of the aristocracy of England, and the progenitors of pure blood. Again, the great evil of the reign of the weak Henry III was the inviting in and employment of these foreign adventurers. This was the perpetual source of his quarrels with the elder barons. At one time Hugh de Burgh succeeded in taking Bedford Castle, and hanging eighty of these foreigners, knights and others, who had been guilty of the greatest excesses. But still later we read that Peter des Roches, a Poictavin, Bishop of Chester, taught the king to detest the older race of barons, to undermine *Magna Charta*, and to rely on foreigners, with whom he filled up every office in the court, the church, the army and government. These hungry knaves, Poictavins, Gascons, French of every description, revelled in the national revenues, grasped at estates, and insulted the people in the most audacious manner.

Such is the state of things down to the year 1270, and we might pursue the matter further; but here is surely enough to demonstrate in what manner the oldest and best blood of English aristocracy has been compounded. It is the product of successive herds of the most miscellaneous and most bloody-minded adventurers which ever disgraced history.

Such was the Norman Conquest, achieved in robbery, rapine, and every crime at which humanity shudders, and succeeded by men and scenes equally revolting. Such was the monarch, and such the followers, who laid the foundations of the Norman power, and built up the fabric of pure blood in England. It is difficult to say which are the more revolting subjects of contemplation, the bastard king who led the way, the ready tools who deluged a whole land with innocent blood at his command, or the reptile swarms who, in the following age, stole in after them to deeds and usurpations equally detestable. Let the English people, when they hear of high blood, recollect the innocent blood of their fathers on which it fattened, and the spawn of miscellaneous, nameless, and lawless adventurers, from whom it really flows.

