

THE RISE AND FALL OF
THE ANGLO-SAXON AUTOCRACY

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FOREWORD

In her work on the battle of Hastings in 1066, the historian Harriet Harvey Wood writes that the battle “wiped out overnight a civilisation that, for its wealth, its political arrangements, its arts, its literature and its longevity, was unique in Dark Age Europe, and deserves celebration. In the general instability, lawlessness and savagery of the times, Anglo-Saxon England stood out as a beacon.”¹ This work proposes to examine the “political arrangements” of this great and still little-known civilization, and in particular its keystone, the Anglo-Saxon, or English Orthodox autocracy.

Why “Orthodox”, and why “autocracy”? The answer to these questions will become clearer in the course of this book, but here we can say briefly the following. First, Anglo-Saxon England was “Orthodox”, because her faith differed in no way from the faith of Eastern Orthodoxy, while the fall of Anglo-Saxon England in 1066 coincided with the introduction of the new faith of Roman Catholicism. For in 1054 the Roman papacy and Eastern Orthodoxy had anathematized each other, creating the schism that persists to this day. And when he conquered England, William the Conqueror showed, by his violence to the old faith and faithfulness to the new “reformed” papacy, that he was Roman Catholic rather than Orthodox.

Secondly, Anglo-Saxon England’s governmental structure was neither despotism of the Roman kind, nor “armed democracy” of the Saxon kind, nor even an embryonic constitutional monarchy of the modern English type, but “autocratic”. In other words, it was of the type found in Orthodox Eastern Europe, being based on the idea of the “symphony of powers” formulated by the Emperor Justinian. This ideal of a harmony, or “symphony”, between the religious and political leadership of a people, and with the people itself, has been rarely realized in history. Still rarer has been the realization of a *Christian* symphony of powers, in which the people and its religious and political leaders have been united with each other and with *the true God, Jesus Christ*, through a common confession of the true faith and an agreement on how to confess that faith in the world. We can count such rare moments on the fingers of one hand: the Byzantine Macedonian dynasty from the ninth to the eleventh centuries; the Georgian Bagratid dynasty from the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries; the Serbian Nemanja dynasty from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries; the Kievan Riurik dynasty from the tenth to the thirteenth centuries, resurrected from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries; and the Muscovite Romanov dynasty in the seventeenth century. All of these dynasties belonged to the Eastern Orthodox tradition. But perhaps the most perfect – and certainly the least well-known – example of the attainment of “symphony” comes from Western Orthodoxy: the English Orthodox kingdom founded by King Alfred the Great in the ninth century and brought to a bloody end by William the Conqueror two hundred years later, in

¹ Wood, *The Battle of Hastings: the Fall of Anglo-Saxon England*, London: Atlantic, 2008, p. 2.

1066.

This book studies the rise and fall of this kingdom, beginning with the Romano-Celtic-Germanic beginnings of British statehood, and with the seven forerunners of the All-English kingdom formed at the coming of the Roman missionaries to England in the year 597. We shall trace the struggle to attain symphony first on a provincial level, that of the seven Anglo-Saxon kingdoms in different parts of England in the seventh century; then the failed attempts to attain national unity under this or that provincial king in the eighth and the first half of the ninth centuries, culminating in the near-destruction of the whole of English Orthodox civilization by the Vikings; then the attainment of national unity under King Alfred, and the partial inclusion of the non-English races of Britain, the Celts and the Danes, into this unity by Alfred's successors, especially Athelstan, up to the time of King Edgar the Peaceable; then the destruction of this unity by the second wave of Viking invasions, and its resurrection under the Anglo-Danish monarchy of King Cnut; and finally the fall of the English Orthodox kingdom to what we may call the third Viking wave, that of the Normans, in 1066, with the consequences of the Norman-Papist Conquest for the English people and Western Christian civilization in general.

It is hoped that this study of the origins, rise and fall of the English Orthodox kingdom will be of interest and profit not only to those Englishmen who seek to rediscover their country's heritage before it was torn away from the One, Holy, Orthodox-Catholic and Apostolic Church in the eleventh century. May it also help Orthodox Christians of other nations to rediscover the ideal of Romanitas (in Latin) or Romeiosyne (in Greek) – that is, the ideal of symphonic harmony between all the spiritual, political and cultural forces of a nation, or family of nations, under the banner of the Orthodox Christian Faith. For “without a vision the people fails” – and the people has never been in greater need of this vision, so wonderfully realized in the English Orthodox kingdom in the so-called “Dark Ages”, in order to reignite its faith in the twenty-first century.

My debts are very many, and will be enumerated as fully as possible in the footnotes. I should like to make particular mention of E.A. Freeman, the nineteenth-century historian who in his massive work on the Norman Conquest first began – dimly, but truly – to see the full significance of 1066 for the English national consciousness; Sir Frank Stenton, whose *Anglo-Saxon England*, is still the best one-volume introduction to the subject; David Starkey, the distinguished historian and expert on British monarchism, whose ideas on the Anglo-Saxon monarchy I have found interesting and fruitful, even if I do not completely agree with them; Robert Tombs, whose *The English and Their History* is, in my view, the best one-volume history of England in existence, and Fr. Andrew Phillips, whose pioneering work on the relationship between Anglo-Saxon England and Eastern Orthodoxy has been an inspiration to me.

It goes without saying that I, and I alone, am responsible for any mistakes or misconceptions that still find themselves in the text.

Through the prayers of our holy Fathers, and especially of all the saints of the British Isles, Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on us!

*August 5/18, 2021.
Holy Martyr-King Oswald of Northumbria.*

INTRODUCTION. BRITAIN AND THE ROMAN EMPIRE

David Starkey begins his history of the British and English monarchies, somewhat unexpectedly, with - Rome, "with the Roman invasions and occupation of Britain. I do so for two reasons. The first is that the great Anglo-Saxon historian Bede, who, more than anyone else, invented the idea of England, thought that this was the right place to start his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*. The second is that Rome is indeed 'our common mother' and is the fount from which all modern western European countries spring.

"But, in the case of England, Rome is at least a stepmother. There is, uniquely in the Western Empire, an absolute rupture between the Roman province of *Britannia* and the eventual successor-state of Anglo-Saxon England. Elsewhere, in France, Italy or Spain, there are continuities of language, laws, government and religion. In Britain there are none [except religion, in the West especially]. Instead the Anglo-Saxon invaders of the fifth century found, or perhaps made, a *tabula rasa*.

"This is normally regretted. Civilization was destroyed, the common story goes, and the Dark Ages began. I am not so sure. For Rome was not so civilized as we think and the Dark Ages - at least in Anglo-Saxon England - were by no means so gloomy. The roots of the misunderstanding, I think, lie in the importance we attach to material culture. We too live in a comfortable age, so we are impressed - too impressed - with the apparatus of Roman comfort: the baths, the sanitation, the running water, the central heating and the roads.

"All these are, indeed, very sophisticated. But the politics that underpinned them was surprisingly crude. Not only was the Empire a mere military despotism, it was also peculiarly mistrustful of any kind of self-help, much less self-government, on the part of its subjects. This is shown by a famous exchange of letters between the Emperor Trajan and the provincial aristocrat and man of letters Pliny the Younger, who was then governor of Bithynia in Asia Minor. The important provincial city of Nicomedia, Pliny informed the emperor, had suffered a devastating fire. Might he encourage the citizens to set up a guild of firemen to fight future conflagrations? On no account, replied the emperor, since such bodies, whatever their ostensible purpose, become fronts for factions and political dissent.

"It was this enforced passivity on the part of its civilian population that helped make the Empire such easy meat for the barbarian invaders. It is the sharpest point of contrast with the kingdom of Wessex, round which England coalesced in the ninth and tenth centuries. Wessex was not a democracy, or even a peasant commonwealth, as some of its more enthusiastic Victorian historians assumed. But it was a participatory society, which balanced a powerful and effective monarchy at the centre with institutions of local government which required - and got - the active involvement of most free men. It was this combination, which was unique in Europe

at the time and long after, as well as good luck and inspired royal leadership, which enabled Wessex to survive, and finally to thrive, in the face of the Viking invasions that destroyed all the other Anglo-Saxon kingdoms.

“The result was England. It was an early, perhaps indeed the earliest, nation-state, with a remarkable unity of language, culture and politics. The vernacular Anglo-Saxon or Old English, not Latin as elsewhere, was the language of politics and administration. It was also the language of *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. This was no episodic monastic annal; it was a book of national record that charted, self-consciously and deliberately, the birth and development of a nation. All this gave Anglo-Saxon England a powerful sense of national solidarity: it could negotiate effectively with its kings even when they were conquerors; it could also strive to settle political disputes without the bloodshed of civil war.

“It was, in short, *different...*”²

Starkey’s main point is both valid and important: Anglo-Saxon England was indeed different, having evolved a form of participatory monarchy that made her more representative of the Orthodox autocratic idea than any other western country. His second point is also valid: that we have to begin our quest for the roots of English monarchism in Rome, England’s “stepmother”. My differences with Starkey are twofold. First, Rome, even in its pagan imperial period, was not a “mere military despotism”, being mixed with aristocratic and democratic elements from its republican past. And secondly, in spite of Britain’s break with Rome in 410, British statehood evolved *back towards* Roman Christian statehood rather than *away from* it; for the Anglo-Saxon monarchy was, in both form and spirit, an *autocracy* on the model of the Christian Roman (more precisely, East Roman or Byzantine) “symphony of powers”.

In 55 and 54 BC, Julius Caesar invaded Britain from Gaul, defeated the tribe of the Catuvellauni, and penetrated beyond the Thames. But he withdrew from the island without making any permanent conquest. Meanwhile, however, Roman influence penetrated into the south-east...

Until his death in 40 AD, Cunobelinus, “Great King of the Britons”, ruled vast swathes of territory from his two capitals of Camulodonum (Colchester) and Verulamium (St. Albans). To judge from his coins, he was a client king of the Romans. On his death in 40 AD, civil war broke out between his son Togidubnus, whom the Romans backed, and Caratacus. On being rejected by the Romans, Caratacus waged a long war for independence from Rome. Eventually, in 51, he was captured and was taken to Rome, where the Emperor Claudius magnanimously pardoned him.³

² Starkey, *Crown & Country*, London: Harper, 2011, pp. 3-5.

³ Miles Russell, “Roman Britain’s Greatest Rebel”, *BBC History Magazine*, June, 2017.

Caratacus' rebellion gave Claudius the excuse he needed to invade Britain in AD 43, and, as Starkey writes, "complete the task that Caesar had started. Claudius was eager to establish his warlike credentials, but could not afford to take any personal risks. The result was that this second Roman conquest of Britain became as much a piece of theatre as a military expedition, with its two initial leaders effectively acting the corresponding roles of impresario and general. They were Aulus Plautius, who the Roman historian Tacitus called a 'famous soldier', and Narcissus, Claudius's all-powerful secretary and an imperial freedman, who accompanied Plautius as a kind of political commissar. But the oddly matched soldier and the manumitted ex-slave proved an effective double act. Plautius, with his Gaulish auxiliaries, fought his way to the Thames, at which point Narcissus informed the emperor that it was time for him to set out. Claudius eventually arrived, complete with ceremonial elephants and a vast cavalcade - and stayed only sixteen days. But it was long enough for him to take part in a set-piece campaign masterminded by Narcissus. He crossed the Thames 'at the side of his troops'; 'caused the barbarians to come to hand in battle' and entered Colchester, capital of the Catuvellauni, in triumph. He was repeatedly acclaimed *imperator* by the troops and received the submission of no less than eleven British kings."⁴

This was only the beginning of the conquest of Britain; eventually, after many wars and rebellions⁵, about two-thirds of the island of Britain was incorporated into the Roman empire; Celtic Scotland remained outside. But Claudius's invasion paved the way for a more important invasion - the coming of the apostles. No less than four of the sacred band of the twelve Holy Apostles - Peter⁶, Paul,⁷ Andrew⁸ and Simon the Zealot⁹ - are said to have evangelized in Britain, and Peter and Paul, of course, are the

⁴ Starkey, *op. cit.*, pp. 7-8.

⁵ For example, the rebellions of Caratacus and Boudicca in the first century, and of Carausius and Allectus in the late third century (Kevin Butcher, "The First British Empire", *BBC History Magazine*, June, 2016).

⁶ The Church historian Eusebius, writing in about 315, said that "the apostles went beyond the ocean to the islands that are called British". According to *The Great Synaxarion of the Orthodox Church* (June 29), it was while St. Peter was in Britain that an angel appeared to him and told him to go to Rome to suffer.

⁷ According to Venantius Fortunatus (c. 580), St. Paul himself "visited Britain and furthest Thule". St. Clement of Rome (first century) says that Paul taught "the whole world and to the limits of the West". And Blessed Theodoret of Cyr (c. 415) says that "on being liberated from his first captivity in Rome, he preached the Gospel to the Britons and others in the West". See R.W. Morgan, *St. Paul in Britain*, London: Covenant Books, 1948.

⁸ George Alexandrou, "The Astonishing Missionary Journeys of the Apostle Andrew", *Road to Emmaus*, vol. V, no. 4 (#19).

⁹ Hieromartyr Dorotheus of Tyre (fourth century) and St. Nicephorus, Patriarch of Constantinople (ninth century), assert that St. Simon the Zealot, one of the Twelve and the bridegroom at the marriage in Cana of Galilee, preached the Gospel in Britain and was crucified here. The fact that he was crucified suggests that he was working in Roman-occupied part of the island; for crucifixion was a specifically Roman method of execution; and according to local tradition, this took place in Caistor in Lincolnshire, well within the Roman zone of occupation. However, the Russian *Lives of the Saints* edited by St. Demetrius of Rostov, while agreeing that St. Simon preached in Britain, claims that he was martyred in Abkhazia. This is geographically closer to the Persia mentioned by the *Roman Martyrology*, Bede's

“Roman” Apostles *par excellence*. It was from Rome that the Apostle Paul sent the first missionaries to England – the holy Apostle Aristobulus, first Bishop of Britain, and, probably, St. Joseph of Arimathea.¹⁰

Christianity expanded slowly in Britain after the apostles. In the year 156, writes the Venerable Bede, the first-known British Christian King, Lucius, known in the Welsh sources as Lleuver Mawr, “the Great Light”, was forced to send beyond the seas for missionaries to restore the Apostolic Faith – and it was to Rome that he appealed. The missionaries established churches in London, Gloucester, Glastonbury and Llandaff.¹¹

By the beginning of the third century, according to Tertullian, Christianity was established in the British Isles.¹² And it was probably to this period that we owe the first native British saint – Martyr Alban of Verulamium. The Turin MS of Constantius’ *Life of St. Germanus* says that after St. Alban’s death, “the evil Caesar [probably Septimius Severus], aghast at such wonders, ordered the persecutions to end, without the orders of the emperors, setting down in his report that the religion actually prospered from the slaughter of the saints...”

According to St. Gildas the Wise, writing in about 540, the British Christians “received the faith without enthusiasm”, but nevertheless kept it “more or less pure right up to the nine-year persecution by the tyrant Diocletian” in the early fourth century. He goes on to describe that persecution, when lack of enthusiasm turned into great zeal: “Before ten years of this whirlwind had wholly passed, the wicked edicts were beginning to wither away as their authors were killed. Glad-eyed, all the champions of Christ welcomed, as though after a long winter’s night, the calm and serene light of the breezes of heaven. They rebuilt churches that had been razed to the ground; they founded, built and completed chapels to the holy martyrs, displaying

Martyrology and the Anglo-Saxon poem, *The Coming of the Apostles*, all of which make no mention of any visit to Britain. Moreover, the famous monastery of New Athos in Abkhazia is dedicated to St. Simon the Zealot, and the locals are able to point to his tomb.

¹⁰ Hieromartyr Hippolytus, Bishop of Rome (third century) links St. Joseph with St. Aristobulus as among the Seventy Apostles, and says that Joseph was a shepherd in Britain

(<http://orthodoxyinfo.org/saints.htm>;

<http://www.stjosephorthodoxchurch.ca/default.cfm?module=%2747%29%20FH%2A%2D7%20%20%20%0A>). William of Malmesbury (early twelfth century) claims that St. Philip sent twelve missionaries from France to Britain, including St. Joseph. See Rev. L.S. Lewis, *St. Joseph of Arimathea at Glastonbury*, Cambridge: James Clarke, 1922. For archaeological evidence of a first-century church at Glastonbury, see Jean and Harold Taylor, “Pre-Norman Churches of the Border”, in N.K. Chadwick and others, *Celt and Saxon. Studies in the Early British Border*, Cambridge University Press, 1963.

¹¹ Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, I, 4; William of Malmesbury, *De Antiquitate Ecclesiae Glastoniensis*, 2; *The Triads of Britain*, 35. Many consider that there was no British King Lucius, and that he was confused by Bede with a king in Syria. However, as against that opinion, see H.M. Porter, *The Celtic Church in Somerset*, Bath: Morgan Books, pp. 125-127, and Protopresbyter James Thornton, “Saint Lucius, King of Britain: An Historical Enigma”, *Orthodox Tradition*, no. 2, 2010, pp. 17-22.

¹² “We have deacons, we have priests and we have churches, to the ends of the earth.” (*An Answer to the Jews*, Chapter. 7, Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 3, pp. 157-8) Then he describes the places: the Sarmatians, Sub-Saharan Africa, the British Isles, and the Scythians.

them everywhere like victorious banners. They celebrated feast days. With pure heart and mouth they carried out the holy ceremonies. And all her sons exulted, as though warmed in the bosom of the mother Church.”¹³

However, other ancient historians imply that Britain was spared this Diocletian persecution because of the pacific policy of its governor, Constantius, the father of the great St. Constantine. And indeed, there are remarkably few names of British martyrs¹⁴ or surviving chapels dedicated to the martyrs.¹⁵

However, we do know that apostolic succession survived: in 314 three British bishops – those of York, London and Lincoln – attended the Council of Arles in France at the invitation of St. Constantine and with his financial support. And in 363 St. Athanasius witnessed that the British were among those who kept the faith.¹⁶

*

The distant province of Britain should have been more committed to the new order of Christian Rome than any other for the simple reason that the first Christian Emperor, Constantine the Great, had been proclaimed emperor for the first time precisely in Britain¹⁷, and had taken the title Britannicus Maximus, “the greatest of the Britons”, in 315. However, in spite of some impressive architectural remains at Bath, York and Hadrian’s Wall, signs of Romanization are fewer in Britain than on the continent even after four centuries of Roman rule. Romans writing about Britain exhibit a certain antipathy towards this province, and the Britons retained, with the Jews, the reputation of being the least assimilated people in the Empire.¹⁸

Perhaps for that reason Britain became the platform for several rebellions against the central authorities in the late Empire. Britain, writes Starkey, “with the strong garrison required by its exposure to barbarian raids, supplied more than its fair share of military usurpers who aspired to the purple. It was also, like other remote outposts of empire, used as a place of internal political exile. The exiles conspired with each other, suborned the troops and generally subverted the province from within.”¹⁹ Thus

¹³ Gildas, *On the Ruin of Britain*, 9; translated by Michael Winterbottom, Chichester: Phillimore, 1978.

¹⁴ Among those we know, including the dates of their commemoration, are Martyrs Aaron and Julius of Caerleon in Wales (July 1), Socrates and Stephen of York (September 17) and, possibly, Bishop Augulus of Augusta and those with him (February 7). Augusta may possibly have been another name for London.

¹⁵ Lichfield, near Birmingham, may be the site of one such martyrdom. St. Martha’s church near Guildford (originally called “Holy Martyrs church”) may be another.

¹⁶ A.W. Haddan & W. Stubbs, *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents relating to Great Britain and Ireland*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, vol. I, 1871, 1964, pp. 7, 8.

¹⁷ In York. The place under York Minster where this hugely important event took place has now been excavated by archaeologists.

¹⁸ Michael Jones, *The End of Roman Britain*, Cornell University Press, 1998.

¹⁹ Starkey, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

in 350 a British officer called Magnentius donned the purple and was acclaimed by the army at Autun in Gaul, only to be defeated the next year.

“All these problems came together in the single great crisis of AD 367, known as the *barbarica conspiratio*, ‘the Conspiracy of the Barbarians’. *Britannia* was attacked from three sides: by the Picts from the north and the Scots (who then inhabited Ireland) from the west, while the Saxons rampaged on the Channel coast of Gaul and perhaps of Britain too. The Roman generals were killed or overwhelmed; internal conspiracy was given free rein and the fall of the Roman regime seemed certain. But the revival of an expeditionary force commanded by a general-cum-politician of genius, Theodosius the Elder, saved the day. The barbarians were seen off; military discipline was restored and the leading traitors executed.”²⁰

However, the British disease of political rebelliousness had not disappeared. In 383 Magnus Clemens Maximus, leader of the army in Britain, seized power and killed the Western Emperor Gratian. He, unlike Magnentius, was a Christian, a champion of the Church and a fine defender of the Western frontier against the Germans. Moreover, his usurpation of the empire should not by itself have debarred him from the throne: many emperors before and after came to the throne by the same means. Nevertheless, he is consistently portrayed as a tyrant; and Sulpicius Severus wrote of him that he was a man “whose whole life would have been praiseworthy if he could have refused the crown illegally thrust upon him by a mutinous army”.²¹

St. Ambrose of Milan rejected Maximus and remained loyal to Gratian’s co-emperor Valentinian II (in spite of the fact that his mother, Justina, was an Arian). He travelled to Trier in the winter of 383-4 to meet Maximus, but refused to give him communion, warning him that “he must do penance for shedding the blood of one who was his master [the Western Emperor Gratian] and... an innocent man.” Maximus refused, and according to Paulinus “laid down in fear, like a woman, the realm that he had wickedly usurped, thereby acknowledging that he had been merely the administrator, not the sovereign [*imperator*] of the state.”²² In 388 he was defeated and executed by the Eastern Emperor St. Theodosius the Great, son of Theodosius the Elder.

The way in which Ambrose could reject the British usurper Maximus, although his credentials were as good as many a pagan emperor, was a tribute to the way in which Christian Rome had transformed political thought in the ancient world. In early Rome a “tyrant” was a man who seized power by force; and in Republican Rome tyrants were those who, like Julius Caesar, imposed one-man rule on the only lawful sovereigns - the senate and people of Rome. During the first three centuries of the empire, many generals seized power by force and the senate and the people were

²⁰ Starkey, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

²¹ Sulpicius Severus, *Dialogues*, I (2, VI).

²² Paulinus, *Life of St. Ambrose*, chapter 19, in the translation by E.R. Hoare.

forced to accept their legitimacy. However, this changed with the coming of St. Constantine, who became the source and model of all legitimate emperors. Constantine, of course, had seized the empire by force; but he had done so against anti-Christian tyrants and was therefore seen to have been acting with the blessing of God. Now legitimate rulers would have to prove that they were in the image of Constantine, both in their Orthodoxy and in their legitimate succession from him. As for who the *real sovereign* was – the emperor or SPQR – this remained unclear.

*

By the early fifth century British Christianity, in spite of the political break with the Christian Roman empire, was well established. There are reports of British pilgrims consulting St. Symeon the Stylite on his pillar in Syria. And St. Jerome, on seeing the crowds of British pilgrims in Jerusalem, said: “It’s as easy to find the way to Heaven in Britain as in Jerusalem.”²³

But increasing integration into the Empire both politically, economically, religiously and culturally did not stop the Britons from being somehow *different*.

The uncomfortable fact was, as Starkey explains, the British “remained semi-detached from the Empire, just as the British now are semi-detached from the European Union. And it is as different, semi-detached and even semi-barbarous, that they appear in our final glimpse of Roman Britain. It comes from the poem *De Reditu Suo* (‘On his Return’) by the Gallo-Roman poet Rutilius Claudius Namatianus, who was returning home after serving as a high official in Rome. He travelled by sea from port to port and at one of these he met his friend Victorinus, the former *vicarius* (governor) of Britain. Namatianus then gives a pen portrait of Victorinus, which turns into a back-handed picture of late Roman Britain. Victorinus, the poet writes, had been a just and upright administrator, who had worked to win the affection of the British people *despite the fact that they were so remote and primitive*.

“Why such language after four centuries of Roman rule? There is only one explanation. Victorinus and Rutilius, Gauls though they were by birth, saw themselves as Romans and heirs to the culture and Empire of Rome. The Britons, on the other hand, were different. They might be within the Roman Empire. But they were outside the charmed circle of Romanness. They were subjects and natives. They were not Romans.

“Such, probably, is the background to the strange death of Roman Britain. For the Romans did not abandon Britain [a prosperous province, and an important source of soldiers and grain] in AD 409 of their own volition. Rather, it seems, they were

²³ Simon Sebag Montefiore, *Jerusalem: The Biography*, London: Phoenix, 2012, p. 185.

expelled by their discontented subjects, who thought they could defend themselves better than the decadent power of Rome.”²⁴

Thus in the years 406-410, British troops attempted to place the “tyrants” Marcus, Gratian and Constantine III on the throne of the Western Empire. Gratian was even given “a purple robe, a crown and a body-guard, just like an emperor,” according to the fifth-century historian Zosimus.²⁵ “Such provincial risings had occurred before and Rome had always fought back. Moreover, the leaders of the British ‘cities’, as the old tribes had been remained, had second thoughts and appealed to Rome for help. But this time the Emperor Honorius had more important concerns on his mind And now, for the first time, the central authorities in Rome did not fight back...”²⁶

There many good practical reasons for this decision. But the most important reason was undoubtedly the fall of the centre, of Rome herself, to Alaric the Goth in 406.

The huge psychological impact of this on the Romans was recorded by St. Jerome, who wrote from Bethlehem: “At the news my speech failed me, and sobs choked the words that I was dictating. She has been captured – the City by whom the whole world had once been taken captive. She dies of hunger before dying by the sword – scarcely do any men survive to be led off into captivity. The fury of the starving fastens on to nourishment unspeakable; they tear each other to pieces, the mother not sparing even the infant at her own breast.”²⁷

Tertullian had said: “In the Emperor we reverence the judgement of God, Who has set him over the nations”²⁸. It followed that the fall of the western emperor, and the capture of his sister Placidia among the booty, had to express the *reversal* of God’s judgement, His guilty verdict against the Romans, perhaps the whole *oikoumene*. Indeed, for patriotic Romans like Jerome, the fall of the City of Old Rome was equivalent to the fall of the whole of humanity: “The flame of the world has been extinguished and in the destruction of a single city, the whole human race has perished!”²⁹

As for the British, they were less shattered, not having invested so much in the name of Rome. Nevertheless, in 410, as in 2016, there were clearly those who lamented, as well as those who rejoiced at, finding themselves outside the Roman Empire. And this early Brexit did indeed mean Brexit: as Procopius wrote: “The

²⁴ Starkey, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

²⁵ Zosimus, *New History*, 6.2.

²⁶ Starkey, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

²⁷ St. Jerome, Letter 127, *P.L.* 22, col. 1094.

²⁸ Tertullian, *Apologeticum*, 32.

²⁹ St. Jerome, *Commentary on Ezekiel*, prologue.

Romans never succeeded in recovering Britain, but it remained from that time on under tyrants.”³⁰

“Tyrants” because, for the Romans, the only legitimate ruler had to be Rome...

St. Gildas the Wise, writing in the 540s, blamed his countrymen for the break, saying that they had “ungratefully rebelled” against “Roman kings”, and had failed in their “loyalty to the Roman Empire”.³¹ It is difficult to argue with that judgement: the British began as they continued to be thereafter - innovators, even revolutionaries, in political theory and practice. The land formerly known as “the Roman island” became, from the beginning of the fifth century, “a province fertile in tyrants” (St. Jerome).³²

*

“Tyrants” they may have been from a Roman point of view, but the rulers of post-Roman Britain did manage to impose some kind of order, albeit yoked to a distinctly lower level of material civilization. The most important of these was Vortigern, whom the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* records in the entry for 449, but who probably came to power some two decades earlier. The name “Vortigern” means “High King”; he probably ruled a large part of Britain, but we have no means of knowing how large it was.

Vortigern is best known for his offering lands in Kent and East Anglia to a group of Jutish barbarians from Denmark in exchange for military help against his enemies. We do not know whether these enemies were the Picts from the north, or, as the ninth-century historian Nennius supposed, the Romans to the south... The other major event of the period was the invitation offered by some of his Christian subjects to St. Germanus, Bishop of Auxerre in Gaul, to visit their island and help them against the heretical teaching of the British monk Pelagius, who denied original sin. St. Germanus came twice, in 429 and 447, and was victorious in his public debates with the Pelagians. Intriguingly, he also helped the Britons on the battle-field: as a former general he successfully organized an ambush of Pictish invaders, using “Alleluia” as the signal to attack. St. Germanus’ victories, both spiritual and military, indicate the close links that still existed between the British and the Continental Church – but also the vacuum of authority that required a bishop to put on his battle-gear...

St. Gildas wrote that his countrymen had “ungratefully rebelled” against “Roman kings”, and had failed in their “loyalty to the Roman Empire”.³³ He, too, distinguished between true kings and tyrants. Among past rulers in Britain,

³⁰ Procopius, *The Vandal War*, 3.2.38.

³¹ St. Gildas, *On the Ruin of Britain*, 4.1, 5.1, 15.1.

³² Christopher Snyder, *An Age of Tyrants*, Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1998, chapters 2, 8 and 9.

³³ St. Gildas, *On the Ruin of Britain*, 4.1, 5.1, 15.1.

Diocletian, Maximus, Marcus, Gratian, Constantine, Constans and Vortigern were all “tyrants”.

After that, however, there had been legitimate rulers, such as Ambrosius Aurelianus, “a modest man, who alone of the Roman nation had been left alive in the confusion of this troubled period... He provoked the cruel conquerors [the Anglo-Saxons] to battle, and by the goodness of our Lord got the victory”. His parents, according to Gildas, even “wore the purple”.³⁴

The distinction between true kings and tyrants was made by other distinguished British Christians. Thus St. Patrick, the British apostle of Ireland, called the Scottish chieftain Coroticus a “tyrant” because he did not fear God or His priests; “for the sake of a miserable temporal kingdom [regnum]” he would face God’s judgement on “wicked kings” [regibus].³⁵ Patrick’s use of the terms “king” and “tyrant” is not clear; his definition of the word “tyrant” seems to be a mixture between the old, secular meaning of “usurper” and the newer, more religious, Ambrosian meaning of “unjust or immoral person in authority”.

Then, at the turn of the century, came the famous King Arthur. He won twelve victories over the Saxons, fighting with a cross or icon of the Virgin Mary on his back, and halted the pagan advance westwards for at least a generation, until his death in 519. David Miles writes: “It is possible that Artos/ Arthur – ‘The Bear’ in Celtic, was the signum, or nickname, of Aurelianus himself. A bearskin cloak would have been a distinguishing element of his uniform as a Roman general.”³⁶ In any case, Arthur of Britain, with Clovis of France, was the first great king of the post-Roman West, and became the stuff of innumerable medieval legends.³⁷

However, Gildas was withering about the kings contemporary with himself: “Britain has kings [reges], but they are tyrants [tyrannos]; she has judges, but they are wicked. They often plunder and terrorize the innocent; they defend and protect the guilty and thieving; they have many wives, whores and adulteresses; they constantly swear false oaths, they make vows, but almost at once tell lies; they wage wars, civil and unjust; they chase thieves energetically all over the country, but love and reward the thieves who sit with them at table; they distribute alms profusely, but pile up an immense mountain of crime for all to see; they take their seats as judges, but rarely seek out the rules of right judgement; they despise the harmless and humble, but exalt to the stars, as far as they can, their military companions, bloody, proud and murderous men, adulterers and enemies of God... They hang around the altars swearing oaths, then shortly afterwards scorn them as though they were filthy

³⁴ St. Gildas *On The Ruin of Britain*, 25. Bede interprets this to mean that they were “of royal race”.

³⁵ St. Patrick, *Letter to Coroticus*, 21, 19.

³⁶ Miles, *The Tribes of Britain*, London: Phoenix, 2006, p. 162.

³⁷ Graham Phillips and Martin Keatman (*King Arthur: The True Story*, London: Arrow, 1993) have made an excellent case for the historicity of King Arthur.

stones..."³⁸

These kings were both Christian and "anointed". But they did not fulfill their vows; they were a terror to good works, but not to the evil – and by that criterion they were not true authorities (Romans 13.3), being linked rather with the tyrants of old, the Ahab and Magnus Maximuses.

So the break with Rome was still keenly felt. Celtic Britain had many great monks and hierarchs, but very few great, or even powerful, kings... But it attracted the continuing interest of the most powerful of kings. Thus there is intriguing evidence that in about 540 the Emperor Justinian was sending subsidies to the kingdom of Gwynedd.³⁹

However, after the great plague of 547, and the renewal of the Saxon advance, links between Britain and the East appear to have been more or less cut off...

The major exception was the Church, which was Orthodox and stronger now than it had been in Roman times – and still in communion with the Orthodox Church in the East.

Thus Simon Young writes that "in the west... there are various Celtic successor states but those too have left Rome far behind them. No surprise there. The west had, after all, always been the least Romanised part of Britannia and it was the very fact that they had primitive tribal societies instead of sophisticated urban ones that allowed the Celtic kingdoms to come through the storm in one piece. They were better able to fight off the barbarians. Indeed, the only Roman thing that survived there was Christianity – that had been the official religion of the later empire – and, closely connected to Christianity, Latin writing..."⁴⁰

However, as Chris Wickham writes: "Fewer and fewer people in the West called themselves Romani; the others found new ethnic markers: Goths, Lombards, Bavarians, Alemans, Franks, different varieties of Angles and Saxons, Britons – the name the non-Anglo-Saxon inhabitants of Britain had given themselves by 550, the Romani having left, and a word itself due soon to be replaced by a Welsh term, Cymry, 'fellow countryman'. Even in a part of the former empire unconquered by invaders, that is to say, the Romans were not the Britons themselves, but other people, earlier invaders, who had come and gone. And although of course the huge majority of the ancestors of all these peoples were men and women who would have called themselves Roman in 400, the Roman world had indeed gone, and Roman-ness with

³⁸ St. Gildas, *On The Ruin of Britain*, 27.

³⁹ Michelle Ziegler, "Emperor Justinian and the British Kings, c. 540", Heavenfield, <https://hefenfelth.wordpress.com/2015/03/20/emperor-justinian-and-the-british-kings-c-540>.

⁴⁰ Young, "Apocalypse then circa 410", *BBC History Magazine*, March, 2010, p. 48.

it.”⁴¹

Did the invading Saxons exterminate the Romano-British population in England, or was there a kind of merger? Much light on this question has been shed recently by a genetic survey of the Peoples of the British Isles (PoBI). Judith Keeling writes that “the PoBI evidence points firmly to a large influx of Anglo-Saxon DNA but also the presence in modern descendants of a substantial amount of an ‘ancient British’ DNA which most closely matches the DNA of modern inhabitants of France and Ireland.

“This led the researchers to conclude that there had been an intermingling between the existing Romano-British population and the newcomer Anglo-Saxons, rather than a full-scale population wipe-out.”⁴²

Especially in the north and east, the Christian Britons seem to have welcomed the new immigrant, and the good reception the Anglo-Saxons had may have predisposed them both to accept the faith of their hosts and to introduce “liberal” legislation on immigration in their law-codes. Thus “Old English charters—early medieval documents predominantly preoccupied with land grants, writs and wills. From the eighth century onward, these charters increasingly favored granting land to laypeople, many of whom were migrants. Those Americans who seek a return to the roots of Anglo-Saxons should realize that this actually translates to more open, inclusive borders. As historian Sherif Abdelkarim writes, ‘[F]irst-millennium Britain offers one glimpse into the extent to which communities mixed and flourished.’ Archaeological finds and historiographical sources, he adds, ‘suggest extensive exchange and assimilation among Britain’s inhabitants and settlers.’”⁴³

However, that there was great destruction and carnage in some areas cannot be denied. Gildas describes the sacking of a British city: “All the columns were leveled with the ground by the frequent strokes of the battering-ram, all the husbandmen routed, together with their bishops, priests, and people, whilst the sword gleamed and the flames crackled round them on every side. Lamentable to behold, in the midst of the streets by the tops of lofty towers, tumbled to the ground, stones of high walls, holy altars, fragments of human bodies, covered with livid spots of coagulated blood, looking as if they had been squeezed together in a press...”⁴⁴

Archaeological evidence – for example, at the great British city of Wroxeter near the Severn - confirms a drastic fall in the standard of living and of building

⁴¹ Wickham, *The Inheritance of Rome: A History of Europe from 400 to 1000*, London: Penguin, 2009, p. 200.

⁴² Keeling, “What Makes the British?”, *Oxford Today*, vol. 25, no. 2, 2013, p. 27.

⁴³ Mary Rambaran-Olm and Erik Wade, “The Many Myths of the Term ‘Anglo-Saxon’”, *The Smithsonian Magazine*, July 14, 2021.

⁴⁴ St. Gildas, *On the Ruin of Britain*,

construction in the second half of the fifth century.

When the pagan advance resumed in the second quarter of the sixth century, some of the British were still able to put up a stiff resistance. David Starkey writes: "The area around Luton and Aylesbury in the modern Buckinghamshire and Bedfordshire did not fall till 571 AD and Bath did not till six years later, after the Battle of Dyrham in 577 AD. And there were pockets of resistance even in the east – like Verulamium, the site of the death of the proto-martyr, St. Alban, and the principal cultic centre of British Christianity or the little British kingdom of Elmet in the modern Yorkshire – which held out longer still.

"By the end of the sixth century, however, the future political geography of Britain was becoming clear. The Britons held on to the territories to the north of Hadrian's Wall, to Cumbria and to the west of the Severn and Wye valleys, while the Anglo-Saxons had conquered everything to the east and to the south."⁴⁵

Now Arthur of Britain, like Clovis of France, was considered a Roman leader of the post-Roman West. And yet by this time Old Rome was well on the way to resurrection in a new form. Under the leadership of the popes it had been restored to ecclesiastical and political unity with the New Rome of Constantinople, and was recovering much of its power and influence among the western peoples. The crucial figure in this revival was Pope Gregory I – "the Great". As well as restoring the power and influence of the papacy throughout continental Western Europe, he determined on recovering Britain, "the Roman island", where the heirs of Christian Rome in Britain had been driven to the West by the pagan Anglo-Saxons. And so, being unable to go himself, he sent his disciple, Abbot Augustine, to England with orders to link up with the British Christians and convert the Anglo-Saxons. Thus Rome was back. Only this time, as J.M. Roberts remarks, "it was another Rome which was to convert the English nation, not *the empire*,"⁴⁶ which had first brought the island within the scope of Roman civilization, but *the Church*...

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What kind of state or states did the missionaries sent to Britain by St. Gregory encounter? The Anglo-Saxons were not town-dwellers, but lived in villages whose houses were well separated from each other. They tended to return to them even after wars had destroyed them. And so "the pattern of rural settlements," writes Martin Wainwright, "established between AD 410 and 1066 survives to this day"⁴⁷

"Fertile, level and well-watered ground was reserved for grazing domestic animals or growing crops, so the land chosen by the Anglo-Saxons for their dwellings

⁴⁵ Starkey, *The Monarchy of England*, vol. 1, London: Chatto & Windus, 2004, p. 16.

⁴⁶ Roberts, *History of the World*, Oxford: Helicon Publishing, 1992, p. 237.

⁴⁷ Wainwright, *The English Village*, London: Michael O'Mara Books, 2011, p. 16.

was often inferior. Architecture was similarly practical. Most villagers lived in modest two-room huts or cabins, half for the family, the other half as a byre for their animals, with a 16-foot opening to admit a pair of yoked cattle...

"... The God-fearing culture of the Anglo-Saxons was reluctant to challenge the Lord's house by erecting some more magnificent secular buildings. The thane would have his hall, and some of them were relatively imposing, but the best craftsmen were always directed to the church and the priest. Their work was modest compared to the glories of church architecture to come, but it was so sound and well executed that more than 400 churches with Saxon work survive..."⁴⁸

At the political level, the society of the Angles and Saxons in their continental homeland was what Tacitus called an "armed democracy": they appear to have had no kings. "But England, in the immediate aftermath of the Anglo-Saxon conquest," writes Starkey, "offered special circumstances which encouraged the development of kingship beyond anything the Germans were familiar with back home. Most important was the long, hard-fought nature of the conquest itself. For the Anglo-Saxons' more-or-less permanent state of war to the death with the British required equally permanent leaders. Moreover, war in a prosperous country like Britain produced booty, which made the war-leaders rich. From this new wealth they could renew their followers. This attracted fresh followers and consolidated the loyalty of the old, which made the leaders more powerful still. And so. Finally, the power and the permanence coalesced into kingship..."⁴⁹

The Anglo-Saxon kingdoms all - with one exception - claimed to derive their origins from the god Woden. (The exception was the kingdom of the East Saxons, in which London was situated, and whose founder was said to be the god Saxnot.⁵⁰) Now this was, of course, a pagan superstition. And yet there was an important truth hidden in this superstition: the truth, namely, that "all power comes from God" (Romans 12.1), for it is God - the true God, the Lord Jesus Christ - Who gives kingship and consequent freedom from anarchy, that worst of all evils, to men.

If God is the Giver of kingship, then it is inseparable from God's Kingdom on earth, the Church. However, Orthodox Christians believe that although the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of men should be united, they are still in principle distinct: "My Kingdom is not of this world," said the King of kings to the representative of Caesar. The ideal relationship between the two is one of harmonic "symphony" that makes for their close cooperation while preserving the distinctiveness and autonomy of each.

As the Emperor Justinian put it in his *Sixth Novella*: "The greatest gifts given by

⁴⁸ Wainwright, *op. cit.*, pp. 16-17, 46.

⁴⁹ Starkey, *The Monarchy of England*, p. 25.

⁵⁰ Sir Frank Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1971, p. 54.

God to men by His supreme kindness are the priesthood and the empire, of which the first serves the things of God and the second rules the things of men and assumes the burden of care for them. Both proceed from one source and adorn the life of man. Nothing therefore will be so greatly desired by the emperors than the honour of the priests, since they always pray to God about both these very things. For if the first is without reproach and adorned with faithfulness to God, and the other adorns the state entrusted to it rightly and competently, a good symphony will exist, which will offer everything that is useful for the human race."

For the Germanic tribes, the king was sacred, being seen as seen as the "warden of the holy temple".⁵¹ But he was not a god-king on the Asiatic model. "For the Indo-Iranians the king is a divinity, and he has no need to attach legality to his power by using a symbol such as a sceptre. But ... for the Germans the king's power was purely human."⁵² This meant that although Germanic kingship might in practice combine political and priestly roles within itself, these roles could in principle be separated. In fact, with the coming of Christianity, writes Chaney, there was "a separation of royal functions, the sacrificial-priestly role of the Germanic tribal monarch going to the Church hierarchy and that of sacral protector remaining with the king. This separation of power manifested itself not in the obliteration of the religious nature of kingship but in the establishment of a sphere of action by and for the ecclesia apart... from that of the regnum."⁵³

⁵¹ Chaney, *The Cult of Kingship in Anglo-Saxon England*, Manchester University Press, 1970, p. 14.

⁵² Benveniste, *Slovar' Indoevropskikh Sotsial'nikh Terminov* (Dictionary of Indo-European Social Terms), Moscow: "Univers", 1995, quoted in Sergius Fomin and Tamara Fomina, *Rossia pered Vtorym Prishestviem* (Russia before the Second Coming), Moscow, 1994, vol. I, pp. 48, 49.

⁵³ Chaney, op. cit., p. 259.

1. THE CONVERSION OF ANGLO-SAXON ENGLAND

The story of the conversion of Anglo-Saxon England, and with it the beginnings of Anglo-Saxon autocracy, is set out with incomparable grace by the Venerable Bede (+735) in his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*.

Of all the pagan kingdoms of England in the sixth century, the most ready to accept the Christian Faith and a “symphonic” relationship with the Church was undoubtedly the Jutish kingdom of Kent. Situated in the south-eastern corner of the island, nearest to the continent, it already had considerable knowledge of, and intercourse with, Frankish Christian civilization. Moreover, King Aethelbert was married to a Frankish Christian princess, Bertha, who had brought with her a Frankish bishop, Liutprand.

So when, in 597, St. Gregory sent St. Augustine and his forty Roman monks to Kent in order to evangelize the island, King Aethelbert received him graciously, giving him food, shelter, the freedom to preach and baptize, and a Romano-British church within the walls of his capital, Canterbury, that was to become the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour and the first church of English Christianity. Soon the holy life of the Roman monks began to bear fruit. And the many miracles they performed brought the king, too, to repentance and Holy Baptism, which took place on the Feast of Pentecost, June 9, 597. On the very same day, in the north-western Scottish island of Iona, Columba, perhaps the greatest of the Celtic saints, died. His successors at Iona, and especially St. Aidan, would complement the work of St. Augustine in the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons...

The Roman monks were not simply renewing what had already been a most important element in British history – the relationship with Rome: they were also rekindling those elements of Orthodox Christianity and Orthodox Christian Autocracy which, while never completely destroyed by the Anglo-Saxon invasions, were nevertheless in danger of being destroyed, at any rate in the east of the island. They made “the Roman island” Roman again – if not part of the Roman Empire, at least part of Romanitas. And while Britain always remained “different” because of its long, nearly two-hundred-year separation from the Roman Empire, it returned to its Roman roots with joy and gratitude.

Five months later, on November 16, 597, Augustine was consecrated to the episcopate in France by Archbishop Virgilius of Arles and other French bishops with the blessing of Pope Gregory, although another source indicates that he was probably consecrated by bishops in the ecclesiastical provinces of Trier and Rheims. Then he returned to Canterbury, where he was received with great joy by the king, who promptly gave him his palace as a monastery and archiepiscopal residence. That Christmas more than 10,000 Englishmen received Holy Baptism. King Aethelbert himself was baptized a few years later, in 601.

On receiving the news, St. Gregory wrote to St. Eulogius, Patriarch of Alexandria: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of goodwill, because a grain of wheat, falling into the earth, has died that it might not reign in heaven alone - even He by Whose death we live, by Whose weakness we are made strong, through Whose love we seek in Britain for brethren whom we know not, by Whose gift we find them whom without knowing we sought."

Augustine now cleansed the pagan temple in which the king had celebrated his idolatrous rites, and rededicated it in the name of the holy Martyr Pancras. During the first Liturgy there, the building was violently shaken as if by an earthquake, as the devil struggled against his expulsion. The ground next to the church became the site of the Monastery of Saints Peter and Paul. It was consecrated on Christmas Day, 605, and from 611 it acquired stavropegial status as "the first-born and chief mother of monasteries in England". From the time of St. Dunstan, who dedicated it anew in the second half of the tenth century, it became known as St. Augustine's.

In 599 Augustine sent messengers to Rome to seek the answers to certain pastoral questions from St. Gregory. These messengers were St. Laurence, later Augustine's successor as archbishop, and St. Peter, first abbot of the monastery of Saints Peter and Paul. They came back in 601 with the answers to the questions and several more missionaries, including Saints Mellitus, Justus and Paulinus.

Starkey writes that "one of the first things Aethelbert did after his conversion was to issue a Law Code, like Justinian and other Christian Roman emperors. But, though the *form* is Roman, the *content* of the Code is wholly Anglo-Saxon and merely sets down in writing the existing law of the folk in their own language, with the necessary adaptations to their new Christian status. Indeed, the Code may be the first document written in English and the story goes that Augustine himself had to devise additional new letters of the alphabet in order to write Anglo-Saxon down. And it is revered: at the top of the document, written in red, it reads: 'These are the dooms [judgements] that King Aethelbert fixed in Augustine's days.'"⁵⁴

Augustine made successful missionary journeys to Dorset and to Yorkshire, and also made contact with the British bishops of Wales (of which more below). On his return from the West, he baptized King Sebert of Essex and consecrated St. Mellitus as bishop of Sebert's capital, London. In the same year he consecrated St. Justus as bishop of Rochester. Then just before his death he consecrated St. Laurence as his successor at Canterbury. These consecrations by a single bishop were blessed by St. Gregory as an exception to the apostolic rule that bishops should be consecrated by no less than two bishops, because of the fact that there were no other canonical bishops in Britain.

⁵⁴ Starkey, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

Having consolidated the Church in Kent, Augustine set off to bring the Gospel to other parts of England. He was a very tall and strong man, and the miraculous signs that accompanied him were similarly great. Thus near York he healed a beggar who had been suffering from blindness and paralysis; he baptized vast numbers of people in the River Swale in Yorkshire; and on leaving York he healed a leper.

From Yorkshire Augustine headed for the borders of Wales, in order to meet the British bishops whose fathers had fled to the West to escape the invasions of the pagan Anglo-Saxons. Augustine had been given authority over the British bishops by St. Gregory; but the task of uniting with the British, as described by Bede, did not prove to be easy. The first obstacle was that the British, having suffered much from the Anglo-Saxons, were not willing to join with Augustine in trying to convert them to the Faith. The second obstacle was that as a result of their isolation from the Church on the continent, the British Church had slipped into practices which were at variance with the apostolic traditions.

One of these was that they sometimes allowed Pascha to be celebrated on the 14th day of Nisan, whereas the Council of Nicaea had decreed that it should never be celebrated before the 15th. Another was that they performed the sacrament of Baptism in an irregular (but unknown) manner. Augustine stipulated three conditions for union: that the British should correct these two irregularities; and that they should cooperate with him in converting the Saxons. However, the British refused to concede any of these points. In particular, they refused to help in converting the Saxons, whom Gildas had called "hateful to God and man".

At length, Augustine suggested that they pray to God to reveal His will in the following manner: "Let a sick person be brought near, and by whosoever's prayers he will be healed, let the faith and works of that one be judged devout before God and an example for men to follow." The British reluctantly agreed, and a blind Saxon was brought before them. The British clergy tried, but failed to heal him. But through Augustine's prayers he received recovery of his sight. The British were impressed, but pleaded for time in which to discuss these questions with their elders before coming to a decision.

Augustine travelled to his second meeting with the British accompanied by Saints Mellitus and Justus. The British were represented by seven bishops and Abbot Dinoh of the great monastery of Bangor, which had well over a thousand monks. Before the meeting they had approached a hermit and asked him how they should answer Augustine. He said that if Augustine rose when they entered, this showed that he was humble and should be obeyed. If he did not rise, then they should not accede to him. Therefore when Augustine did not rise at their entrance, the British became angry and refused both to accept his stipulations and to acknowledge him as their archbishop.

As the meeting broke up, St. Augustine prophesied that since the British had refused to cooperate in the conversion of the pagan English they would themselves be put to sword by the same English - a prophecy which was fulfilled a few years later when the pagan King Aethelfrid of Northumbria defeated the British in battle at Chester and killed 1200 of the monks of Bangor.

St. Augustine reposed in the Lord on May 26, 605, and was buried next to the unfinished church of Saints Peter and Paul. His successors continued the missionary drive. Although rebuffed by the British of Wales, they made rapid progress in eastern and southern England, and were helped by other missions from the continent - for example, that of the Italian St. Birinus, who landed in Hampshire and converted the king of the West Saxons, and that of the Burgundian St. Felix, who began the conversion of East Anglia. However, while the kings of East Anglia, Essex and Kent eagerly accepted the faith, their successors as often as not apostasized, which may be reflected in the burial grounds of the early seventh-century kings found at Sutton Hoo and Southend, where a high level of material culture is combined with few signs of Christianity...

No less important than the Roman and continental missions, were those of the Irish. From the great Irish monastery of Iona in Scotland came St. Aidan, who established a bishopric at Lindisfarne in Northumbria, and proceeded with his disciples to convert the Angles of southern Scotland and northern England. In 653, St. Finan, his successor at Lindisfarne, baptized Peada, king of Mercia, opening the door of missionary opportunity to many Irish-trained Northumbrians bishops and priests, notable among them being the brother-bishops St. Chad of Lichfield and St. Cedd of Essex.

The Roman missionaries tried hard to reconstruct the few bridges that connected the land with its Romano-British past, heading straight for the former Roman centres such as Canterbury and York, London and Dorchester. Three churches in Kent were built over late Roman mausoleums; the memory of the first Romano-British martyr Alban was faithfully kept at Verulamium; and the first wooden church in York was built right in the middle of the vast Roman praetorium where St. Constantine had been hailed as emperor in 306.⁵⁵ Moreover, place-names in "eccles-", coming ultimately from the Greek "ecclesia", but more directly from the Brittonic "ecles", "a church", in some parts of Southern Scotland, the North Midlands and East Anglia probably indicate the continuity of church life there from Romano-British times.⁵⁶ It has also been suggested that dedications to St. Michael signify transitions from the British to the Anglo-Saxon Churches.⁵⁷

In general, however, the missionaries found a virtual cultural tabula rasa amid

⁵⁵ Richard Fletcher, *The Conversion of Europe*, London: HarperCollins, 1997, p. 8.

⁵⁶ John Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, Oxford University Press, 2005, pp. 70-71, 29-30.

⁵⁷ Graham Jones, *Saints in the Landscape*, Stroud: Tempus, 2007, pp. 77-79.

pagans who knew next to nothing about Rome.⁵⁸ This makes the enthusiastic embrace by the English of Romanity both in its religious and political aspects, the more remarkable. Not only King Aethelbert and Archbishop Augustine (in Kent), but also King Oswald and Bishop Aidan (in Northumbria), and King Cynegils and Bishop Birinus (in Wessex) enjoyed close, “symphonic” relations on the Roman model. The kings of East Anglia and Mercia were also converted. By the 680s the last English kingdom, Sussex, had been converted to the faith by St. Wilfrid. Thereafter references to paganism in the sources are few; the conversion of England to the Orthodox Christianity was virtually complete.

The enthusiasm of the English for Christianity may be partly explained by the fact that, unlike the other Germanic tribes who, for generations before accepting the faith, had been settled within the boundaries of the Roman Empire, and had even been employed as *foederati* in the army, they were newcomers whose conversion to Romanity was the stronger in that it was fresher, less hindered by historical hatreds.

They had been called by God from darkness into light by Pope Gregory and his disciples; and their gratitude to St. Gregory, “the Apostle of the English”, was boundless. As we read in the earliest work of English hagiography, a monk of Whitby’s *Life of St. Gregory*: “When all the apostles, leading their Churches with them, and each of the teachers of separate races, present them to the Lord on Judgement Day in accord with Gregory’s opinion, we believe he will wondrously lead us, that is, the English nation, taught by him through the grace of God, to the Lord.”⁵⁹

From that time English men and women of all classes and conditions poured across the Channel in a well-beaten path to the tombs of the Apostles in Rome (to whom almost all the English cathedrals were dedicated), and a whole quarter of the city was called “Il Borgo Saxono” because of the large number of English pilgrims it accommodated.⁶⁰ English missionaries such as St. Boniface of Germany and St. Willibrord of Holland carried out their work as the legates of the Roman Popes. And the voluntary tax known as “Peter’s Pence” was paid by the English to the Roman see even during the Viking invasions, when it was the English themselves who were in need of alms.

As the English were absorbed into Christian Rome by the Roman missionaries, the symbolism of “Romanity” reappeared in the English land. Thus St. Gregory

⁵⁸ As Blair says, “Augustine of Canterbury began his mission with an almost clean slate” (*op. cit.*, p. 25).

⁵⁹ C.W. Jones, *Saints’ Lives and Chronicles in Early England*, Cornell, 1947.

⁶⁰ Peter Llewellyn, (*Rome in the Dark Ages*, London: Constable, 1996, p. 254) writes that, during the pontificate of Pope Pascal (early ninth century) “the English colony of the Borgo, near St. Peter’s, which followed its native custom of building in wood, lost its houses in a disastrous fire, the first of many to sweep the crowded quarter around the basilica. Pascal, roused at midnight, hurried barefoot to the scene and supervised the fire-fighting operations himself; ever solicitous of pilgrims, he granted the Saxon community estates and money for rebuilding, with woods for a supply of timber.”

compared the newly enlightened King Aethelbert of Kent to St. Constantine and Queen Bertha to St. Helena, and according to Fr. Andrew Phillips they “had, it would seem, actually emulated Constantine. Having made Canterbury over to the Church, they had moved to Reculver, there to build a new palace. Reculver was their New Rome just as pagan Byzantium had become the Christian city of New Rome, Constantinople. Nevertheless, King Ethelbert had retained, symbolically, a royal mint in his ‘Old Rome’ – symbolically, because it was his treasury, both spiritually and physically. The coins he minted carried a design of Romulus and Remus and the wolf on the Capitol. Ethelbert had entered ‘Romanitas’, Romanity, the universe of Roman Christendom, becoming one of those numerous kings who owed allegiance, albeit formal, to the Emperor in New Rome...”⁶¹

The Romanization of England was greatly aided by the appointment, in 668, of a Greek from Tarsus, St. Theodore, as archbishop of Canterbury. He created a single Church organization and body of canonical law, and convened Councils that formally recognized the first Six Ecumenical Councils. (In fact, the English Church anathematized Monothelitism as early as 679, at the Council of Hertford, and the acts of that Council were then taken to Rome, where the Church of Rome, welcoming the English initiative, again anathematized the heresy. The Sixth Ecumenical Council took place two years later, in 681.) Bishops like SS. Wilfrid, Egwin and Aldhelm strengthened the links with Rome by frequent trips there, and abbots like SS. Benedict Biscop, Botulf and Ceolfrid imported books, icons and even the chief chanter of the Roman Church to make sure that even in the furthest recesses of the north things were done as the Romans did them.⁶²

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“The acceptance of Christianity,” writes H.O. Loyn, “made a great difference to ... to the kingship. It might not be too much to say that the king was no longer regarded merely as in the folk but over the folk. Populus iuxta sanctiones divinas ducendus est non sequendus [the people should be led, not followed, in accordance with the Divine commandments] as Alcuin wrote to Charles the Great. The bond between noble and king, originally so much that between household retained and lord, was knit more strictly by Christian oaths. The lordship of the king and of Christ lay over the land and the people.

“As far as the person of the king was concerned, from the earliest days when the institution of kingship was known a belief in the symbolic efficacy of the blood royal was held by the Germanic peoples. Reges e sanguine, duces e virtute [kings by blood, leaders by virtue] is a text upon which many a historical sermon has been preached... In England there are plentiful indications of this sentiment at work. Sigebert of East

⁶¹ Phillips, *Orthodox Christianity and the Old English Church*, English Orthodox Trust, 1996, p. 15.

⁶² For Byzantine influences and remains in England, see Bettany Hughes, *Istanbul: A Tale of Three Cities*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2017, chapter 40.

Anglia was forcibly dragged from his monastic retirement because he had formerly been a brave battle-leader. The special concern of the followers of St. Guthlac on his reformation – he was a doughty leader of bandits until his twenty-fourth year – may be ascribed in part to his possession of the blood royal. The career of Aethelbald of Mercia shows how a successful leader of a war-band might aspire to the highest honours, provided that he had good claim to possession of royal blood. German heroic poetry is laden with belief in the supernatural force of royal king. A long and honourable genealogy was a sure earnest of a successful reign. If royal blood did not exist it could be discovered. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle reiterates with emphatic monotony: ‘His king goes to Cerdic’.

“This belief was deep-rooted in pagan practice, yet the Christian religion did not reject it. Indeed Christianity emphasized rather than denied the value of the blood royal. There was good sense behind this attitude. It was in the interest of the Church to have order preserved, to seek for legitimate authority. This was so not only because of the teachings of the Church but also for solid economic reasons. The Church quickly became a substantial land-owner, and seventh-century records are studded with references to munificent gifts; its first material consideration was to protect its estates and the lands of the faithful from possible deprivation by bands of lawless young men. Established legitimate kingship offered its greatest hope of success, accompanied too by established legitimate nobility. The ability to exercise lordship over freemen developed into the most obvious mark of nobility, and particularly as the Church passed out of the initial converting stage, it became increasingly desirable to ensure peaceful succession on the part of the Church to estates and power in a locality. The strong and colourful anathemas in the more prolix land-charters have more than a mere antiquarian flavour; they state in the most picturesque terms the ecclesiastical desire for security of land-tenure, bringing down on the heads of those who fail to observe the terms of the settlement the punishment of Judas and the sacrilegious Jews who mocked Christ, that they may burn in ‘eternal confusion in the devouring flames of blazing torments in punishment without end’.”⁶³

⁶³ Loyn, *Anglo-Saxon England and the Norman Conquest*, London: Longmans, 1962, pp. 203-204.

2. THE SCHOOL OF YORK

On May 25, 735, the Venerable Bede, “The Father of English History”, reposed in peace with the “Gloria” on his lips and a just-completed translation of St. John’s Gospel in his hands. With his repose the Golden Age of English Orthodoxy came to an end, the age of adolescence and early manhood. Ahead was an age of long, slow decline from a purely cultural point of view - the “Dark Ages” as irreligious historians have called it. In fact, however, it was an era shining with the radiance of true sanctity.⁶⁴

The ninth and tenth centuries were the epoch in which England came of age, not so much as a *nation*, - as the title of Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation* shows, the English were already a single nation, and conscious of themselves as such - but as a unified *nation-state* confessing the truth of Orthodox Christianity under a single Orthodox king, the Anointed of God. Before that, the eighth century was the epoch in which England made her first major impact on the surrounding world - the impact of missionary saints and scholars and martyrs, not, as in later centuries, of military conquerors and colonizers and revolutionaries. This rest of this book is a history of the eighth to eleventh centuries, from the early, failed attempts to achieve political union to its successful accomplishment under King Alfred the Great and his successors to its violent destruction by the Norman Duke William the Conqueror.

The idea that the seven major kingdoms and many sub-kingdoms of the Angles, the Saxons and the Jutes should really be united in a single nation-state was implicit in the concept of the bretwalda, or “high king”, a title that Bede ascribed to a series of English kings, beginning from the obscure King Aelle of Sussex in the fifth century. In the seventh century this title had been borne by some truly worthy rulers, such as Martyr-Kings Edwin and Oswald of Northumbria. But England in the early seventh century was disunited, not only politically, but also in faith, not only between Christians and pagans, but also between the adherents of the Roman-Byzantine traditions and those of the Celtic traditions. It was not until the coming of St. Theodore “the Greek” of Tarsus (+690), that she even acquired a single ecclesiastical administration.

Now Bede had counseled Archbishop Egbert to provide, among other things, improved educational facilities for the clergy of his diocese. This stimulated the archbishop to establish the School of York in 735, which, together with the Schools of Ireland and Canterbury, made the British Isles a beacon of Christian enlightenment for Western Europe in this period.

In the same year a new, and still closer bond between England and Rome was

⁶⁴ See V. Moss, *Saints of England’s Golden Age* (Etna, Ca.: Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies, 1997) and *The Saints of Anglo-Saxon England*, volumes 1, 2 and 3 (Seattle: St. Nectarios Press, 1990s)

created, when Archbishop Egbert went to Rome to receive his pallium, or symbol of archiepiscopal authority. In the following year Archbishop Nothelm of Canterbury went to Rome for the same purpose.⁶⁵ Now there was nothing sinister in seeking and receiving the pallium from Rome, novel though the practice was in English Church life. The Venerable Bede had counselled Egbert, in his letter of November 5, 734, to seek the pallium and metropolitan status for his see in accordance with St. Gregory's original plan for the Church in Britain. And Alcuin wrote to a later Pope that the pallium was needed "to put down the indiscipline of evil men and preserve the authority of the Church".⁶⁶ Nevertheless, what was originally sought and given as a support of the authority of the local Church later became an instrument of its suppression. But that was still over four centuries into the future...

We may conveniently see in the founding of the School of York, in the death of St. Bede and in the granting of pallia to the archbishops of Canterbury and York – all in the same year of 735 – the beginning of an important new period in English Church history...

In a ninth-century *Life of Alcuin*, the most famous product of the School of York, we find the following story that gives us an interesting look into the daily life of the Oxford and Cambridge of its time: "When he was eleven years of age, it happened one night that he and a tonsured rustic, one of the menial monks, that is, were sleeping on separate pallets in one cell. The rustic did not like being alone in the night, and as none of the rustics could accommodate him, he had begged that one of the young students might be sent to sleep in the cell. The boy Albinus [Alcuin] was sent, who was fonder of Virgil than of Psalms. At cock-crow the warden struck the bell for nocturnes, and the brethren got up for the appointed service. This rustic, however, only turned round onto his other side, as careless of such matters, and went on snoring. At the moment when the invitatory psalm was as usual being sung, with the antiphon, the rustic's cell was suddenly filled with horrid spirits, who surrounded his bed, and said to him, 'You sleep well, brother.' That roused him, and they asked him, 'Why are you snoring here by yourself, while the brethren are keeping watch in the church?' He then received a useful flogging, so that by his amendment a warning might be given to all, and they might sing, 'I will remember years of the right hand of the Most High', while their eyes prevented the night watches. During the flogging of the rustic, the noble boy trembled lest the same should happen to him; and, as he related afterwards, cried from the very bottom on his heart, 'O Lord Jesus, if Thou dost now deliver me from the cruel hands of these evil spirits, and I do not hereafter prove to be eager for the night watches of Thy Church and the ministry of praise, and if I any longer love Virgil more than the chanting of psalms, may I receive a flogging such as this. Only, I earnestly pray, deliver me, O Lord, now.' That the lesson might

⁶⁵ *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, E, 735, 736.

⁶⁶ Alcuin, Letter to Pope Leo III, in *Alcuin of York*, translated by Stephen Allott, Alcuin of York, York: Sessions Book Trust, 1974, p. 27.

be the more deeply impressed upon his mind, as soon as by the Lord's command the flogging of the rustic ceased, the evil spirits cast their eyes about here and there, and saw the body and head of the boy most carefully wrapped up in the bedclothes, scarce taking breath. The leader of the spirits asked, 'Who is this other asleep in the cell?' 'It is the boy Albinus,' they told him, 'hid away in his bed.' When the boy found that he had been discovered, he burst into showers of tears; and the more he had suppressed his cries before, the louder he cried now. They had all the will to deal unmercifully with him, but they had not the power. They discussed what they should do with him; but the sentence of the Lord compelled them to help him to keep the vow which he had made in his terror. Accordingly they said, imprudently for their purpose, but prudently for the purpose of the Lord, 'We will not chastise this one with severe blows, because he is young; we will only punish him by cutting with a knife the hard part of his feet.' They took the covering off his feet. Albinus instantly protected himself with the sign of the Cross. Then he chanted with all intentness the twelfth psalm, 'In the Lord put I my trust'; and then with the rustic, half dead boy going before him with agile step, he fled into the basilica to the protection of the saints."⁶⁷

Under the supervision of Archbishop Egbert, Alcuin and his fellow students studied grammar, the liberal arts and the Holy Scriptures. An important place was also given to what we would now call patristics, that is, the doctrine set forth by "the holy apostle of the English, Gregory; by Augustine, his disciple; by holy Benedict [Biscop]; also by Cuthbert and Theodore, who followed in all things [in the footsteps] of their first father and apostle; and by the man most loved of the Lord, Bede the presbyter, Egbert's own teacher."

Moreover, the library contained the works of other Holy Fathers:

*Whatever Rome can tell us from the West,
Whatever glorious Greece passed on to Rome,
Refreshing streams from Hebrew sources drawn,
Illumination spread from Africa;
The thought of Jerome and of Hilary,
Of Bishop Ambrose, Athanasius,
Augustine too, and old Orosius,
And all the teachings of great Gregory,
Pope Leo, Basil and Fulgentius,
And Cassiodorus, John and Chrysostom;
Aldhelm and Master Bede, and everything
That Victorinus wrote...⁶⁸*

⁶⁷ *Vita Alcuini*, in G.F. Browne, *Alcuin of York*, London: SPCK, 1908, pp. 10-12.

⁶⁸ Alcuin, *On the Saints of the Church of York*, 11.1535-1546; in Allot, *op. cit.*

Alcuin has more to say about this great shepherd, Egbert, his first teacher, who, with his brother King Edbert, created a near-perfect incarnation of the Byzantine ideal of the symphony of the two powers, secular and ecclesiastical:

*Egbert was born of royal lineage:
His parents made him noble to the world,
His kindly service noble to the Lord.
Wealthy in earthly goods, which he dispersed
To needy poor, to gather wealth in heaven,
He always was concerned to help the poor,
And, giving treasure with devoted heart,
Gained in Olympus what he lost on earth.
He was a famous ruler of the Church,
A leading teacher whom all men revered,
A saintly character, both gentle and
Severe, to good most kind, to evil strict.
Both day and night at holy offices –
He spent long nights in unremitting prayer,
And celebrated solemn mass by day;
And he in many ways enriched the house
Of God – with gold and silver and with gems,
And hanging silken fabrics from abroad;
He consecrated worthy acolytes
To keep the festivals of God aright;
Others he made to chant the holy psalms
And tune their voices well in hymns to God.
His brother Edbert, who like him was reared
In royal purple, took his nation's throne.
He often drove the foeman's ranks in fear
And wider spread the borders of his realm.
So then Northumbria was prosperous,
When king and pontiff ruled in harmony,
One in the Church and one in government;
One wore the pall the Pope conferred on him,
And one the crown his fathers wore of old.
One brave and forceful, one devout and kind,
They kept their power in brotherly accord,
Each happy in the other's sure accord.⁶⁹*

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In 757 King Edbert, following a very common practice among English Orthodox

⁶⁹ Alcuin, *On the Saints of the Church of York*, 11.1250-283; in Allott, *op. cit.*

kings, became a monk⁷⁰; this was the signal for the beginning of a period of near-anarchy in the Northumbrian kingdom. Nevertheless, this “Age of York”, a kind of Indian summer of the great age of Northumbrian Orthodoxy, laid the foundations for that great missionary movement to Germany and Holland, led by the Northumbrian St. Willibrord-Clement and the Devonian St. Boniface, which is one of the great glories of English Orthodox history. But we must pass this over in order to continue the main thread of our story...

⁷⁰ For example, St. Ceolwulf, his predecessor on the throne of Northumbria, had become a monk in Lindisfarne in 737.

3. KING OFFA OF MERCIA

As the power of Northumbria declined, the first place among the seven English kingdoms began to be occupied by the Midland kingdom of Mercia. The discovery in 2009 of a large treasure trove of very high-quality crosses and bejewelled items of many kinds near Lichfield in Staffordshire dating probably to the seventh century demonstrates that the kingdom of Mercia was by no means as barbarian from a cultural point of view as has sometimes been thought.⁷¹ Moreover, as Michael Wood writes, “for most of the eighth century, Mercia was supreme over all the lands south of the Humber under its kings Aethelbald and Offa; they more than any others paved the way for the future unification of the English.”⁷² Not for nothing did Charlemagne treat King Offa as more-or-less an equal.

And yet when King Offa made a most determined attempt to unite England both politically and spiritually, he failed. The question is: why?

The first answer must lie in the violent means he used to attain the kingdom and to expand it. Warfare, of course, was commonplace between Dark Age kingdoms. But Offa was notorious for his ruthlessness, and for the way in which his kingdom grew. In 757 King Aethelbald of Mercia – a lecherous old man whom St. Boniface had castigated in his letters, but a legitimate ruler nevertheless – was killed by his bodyguard. The participation of the future King Offa in the murder is not proven. But almost immediately Offa called Aethelbald’s successor, Beornred, a usurper, and drove him from the throne before going on to wage war against the Kingdoms of Kent, Sussex and Celtic Wales – and possibly also Northumbria.

It was not only Offa who sinned in this respect. Regicide was part of the general decline in morals that Alcuin noted in the second half of the eighth century. Not for nothing did a Council held at Calchyth in 787 under the presidency of two papal legates, Cardinal Bishop George of Ostia and Cardinal Bishop Theophylact of Todi, declare: “Let no one dare to conspire to kill a king, for he is the Lord’s Anointed”.⁷³

However, the Council appears to have had little effect. Very shortly after it, King Ceolwulf of Wessex was killed. On September 23, 788 King Aelfwald of Northumbria was killed, “and a light was frequently seen in the sky where he was killed”. In 794 Offa lured the young King Aethelbert of East Anglia into Mercia and murdered him.⁷⁴

⁷¹ Caroline Alexander, “Magical Mystery Treasure”, *National Geographic*, November, 2011, pp. 38-61.

⁷² Wood, *In Search of the Dark Ages*, London: Penguin Books, 1994, p. 70.

⁷³ A.W. Haddan & W. Stubbs, *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents relating to Great Britain and Ireland*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, vol. III, 1871, 1964, p. 454. The Council also decreed that “kings are to be lawfully chosen by the priests and elders of the people, and are not to be those begotten in adultery or incest” (in Harriet Harvey Wood, *op. cit.*, p. 45).

⁷⁴ M.R. James, “Two Lives of St. Ethelbert, King and Martyr”, *English Historical Review*, XXXII, 1917, pp. 214-244; *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, A, E, F, 792.

Offa, astonished at the miracles taking place through St. Ethelbert's intercession, did penance by founding the monastery of St. Alban's. But his apparent complicity in the murder of King Osred of Northumbria later that year casts doubt on that story. But another story goes as follows. One night an angel appeared to him and told him to raise the body of the first British martyr, St. Alban, and place it in a suitably ornamented shrine. Offa then related this vision to his counsellors Humbert, archbishop of Lichfield, and Unwona, bishop of Leicester; whereupon the three of them set off for Verulamium, the site of the saint's martyrdom, to recover his relics. As they approached the town, the king saw a bright light shining over the town, which was gladly received by them as a harbinger of success. When the king, the clergy and the people were assembled, they embarked upon the search with prayer, fasting and alms, and struck the earth everywhere trying to find the place of burial. And the search had not continued for long when a light, like the star over the manger at Bethlehem, appeared and led them to the place. They began to dig, and in the presence of Offa the body of the saint was found. The body was then taken in solemn procession into the church, which had been erected on the spot where the saint was beheaded. It was deposited in shrine enriched with plates of gold and silver. Offa himself placed a circle of gold, inscribed with Alban's name and title, around the skull.

But before erecting a monastery on the site, the king decided to go to Rome to procure privileges for it. This was granted, at the price of the resumption of payment of "Peter's pence", a voluntary contribution from the English Church to the papacy which had been instituted by King Ina of Wessex for the maintenance of the Saxon college in Rome. On his return to England, King Offa convened a great assembly at Verulamium, where it was resolved that the monastery should be large enough to keep one hundred monks, and well enough endowed to give hospitality to the many travellers who passed along Watling Street from London to the North. The monks were carefully selected from the leading monasteries of England; and the first stone was laid by Offa himself. He was still working on the construction of the monastery when death overtook him some four or five years later.⁷⁵

The Council of Calchyth, near London, was the first of two Councils presided over by the papal legates in 787 (the other was in the north at Pincanhale). They represent the first time that papal legates had ever been present at a Council of the English Church. They had come, it was said, "to renew the faith and the peace which St. Gregory had sent us by Augustine the Bishop"⁷⁶. This shows that Rome was beginning to take a more direct interest in the affairs of the English Church...

⁷⁵ Matthew of Paris, in *Old England: A Pictorial Museum of Regal, Ecclesiastical, Baronial, Municipal and Popular Antiquities*, 1845, reprinted by Arno Press, New York, 1978.

⁷⁶ *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, F, 785. See also Symeon of Durham, *Historia Regum*, for the year 786. Both in Haddan & Stubbs, *op. cit.*, pp. 444, 443.

The Council of Calchyth (perhaps Chelsea) is notable for its anathema against those who kill the Lord's Anointed in Canon 12: "That in ordaining kings, none permit the votes of wicked men to prevail. But let kings be lawfully chosen by the priests and elders of the people; not such as are born in adultery or incest, for as in our times, according to the Canons, none can arrive at the Priesthood who is of an adulterous brood, so neither can he who is not born in lawful marriage be the Lord's Anointed, King of the whole Kingdom, and Heir of the Country, since the Prophet says, "Know ye that the Lord ruleth in the Kingdom of Men." We have admonished all in general, that with unanimous voice and heart they pray to the Lord, that he who elects him to the Kingdom, would give him the Spirit of Discipline, for the governing of his people: And let Honour be paid him by all, since the Apostle says, "Honour the King. ...Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme." (I Peter 2:17, 13) Let none be guilty of detraction toward the King, since Solomon says, "Detract not from the king with thy mouth, nor curse the prince in thine heart." (Ecclesiastes 10:20) And let none conspire the death of the King, because he is the Lord's Anointed. If a Bishop, or any of the Priestly Degree, consent to such a crime, let him be thrust out, as Judas was from the Apostolical Degree: And whoever approves of such sacrilege, shall perish in the eternal bond of an anathema, and being a comrade of Judas, shall burn in everlasting fire, as it is written, "not only they who do it, but who approve it, etc." (Romans 1) The two eunuch who desired to kill King Ahasuerus were hanged on gallows (Esther 12:3). Observe what David did (I Samuel 23:5,7, II Samuel 1) and this was imputed to him for righteousness, and to his seed after him. It has been proved by many examples among you, that whoever have been (the authors) of killing their lords, have shortly ended their own lives, and been out-lawed both in Church and State."

The kings and hierarchs who signed the English Councils of 787 give us some idea of the geographical extent of the English Church at this time. They included Kings Offa of Mercia and Aelfwald of Northumbria, and bishops from all parts of England except the south-west (Celtic Cornwall, which came under the English crown early in the tenth century); Bishop Aethelbert of Whithorn in Scotland; Bishop Adulf of Mayo in Ireland. Probably Bishop Elbod of Bangor in Wales should also be included; to him belongs the honour of having restored the Welsh Church from schism to the True Church and to the Roman-Byzantine calendar.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ In 664 the Welsh had rejected the decrees of the Synod of Whitby, which brought about a union of the Celtic and Roman traditions in the British Isles through the acceptance of the Byzantine-Roman Paschalion. They went into schism, and were regarded as schismatics by the Anglo-Saxon and Irish Churches. As an Irish canon put it, "the Britons [of Wales] are... contrary to all men, separating themselves both from the Roman way of life and the unity of the Church" (Haddan & Stubbs, volume I, p. 122).

St. Aldhelm of Sherborne, described the behaviour of the schismatic Welsh thus: "Glorying in the private purity of their own way of life, they detest our communion to such a great extent that they disdain equally to celebrate the Divine offices in church with us and to take course of food at table for the sake of charity. Rather,.. they order the vessels and flagons [i.e. those used in common with clergy

In other words, the English Church encompassed the southern, central and eastern parts of the island of Great Britain, with outposts in the south of Scotland and the west of Ireland, and links with the Church in Wales. The presence of papal legates re-established, if this were ever in doubt, that this body of bishops was canonically subject to the Pope in Rome and confessed the Faith of the first Six Ecumenical Councils (the decrees of the Seventh had not yet been received).

However, the Council of Calchyth is described as “contentious”⁷⁸; and the reason for this gives us the second reason why Offa, for all his power, did not become the founder of the All-English kingdom. For the Council and the papal legates, undoubtedly at Offa’s prompting, decided to remove part of the jurisdiction of Archbishop Jaenberht of Canterbury, and place it in the jurisdiction of a newly created metropolitan see at Lichfield in Mercia. The first metropolitan of Lichfield, Hygeberht, then anointed Offa’s son Egfrith in an obvious snub to the archbishops of Canterbury and York. But this innovation did not last: in 803, after the deaths of both Offa and his son, a Council in Clovesho abolished the Lichfield archbishopric, and the pattern of the two metropolitan archbishoprics which had prevailed before was restored.⁷⁹

“In one respect,” writes H.R. Loyn, “an event of wide significance for the future of English kingship took place during the later days of King Offa. Basing his action on Carolingian precedent, the Mercian king had his son Ecgfrith consecrated to the kingship, the first of the English kings so to receive Christian anointing. The early and tragic death of Ecgfrith only five months after his accession made the event of less significance than might otherwise have been the case, and there is no proof that the precedent was followed immediately in Mercia or Wessex. Not until the tenth century do the West Saxons, in this as in so much else, prove themselves true heirs of

of the Roman Church] to be purified and purged with grains of sandy gravel, or with the dusky cinders of ash.. Should any of us, I mean Catholics, go to them for the purpose of habitation, they do not deign to admit us to the company of their brotherhood until we have been compelled to spend the space of forty days in penance... As Christ truly said: ‘Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees; because you make clean the outside of the cup and of the dish.’” (*Aldhelm: The Prose Works*, translated by Michael Lapidge and Michael Herren, Ipswich: Brewer, 1979, p. 158; Haddan & Stubbs, *op. cit.*, pp. 202-203)

The calendar dispute rumbled on. Kice Ees (*Essay on Welsh Saints*, p. 6, note) gives the following extract from Hughes’ *Hone Britannico*: “We find in the Greek life of St. Chrysostom, that certain clergymen, who dwelt in the isles of the ocean, repaired from the utmost borders of the habitable world to Constantinople, in the days of Methodius (who was patriarch there from the year 842 to 847), to enquire of *certain ecclesiastical traditions and the perfect and exact computation of Easter*. It is to be inferred from hence, as there can be no doubt that the British Isles are referred to, that the disputes respecting Easter were not yet laid to rest, and that our Britons, not being satisfied with the determination of the Pope of Rome, resorted to the decision of the Bishop of Constantinople” (vol. ii, p. 317).

⁷⁸ *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, E, 785.

⁷⁹ Haddan & Stubbs, *op. cit.*, pp. 447-462. See also William Hunt, *The English Church from its Foundation to the Norman Conquest (597-1066)*, London: Macmillan, 1912, pp. 239-240.

the Mercian kings..."⁸⁰

King Offa was a man, in Michael Wood's words, of "power, prestige and sophistication" who registered some impressive achievements: "the palace with the stone church inside the Roman fort in London; the 'wonder and marvel of the age' at Tamworth; the Roman-style basilica at Brixworth; the dyke [along the border with Wales] with its palisades, ditches and wall walks; the beautiful coins representing Offa as a new Theodosius".⁸¹ But he committed, as Alcuin said, "cruel and greedy acts". Moreover, he attempted to use the Church – both the Local English Church and the Pope in Rome – to further his political ambitions. In this he may have been influenced by his more famous contemporary, Charlemagne. It is perhaps for this reason above all that he was not counted worthy to be the founder of the All-English kingdom...

In any case, the time was not ripe, and the people were not ready. Local patriotism was still too strong, and the perceived need for unity not strong enough. It would require the terrible trials and humiliations of the next eighty years to bring the English people to the point where they could long for and receive this gift to their profit...

⁸⁰ Loyn, *Anglo-Saxon England and the Norman Conquest*, London: Longmans, 1962, p. 210.

⁸¹ Wood, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

4. CHARLEMAGNE, ROME AND CONSTANTINOPLE

In discussing Anglo-Saxon kingship in the eighth century, it is impossible to avoid consideration of the important political developments taking place on the continent, which had such a profound influence on the whole of Western Christian civilization...

Up to the middle of the eighth century, the Popes of Rome were citizens of the Eastern Roman Empire and often Greek or Syrian by race. However, in 751, the last Greek-speaking Pope, Zachariah, died⁸²; and in 754, at a council in Constantinople, the heresy of iconoclasm was officially proclaimed as the religion of the Eastern Empire. This, combined with the fall of Ravenna, the capital of Byzantine power in northern Italy, to the Lombards, signified a radical shift in the political allegiance of the Roman papacy away from Byzantium and towards the West...

The successor of Zachariah, Pope Stephen II, did not want to break with Byzantium, but since the Byzantines were no longer able to defend their Italian lands, he was forced to look for protectors elsewhere. So he travelled to France and anointed the former major-domo of the Merovingian dynasty, Pepin the Short, as the first of a new dynasty of Frankish kings, giving him the Roman title of *patricius* and appointing him protector of the papal lands. The honour bestowed by Pope Stephen on the Frankish ruler had its desired effect and Pepin defeated the Lombards, who were threatening Rome.

Stephen then accepted from Pepin, as “a gift to St. Peter”, the former Byzantine Exarchate of Ravenna. This both created the territorial base for the Papal State, and revealed that the Pope had renounced his allegiance to Byzantium. From this time, to mark the new regime, the Popes began to change the dating of their documents, and to issue their own coins.⁸³

The significance of the new relationship between the Roman Church and the Frankish State was underscored by the fact that Pope Stephen’s anointing of Pepin was his *second* anointing to his kingdom. Some years earlier, after the deposition and sending to a monastery (with Pope Zachariah’s blessing) of the last weak Merovingian ruler of Francia, Pepin had been specially crowned and anointed by the English missionary archbishop of Mainz, St. Boniface. For the change of dynasty had

⁸² Andrew Louth writes: “From 680 to 751, or more precisely from the accession of Agatho in 678 until Zacharias’ death in 751 – the popes, with two exceptions, Benedict II and Gregory II, were Greek in background and speakers of Greek, which has led some scholars to speak of a ‘Byzantine captivity’ of the papacy. This is quite misleading: most of the ‘Greek’ popes were southern Italian or Sicilian, where Greek was still the vernacular, and virtually all of them, seem to have made their career among the Roman clergy, so, whatever their background, their experience and sympathies would have been thoroughly Roman” (*Greek East and Latin West*, Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2007, p. 79).

⁸³ Judith Herrin, *Women in Purple: Rulers of Medieval Byzantium*, London: Phoenix, 2001, p. 47.

to be legitimized, as did the claims of the new dynasty to power over the vast new territories recently Christianized by St. Boniface to the east of the Rhine. But the *second* anointing had a deeper significance. Whether Stephen already had this in mind or not, it came to signify *the re-establishment of the Western Roman Empire*, with its political capital north of the Alps, but its spiritual capital, as always, in Rome.

In 768, King Pepin's son, Charles, later known as Charlemagne, ascended the throne. He vigorously expanded the boundaries of his kingdom from the Elbe to the Spanish Marches, from Brittany to the borders of Byzantine Italy and Hungary. In 796 he wrote to King Offa of Mercia. "In it he recognized Offa 'to be not only a most strong protector of your earthly country, but also a most devout defender of the holy faith'. He also addressed Offa as 'brother' and acknowledged him as an equal. Offa, for his part, was influenced by Charlemagne's revival of the apparatus of Roman power. But there is no sign that Offa understood or imitated its cultural dimension."⁸⁴

For his achievements were by no means limited to the military and the secular: he promoted education and art, held twice-yearly Synods of his bishops and nobles, suppressed heresy and did his best to weld the very varied peoples and customs of his far-flung realm into a multi-national whole.

Charlemagne's empire was seen by those around him as a resurrection of the Western Roman Empire. Thus in 794, during the building of the palace complex at Charlemagne's new capital of Aachen, a court poet wrote:

*From the high citadel of a new Rome my Palemon sees
That all the separate kingdoms are joined in his empire through victory,
That the age has been changed back into the culture of Antiquity,
Golden Rome is restored and reborn to the world.*⁸⁵

The question was: would Charlemagne lay claim, not only to the Western Roman Empire, but also to the Eastern, now that Constantinople had fallen into the iconoclast heresy – and, moreover, was ruled by a woman, the Empress Irene, something unheard of in the Germanic lands? Certainly, as long as the Eastern Emperors were iconoclasts, and while Charlemagne himself remained Orthodox, he could have had some justification in claiming for himself the leadership of the Christian world. However, he very quickly lost this justification; for in 787 the Eastern Empire returned to Orthodoxy at the Seventh Ecumenical Council, while Charlemagne, through his false council of Frankfurt in 794, became a heretic!

The story is as follows. In 787, following the decisions of Local Councils in Rome earlier in the century, the Fathers of the Seventh Ecumenical Council in Nicaea

⁸⁴ Starkey, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

⁸⁵ Mary Garrison, "The Teacher and the King", *BBC History Magazine*, 2, № 7, July, 2001, p. 25.

anathematized the heresy of iconoclasm and upheld the veneration of icons. And in the *Synodicon* of the Council every heresy and innovation was anathematized in general terms: "All that was innovated and enacted, or that in the future shall be enacted, outside of Church tradition and the teaching and institution of the holy and ever-memorable Fathers, **Anathema** (thrice)." The Empress Irene confirmed these decisions, and so the Eastern Empire recovered its status as the One True Christian Empire.

In 792 the Frankish King Charlemagne sent a Latin translation of the Acts of the Seventh Council to the kings and bishops of Britain. Unfortunately, the translation seems to have confused the vitally important difference between the Greek word *latreia*, the worship or adoration ascribed to God alone, and *proskynesis*, the veneration ascribed to the saints and the holy icons.⁸⁶ It was therefore supposed by some in Britain that the Fathers of the Seventh Council had asserted, in the words of Simeon of Durham, "that icons are to be adored [worshipped], which is altogether condemned by the Church of God". Deacon Alcuin of York, Charlemagne's main counsellor on ecclesiastical and cultural matters, brought the negative opinion of the British Church back to the continent.⁸⁷

In 794 Charlemagne convened a council in Frankfurt that was attended by clergy from Britain and the envoys of Pope Hadrian. Because of the above-mentioned mistranslation, the decrees of the Seventh Council were rejected – in spite of the fact that Pope Hadrian had already anathematized anyone who rejected the Seventh Council. In actual fact, perhaps because of Hadrian's anathema, this Frankish decision had little effect in either Francia or England, where iconography continued to be practised (albeit of decreasing quality).

Of greater long-term effect was the council's insertion of the Filioque into the Creed. "Filioque" means "and from the Son" in Latin. It has often been said, erroneously, that this was first introduced into the Creed by a council in Toledo in

⁸⁶ Louth writes: "The Frankish court received a Latin version of the decrees of Nicaea II in which a central point was misrepresented: instead of an assertion that icons are not venerated with the worship owed to God, the Latin version seems to have asserted exactly the opposite, that icons are indeed venerated with the worship due to God alone. There is certainly scope for misunderstanding here, especially when dealing with a translated text, for the distinction that the iconodules had painstakingly drawn between a form of veneration expressing honour and a form of veneration expressing worship has no natural lexical equivalent. *Proskynesis*, which in Greek at this time probably carried a primary connotation of bowing down, prostration – a physical act – and *latreia*, the word used for worship exclusively due to God – a matter of intention – are derived from roots, which in their verbal forms are used as a hendiadys in the Greek version of the second commandment in the Septuagint (προσκυνήσεις... λάτρεύσης: 'you shall not bow down... you shall not worship': Exod. 20.5). Latin equivalents add further confusion, not least because the Latin calque of *proskynesis*, *adoratio*, was the word that came to be used for *latreia*. But whatever the potential confusion, the distinction explicitly made by the Nicene synod simply collapsed into identity by the faulty translation that made its way to the Frankish court" (op. cit., pp. 86-87).

⁸⁷ Haddan & Stubbs, op. cit., pp. 468-469.

Spain in 589, in order to counter the Arian teaching of the Visigoths by exalting the dignity of the Son.⁸⁸ It presupposed a change in the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, whereby the Spirit was declared to proceed, not from the Father alone, but “from the Father *and the Son*”. The Orthodox rejected this innovation because: (a) it contradicted the words of Christ Himself about the procession of the Spirit from the Father *alone* (John 15.26), (b) it involved a change in the Creed, which was forbidden by the Third Ecumenical Council, and (c) it was objectively false, in that it destroyed the monarchy of the Father, introducing a second principle into the life of the Holy Trinity.⁸⁹

It is important to realize that at this time the innovation of the Filioque was accepted neither by Byzantium, nor by Rome, nor by the English Church. Thus Alcuin thundered against “the Spanish error” in a letter to the monks of Lyons: “Follow in the Faith of the ancient Fathers and be joined to the unanimity of the holy universal Church. Do not try to insert novelties into the Symbol of the Catholic Faith. And do not decide to affect traditions unknown of old in the ecclesiastical offices.”⁹⁰

Nevertheless, while opposing his heresy, Alcuin remained faithful to Charlemagne himself, comparing him to King David, who combined the functions of royal leadership and priestly teaching in order to guide his people to salvation.⁹¹ He even supported the idea that was becoming fashionable that Charlemagne was greater than both Pope and Emperor: “There have hitherto been three persons of greatest eminence in the world, namely the Pope, who rules the see of St. Peter, the

⁸⁸ For a refutation of this error, see Hieromonk Enoch, “Tampering with the 589 Acts of Toledo and the Filioque: A Centuries-Old Slander”, <http://nftu.net/tampering-583-acts-toledo-filioque>.

⁸⁹ See St. Photius the Great, *The Mystagogy of the Holy Spirit*, Boston: Studion Publishers, 1983; “The Filioque: Truth or Trivia?”, *Orthodox Christian Witness*, March 21 / April 3, 1983.

⁹⁰ Alcuin, *Letter 69*. See Cyriaque Lampryllos, *La Mystification Fatale*, Lausanne, pp. 28-39. During the whole of this period and right until the end of the eleventh century, the English Church appears to have been completely ignorant that there was any controversy about the Filioque. As we can read in Haddan & Stubbs, most professions of faith of newly-elected English bishops neither affirmed nor denied the *Filioque*, stating simply: “I believe in God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, the Son being born and having suffered for the redemption and salvation of the human race”. Shortly after the middle of the ninth century, when Pope Nicholas I introduced the Filioque for the first time into the Creed of the Roman Church, it begins to appear in English confessions for the first time – for example, in those of the Bishops of London, Hereford and Dunwich to Archbishop Ceolnoth of Canterbury. But in the same period, and in the same metropolitan province, the professions of the Bishops of Winchester (including the famous St. Swithun) did not contain it. If we apply the moderate criterion of St. Photius the Great – if “they deviated from the right path, but no question was put to them nor did anyone challenge them to learn the truth, we admit them to the list of the Fathers” – then we must conclude that the English, while sometimes employing the heretical interpolation out of ignorance, remained within the bounds of Orthodoxy. Bishop Enoch points out (private communication, November 5, 2021): “1) The 8th Century Saleberga Psalter is generally believed to have been written by English Scribes and it does not contain the Filioque in its edition of the Symbol, 2) the 11th Century Mainz Manuscript is believed to have been written by English scribes and it does not contain the Filioque in its edition of the Symbol; <https://traditionalwesternorthodoxchristian.blogspot.com/2021/10/11th-century-mainz-manuscript-credo.html>.”

⁹¹ Joseph Canning, *A History of Medieval Political Thought, 300-1450*, London: Routledge, 1996, p. 50.

chief of apostles, as his successor...; the second is the Emperor who holds sway over the second Rome...; the third is the throne on which our Lord Jesus Christ has placed you to rule over our Christian people, with greater power, clearer insight and more exalted royalty than the afore-mentioned dignitaries. On you alone the whole safety of the churches of Christ depends."⁹²

This exalted view of his kingly role was shared by others, such as Paulinus of Aquileia, who called Charlemagne "king and priest" in 794. And as early as 775 Cathwulf wrote to Charlemagne comparing the relationship between king and bishop to that between the Father and the Son: "Always remember, my king, with fear and love for God your King, that you are in His place to look after and rule over all His members and to give account on judgement day even for yourself. And a bishop is in second place: he is only in Christ's place. Ponder, therefore, within yourself how diligently to establish God's law over the people of God."⁹³

Following this caesaropapist teaching, Charlemagne set about imposing his heretical views on the Church. Thus in a council in Aachen in 809 he decreed that the *Filioque* was a dogma necessary for salvation. Then he sent envoys to Rome to pressurize Pope Leo III - who had crowned him as Holy Roman Emperor in 800 - into accepting it. The Pope stood firm against his secular protector, and had the original Creed *without the Filioque* engraved in Latin and Greek on silver shields and placed at the doors of St. Peter's in Rome. However, the former champion of Orthodoxy and Romanity against the heretical and despotic iconoclast emperors was now well on the way to becoming the chief enemy of Orthodoxy and Romanity, considering, as Fr. John Romanides puts it, "that the East Romans were neither Orthodox nor Roman!"⁹⁴

Let us look more closely at the critical point of Christmas Day, 800, when Pope Leo III crowned Charlemagne "Emperor of the Romans" in Rome. Now Charlemagne's biographer Einhard claims that he would never have entered the church if he had known what the Pope was intending to do. And there is evidence that in later years Charlemagne drew back from too sharp a confrontation with Constantinople, dropping the phrase "of the Romans" while retaining the title "Emperor". Moreover, he dropped his idea of attacking the Byzantine province of Sicily. Instead he proposed marriage to the Byzantine Empress Irene (or perhaps it was her idea⁹⁵), hoping "thus to unite the Eastern and Western provinces", as the chronicler Theophanes put it⁹⁶ - not under his sole rule, for he must have realized that that was

⁹² Allott, *Alcuin of York*, p. 111.

⁹³ Canning, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

⁹⁴ Romanides, *Franks, Romans, Feudalism and Doctrine*, Brookline, Mass.: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1981, p. 31.

⁹⁵ Herrin, *op. cit.*, pp. 117-118.

⁹⁶ A.A. Vasiliev, *A History of the Byzantine Empire*, Milwaukee: University of Wisconsin Press, 1958, p. 268.

impossible, but perhaps on the model of the dual monarchy of the fifth-century Roman empire.

In any case, all these plans collapsed with Irene's overthrow in 802...

The Byzantines treated Charlemagne as yet another impudent usurper; for, "the men about the court of Charles the Great called him Emperor because he wore a precious crown upon his head. But in truth, no one should be called Emperor save the man who presides over the Roman - that is, the Constantinopolitan kingdom."⁹⁷ As Russell Chamberlin writes: "The Byzantines derided the coronation of Charlemagne. To them he was simply another barbarian general with ideas above his station. Indeed, he took care never to style himself *Imperator Romanorum*. His jurists, dredging through the detritus of empire, came up with a title which met with his approval: Romanum gubernans imperium 'Governing the Roman Empire'. The resounding title of the first of the post-classical Western Emperors was 'Charles, Most Serene Augustus, crowned by God, great and merciful Emperor, governing the Roman Empire and by the mercy of God, King of the Lombards and the Franks'."⁹⁸

Whatever Charlemagne's real intentions in 800, by the mid-ninth century it was clear that for the West the only Orthodox Roman Emperor was the Emperor of the Franks. Thus whereas Alcuin in the previous century still followed the convention of calling Constantinople the second Rome, for a later Latin eulogist the second Rome was Charlemagne's capital, Aachen: "Most worthy Charles, my voice is too small for your works, king, love and jewel of the Franks, head of the world, the summit of Europe, caring father and hero, Augustus! You yourself can command cities: see how the Second Rome, new in its flowering and might extent, rise and grows; with the domes which crown its walls, it touches the stars!"⁹⁹

Romanides writes that the Frankish position "was clearly spelled out in a letter of Emperor Louis II (855-875) to Emperor Basil I (867-886) in 871. Louis calls himself 'Emperor Augustus of the Romans' and demotes Basil to 'Emperor of New Rome'. Basil had poked fun at Louis, insisting that he was not even emperor in all of Francia, since he ruled only a small part of it, and certainly was not emperor of the Romans, but of the Franks. Louis argued that he was emperor in all of Francia because the

⁹⁷ Chronicler of Salerno, in Richard Chamberlin, *Charlemagne, Emperor of the Western World*, London: Grafton books, 1986, p. 52.

⁹⁸ Chamberlin, "The Ideal of Unity", *History Today*, vol. 53 (11), November, 2003, p. 57. And yet in 812 the legates of Emperor Michael I saluted Charles in Aachen with the title "emperor". So from 812, as Vasiliev says, "there were two Roman emperors, in spite of the fact that in theory there was still only one Roman empire" (*op. cit.*, p. 268). There is an interesting parallel to this in the theory of the One Christian Empire in China. Thus when the Chinese empire actually split between the Khitans and the Sung in 1004, "to preserve the myth of indivisibility the relationship between the two emperors was henceforth expressed in the language of a fictional blood relationship" ("China in the year 1000", *History for All*, vol. 2, issue 6, December / January, 2000, p. 37).

⁹⁹ Wil van den Bercken, *Holy Russia and Christian Europe*, London: SCM Press, 1999, p. 148.

other Frankish kings were his kinsmen by blood. He makes the same claim as that found in the *Annals of Lorsch*: he who holds the city of Old Rome is entitled to the name 'Emperor of the Romans'. Louis claimed that: 'We received from heaven this people and city to guide and (we received) the mother of all the churches of God to defend and exalt... We have received the government of the Roman Empire for our Orthodoxy. The Greeks have ceased to be emperors of the Romans for their cacodoxy. Not only have they deserted the city (of Rome) and the capital of the Empire, but they have also abandoned Roman nationality and even the Latin language. They have migrated to another capital city and taken up a completely different nationality and language.'"¹⁰⁰

And yet the grandiose claims of the Frankish empire were soon humbled by harsh political reality. For while the Eastern Empire became stronger after the Triumph of Orthodoxy in 843, the Frankish Empire began to disintegrate. Moreover, the East decisively rejected the claims of the West. Thus in 867 and again in 879-80, St. Photius convened Councils in Constantinople that condemned Pope Nicolas I for introducing the heretical Filioque into the Roman Creed.

Significantly, the Acts of the 879 Council were signed by the legates of Pope John VIII. This Council also decreed that there was no papal jurisdiction in the East, and reaffirmed the original text of the Nicene Creed *without* the Filioque, explicitly condemning all additions to it. So a Roman Pope formally recognized that he had no jurisdiction in the Eastern Church and that the Filioque was a heresy!¹⁰¹ Both East and West (outside Francia) in her most senior representatives now agreed that it was the *Western, Frankish* empire that was *not* Orthodox. And since both Greeks and Romans and Franks agreed that there could be only one Christian Roman Empire, this meant that the Frankish attempt to usurp the Empire and impose its heretical teachings on the West had been defeated – for the time being...

¹⁰⁰ Romanides, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

¹⁰¹ However, Pope John knew he had a hard task ahead of him in persuading the Franks. As he wrote to Photius: "I think your wise Holiness knows how difficult it is to change immediately a custom which has been entrenched for so many years. Therefore we believe the best policy is not to force anyone to abandon that addition to the Creed. But rather we must act with wisdom and moderation, urging them little by little to give up that blasphemy. Therefore, those who claim that we share this opinion are not correct. Those, however, who claim that there are those among us who dare to recite the Creed in this way are correct. Your Holiness must not be scandalized because of this nor withdraw from the sound part of the body of our Church. Rather, you should aid us energetically with gentleness and wisdom in attempting to convert those who have departed from the truth..." (P.G. 102, 813, quoted in Richard Haugh, *Photius and the Carolingians*, Belmont, MA: Nordland, 1975, pp. 129-130, 137; cf. V. Moss, "Western Saints and the Filioque", *Living Orthodoxy*, volume IV, № 1, January-February, 1982) St. Photius seems to have accepted this, and remained in communion with Rome for the rest of his life, referring to the Pope as "my John". But in 903 his successor St. Nicholas the Mystic broke communion with Pope Christopher because the latter introduced the Filioque into the Creed of the Roman Church again. But communion was again restored under the next Pope.

5. FROM MERCIA TO WESSEX

When King Offa and his son died in 796, there was a succession crisis in the Mercian kingdom. Eadbert Praen, a priest, took advantage of this situation to assume the crown of the sub-kingdom of Kent and reject the lordship of the kingdom of Mercia. He was immediately rejected by Archbishop Aethelheard of Canterbury and anathematised by Pope Leo III, who wrote that such a priest-king was like Julian the Apostate.¹⁰² Finally, Cenwulf, a distant kinsman of Offa's, resolved the succession crisis in Mercia and took his revenge on the Kentishmen. "The revolt was suppressed and Eadbert taken to Mercia. There he was ritually mutilated to disable him from kingship: his eyes were put out and his hands cut off. Nor surprisingly, Kent subsequently remained quiet, though Cenwulf in turn made some concession to local pride by setting up his brother Cuthred as puppet-king of Kent."¹⁰³

However, Cenwulf's style, as David Starkey puts it, "was pure Offa" and typically Mercian, not only in his cruelty but also in his treatment of the Church. Just as King Aethelbald had forced monks to work on his royal building projects, eliciting very robust criticism from St. Boniface; and just as King Offa appears to have stolen some minsters and other property from the Church of Worcester, so King Cenwulf had a long and bitter struggle with Archbishop Wulfred of Canterbury over the ownership of a group of minsters in the Canterbury diocese. The Councils of Clofesho in 803 and the second Council of Calcyth in 816 attempted to restore power over the monasteries to the bishops. But Cenwulf did not give up. He tried to obtain "stavropegial" status for some monastic minsters from the Pope, so that they would be outside the control of local bishops.¹⁰⁴

Cenwulf died in 821, and was succeeded by his son Kenelm. However, since he was still young, his sister Cwendritha became regent, while her lover Asconbert became the little king's guardian. The lovers then killed the king and tried to hide his body. But a commission appointed by the Pope and led by Archbishop Wulfred investigated and found the body to the accompaniment of miracles. The martyr-king was buried next to his father – the two coffins can still be seen in Winchcombe Abbey.¹⁰⁵

On September 17, 822 Archbishop Wulfred consecrated Ceolwulf as king. However, Mercian predominance was soon to give way to that of the southern kingdom of Wessex, the West Saxons, whose capital since the seventh century had been at Winchester.

¹⁰² Haddan & Stubbs, *op. cit.*, vol. III, p. 524.

¹⁰³ Starkey, *The Monarchy of England*, vol. 1, London: Chatto & Windus, 2004, pp. 49-50.

¹⁰⁴ Blair, *op. cit.*, pp. 122-124.

¹⁰⁵ The mainly twelfth-century sources for St. Kenelm's life were collected by John Humphreys in *Studies in Worcestershire History*, Birmingham: Cornish Brothers, 1938.

In order to trace this rise of this kingdom, we must go back to 685, when King Ceadwalla abdicated and retired to Rome, where he died shortly after being baptized. "He was succeeded," writes Richard Stanton, "by his kinsman Ina, who had a long and prosperous reign of 37 years. He was successful in his wars in Kent, East Anglia, and with the Welsh. His wisdom as a legislator is proved by the code of laws which he promulgated, and his piety by the many services he rendered to the Church. In the reign of Ina the diocese of Wessex was divided and the See of Sherborne established, of which St. Aldhelm, the King's friend and counsellor, was the first titular. He also refounded the ancient Abbey of Glastonbury, and endowed that of Malmesbury, as well as other religious houses."¹⁰⁶ In 726 he retired to Rome with his Queen, Ethelburga (who in 722 had helped him by destroying the rebel stronghold of Taunton), where they ended their days in the monastic habit.

However, the real rise of Essex began in the year 802, when King Beorhtric of Wessex died, and a certain Egbert, who for years had been an exile at Charlemagne's court, succeeded to the kingdom. Gradually Egbert built up his domain, which extended over most of southern England; and while not all of his conquests were permanent, his realm became the most powerful in the island.

David Harrison writes: "In 825, after a brush with the Welsh of Cornwall, [Egbert] defeated Beornwulf [of Mercia] in a bloody battle at Ellendun, identified with Wroughton just south of the present Swindon. What provoked this clash and who was the aggressor, are equally unknown. Flushed with victory, Ecgberht [Egbert] at once sent a large army under his son Aethelwulf into Kent, which expelled King Bealdred, presumably a Mercian under-king. The folk of Surrey, Sussex and Essex thereupon submitted to Ecgberht, never again to be separated from Wessex, except when the Danes later occupied Essex. The Kentishmen had resented Offa's rule and were infuriated by Cenwulf's cruelty, and if, as seems likely, Ecgberht was connected with their royal house, he would have been gladly welcomed by them. The control of the south-east was an essential step to West Saxon supremacy in England, since Canterbury was the ecclesiastical capital, London the chief English port and trading centre, and Kent the doorway to communication with the continent. After this success, it was natural that the king of East Anglia should appeal to Ecgberht for protection against Mercia...

"Ecgberht now sought to improve on his successes by a bold bid for supremacy over all the English kingdoms. In 829 he defeated and expelled the new Mercian king, Wiglaf, annexed his realm and then led his army to Dore (now a south-western suburb of Sheffield), where the Northumbrians bought off his threatened hostility by accepting his overlordship. The *Chronicle* exulted over this triumph by hailing him as the eighth Bretwalda, conveniently omitting all mention of the great Mercian kings.

¹⁰⁶ Stanton, *A Menology of England and Wales, or, Brief Memorials of the Ancient British and English Saints Arranged According to the Calendar, Together with the Martyrs of the 16th and 17th Centuries*. London: Burns & Oates, 1892. pp. 440-441.

“It was certainly a remarkable achievement and one which, could it have been maintained, would have been to England’s general benefit. It seems clear, however, that Egberht had stretched his power beyond his resources. For two enigmatic entries in the *Chronicle* for the following year inform us that he reduced all the Welsh to submission and yet that Wiglaf retained his kingdom. The first seems to show Egberht rounding off his conquests by a thorough reduction of the Welsh, the second suggests that he was nevertheless powerless to prevent a Mercian revolt against his authority. For if, as some have supposed, he had himself restored Wiglaf as his under-king, the *Chronicle* would surely have made this clear...”¹⁰⁷

Egbert also scored the first victory over the new and terrible threat that had appeared off Britain’s shores – the Northmen, or Vikings. For after an initial defeat by raiders who landed thirty-five ships at Carhampton in Somerset, he defeated a large force of Danes and Cornishmen west of Hingston Down in Cornwall. From now on, the brunt of the fighting against the Northmen would be undertaken by the Kings of Wessex...

As a fitting crown to a long and remarkable reign, King Egbert established a kind of entente with the Church, which did much to remove the distrust caused by the behaviour of the Mercian kings. In 838, at a meeting of the leading people of the realm held at Kingston in Surrey, Archbishop Ceolnoth of Canterbury made a perpetual alliance between himself and his successors and Egbert, his son Aethelwulf and their heirs. The king confirmed some privileges to the Church, reversing some unjust decisions of King Cenwulf, and promised liberties to the ancient monasteries under his protection. In return, the archbishop promised that he and his successors would maintain a personal friendship with him and his heirs, and would help them in all times of need.

The archbishop’s promise was kept, and the West Saxon house, which was at last enabled by the courage and wisdom of King Alfred and his successors to bring the work of Egbert in the unification of England to a triumphant conclusion, received constant and invaluable support until the fall of the English Autocracy.

In 839, on the death of King Egbert, his son Aethelwulf succeeded him on the throne of Wessex. He was brought up by the holy priest Swithun, later Bishop of Winchester, and always exhibited a great concern for the welfare of the Church.¹⁰⁸

“His reign,” writes Harrison, “was one long struggle against the Danish raiders, who now redoubled their onslaughts. While their main bands made daring but

¹⁰⁷ Harrison, *England before the Norman Conquest*, Ipswich: Hadden Best, 1912, p. 276.

¹⁰⁸ There is a tradition that Aethelwulf had been a subdeacon before, and that he became king only by a special dispensation of the pope. See William of Malmesbury, *Annals of Wintonia* for 837; *The Book of Hyde*.

devastating inroads into the heart of France and even harried the coasts of Spain, others launched repeated attacks all around the eastern and southern coasts of England. In 840, the alderman of Hampshire overthrew thirty-three ships' crews at Southampton, but his colleague of Dorset was defeated and slain in a hard fight at Portland. Next year the heathen men did great slaughter in Lindsey, East Anglia and Kent, killing another alderman in Romney Marsh; and the year after London and Rochester were raided, as was Southampton for the second time. In 844 King Raedwulf of Northumbria was defeated and slain by another band at Durham. In 845 the levies of Somerset and Dorset under their two aldermen and the warlike Bishop Ealhstan of Sherborne – the first such recorded in English history – defeated a Danish army with great slaughter at the mouth of the Parret.”¹⁰⁹

In 851, “for the first time the heathen stayed through the winter on Thanet. And the same year three hundred and fifty ships came into the mouth of the Thames and stormed Canterbury and London and put to flight Beorhtwulf, king of the Mercians, with his army, and went south across the Thames into Surrey. And King Aethelwulf and his son Aethelbald fought against them at Aclea [Church Oakley, near Basingstoke] with the army of the West Saxons, and there inflicted the greatest slaughter on a heathen army that we have ever heard of until this present day, and had the victory there. And in the same year King Athelstan [the under-king of Kent] and Alderman Elhere fought in ships and slew a great army at Sandwich in Kent, and captured nine ships and put others to flight.”¹¹⁰

These were famous victories, notable especially for the fact that they were won by the West Saxons, not by the Mercians or the Northumbrians. For these latter nations, having been so prodigal of their kings' lives in the past, were now deprived of the strength to repel the pagans. The pious Aethelwulf's victories showed that his father's gains were not ephemeral – the future of England lay with his dynasty.

In 853 King Aethelwulf went on pilgrimage to Rome, taking with him his four-year-old son Alfred, later known “the Great”, together with Alfred's tutor, St. Swithun, Bishop of Winchester.

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“At this time,” writes Alfred's earliest biographer, his friend the Welsh Bishop Asser, “the lord Pope Leo [IV] was ruling the apostolic see. He anointed the child Alfred as king, ordaining him properly, received him as an adoptive son and confirmed him.”¹¹¹

This extraordinary event could be dismissed as fiction – and has been so dismissed

¹⁰⁹ Harrison, *op. cit.*, p. 277.

¹¹⁰ *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, E, 851.

¹¹¹ Bishop Asser, *Life of King Alfred*, 8.

by many historians – if it were not confirmed by a letter written in the same year by the Pope himself to King Aethelwulf: ‘We have now graciously received your son Alfred, whom you were anxious to send at this time to the threshold of the Holy Apostles, and we have decorated him, as a spiritual son, with the dignity of the belt and vestments of the consulate, as is customary with Roman consuls, because he gave himself into our hands.’”¹¹²

Roman consul? This was surely an archaism – although in 754 Pope Stephen IV had given the title of patricius to Pippin, King of the Franks, as a sign that the Franks, and not the Byzantines, were now his secular protectors. Adoption as his spiritual son and godson? Possibly. Anointing to the kingdom? This was the most likely explanation. For while such an action was unusual, a certain precedent existed for it in that both Charlemagne and King Offa of Mercia had had their sons associated with themselves in the kingship by Pope Hadrian. But the honour accorded to Alfred seems to have been even greater than that – and more surprising in that Alfred had four older brothers who would be expected to ascend the throne before him!

The only explanation of the Pope’s extraordinary action, according to the twelfth-century writer Aelred of Rievaulx, was that Pope Leo was a prophet and foresaw the future greatness of Alfred.¹¹³ If so, then it made sense for him to tie the boy’s destiny as closely as possible with the city of Rome and the papacy. For that same prophetic gift would have told him that the Carolingian empire with which the papacy was officially linked would soon collapse, and so the future of Roman Christian civilization depended on reviving the already close links between the papacy (recovered from heresy after 878) and “the land of the angels”, as Pope Gregory I had called England.¹¹⁴

In 855, Aethelwulf gave a tenth of all his possessions to the Church “for the glory of God and his own eternal salvation. And the same year he proceeded [with Alfred] to Rome in great state, and remained there twelve months, and then made his way towards home.”¹¹⁵

“On the way back from Rome,” writes Starkey, “Aethelwulf visited the Frankish court, and, on 1 October 856 at Verberie-sur-Oise near Paris, was married to Princess Judith, daughter of Charles the Bald, King of West Francia, and great-granddaughter

¹¹² Nevertheless, this letter is considered by some to be a papist forgery. See William Hunt, *The English Church from its Foundation to the Norman Conquest (597-1066)*, London: Macmillan, 1912, p. 278; Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983, p. 232, note 19.

¹¹³ Justin Pollard, *Alfred the Great*, London: John Murray, 2006, p. 63. St. Photius the Great, the contemporary patriarch of Constantinople, had a high opinion of Pope Leo.

¹¹⁴ Alfred, too, seems to have been conscious of these links. As Geoffrey Hindley writes, “he ascended the throne conscious that the aura of a Roman authority was about him and he consciously prepared to defend the Christian Roman legacy in his kingdom of Wessex against the pagan invaders.” (*A Brief History of the Anglo-Saxons*, London: Robinson, 2006, p. 210).

¹¹⁵ *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, A, 855.

of Charlemagne. At the same time, Judith was anointed and crowned queen by Archbishop Hincmar of Rheims, the master-liturgist and inventor of tradition, in an ordo or form of service which he had devised. It was the first recorded coronation of an English queen and perhaps the first time as well that a crown had been used, rather than the royal helmet (which was, in any case, unsuitable for a woman). 'May the Lord crown you with glory and honour,' Hincmar intoned as he placed the crown on the queen's head, 'that... the brightness of the gold and the... gleam of the gems may always shine forth in your conduct and your acts.'"¹¹⁶

It is at about this time that an Anglo-Saxon poem called *Judith* was composed that has been described as "one of the noblest poems in the whole range of Old English Literature, combining the highest dramatic and constructive power with the utmost brilliance of language and metre". Professor Cook of Yale University thinks that it was composed by St. Swithun in about the year 856 in gratitude for the deliverance of Wessex from the fury of the Vikings and dedicated to Judith, wife of King Aethelwulf. In the poem the Vikings are represented by the Assyrians, the English by the Jews, and Queen Judith by her namesake in the Bible story.

On returning to England, the king found that his eldest surviving son, Aethelbald, together with Bishop Ealhstan of Sherborne and the alderman of Somerset, were plotting to prevent his resumption of the reins of power. The people were on the king's side, and were ready to support him against his son. But the king displayed great forbearance in giving the western half of the kingdom to Aethelbald.¹¹⁷

When the king died, in 858, leaving a vast sum of money in his will for the poor, for the pope, and for the churches of Rome, Aethelbald married his stepmother Judith. But when he, too, died, she eloped with Count Baldwin of Flanders. She was not so like her Biblical namesake after all...

However, King Athelwulf's forbearance reaped its reward five years later, in the reunification of the kingdom by his third son Aethelbert. Civil war, so frequent in Mercia and Northumbria, had been averted in Wessex. So Wessex would be the nucleus of a new, united England.

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When King Aethelbert ascended the throne, the Vikings sacked his capital of Winchester. Then, on July 2, 862 St. Swithun, the protector of the kingdom and Alfred's tutor, died. In 865 Aethelbert also died, and the fourth son Aethelred came to the throne. He had to face a renewed threat from the Vikings, who in 866 invaded the northern kingdom of Northumbria, which was divided by civil war between two English kings. The Danes conquered the Northumbrian capital of York, killed both

¹¹⁶ Starkey, op. cit., p. 54.

¹¹⁷ Bishop Asser, *Life of King Alfred*, 12-13.

kings in a particularly cruel manner and then installed a puppet-king of English nationality in their place. In 869, supplemented by reinforcements from overseas, the Danes assembled their greatest army yet and invaded East Anglia, conquering it after a bitter and bloody struggle against the Holy Martyr-King Edmund.

6. MARTYR-KING EDMUND OF EAST ANGLIA

No part of the country was more exposed to the pagan attacks than the small kingdom of East Anglia, and the old King Offa of East Anglia resolved to go on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land to pray for the forgiveness of his sins and the safety of his kingdom.¹¹⁸

On the way, he visited his cousin Alcmund, who, on being exiled from East Anglia after the death of the Martyr-King Aethelbert (+May 20, 793), had been entrusted with the kingdom of Old Saxony by the Emperor Charlemagne. Alcmund had married a German princess named Siwara, and with her often besought the Lord to give him a numerous and saintly family. In answer to his prayer, an angel appeared to him and told him to undertake a pilgrimage to the tombs of the apostles in Rome, where God would grant his petition. During this pilgrimage, while the king was one day conversing with his hostess, a noble and pious Roman woman, she noticed on his breast a brilliant sun, whose rays, darting to all four points of the compass, threw a miraculous light on all around. Filled with the spirit of prophecy, she declared that from him would come a son whose fame, like the sun, would illumine the four quarters of the world and bring many to Christ. A few months later, after returning to North Hamburg, the capital of Old Saxony, Alcmund's wife Siwara bore him his second son, Edmund.

Now when King Offa came to Saxony, Edmund was appointed to accompany him; and the old king was immediately struck by the beauty, both physical and spiritual, of the young prince, and by the zeal of his service. He applied to him the words of Solomon: "Hast thou seen a man swift in his work? He shall stand before kings and shall not be in obscurity" (Proverbs 22.29). Then in the presence of the whole court he embraced him and, putting a ring on his finger, said: "My most beloved son Edmund, accept this memento of our kinship and mutual love. Remember me as one grateful for your service, for which with God's permission I hope to leave you a paternal inheritance."

Edmund's father hastened to explain to him the significance of this ceremony: was he prepared to accept King Offa as his adoptive father in place of his natural father? On Edmund's acceptance, Offa tearfully drew from his finger his ring - in fact, it was a coronation ring - and said: "Son Edmund, observe closely this ring, notice its design and seal. If, when I am far away, I intimate to you by this token my wish and desire, do you without delay execute my order. As the noble assembly here bears witness, I intend to regard you as my most beloved son and heir."

¹¹⁸ The main sources for this chapter are Abbot Aelfric, *Passio Sancti Eadmundi*; *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, E, 870; Rev. J.B. Mackinlay, *Saint Edmund King and Martyr*, London, 1893; David Farmer, *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints*, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1978, pp. 120-122.

Then Offa continued on his pilgrimage. Having arrived in the Holy Land and venerated the Holy Places, he set out on his return journey via Constantinople. But as he was sailing through the Hellespont, he fell ill; so, disembarking at the monastery of St. George, he received the Holy Mysteries and prepared for death. His last act was to entrust his kingdom of East Anglia to Edmund, ordering his nobles to take his ring to Saxony as a token of his will. Then he reposed in peace and was buried in St. George's Bay on the Hellespont in the year 854.

And so the fourteen-year-old Edmund set sail with a retinue of nobles for the promised kingdom he had never seen before. They landed at what is now called St. Edmund's Head near Hunstanton in Norfolk. Disembarking in a dry river-bed, the king prostrated on the ground and prayed to God to bless his coming and make it profitable for the land and its people. As the saint rose and mounted his horse, twelve springs of sweet, clear water gushed out of the earth, which worked many miracles of healing for the sick. From that hour the soil of that region, which before had been sandy and barren, bore the richest crops in all Eastern England.

The saint proceeded to Attleborough, Offa's former capital, and staked his claim to the throne. On November 5, 855, he was in Winchester, attending a council convened by King Aethelwulf of Wessex to provide a charter of immunities for the English Church. Then he returned to Attleborough, where on Christmas Day he was proclaimed sovereign of the people of Norfolk (the northern half of East Anglia) by Humbert, Bishop of Elmham. For the next year the king stayed quietly in Norfolk, learning the psalms of David under the guidance of Bishop Humbert. Eventually the people of Suffolk (the southern half of East Anglia) decided to accept him as their king, and on Christmas Day, 856 he was anointed and crowned king of the whole of East Anglia. The church in Bures, Suffolk, where the coronation took place, survives to the present day.

St. Edmund was fair-haired, tall, well-built, with a natural majesty of bearing. By his piety and chastity he won the respect of all. He was a defender of the Church, a protector of orphans and widows, and a supporter of the poor. No man sought for justice from him and failed to get redress, and no innocent pleaded in vain for mercy. It was said that under his strong rule a boy could drive a mule from Lynn to Sudbury, or from Thetford to Yarmouth, and no one would dare to molest him.

In 865 the pagan Danes, led by the three brothers Hinguar, Healfdene and Hubba, again invaded, bent on revenge for the death of their father Ragnar Lodbrok, who had sacked Paris some years before, at the hands of the English King Aelle of Northumbria (he was thrown into a pit full of poisonous snakes). Hinguar carried with him the famous standard of the Raven, which had been woven by the three daughters of Lodbrok for their three brothers. Magical spells had been cast during the weaving, so that when the bird flapped its wings in the wind, it was believed to betoken victory, while when it hung motionless, it betokened defeat.

St. Edmund went out to meet the Danes under another banner, which showed Adam and Eve eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and above them the Lamb of God slain to wash away their sins.

Edmund defeated the enemy in several skirmishes, showing subtlety no less than valour. Thus he was once surprised by the enemy within one of his camps with no avenue of escape. The siege was so long that both besiegers and besieged began to suffer from famine. But Edmund determined that the enemy should not learn about his men's suffering, which might persuade them to disband their own troops. So he ordered a fatted bull which had been fed with good wheat to be set loose outside the enclosure. The Danes seized it and killed it. And when they opened its stomach and found fresh wheat inside, they concluded that the English had no lack of provisions. So they abandoned the siege and split up into foraging parties. Edmund then followed them stealthily, and killed large numbers of them.

On another occasion Edmund and his men were besieged inside the almost impregnable fortress of Framingham. However, Hinguar captured an old and decrepit man by the name of Sathonius whom the saint had been feeding and accommodating at his own expense in the castle. By means of a bribe, the old man was induced to betray to Hinguar a weak spot in the castle walls, which he himself had helped to build in his youth. Advancing on the castle at this point, Hinguar caught the English by surprise. Edmund jumped onto his swiftest charger and galloped out through the open gates. Some of the Danes saw him, but did not suspect who he was and galloped after him, hoping to get some information about the king. But Edmund, like St. Athanasius the Great on a similar occasion, turned to them and said: "Go back as fast as you can, for, when I was in the castle, the king whom you seek was there also." Turning back, they discovered that the king had fooled them. Then St. Edmund gathered his forces and fell upon the baffled Danes as they were retreating.

The Danes now made peace with Edmund and headed north to Northumbria (North-Eastern England), arriving in York on November 1, 866. The English Kings Osbert and Aelle, who had been fighting each other up to that moment, now joined forces and marched on York, and after destroying the city walls they entered the city on March 21, 867. However, the resultant battle within the city was disastrous for the English: both kings and eight of the leading noblemen were killed. The Danes then ravaged the whole of Northumbria as far as the River Tyne before installing an Englishman named Egbert as puppet-king of the region under their power.

This was only "the beginning of sorrows" for the English. At the end of the year the Danish "Great Army" moved south into Mercia (Central England) and took the city of Nottingham. In answer to King Burhred of Mercia's appeal for help, King Aethelred of Wessex, his younger brother Alfred (the future King of England) and St.

Edmund came to meet him outside the walls of Nottingham. However, the Danes avoided a battle with the English kings outside Nottingham, so peace terms were concluded. In exchange for giving up Nottingham, the Great Army was allowed to retreat back into Northumbria.

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Now began a horrific despoliation of the Christian inheritance of the whole of Eastern England. In the north, St. Ebba's monastery at Coldingham was burned down with the nuns inside after they had all, with Abbess Ebba giving them the lead, cut off their noses and upper lips to deter the attackers from raping them. Tynemouth, Wearmouth, Jarrow, Whitby and other famous monasteries were destroyed; and in Eastern Mercia Bardney and Crowland were gutted.

When the news of the Great Army's approach reached Abbot Theodore of Crowland, he sent away all the able-bodied men and buried the church valuables. Then, as the flames of nearby Kesteven lit up the sky, he calmly vested himself for the Divine Liturgy, which he celebrated with the assistance of Deacon Alfgot, Subdeacon Savin and Monks Aethelred and Wulric. Hardly had they finished when the Danish leader Oscytel burst in, beheaded the abbot, tortured the elder monks and killed the boys before setting fire to the monastery. This took place on August 26, 869.

Then it was the turn of the fenland monasteries Thorney, Peterborough, Ramsey and Ely. At Peterborough Hinguar was struck by a stone; so his brother Hubba with his own hand slaughtered Abbot Hedda and 84 monks on one stone to avenge his injury. At Ely a Dane took hold of the pall which covered the incorrupt body of St. Etheldreda (+June 23, 679) and struck the marble of the tomb with his battle-axe. But a splinter flew back from off the ground and entered the striker's eye, and he fell dead. At this the others left the tombs of the other saints, which they were thinking of violating, and fled.

Another saint met the invaders in a different way. The body of St. Werburga (+3 February, c. 700) had been preserved incorrupt at Chester right up to the coming of the Danes. But when they approached the city, the body suddenly disintegrated...

While Hubba with 10,000 men was sacking Ely and Soham, Hinguar pressed eastwards into East Anglia. On Newmarket Heath he encountered Alderman Ulfcetyl defending two or three earthworks later known as "Holy Edmund's Fortifications". The English were overwhelmed and slaughtered to a man. Then the host proceeded to the capital, Thetford, which they captured amidst terrible scenes of rape and butchery. The whole population was killed, and only King Edmund with a small army survived to face the Danes...

Hinguar then sent a messenger to Edmund, saying: "Hinguar our king, brave and victorious by sea and by land, has subdued many nations and has now landed

suddenly here with his host. Now he orders you to divide your hidden treasure and the wealth of your ancestors with him quickly. And if you want to live, you can be his under-king, because you do not have the power to resist him."

Then Edmund summoned Bishop Humbert and discussed with him how he should answer Hinguar. The bishop, fearful because of the disaster at Thetford and the threat to the king's life, counselled him to submit to whatever Hinguar demanded. Edmund replied: "O bishop! This wretched nation is humiliated, and I would rather die in battle against him who is trying to possess the people's land." Then the bishop said: "Alas, dear king, your people lie slaughtered, and you do not have the forces to fight. And these pirates will come and bind you alive, unless you save your life by fleeing, or by submitting to him in this way." The king replied: "What I want and desire with all my heart is that I should not be left alone when my beloved thanes with their wives and children have been suddenly killed by these pirates. It was never my custom to flee, and I would rather die for my country if I have to. And Almighty God knows that I will never renounce His worship, nor His true love, in life or in death."

Then he turned to Hinguar's messenger and said: "You would certainly deserve to die right now, but I will not dirty my clean hands in your filthy blood, for I follow Christ, Who set us this example. And I will gladly be killed by you if God so ordains it. Go quickly now and tell your savage lord: 'Edmund will never while living submit in this land to the pagan war-lord Hinguar, unless he first submit in this land to Christ the Saviour in faith.'"

Then Edmund marched with his men to Thetford. The battle raged for seven hours on the plain between Melford and Catford bridges; and finally Hinguar and his men retreated to their entrenched camp. Edmund was the victor, but at a terrible cost; and as he marched back to Hoxne he resolved to give himself up rather than continue the blood carnage.

Shortly after his arrival in Hoxne, the news came of a fresh Danish inroad into the country. Hubba had completed his destruction of Ely and Soham, and had now set out with 10,000 more men to help his brother complete the conquest of East Anglia. Resistance was now hopeless, and Edmund's only thought was how to preserve his country from further bloodshed and preserve in it the Christian faith. Bishop Humbert again counselled flight, if only in the hope that he might return to reconquer the land for Christ. But Edmund knew that the enemy would the more ruthlessly put to sword any able-bodied man who might assist in his restoration. Nor would that be enough: Hinguar entertained a personal hatred of the king which would be satisfied only by his being captured alive... So the saint turned to Humbert and said: "O Bishop Humbert, my father, it is necessary that I alone should die for the people, and that the whole nation should not perish." Then, having dismissed his men and laid aside his arms, he entered the church and prostrated himself in front of

the altar, praying for strength for his feat of martyrdom for Christ and his suffering people.

Having marched up to the town and surrounded it, Hinguar sent his men into the church with orders to touch no one except the king. They seized the king, bound him, and beat him with cudgels while insulting him continually. Then they tied him to a tree and flogged him with whips for a long time. Meanwhile the king called unceasingly on the name of Christ. This infuriated the pagans, and they now shot at him with arrows until he was entirely covered with them, like the holy Martyr Sebastian. When Hinguar saw that the holy king would not renounce Christ, he ordered him to be beheaded. And so they dragged him, still calling on Christ, to the place of slaughter and there beheaded him. Then Bishop Humbert, too, was led into the arena and beheaded. This took place on November 20, 869, when Edmund had reigned for fifteen years and was twenty-nine years old.

The pagans returned to their ships, having thrown the head of St. Edmund into dense brambles so that it would be left unburied. Then the local inhabitants came and found the headless body, but could not find the head. A man who had been a witness of the martyrdom said that he thought that they had hidden the head somewhere in the wood. So a search-party was organized which scoured the bushes and brambles. And as they were calling to each other, they heard answered "Here! Here! Here!", until they all came to the place where the head lay. And there they saw it lying between the two paws of a grey wolf, who, while not daring to harm it himself, had been protecting it from the other wild beasts. Thanking God Almighty for His miracles, the people took the head and carried it back to the town. The wolf followed them as if he were tame, and then, having seen it into the town, returned to the wood. The people joined the head back to the body, and then buried it as best they could, hastily erecting a wooden chapel over it...

During the reign of King Edward the Elder in the early tenth century, the Danelaw - the area of England controlled by the Danes - was steadily re-conquered, beginning with East Anglia. Thus already in his reign the Danish ruler Eric was ruling the province under the suzerainty of King Edward. And it was in about 915 that a miracle drew the attention of the liberated people to their last Christian king, St. Edmund.

One night, a blind man and a boy who was leading him were walking through the woods near Hoxne. Not seeing any house nearby, they resolved to stay the night in what was in fact the wooden chapel constructed over St. Edmund's grave. Upon entering, they stumbled across the martyr's grave; but, though terrified at first, they decided not to leave but to stay in the chapel, using the grave as a pillow for the night. Hardly had they closed their eyes, when a column of light suddenly illumined the whole place. The boy woke up his master in fear. "Alas! Alas!" he cried, "our lodging is on fire!" But the blind man calmed him down, assuring him that their host would not let them come to harm. And indeed, at dawn they discovered that through St.

Edmund's prayers the blind man could now see.

The news of this miracle spread throughout East Anglia, and the people resolved to translate the body of their saint to a safer and more honourable shrine. They chose the town of Beadricsworth (now Bury St. Edmunds), whose church and monastery, founded by St. Sigebert in the seventh century, had been destroyed by the Danes, but some of whose priests still survived. When they had rebuilt the church, Bishop Theodred of Elmham and the whole clergy of East Anglia translated the holy body with great ceremony into its new shrine.

7. KING ALFRED THE GREAT, THE ENGLISH DAVID

In 870, the year after King Edmund's martyrdom, the Vikings crossed the Thames and defeated King Aethelred and his brother Prince Alfred at Reading. However, on January 8, 871 the two brothers met the Vikings at Ashdown and won a famous victory – the first major setback for the Vikings in England.

The manner of the victory was significant. Prince Alfred and his men took up position blocking the Viking advance. However, King Aethelred would not join him at first because he was attending the Divine Liturgy in his tent, and said that he would not fight until the liturgy was completed. Alfred had no choice but to begin the battle without his brother and when he was not yet in position. He charged *uphill* at the pagans "like a wild boar". They retreated, and when King Aethelred joined his brother the retreat turned into a rout. The Vikings lost thousands of men, and were driven all the way back to their camp at Reading.¹¹⁹

However, on March 22 another battle took place at Meretun at which King Aethelred was mortally wounded. On St. George's day, April 23, 871, he died, and at the tender age of twenty-one, after the deaths of all four of his brothers, Alfred was king of Wessex. As the holy pope had foreseen, he was now in the position of a Roman consul, defending the last outpost of Christian Rome and commanding the last significant army standing in the way of the complete triumph of the pagan Vikings over Christian England.

The reign of King Alfred, the founder of the All-English kingdom, did not begin well. In his first battle as king he lost to the Vikings at Wilton. Four years of peace ensued, during which the Vikings consolidated their control over northern and central England. They placed puppet kings on the thrones of Northumbria and Mercia. In 874, King Burhred of Mercia fled to Rome with his wife, Alfred's sister, and died there as a monk.

Sometimes King Alfred would visit his spiritual father, St. Neot, asking for his blessing. There is some evidence that the king was in conflict with Archbishop Aethelred of Canterbury at this time - there exists a letter dated to 877 from the archbishop to Pope John VIII complaining about the king. It may be in this connection that St. Neot severely criticized the king for his proud harshness, bringing before him the humility of David as an example, and pointing out that Saul, who had been placed at the head of the tribes of Israel when he was small in his own eyes, was later condemned for his pride. Then he prophesied that the barbarians would invade the land and triumph by God's permission, and he would be the only one to escape, wandering as a fugitive over the land. "O King," he said, "you will suffer much in this life; no man can say how much you will suffer. But now, beloved child, hear me

¹¹⁹ Bishop Asser, *Life of King Alfred*, 37-38.

if you are willing, and turn your heart to my counsel. Forsake your wickedness; redeem your sins by almsgiving, and wipe them out through tears." And he urged him, when he would see his words fulfilled, not to despair, but to act like a man and strengthen his heart. For through his intercessions he had obtained from God that Alfred would again be restored to his former prosperity, so long as he ceased from doing evil and repented of his sins. And he further urged him to send gifts to the Pope, beseeching him to give freedom to the English School in Rome. This good deed would help him in his troubles. Alfred then sent the Pope as he had been advised, and obtained his request, together with several holy relics and a portion of the True Cross.

In 876, the Vikings resumed their offensive. Their new leader Guthrum rode from Cambridge to Wareham, deep inside Alfred's kingdom. A Viking fleet was very near, and the combination of the army in Wareham and the fleet at sea presented a mortal threat to King Alfred. By God's Providence the fleet was completely destroyed in a storm. However, being unable to defeat the land army under Guthrum, Alfred was forced to make peace with him. According to the agreement, Guthrum was supposed to leave Wessex, but instead, under cover of night, he established himself within the Roman walls of the city of Exeter. Alfred pursued him, and the two sides again made peace, exchanging hostages.

On July 31 St. Neot died. Almost immediately, in August, Guthrum retreated north of the Thames into Viking-dominated territory at Gloucester. The threat had passed – for the time being...

King Alfred celebrated Christmas, 877 at his royal villa at Chippenham in Wiltshire. On Twelfth Night, January 6, traditionally the climax of the festivities, Guthrum made a sudden surprise attack on Alfred and forced him to flee to the west. After Pascha (March 23), Alfred and a few men arrived at a small island surrounded by marshes called Athelney, near Glastonbury, the place where St. Joseph of Arimathea had first preached the Gospel in apostolic times. The island was 9,500 square metres in size – the full extent of Orthodox England controlled by the king at this, the lowest point in English Orthodox history.

Although the main sources for Alfred's reign – Bishop Asser's *Life* and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* – make no direct mention of this, there is strong evidence that Alfred was betrayed - perhaps by his nephew Aethelwold, who joined the Danes after his death¹²⁰, more probably by Alderman Wulfhere of Wiltshire.¹²¹ Guthrum and the English traitors probably planned either to kill Alfred or force him to flee abroad, making way for an English puppet-king for Wessex on the model of the puppet-kings already installed in the north. But Alfred refused to flee the country as his brother-in-law King Burhred of Mercia had done.

¹²⁰ Michael Wood, *In Search of the Dark Ages*, London: Penguin, 1994, p. 106.

¹²¹ Justin Pollard, *Alfred the Great*, London: John Murray, 2006, pp. 166-167.

This decision of Alfred's probably saved Anglo-Saxon England and English Orthodox Christian civilization as a whole...

However, his situation was still desperate. For, as Bishop Asser writes, he "had nothing to live on except what he could forage by frequent raids, either secretly or even openly, from the Vikings as well as from the Christians who had submitted to the Vikings' authority."¹²² One day, the king was asked for alms by a poor beggar. He gave him some of the little he possessed. That night, the beggar appeared to him in a dream and revealed that he was the famous St. Cuthbert of Lindisfarne (the greatest of the English saints, whose incorrupt relics were at that moment being carried by monks around the North of England to escape the marauding Vikings). He then told the king that God would now have mercy on England after the great suffering she had undergone because of her sins, and that Alfred himself would regain his kingdom. As a sign of the truth of his words, the saint said, the next morning Alfred's fishermen would bring in an enormous catch of fish, which would be the more miraculous because of the extreme coldness of the weather. When Alfred awoke, he discovered that his wife had had exactly the same vision; and at the same time his men came in to announce that they had made an enormous catch of fish. Soon the rest of the vision was fulfilled...¹²³

Encouraged by this, the king decided on some daring reconnaissance work. With one follower, he gained admittance to the Danish camp as a singing actor, and there was able to find out everything he needed to know before returning to Athelney.¹²⁴ Then, as winter turned into spring, Alfred was joined by Alderman Aethelnoth of Somerset and a small force. Together, they prepared a great counter-attack...

"The key to the counter-attack," writes David Starkey, "was, once again, the shires. Historic Wessex (that is, the kingdom before its expansion under Alfred's grandfather, Egbert) was divided into five 'shires' or, as we would now say using Norman-French rather than Anglo-Saxon, 'counties': Somerset itself, Devon, Wiltshire, Dorset and Hampshire. The shires were further sub-divided into 'hundreds', so called because, in theory though rarely in practice, they contained a hundred 'hides' or parcels of land each sufficient to maintain a family. We do not know when the shires and hundreds began. The former are first mentioned in the seventh century and the latter in the eleventh. But they are clearly much older. Perhaps indeed they are immemorial and go back to the folk-moots of the first Saxon settlers in western Britannia. This could explain why their meetings took place in the open air, at traditional assembly points that were often marked by a prehistoric monument, like a tumulus or barrow..."

¹²² Bishop Asser, *Life of King Alfred*, 53.

¹²³ William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, 121.

¹²⁴ William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, 121.

“These meetings, and the less frequent but more important shire assemblies, which took place twice a years, were called ‘courts’. They did indeed try legal cases, both criminal and civil. But they did much more. They kept the peace; levied taxes and raised troops. Finally, their sworn testimony, later systematized as the jury, supplied the basic information about property rights and inheritance without which royal government could not function: even William the Conqueror, in all his power, would depend on such juries to produce the myriad facts on which the Domesday Book was based.

“For the hundred and shire were also, whatever their folk origins might have been, the agencies of royal government. It was one royal official, the reeve or bailiff, who presided over the Hundred Court, and another, much greater one, the *ealdorman* [alderman], who chaired the Shire Court. The *ealdorman* was the leading man in his shire and one of the greatest in Wessex. He commanded the shire levies, acted as intermediary between the court and the county, and used his authority to settle most local disputes.

“Indeed, the *ealdorman* was so powerful that it was easy for him to forget that he was the king’s servant and to aspire instead to become a territorial magnate in his own right. Alfred was well aware of the temptation and, in a well judged interpolation in one of his translations, he denounced the *ealdorman* who turned his delegated authority (*ealdordome*) to lordship (*hlafforddome*) and caused ‘the reverence of himself and his power to become the regular custom of the shire he rules’.

“Alfred fought this tendency. So did his successors. So, too, perhaps, did the people. The result was that the paths of government in Wessex and Francia started to diverge. In Francia, the nobility, like Alfred’s ambitious *ealdorman*, soon took over the king’s former powers in the localities and privatized justice, taxation and the raising of troops. In so doing, they interposed themselves between king an people: the people of a district were now their lord’s not the king’s. In Wessex, this never quite happened. Here, instead, the partnership between king and people, into which rough and ready egalitarianism of the early Saxon settlers had developed, held. This the partnership with its sense of all being in it together, would make it easier for Alfred to impose heavy demands on the people as the crisis drew out over years and decades. It also provided, in ‘the self-government at the king’s command’ of the shires and hundreds, and the collective self-consciousness which they fostered, the means for Alfred to being his fight-back against Guthrum...”¹²⁵

This is an important insight: the kings of Alfred’s line succeeded only because they remained popular at the same time as autocratic; they did not allow any of their servants, even the most senior, to stand between them and the people.

¹²⁵ Starkey, *The Monarchy of England*, vol. 1, London: Chatto & Windus, 2004, pp. 58-60.

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It was in this period, the most critical in his reign, that St. Neot appeared to the king in his misery one night, and told him that he would triumph over the enemy in the seventh week after Pascha, and that the Danish King Guthrum and his nobles would be baptized.

And so, in the seventh week after Pascha Alfred rode to a secret meeting place called Egbert's stone, and there, writes Bishop Asser, "all the inhabitants of Somerset and Wiltshire and all the inhabitants of Hampshire – those who had not sailed overseas for fear of the Vikings – joined up with him. When they saw the king... they were filled with immense joy."¹²⁶

Then, on the night before the battle of Edington, in the village of Iley, St. Neot again appeared to the king. He looked like an angel, his hair white as snow, his garments glistening and fragrant. "Arise quickly," he said, "and prepare for victory. When you came here, I was with you, I helped you. So now you and your men go out to battle tomorrow, and the Lord will be with you, the Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle, Who gives victory to kings. And I will go before you to the battle, and your enemies shall fall by your arm before my eyes, and you will smite them with the edge of the sword."¹²⁷

The next morning, during the battle, an invisible hand seized Alfred's standard and waved the English on. The Danes were so overwhelmed that they agreed to leave Wessex forever, while Guthrum and thirty of his leading men agreed to be baptized.

This time the Danes kept their promises: at Aller (only three miles from Athelney) Alfred received his enemy from the baptismal font, and for twelve days the Danes remained with Alfred and enjoyed his generous hospitality.¹²⁸

"In 880," write Julian D. Richards and Dawn Hadley, "Guthrum's army went to East Anglia 'and settled there and shared out the land'.

"Soon after, Guthrum and Alfred formally divided out their areas of jurisdiction, and made arrangements for relations between their followers over legal disputes, trade and the movement of people. Guthrum minted coins in his realm, some of which were copies of those of King Alfred, while on others he used his baptismal name of Aethelstan. These initiatives were part of the process by which Guthrum became a Christian king in England."¹²⁹

¹²⁶ Bishop Asser, *Life of King Alfred*, 55.

¹²⁷ Eleventh-century Anglo-Saxon Homily translated in Whitaker, *The Life of Saint Neot*, 1809.

¹²⁸ Bishop Asser, *Life of King Alfred*, 56.

¹²⁹ Richards and Hadley, "The Great Viking Terror", *BBC History Magazine*, September, 2016, p. 39.

The coins issued by Aethelstan-Guthrum commemorate King Edmund – the same Edmund whom the Viking Great Army had murdered – as a saint. This shows the extraordinary degree to which the Vikings of East Anglia had been assimilated into Christian England. Thus Anna Chapman writes: “The invocation of Edmund as a saint (and perhaps the central cross motif too) is a deliberate and ostentatious display of Christianity; this, and the fact that he was still being referred to as king over twenty years after his death, are not perhaps things we expect to find in an area just colonized under Viking leaders who had only recently been converted. This continuity all evokes a time before the Vikings arrived, and a past from which they were necessarily excluded.”¹³⁰

In 885 a Viking fleet appeared on the Thames. Alfred saw this as a violation of his agreement with Guthrum and seized London from the Vikings. Then, according to Asser, “all the Angles and Saxons – those who had formerly been scattered everywhere and were not in captivity with the Vikings – turned willingly to Alfred and submitted to his lordship.”¹³¹ Seizing the opportunity, Alfred now drew up a permanent treaty with King Guthrum. The English and Danish kings divided England between them: most of the north and east became the “Danelaw”, the administration of the Danes, while the English kept the south and the west (except Cornwall, which was a Celtic kingdom).

¹³⁰ Chapman, “King Alfred and the Cult of St. Edmund”, *History Today*, July, 2003, pp. 39-40.

¹³¹ Bishop Asser, *Life of King Alfred*, 83.

8. KING ALFRED THE GREAT, THE ENGLISH SOLOMON

King Alfred was even greater in peace than he was in war; he was a philosopher-king no less than a warrior-king. Determined that he should never again be caught out and outmanoeuvred by the rapid strikes of the Danes, he made three important innovations in the sphere of military organization that proved to be very important when war with the Vikings resumed in the 890s. Although the Vikings were not decisively defeated then, they gave up their attempts to conquer England for another one hundred years.

Alfred's first innovation was the building of a fleet in order to meet and destroy the marauding pagans before they ever set foot on English soil. He even ordered the construction of a long-ship according to his own design.¹³² This was the first permanent fleet that any British ruler had constructed since the fourth-century Romans, who had built a fleet to protect the island against – the pagan Anglo-Saxons.

Secondly, he went part of the way to creating a standing army, “dividing his army in two, so that always half its men were at home, half out on service, except for those men who were to garrison the *burhs*”.¹³³ Chris Wickham writes that Alfred's “dense network of public fortifications, *burhs*, throughout southern England, defended by public obligation... was sufficiently effective to hold off a second large-scale Viking assault in 892-6. Alfred died ‘king of the Anglo-Saxons’, or, in the *Chronicle*'s words, ‘of the whole English people except that part which was under Danish rule’; he may have been the first king to see himself in ‘English’, not West Saxon or Mercian, terms... But it was the Vikings who made that choice possible for him.”¹³⁴

The *burhs*, or new towns, were Alfred's third and most original innovation: he constructed, or reconstructed, thirty of them at equal intervals throughout Wessex so that no Englishman working in the fields was more than twenty miles from a *burh*, to which he could flee in time of Viking invasion. The *burhs* were laid out in rectilinear street plans designed to facilitate the movement of soldiers. They were protected by massive earthworks, and Alfred appointed 27,000 soldiers to man their walls. The local landowners were required to provide four men to man each “pole” of wall (5.5 metres). The towns were also designed as centres of trade, so the predominantly rural civilization of Anglo-Saxon England was soon acquiring an urban “middle class”.

The only real city in England before this had been London, which was now relocated within the walls of the old Roman town by Alfred and extensively rebuilt. This Romanizing tendency was also revealed in the coins he minted in London,

¹³² *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 896.

¹³³ *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 893.

¹³⁴ Wickham, *The Inheritance of Rome: A History of Europe from 400 to 1000*, London: Penguin, 2009, p. 457.

which, as Geoffrey Hindley points out, “show ‘design elements deliberately and carefully copied’ from Roman models”.¹³⁵ In his London coins Alfred calls himself “king of the English” rather than “king of Wessex”; and, sensitive to the Londoners’ feelings, he appointed a Mercian, not a Wessex man, as ealdorman of the city and gave him his daughter in marriage.

Alfred’s policy towards London was a part of his wider policy of abolishing the regional differences and rivalries among the Anglo-Saxons and creating a genuinely all-English kingdom. Conscious that the divisions among the Anglo-Saxons had been at least partly to blame for their near-conquest by the Vikings, he deliberately tried to promote Englishmen from north of the Thames, especially in Church appointments. He was also very generous towards the Welsh Celts, who had only recently returned from a century-long schism from the Orthodox Church because of their hatred of the English. Thus the Celtic Bishop Asser moved to England as Bishop of Sherborne and became his main counselor and biographer, and by the end of his reign all the South Welsh kingdoms had submitted freely to his rule.¹³⁶

An important aspect of Alfred’s unification policy was his codification of law. His *Lawbook* of 893 acknowledges his debt to the law-codes of earlier kings of Wessex, Kent and Mercia, and he seems to have intended it to cover, not only Wessex, but also Kent and English (Western) Mercia.¹³⁷ Alfred himself travelled round the kingdom checking on the activities of his judges, and if he discovered that they had committed some injustice he imposed on them an original penance – further education. Bishop Asser recounts his words: “I am astonished at this arrogance of yours, since through God’s authority and my own you have enjoyed the office and status of wise men, yet you have neglected the study and application of wisdom. For that reason I command you either to relinquish immediately the offices of worldly power that you possess, or else to apply yourselves much more attentively to the pursuit of wisdom.’ Having heard these words, the aldermen and reeves were terrified and chastened as if by the greatest of punishments, and they strove with every effort to apply themselves to learning what is just...”¹³⁸

Alfred’s attitude to wisdom was both mystical and intensely practical. The most famous relic of his reign, the Alfred Jewel, portrays a figure in cloisonné enamel that has been interpreted to represent the Wisdom of God.¹³⁹ Again, when he translated Boethius’ *The Consolation of Philosophy*, he recast the work as a dialogue between the inquirer’s mind and Wisdom personified, adding passages of his own composition which revealed both his devotion to wisdom as the key virtue, and his own conception of kingship.

¹³⁵ Hindley, *A Brief History of the Anglo-Saxons*, London: Robinson, 2006, p. 210.

¹³⁶ Bishop Asser, *Life of King Alfred*, 80.

¹³⁷ Sir Frank Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1971, p. 276.

¹³⁸ Bishop Asser, *Life of King Alfred*, 106.

¹³⁹ Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983, p. 205.

For example: "Look, Wisdom, you know that desire for and possession of earthly power never pleased me overmuch, and that I did not unduly desire this earthly rule, but that nevertheless I wished for tools and resources for the task that I was commanded to accomplish, which was that I should virtuously and worthily guide and direct the authority which was entrusted to me. You know of course that no one can make known any skill, nor direct and guide any authority, without tools and resources; a man cannot work on any enterprise without resources. In the case of the king, the resources and tools with which to rule are that he have his land fully manned: he must have praying men, fighting men and working men. You know also that without these tools no king may make his ability known. Another aspect of his resources is that he must have the means of support for his tools, the three classes of men. These, then, are their means of support: land to live on, gifts, weapons, food, ale, clothing, and whatever else is necessary for each of the three classes of men. Without these things he cannot maintain the tools, nor without the tools can he accomplish any of the things he was commanded to do. Accordingly, I sought the resources with which to exercise the authority, in order that my skills and power would not be forgotten and concealed: because every skill and every authority is soon obsolete and passed over, if it is without wisdom; because no man may bring to bear any skill without wisdom..."¹⁴⁰

"From the cradle onwards," wrote Bishop Asser, "in spite of all the demands of the present life, it has been the desire for wisdom, more than anything else, together with the nobility of his birth, which have characterized the nature of his noble mind."¹⁴¹ But the bishop criticized his parents for not teaching the young Alfred to read until he was twelve. Nevertheless, he was a good listener, and memorized English poems recited by others. And then one day his mother his mother offered to give a beautifully embroidered book of English poetry to whichever of her five sons would learn it fastest. Alfred won the contest...¹⁴²

Having defeated the Danes, King Alfred not only indulged his passion for book learning, but decided to educate the whole of his kingdom. He lamented that England, which had once been famed for her literary culture (especially Northumbria, the home of the Venerable Bede and of Alcuin, Charlemagne's "minister of education"), was now largely illiterate in Latin as a result of the Viking devastations. So he invited the last few learned men of the land to his court, and together with them foreign imports such as the Frankish St. Grimbald, who founded a monastery in Winchester, as well as Germans and Bretons. With the aid of these men, and especially Grimbald, he began an astonishingly ambitious programme of translation and copying.

¹⁴⁰ Keynes and Lapidge, *op. cit.*, pp. 132-133.

¹⁴¹ Bishop Asser, *Life of King Alfred*, 22.

¹⁴² Bishop Asser, *Life of King Alfred*, 23.

Alfred himself did not at first know Latin, but having learned “by divine inspiration”, according to Asser, both to read Latin and translate it into English “on one and the same day”¹⁴³, he set about translating the following books which he judged to be “the most necessary for all men to know”: St. Gregory the Great’s *Pastoral Care*, Boethius’ *Consolation of Philosophy*, St. Augustine’s *Soliloquies* and the first fifty psalms of David. Moreover, several other works, including St. Gregory’s *Dialogues* and the Venerable Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History* were translated by others at his initiative. In addition, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and an *Old English Martyrology* containing the lives of about two hundred saints were probably started in King Alfred’s reign. Nor did King Alfred neglect the physical well-being of his subjects: a book containing cures for eighty-eight illnesses (listed in order from head to foot) was composed in his reign, and Alfred sent the second part of this work to Patriarch Elias of Jerusalem (together with alms for the Church of Jerusalem and “the monks of India”).

Alfred sent his translations, together with prefaces written by himself, to the leading bishops of his kingdom, asking them to make further copies. In this way a strong vernacular tradition of sacred and secular literature grew up in England which continued to flourish into the tenth and eleventh centuries.¹⁴⁴ This Anglo-Saxon vernacular tradition was unique in Western Europe in the Orthodox period, but was destroyed by the Roman Catholic Church after the Norman conquest of England.

King Alfred’s astonishingly broad range of achievements was accomplished in the face of enormous difficulties: enemies from without, inertia from within his kingdom, and extremely painful illnesses. As a youth, Alfred prayed to God for an illness that would help him suppress his carnal desires, and contracted piles. Later, during a visit to the shrine of St. Guerir (or Gwinear?) of Cornwall, he asked God to replace the piles with a less severe illness that would not be outwardly visible. The piles disappeared, and then on his wedding day, in 868, he was suddenly struck by a new and mysterious illness which lasted until his forty-fifth year. “And if at any time through God’s mercy,” writes Bishop Asser, “that illness abated for the space of a day or a night or even of an hour, his fear and horror of that accursed pain would never desert him, but rendered him virtually useless – as it seemed to him – for heavenly and worldly affairs.”¹⁴⁵

In spite of all this, continues the bishop, the king “did not refrain from directing the government of the kingdom; pursuing all manner of hunting; giving instruction to all his goldsmiths and craftsmen as well as to his falconers, hawk-trainers and dog-keepers; making to his own design wonderful and precious new treasures which far

¹⁴³ Bishop Asser, *Life of King Alfred*, 86.

¹⁴⁴ In about the year 1000, Abbot Aelfric, who himself wrote many homilies in Anglo-Saxon, referred to “the books which King Alfred wisely translated from Latin into English, which are obtainable” (in Keynes and Lapidge, *op. cit.*, p. 45).

¹⁴⁵ Bishop Asser, *Life of King Alfred*, 74; Keynes and Lapidge, *op. cit.*, pp. 255-256.

surpassed any tradition of his predecessors; reading aloud from books in English and above all learning English poems by heart; issuing orders to his followers: all these things he did himself with great application to the best of his abilities. He was also in the invariable habit of listening daily to divine services and the Liturgy, and of participating in certain psalms and prayers and in the day-time and night-time offices, and, at night-time,.. of going (without his household knowing) to various churches in order to pray. He similarly applied himself attentively to charity and distribution of alms to the native population and to foreign visitors of all races, showing immense and incomparable kindness and generosity to all men, as well as to the investigation of things unknown. Wherefore many Franks, Frisians, Gauls, Vikings, Welshmen, Irishmen and Bretons subjected themselves willingly to his lordship, nobles and commoners alike; and, as befitted his royal status, he ruled, loved, honoured and enriched them all with wealth and authority, just as he did his own people. He was also in the habit of listening eagerly and attentively to Holy Scripture being read out by his own countrymen, or even, if the situation should somehow arise, of listening to these lessons in the company of foreigners. With wonderful affection he cherished his bishops and the entire clergy, his ealdormen and nobles, his officials as well as all his associates. Nor, in the midst of other affairs, did he cease from personally giving, by day and night, instruction to all in virtuous behaviour and tutelage in literacy to their sons, who were being brought up in the royal household and whom he loved no less than his own children."¹⁴⁶

The king founded only two monasteries, a men's at Athelney, and a women's at Shaftesbury, whose first abbess was his daughter Aethelgifu. However, by his educational work, which was directed above all for the benefit of the Church, he made possible the great monastic revival of the tenth century. And if a man can be judged by his descendants, then he must be judged very highly; for his descendants in the tenth and eleventh centuries comprise one of the most distinguished dynasties in Orthodox history, with several canonized saints (the nuns Elgiva, Edburga and Edith, and Kings Edward the Martyr and Edward the Confessor).

King Alfred reposed in peace on October 26, 899... In Western Orthodox history, only King Alfred and Charlemagne among rulers have been accorded the title "the Great". But Alfred deserves the title much more than the heretical Charlemagne. Thoroughly Orthodox in faith (the Filioque found no place in English churches in his reign), Alfred accomplished more, in more directions, and in the face of greater difficulties, than any other ruler of the so-called "Dark Ages". Unlike Charlemagne, he did not quarrel with the Orthodox Church in the East, but asked for the prayers of the Eastern Patriarchs. And if his kingdom was smaller and humbler than Charlemagne's, it was more united, lasted longer and produced more fruit... He saved English Orthodox civilization for another two hundred years.

¹⁴⁶ Bishop Asser, *Life of King Alfred*, 76.

Justly, therefore, did his descendant, the tenth-century chronicler Aethelweard, describe him as “the unshakeable pillar of the western people, a man full of justice, vigorous in warfare, learned in speech, above all instructed in Divine learning...

“Now, O reader, say ‘O Christ our Redeemer, save his soul!’”¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁷ Aethelweard, in Keynes and Lapidge, *op. cit.*, p. 191.

9. ATHELSTAN, CONQUEROR OF THE NORTH

The northern province of Northumbria had fallen on hard times since its golden age in the seventh and eighth centuries. The Vikings had struck there first in 793, sacking the great monastery of Lindisfarne. And yet God did not intend this great province, the homeland of so many saints, to remain in slavery to the pagans...

In 883, St. Cuthbert, the greatest saint of the north of England, appeared "to the holy abbot of Carlisle, whose name was Eadred [Edred], firmly enjoining him as follows: 'Go,' he said, 'across the Tyne to the army of the Danes, and say to them that, if they will obey me, they are to point out to you a certain boy, Guthfrith, Hardcnut's son by name, a purchased slave of a certain widow, and you and the whole army are to give in the early morning the price for him to the widow; and give him the aforesaid price at the third hour, and at the sixth hour lead him before the whole multitude, that they may elect him king. And at the ninth hour lead him with the whole army on to the hill which is called 'Oswiu's down', and there place on his right arm a gold armet, and thus they may all appoint him as king. Also say to him, when he has been made king, that he is to give me the whole territory between the Tyne and the Wear; and whoever shall flee to me, whether on account of homicide, or of any other necessity, is to have sanctuary for thirty-seven days and nights.' Resolved as a result of this vision, and strengthened by the reasonable command of the blessed confessor, the holy abbot confidently hastened to the barbarian army; and being honourably received by it, he faithfully carried out in order what had been enjoined by him. For he both found and redeemed the boy, and made him king by the great goodwill of the whole multitude, receiving the land and right of sanctuary. Then Bishop Eardwulf brought to the army and to the hill the body of St. Cuthbert, and over it the king himself and the whole army swore peace and fidelity, for as long as they lived; and they kept this oath well."¹⁴⁸

This must count as one of the most extraordinary acts of king-making (and massive land-redistribution) in Christian history; and the obedience of the pagan Vikings to the Christian saint was a good sign for their future conversion.

The newly-crowned King Guthfrith settled the monks of St. Cuthbert at Chester-le-Street, where he built them a cathedral in which to house the saint's incorrupt body. And in response to the saint's command, he gave them all the lands between the Tyne and Wear. In view of St. Cuthbert's decisive interventions both in the north and the south of the country, it is no wonder that when King Alfred was dying, he admonished his son and successor, Edward the Elder, "that he should have especial honour for St. Cuthbert".¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ Anonymous, *History of St. Cuthbert*; translated by Dorothy Whitelock, *English Historical Documents*, London: Eyre & Spottiswood, 1955, p. 261.

¹⁴⁹ Symeon of Durham, *History of the Church of Durham*.

After the death of King Guthfrith there was a pagan reaction under King Ragnald, who conquered the whole of the north. "He divided the estates of St. Cuthbert, and he gave one part, towards the south, from the estate which is called Eden as far as Billingham, to a certain powerful thegn of his who was called Scula; and the other part, from Eden as far as the River Wear, to one called Olaf Ball. And this son of the devil was hostile in every way he could to God and St. Cuthbert. And thus on a certain day, when full of the unclean spirit he entered raging into the church of the holy confessor, he said in the presence of Bishop Cutheard and the whole community: 'What can this dead man do against me, when his threats are daily disregarded? I swear by my mighty gods, Thor and Othin, that from this hour I will be a great enemy to all of you.' And when the bishop and the whole congregation knelt before God and St. Cuthbert, and besought them for vengeance for these threats, as it is written: 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay', this son of the devil turned away with great pride and indignation, wishing to depart. But when he had put one foot outside the threshold, he felt as if iron were fixed in the other foot. With this pain piercing his diabolical heart, he fell, and the devil thrust his sinful soul into hell. And St. Cuthbert, as was right, received his land."¹⁵⁰

Meanwhile, the re-conquest and re-evangelization of the Viking parts of Eastern England was continuing apace. King Alfred's son, Edward the Elder, in alliance with his elder sister, Aethelflaeda, "the Lady of the Mercians" and her husband, Aethelred, fought several battles against the Vikings of the Danelaw. They were helped by the warrior-saints of England. Thus in 909 Aethelflaeda brought the relics of St. Oswald from Bardney in Lincolnshire to her newly restored city of Gloucester. The next year the Mercians crushed an invading Viking army at Wolverhampton on August 5, the feastday of St. Oswald.¹⁵¹ Meanwhile, in neighbouring East Anglia the Danish King Eric, successor of Guthrum, accepted King Edward as his suzerain. The Christianized Danes even issued coins commemorating the Martyr-King Edmund, whom they themselves had killed only a few years before!

But it was under Edward's successor, Aethelstan, that England, together with extensive Celtic lands, was finally reunited under an Orthodox Anglo-Saxon king. While still a child, Athelstan had been invested with a sword by his grandfather King Alfred. This was a prophetic indication of his future prowess in war.

At first, he tried to unite the north to his kingdom through peaceful methods. Thus in 925 he married his sister Eadgyth (Edith) to the Danish King Sihtric of Northumbria, who 'gave up the heathen religion for the love of the maiden and received the faith of Christ. But no long afterwards he cast off the blessed maiden and, deserting his Christianity, restored the worship of idols, and after a short while ended his life miserably as an apostate. Accordingly the holy maiden, having preserved her chastity, remained strong in good works to the end of her life, at

¹⁵⁰ Anonymous, *History of St. Cuthbert*; translated by Whitelock, *op. cit.*, p. 262.

¹⁵¹ The coincidence was pointed out by Michael Wood in a BBC television programme.

Polesworth, in fasts and vigils, in prayers and in zeal for almsgiving. She departed after the passage of a praiseworthy life from this world on 15 July, at this same place, where to this day Divine miracles do not cease to be performed..."¹⁵²

Sihtric died early in 927, whereupon Athelstan took his revenge on the apostate who had so dishonoured his sister. As Michael Wood writes, "he invaded Northumbria, expelled Sihtric's son Anlaf and his brother Guthfrith, and entered York, demolishing the Danish fortifications and seizing huge booty which he distributed to his army. It was a historic moment, for a southern king had never directly ruled in York before..."

"York was only the beginning. That summer Athelstan rode up the Great North Road, attacked Bamburgh and drove out the Anglo-Saxon early Ealdred Ealdufing, who had ruled north of the Tees like an independent king. Ealdred became Athelstan's man and was reinstated. Meanwhile ambassadors had been sent to the north British kings who had given help to the Viking fugitives from York. Under threat of war they too submitted - Constantine, king of the Scots, Owain, king of the Cumbrians, and probably (though he is not mentioned) Constantine's brother Donald, king of the Strathclyde Welsh. Their submission was the prelude to 'all the kings of the island' becoming Athelstan's men.

"12 July 927... The northern kings and the Bamburgh dynasty gave up their kingdoms and were reinstated as tributaries in a ceremony on what was the northern border of the English kingdom. Eamont was a great Roman road junction twenty miles south of Carlisle, and Athelstan was establishing his frontier along the Eamont, Ullswater, and across the fells and down the Duddon to the sea. In so doing he was cutting back the expansion of the northern kings who had reached their rule deep into southern England during the Viking era. 'They established a covenant of peace with pledges and oaths,' says the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 'and then separated in concord'. The kings gave each other rich gifts, and Aethelstan received Constantine's son from the font having ordered him to be baptized."¹⁵³

Athelstan then subdued the North Welsh kings, including the Anglophile Hywel Dda, 'the Good'. Five kings met him at Hereford, acknowledging him to be "mechteyrn" (Great King), and agreeing to give him a huge yearly tribute. Then he subdued the "West Welsh" of Cornwall, establishing a new boundary at the Tamar and refurbishing the Roman walls of Exeter. He created a new bishopric at St. Germans, and returned at Pascha, 928 to receive the obeisance of two Welsh kings and 'Huwal, king of the West Welsh'. His conquest of Britain complete, Athelstan now received the praises and gifts of several West European rulers. A Frankish cleric said he "excelled in fame and honour all earthly kings of modern times".

¹⁵² Roger of Wendover, *Flores Historiarum*, in Whitelock, *op. cit.*, p. 257.

¹⁵³ Wood, *In Search of the Dark Ages*, London: Penguin, 1994, pp. 129-130.

Athelstan, like Alfred, was as strong in peace as he had proved himself in war, and also shared the cultural interests of his grandfather. He cultivated good relations with foreign rulers, often through the exchange of relics and books, of which he was quite a connoisseur. Thus he exchanged books with Otto of Germany on the occasion of Otto's marriage to the West Saxon Edith.¹⁵⁴ And after giving refuge to Alan Forkbeard of Brittany (as he did to Hakon the Good of Norway and Louis d'Outremer of France), the Bretons gave him many relics, including a part of the True Cross. Again in emulation of his grandfather, Athelstan created law codes; he reorganized and refurbished the borough system; he created a single currency for the whole country; and he revitalized economic life to such an extent that, as an English writer said in the 980s, "from this period there was peace and abundance of all things".¹⁵⁵

In 934 Constantine, king of the Scots, rebelled. Athelstan quickly assembled a great army at Winchester, which included four subject kings from Wales, and rode to Nottingham, where several Viking earls from the Danelaw joined him. Then he moved on further north, giving gifts on the way to the shrines of the major Northumbrian saints: St. John's at Beverley, St. Wilfrid's at Ripon and St. Cuthbert's at Chester-le-street. He also brought relics of many Northumbrian saints south to the West Saxon shrines, such as Glastonbury and his own foundation at Malmesbury. Athelstan's army marched deep into Scotland "as far as Dunnottar, the dramatic rock-fortress of the Picts on the coast south of Aberdeen", while his navy "reached the northernmost point of the mainland, striking at the Norse settlements in Caithness"¹⁵⁶. The northern kings surrendered without a fight. Constantine and Owain were restored to their kingdoms, gifts were exchanged, and Constantine surrendered his son as a hostage.

"The events of 934," writes Wood, "confirmed Athelstan's position at the apex of the hierarchy of rule in Britain. He was an emperor, a king who ruled other kings. He was, splendidly, '*basileus* and *curagulus*' (Greek titles used by the Byzantine emperor in Constantinople) of the whole island of Britain."¹⁵⁷ The Roman theme was emphasized again in 935, when all his subject kings came to him again at the Roman city of Cirencester. In addition to "bowing" to Athelstan, the sub-kings had to take him as "father and lord" and swear to be "his co-worker by land and sea".¹⁵⁸

Athelstan had been generous to the Scottish King Constantine when he broke his oath of allegiance and rebelled. But when "the hoary-headed traitor", as the English called him, rebelled again in 937, forming a grand alliance with the Viking King Anlaf of Dublin and several Celtic kings, vengeance would finally strike him down. However, things seemed to be going well for the rebels at first, when they sailed into

¹⁵⁴ Wood, *op. cit.*, p. 133.

¹⁵⁵ Wood, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

¹⁵⁶ Wood, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

¹⁵⁷ Wood, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

¹⁵⁸ Wood, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

the Humber and the whole of Northumbria submitted to them...

As the weather deteriorated, and the rebels ravaged the land, Athelstan bided his time – to the annoyance of his fellow-countrymen. But then he suddenly struck at Brunanburgh, somewhere in the north of England, in what *The Annals of Ulster* described as “the immense, lamentable, horrible and desperately fought battle”, or simply “the great battle”, as Aethelweard called it. The northern coalition was crushed with heavy slaughter on both sides.

As if to emphasize that he was now a pan-British king, Athelstan was aided by the intercessions of a Celtic saint. Thus we read in the *Life of St. Nectan of Hartland*, a sixth-century Celtic saint, that on the eve of the battle, a young man from Hartland who was lying in a tent near the king’s pavilion “felt himself suddenly seized with the bubonic plague, which at that time was miserably destroying the army of the English. He began therefore to wail and groan, and with loud clamour to call upon God, repeatedly naming St. Nectan. And so loud were his cries that they disturbed the king and others who were resting in the adjoining tents, so that they could not sleep. After midnight, the blessed martyr came, and standing by the sick man gently touched the part of his body that was affected, and the sick man was immediately cured. When it was morning, inquiry was made who it was who had broken the king’s rest that night, and he was discovered by the watch and his fellow servants, and brought before the king. When the king observed how frightened he was, he bade him not be afraid but tell him why he had cried so loud. Then he said: ‘I felt that this pestilence which rages among the people had struck me, and inconsolable grief took possession of me, to think that I would die unexpectedly, on an expedition in a foreign land, and I began with mournful voice to call upon God, and to invoke again and again, among other saints, St. Nectan, and I was heard; for he came to me when I invoked him, touched with his hand the part affected by the disease and drove away all the disease from me.’

“The king asked him to tell him about the life of the martyr and how he was martyred, and he briefly informed him on both points. Having now recovered his confidence, and being no longer afraid to speak to the king, he added, ‘Begging your pardon, my lord king, I want to say that I trust in our Lord Jesus Christ and in the help of His martyr, which I have often experienced, and if thou devoutly invoke him and commit thyself to his patronage, by his prayers and merits thou wilt obtain victory over the enemy and drive the pestilence away from the people who are perishing.’ What more shall I say? The king accepted the wise advice the young man offered him, and promised that he would give the honour to the Lord and to blessed Nectan if he won the victory and returned safely with his men. The Divine clemency consequently regarded the king’s faith, gave him victory over his enemies and removed the deadly peril of pestilence which had been threatening his army. Wherefore, at his first coming to Devon, when he had been informed by the bailiffs that the manor of Hartland was reckoned to contain twenty hides, he bestowed a tithe

of them, i.e. two hides, upon the church of the blessed martyr, and as long as he lived had a special trust in his intercession."¹⁵⁹

Wood poses the question about King Athelstan: "What made the impression that stuck, so that even after the Norman Conquest, 'the opinion was firmly held among the common people that no one more just or learned had ever ruled the country?'

"His manner was charming and well disposed to churchmen, affable and kind to laymen, serious with magnates out of regard for his majesty.' Athelstan put aside the 'pride of kingship' only with the poor, to whom he was 'approachable and serious minded... out of sympathy for their poverty', a suitable enough sentiment on the part of the rich. His spirit we are told was 'audacious and forceful, much beloved by his subjects for his courage and his humility and like a thunderbolt to rebels with his invincible steadfastness' (William of Malmesbury, *On the Deeds of the English Kings*)."¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ G.H. Doble, *The Saints of Cornwall*, part five, Oxford: The Holywell Press, 1970, pp. 59-79. Another saintly intercession in the battle is recorded by William of Malmesbury: "During the battle, the king was saved from death by the prayers of St. Aldhelm, bishop of Sherborne: "[The Viking King] Olaf, coming well prepared by night, killed a certain bishop with all his household, who had reached the army in the evening and in ignorance of what had occurred had pitched his tent there on account of the evenness of the green plain. Then, proceeding further, Olaf came upon the king himself unprepared, for he had given himself up to profound sleep, not fearing at all that the enemy would dare such an attack. But when, roused from bed by so great an uproar, he urged his men to battle as much as he could through the darkness, by chance his sword fell from its sheath; wherefore, when all things were full of dread and blind confusion, he invoked God and St. Aldhelm, and replacing his hand on the scabbard, he found the sword, which today is kept in the kings' treasury..." (*Gesta Regum Anglorum*, 131; cf. *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum*, I, 14).

¹⁶⁰ Wood, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

10. ST. DUNSTAN AND THE MONASTIC REVIVAL

In 939, King Athelstan died, and was succeeded by King Edmund. Wisely, the new king chose as one of his counselors St. Dunstan, abbot of Glastonbury, which was not far from the king's court at Cheddar in Somerset. St. Dunstan would be the main driving force behind one of the great achievements of Anglo-Saxon England, the tenth-century monastic revival, whose foundations had been laid in the reign of King Athelstan.¹⁶¹

However, Dunstan's ascent to prominence was not smooth: slander and envy, which had already caused him grief in the previous king's reign, did not cease to pursue him now. As a result, the king ordered his banishment. Dunstan then asked some foreign envoys at the court to help him; they promised him hospitality and everything he might need if he accompanied them back to their kingdom on the continent.

The next day the king rode out hunting with his men. As they came to the forest, they dispersed in friendly competition along different paths. However, the baying of the dogs and the calling of the horns enabled many of the stags to make a quick escape; and only the king, with one pack of dogs, found himself on the track of a stag. In his flight the exhausted animal came to a very deep gorge into which he suddenly hurled himself, followed by the dogs. The king, following close behind, was accelerating when he saw the gorge. Desperately he tried hold back his horse, but without success. With all hope for his life gone, he commended his soul into the hands of God, saying within himself: 'I thank Thee, O God Most High, that as far as I can remember, I have not harmed anyone at this time, except only Dunstan, and I shall be reconciled with him promptly if my life is saved.' When he had said this, his horse came to a standstill on the very edge of the abyss.

Praising and giving thanks to God, the king realized that he had come so near to

¹⁶¹ The main sources used in this chapter are: W. Stubbs, *Memorials of St. Dunstan*, Rolls series, 1874, containing the earliest *Vita Dunstani* by Saxon priest B. (c. 1000) and the eleventh-century *Lives* by Abelard, Osbert and Edmer; William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum* and *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum* and *De Antiquitate Glastoniae Ecclesiae*, 2; *Oratio Edgari regis*, P.L. 138, 515D-516A; Eleanor Duckett, *Saint Dunstan of Canterbury*, London: Collins, 1955; David Farmer, *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints*, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1978, pp. 112, 118-120, 140-142, 305-307; Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, Oxford University Press, 1971, pp. 370-372.; Christopher Brooks, *The Saxon and Norman Kings*, London: Fontana, 1963, pp. 127-128; Andrew Prescott, *The Benedictional of St. Aethelwold*, London: The British Library, 2002, pp. 2-8; Ryan Lavelle, *Aethelred II: King of the English 978-1016*, Stroud: Tempus, 1002, pp. 29, 31; Abbot Aelfric, *Vita Aethelwoldi*, in Dorothy Whitelock, *English Historical Documents*, London: Eyre & Spottiswood, 1955; Abbot Aelfric, *Lives of the Saints*, Early English Texts Society, no. 76, 1881; Denis Brearley and Marianne Goodfellow, "Wulfstan's Life of Saint Aethelwold: A Translation with Notes," *Revue de l'Universite d'Ottawa/University of Ottawa Quarterly*, vol. 52, no. 3, pp. 397-407; Anonymous, *Vita Oswaldi*, in J. Raine, *Historians of the Church of York*, Rolls series, 1874, vol. 1, pp. 399-475; Edmer, *Miracula Sancti Oswaldi Archiepiscopi*, in Raine, op. cit., vol. II, pp. 1-59.

being killed in order that Dunstan might be vindicated; and on his return he ordered him to be brought before him without delay. When Dunstan came in, he said: 'Hurry up, get a horse, and come with me and my soldiers.' And, mounting their horses, they immediately took the road to Glastonbury. On arrival, they went into the church to pray; and after praying and wiping the tears from his eyes, the king again called the servant of God to him. Taking him by the hand, he kissed it and led him to the priest's chair. Having seated him in it, he said: 'Be the powerful incumbent of this seat and the most faithful abbot of this church. And whatever you need, whether for the Divine services or for the sacred Rule, I shall devoutly supply from my royal bounty.'

Dunstan was placed in charge of the monastery at Glastonbury in the year 943, and immediately instituted the strict application of St. Benedict's Rule for the monks, thus giving a major impetus to the revival of monasticism in England after the devastation of the Viking wars. He also began to build many new buildings for the monastery in accordance with a vision he had had in childhood.

Through a vision of evil spirits, the saint prophesied the death of King Edmund. For as he was travelling in the king's escort, he suddenly saw a black form running among the king's trumpeters. After gazing at it for a long time in amazement, he turned to his neighbour, 'Half-King' Athelstan, the alderman of East Anglia, and said: 'Beloved, do you see what I see?' 'Nothing out of the ordinary,' he replied. 'Sign yourself with the sign of the Holy Cross, and then see if you can see what I see,' said the holy man. When he did this, Athelstan also saw the evil spirit. When they made the sign of the Cross again, the enemy disappeared.

As they continued on their way, Athelstan asked the saint to what extent this vision of theirs was related to a dream he had had, in which he had seen the king fall asleep while feasting among his nobles, whereupon almost all the chief men and counsellors had turned into sheep and goats. Dunstan immediately replied: 'The king's sleep means his death; but the changing of the chief men and counsellors into mute and irrational beasts refers to the future, when almost all the chief men and rulers will of their own accord deviate from the way of truth.'

At dusk on the same day Dunstan again saw the evil spirit wandering among the servants at the king's banquet. Then, on the very day on which the king was killed, May 26, 946, he saw it for the third time as the king was returning from the Divine Liturgy to the banquet-hall. During the feast, the king saw a man named Liofa, whom he had banished from the kingdom six years before, sitting at a table next to an alderman. He got up and tried to drive the outlaw from the hall, but was stabbed by him and died. The king's body was taken to Glastonbury, where St. Dunstan performed the funeral service.

Edmund was succeeded by his brother Edred, who loved Dunstan no less than his

predecessors, loading him with honours and submitting to his wise counsel. Like his brother before him, Edred had to deal with uprisings of the Northumbrians, who first took Eric Bloodaxe, son of Harold Fairhair of Norway, as their king; then Olaf Cuaran, another Viking; and then Eric again. Finally, in 954, King Edred regained permanent control of the North. Archbishop Wulfstan of York, who had sided with the rebels, was imprisoned, and then, perhaps on St. Dunstan's advice, was brought south and given the diocese of Dorchester¹⁶², while the Danish bishop of Dorchester, Osetel, was given York. This was a bold move, but it worked – the Dane was better able than the Englishman to control his countrymen, while being completely loyal to the English Crown. Indeed, both archbishops (Oda of Canterbury and Osetel of York) were Danish at this time; and it says much for the wisdom, charity and lack of prejudice of the English leaders that they were able to promote such men to the spiritual leadership of the nation when the Danish wars had by no means receded from the people's memory.

In 955 Edred called himself, with pardonable exaggeration, "King of the Anglo-Saxons and Emperor of the whole of Britain".

In 953, Bishop Ethelgar of Crediton died; whereupon King Edred tried to persuade St. Dunstan to accept the vacant see. But he refused, not wishing to desert the king, whom he loved, for the sake of the episcopate. The king then asked his mother, St. Elgiva, to intercede. So she invited him to a royal banquet and again put forward the same proposal. But he replied: 'I ask you, lady, not to ask me this again; for I tell you truly: I must not be made a bishop during the lifetime of your son the king.'

The Lord, however, was not pleased by Dunstan's refusal, as was revealed to him in a vision that night. For he saw himself returning from a pilgrimage to the apostles' tombs in Rome and was coming near the Mons Gaudium. Then St. Peter and his fellow apostles Paul and Andrew approached him. Each held in his hand a sword, which they offered him. On Peter's sword were inscribed the words: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.' Then Andrew sang sweetly from the Gospel: 'Take My yoke upon you, for I am meek and lowly of heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls.' Peter then raised a staff which he held in his hand and struck Dunstan lightly on the palm, saying: 'Take this as a warning not to refuse the yoke of the Lord in future.' Waking up, the saint asked a monk who was sleeping in the same room who it was that had struck him. He said that he did not know. Dunstan thought for a while, and then said: 'Now I know, my son, now I know by whom I have been struck.'

In the morning he recounted his vision to the king, who said: 'Since the swords you took up with the apostles' blessing are the weapons of the Holy Spirit, you can be quite certain that through the sword given you by the blessed Peter and inscribed

¹⁶² On Eric Bloodaxe and Archbishop Wulfstan, see Wood, *op. cit.*, chapter 7.

with the word of God, you are to receive the archbishopric from heaven.' As for the other swords, that given by St. Paul may have signified the see of London, whose cathedral church was dedicated to the apostle and which Dunstan held for a short period before he became archbishop. And that of St. Andrew may have signified the see of Rochester, whose church was dedicated to the First-Called and which Dunstan was called upon to defend in his later years.

King Edred had been chronically sick throughout his reign, and now he came to die. Feeling his end draw near, he sent a messenger to Dunstan to bring his treasures from Glastonbury, where the saint had been looking after them, to Frome, where the king lay. As Dunstan was riding to Frome, on St. Clement's day, 955, he suddenly heard a voice from heaven: 'King Edred now rests in peace.' At the sound of the voice, his horse, unable to bear the angelic power, fell dead to the ground, astonishing the saint's companions. When he had explained to them the voice and its meaning, and as they were blessing God and commending the soul of the dead man into the hands of God, messengers came up and confirmed the truth of the voice.

And so the walls of the palace were resounding to cries of lamentation as the saint entered. He found the royal corpse abandoned. Faithful in death as in life, he performed the funeral service and buried the king in the Old Minster, Winchester.¹⁶³

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The death of King Edred marked the end of the peaceful part of St. Dunstan's tenure of the Glastonbury abbacy. For he was succeeded by Edwig, the son of King Edmund - a rash youth under the influence of a mother and daughter, both named Elgiva, who wanted him to choose one of them to be his wife. This wanton behaviour of the king was to bring him into conflict with the saint...

Now the time came for the anointing and consecration of the new king after his election by the people. The ceremony was duly performed, but then the king had no time to attend the banquet with his nobles and bishops, but immediately ran after the loose women. When the holy Archbishop Oda saw that the king's wilfulness on the day of his coronation displeased all the counselors sitting around, he said to his fellow-bishops and the other leading men: 'Let some of you, pray, go and fetch the king, so that he may, as is fitting, be a pleasant companion to his followers at the royal banquet.' But one by one, fearing to incur the king's wrath or the women's complaint, they began to demur. Finally, they chose from among them two whom they knew to be strong in spirit - Abbot Dunstan and Bishop Cynesige, a kinsman of Dunstan's, to go in obedience to the command of all and bring back the king, whether he wished it or not.

¹⁶³ Adelard, *Vita Dunstani*, in Stubbs, *op. cit.*, p. 58) says that Edred was buried in the Old Minster. However, David Farmer (*op. cit.*, p. 112) claims that he was buried in Glastonbury.

Entering the king's chamber in accordance with their superiors' command, Dunstan and Cynesige found the king's crown, which was bound with gold, silver and precious stones, and shone with a many-coloured light, carelessly thrown on the floor far away from his head, while the king himself wallowed between the two women as if he were in a pig-sty. They said to him: 'Our nobles have sent us to you to ask you to come as quickly as possible to your proper seat, and not to scorn to be present at the joyful banquet of your chief men.' But when the king did not want to rise, Dunstan, after first rebuking the folly of the women, drew him by his hand from his licentious reclining with them, replaced the crown on his head, and brought him with him to the royal assembly by force.

Like Jezabel of old, the elder Elgiva now conceived a violent hatred for Dunstan and obtained the consent of the king to deprive him of all his honours and possessions, and to expel him from the kingdom. Dunstan's friends and supporters were also persecuted. Elgiva even sent secret agents to kill Dunstan before he could leave the country. But he eluded her grasp, and made a speedy passage to the continent. There he was kindly received by Count Arnulf of Flanders, staying in the Abbey of St. Peter in Ghent.

The saint did not cease to weep and groan day and night, thinking of his country and the spiritual condition of his monastery. One night, he dreamed that he was with a group of brethren as they were coming to the end of the Vespers psalms. After the canticle, 'My soul doth magnify the Lord', they began to sing the antiphon from Job: 'Why have ye disparaged his truthful words, and composed speeches to reprove him, and...' At this point the chant stopped and they all fell silent; nor was he able to persuade them to complete either the words or the melody. Several times they went back to the same point in the chant, never did they say the last words. And he, rebuking them in the same vision, said: 'Why do you not want to end the antiphon with the words: "what ye have had in mind ye discharge"?' Then came the Divine reply: 'Because, I say, they will never discharge what they are striving for in their minds - to tear you away from the government of this monastery.' Waking up, the saint gave thanks to God the Most High, his Comforter. And indeed, some of the people in the vision turned out later to have been plotting against him in secret.

King Edwig married the younger Elgiva, although the union was within the forbidden degrees of kinship. As a result, the northern parts of the England, Mercia and Northumbria, rebelled against him, and chose his brother Edgar as their king. And in the next year Archbishop Oda dissolved his marriage. When Elgiva tried to rejoin the king, she was caught by men from the north; they severed the muscles and sinews of her lower limbs, and she died in agony a few days later. Finally, Edwig died, and when Edgar reunited the kingdom under his sole rule, he recalled Dunstan from exile...

Edgar 'the Peaceable' ascended the throne in 958. In the same year St. Dunstan was made Bishop of Worcester. Then, in 959, he was transferred to the see of London. And in 960 he was elected Archbishop of Canterbury.

After Dunstan had been elected archbishop, he set off for Rome, to receive the pallium (omophorion) from the Pope. On his return, he immediately set about spreading the monastic reforms which he had initiated at Glastonbury; and he found the king a willing helper in this holy task. Already, as Bishop of London, he had founded a small monastery of twelve monks at Westminster with St. Wulfsige as abbot. Now he appointed his disciples Saints Aethelwold and Oswald to the sees of Winchester and Worcester respectively; and under their vigorous leadership the south of England was soon covered with Benedictine monasteries.

In Edgar's reign, England reached the peak of her glory, founded on a strong monastic revival supported by a powerful king and a sainted archbishop. The relationship between them was truly symphonic, but with a particularly strong role assigned to the king: "I have in my hand the sword of Constantine; you hold that of Peter," wrote King Edgar to Dunstan in 967. "Let us join our right hands sword to sword, so that the sanctuary of God may be cleansed."

The truly "symphonic" cooperation of King Edgar and Archbishop Dunstan laid the foundation of a golden age in the history of the Anglo-Saxon Church. This age had been prophesied by a heavenly voice which St. Dunstan had heard in 943, at the birth of Edgar: "Peace to England as long as this child reigns, and our Dunstan survives." "The succession of events," wrote William of Malmesbury, "was in unison with the heavenly oracle; to such an extent did ecclesiastical glory flourish and martial clamour decay while he was alive."

King Edgar was anointed for the first time in 960 or 961. For many years he was not allowed to wear his crown in penance for a sin he had committed. But in 973, at the age of thirty (perhaps not coincidentally, the canonical age for episcopal ordination in the West) he was anointed again, this time as "Emperor of Britain" in the ancient Roman city of Bath. In the same year, again emphasizing the imperial theme, he was rowed at Chester on the River Dee by six or eight sub-kings, include five Welsh and Scottish rulers and one ruler of the Western Isles.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁴ Some see in this event less a submission of the northern kings to Edgar than a kind of peace treaty between them. Be that as it may, it is true to say that the power of the Anglo-Saxon kings never really extended into Scotland, where a native dynasty founded by Kenneth MacAlpin (840-858) "destroyed the last Pictish kings, and imposed Gaelic customs and the Gaelic language throughout the kingdom of Alba" (Ann Williams, "Britain AD 1000", *History Today*, vol. 50 (3), March, 2000, p. 34). One of these Scottish Orthodox kings was Macbeth (+1057), made famous by the hero of Shakespeare's play. He made a pilgrimage to Rome, where he "scattered money like seed among the poor".

“This was a move,” writes Ryan Lavelle, “that recalled the actions of his great-uncle Athelstan, the successful ruler of Britain, but it was also an English parallel to the tenth-century coronation of the Holy Roman Emperor, Otto of Germany, in which the stem-dukes had undertaken the task of feeding the emperor.”

Edgar’s adoption of the trappings of Romanitas was not without foundation. The economy was strong, the taxation and legal systems were sophisticated, the coinage was secure (with an impressive system of monetary renewal whereby all coins issued from the royal mints had to be returned and reissued every five years). England was now a firmly Orthodox, multi-national state composed of three Christian peoples, Anglo-Saxons, Celts and Danes, living in mutual amity, while the Celtic peoples living beyond his frontiers owed him a certain allegiance.

For through the ceremony on the Dee, as Sir Frank Stenton writes, “Edgar, like Edward the Elder and Athelstan on similar occasions, became secure against attack from the princes who had become his men, and entitled to their help if others made war on him. The weakness of this relationship was its personal character and its consequent impermanence. At the middle of the century Edmund, Edgar’s father, was already feeling his way towards a more stable understanding when he gave Strathclyde to Malcolm king of Scots. There is evidence that shortly after the meeting at Chester Edgar attempted to secure the allegiance of Kenneth, the Scottish king, by a grant of the English lands between the Tweed and the Forth which were then collectively called Lothian. The grant is not mentioned by any contemporary whose work has survived. But a thirteenth-century write who had preserved much ancient material states that Kenneth was brought to Edgar by Aelfsige, bishop of Chester-le-Street, and Eadwulf, ealdorman of Bernicia, that Kenneth did homage to Edgar, and that Edgar thereupon gave him Lothian and a number of estates in England on which he could reside when he came in future to Edgar’s court. The story deserves to be taken seriously. It is set down as a simple matter of fact, and the names which come into it raise no chronological difficulties. As the bare record of a tradition it naturally ignores the historical significance of the grant. The cession of Lothian determined the future of the Scottish kingdom. Within a century it had become an Anglo-Celtic state in which the English element was steadily rising to predominance. But the change was very slow at first, and no Englishman of Edgar’s time could have foreseen its consequences.

“Even within his own country it was Edgar’s policy to limit the responsibilities of his government. He was the first king to recognize in legislation that the Danish east of England was no longer a conquered province but an integral part of the English realm. The recognition took the form of a grant of autonomy to its inhabitants. In the most explicit of terms Edgar ordains that in return for the loyalty which the ‘Danes’ have always manifested, such social and legal customs shall prevail among them as they themselves may choose. In another passage he expressly contrasts this liberty of

theirs with the subjection of 'Englishmen' to the laws which he and his council have made. When issuing a set of regulations intended to suppress traffic in stolen cattle, he is apologetic in insisting that they shall apply in Danish as well as English territory; and even so, he allows the Danes themselves to decide what punishment shall be inflicted for the breach of these regulations in their country. It is not surprising that within at most a generation after his time the shires of Danish England had come to be known collectively as the Danelaw.

"This did not mean that his authority in that land was negligible. He appointed the earls and bishops through whom it was governed, its leading magnates regarded themselves as his men, and its militia was bound to join him when he went to war in person. There, as elsewhere, he possessed estates which were important centres for the administration of justice; and the breach of his peace, given under his hand and seal, was punished even more severely in Danish than in English territory. But he was rarely seen in its more distant parts, and the rights which belonged to him as king of the whole land left open a vast field of action within which his Anglo-Danish subjects were free to govern themselves. It is this freedom which, more than any other cause, explains their acquiescence in their political subject. Here and there, especially in the northern Danelaw, men who could trace their descent from companions of Ivar the Boneless may have wished for a king of their own race. But in normal times the feeling never outweighed the solid advantages offered by Edgar's promise of autonomy in return for allegiance."

King Edgar's remarkable combination of power from the centre with the granting of autonomy to the regions serves as a model of statesmanship. He certainly earned his epithet of "the Peaceable"...

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If St. Dunstan was the leader of the monastic revival, its most powerful executive, as it were, was his disciple, St. Aethelwold. It was while Aethelwold was prior of the monastery at Glastonbury that St. Dunstan had a prophetic dream about him. Wulfstan, a pupil of Aethelwold's at Winchester, relates that Dunstan was sitting outside the monastery dormitory when he saw "a certain tree as if it were of wondrous height. It seemed to spread its branches east, west, north, and south, over the entire region of Britain, astonishingly extensive in its length and breadth. The branches of this tree were laden with countless cones, large and small, while the tree itself bore at the very top a huge cone which, rising above, protected the others with the covering of its scales, and surpassing them all together with its great height, touched the very sky. But the man of the Lord, Dunstan, very astonished by such a vision from above, questioned the elder adorned with white angelic hair, who was pointing this tree out to him, and said: 'I beseech you, venerable elder, what is this strong and lofty tree whose branches spreading out far and wide seem to support so many countless cones?' The elder answered him: 'This tree which you see, Abbot

Dunstan, represents **the site of this island; moreover, the great cone which rises on the pinnacle of this tree represents your monk Aethelwold who serves Christ devoutly in this monastery. Now the other cones with which these branches appear laden represent the multitude of monks who are to be instructed by his learning and who are to be gathered together in this area from all regions for the service of Almighty God. Under his leadership they will reach the glory of the Kingdom of Heaven and the fellowship of the blessed spirits who reign with Christ.' Having received this reply, the holy man awoke and reflected silently upon the vision, and afterwards made it known to the faithful by a true account. The report of the vision, spreading with the passage of time, became known to many and at length came also to my humble notice.

“And it was also no less fitting,” continues Wulfstan, “that another dream be fulfilled which Aethelwold, the holy man of God, once related to me concerning himself, saying: ‘I thought that I was standing by the sea shore where it seemed to me that there appeared a certain great ship, in which there was contained a plentiful number of fish, especially eels, heaped up from the bottom to the top. And when I silently considered the meaning of this vision which I saw, I suddenly heard a voice calling me by my own name, and saying to me: “Aethelwold, Aethelwold, this command has been sent to you by God from heaven: Call forth those fish, with which the ship that you perceive is filled, and bring it about by your prayers that they may be men, just as they were before.” Thereupon, complying with this command I stood before them to pray and overcome with a shower of tears, I said sighing: “Lord Jesus, for Whom nothing is impossible, look favourably upon these souls deceived by diabolical trickery, who have been alienated from the slimy mud of this world. I beseech Thee, Good Jesus, do not allow the enemy of the human race to glory in his triumph over them, but grant that, through the almighty power of Thy Name, they may be restored to life, so that, escaping the sleep of eternal death, they may acknowledge Thee as the true and only Saviour of the world, and thereafter, always fleeing towards the peaceful gate of salvation, may be rescued from all dangers of the world and remain secure under Thy governance. For it is Thine, O Christ, to make the dead live, and to restore to its former glory Thine own image which Thou hast created. Thou camest into this world to save sinners and having suffered the dreadful punishment of death on the Cross, Thou didst deign to pour forth Thy precious Blood for the salvation of us all.” When I uttered these and similar words of prayer with a remorseful heart and spirit of humility, behold the fish which I had seen before covered in the filthy mud and in the waters of misery, I suddenly saw made into men and revived from death. There arose from the ship and proceeded hastily to land a great multitude of men, many of whom I had known personally. One man among them who fell behind was transformed again into an eel. Without doubt he was that Athelstan, who had long ago been ordained priest with me, and whom thereafter I had been unable to rouse by any means or to bring it about that he might become a man. Indeed, all the others with one accord raised their voices to heaven, clapping their hands and offering thanks to Almighty God because through His ineffable

mercy and my insignificant coming, they were worthy to be recalled from death to life and to be restored to human reasoning which they had lost. But I, rejoicing in God and wishing them joy, awoke, and thus I recall this vision for you, my children, so that with the labour of good works you may persevere in the holy purpose; whereby, through the grace of God, you are able to be counted in the number of those who have been entrusted to me, although I am unworthy, so that they may be freed from the unclean abyss of this world and be saved in eternal blessedness without end.”

After some time, the saint wished to go overseas to Cluny to learn more about the monastic life. However, the Dowager-Queen Elgiva, King Edred’s mother, was against this (Aethelwold later sent the monk Osgar to Fleury instead of himself); and she persuaded her son to give Aethelwold the derelict monastery at Abingdon, together with a large area of land to support it. And so, with St. Dunstan’s blessing, the saint set about rebuilding this monastery. He was ordained as abbot at the king’s request.

“Under Aethelwold,” writes Andrew Prescott, “Abingdon grew into a ‘glorious minster’. One of his first actions was to establish a school, and the future King Edgar studied there. Aethelwold’s reputation for sanctity and strict observance attracted men from all over the country to follow the monastic life at Abingdon. He established contact with reformers on the Continent, and sought to ensure that observance at Abingdon was in line with the most up-to-date Continental practice. Monks from the reformed monasteries at Fleury and Corbie came to Abingdon to instruct their English counterparts in the forms of chanting. The monastery’s endowments were substantially increased, particularly by gifts of royal land. A magnificent new church was built, furnished in the most sumptuous fashion. A twelfth-century description of the church states that ‘the chancel was round, the church itself was also round, having twice the length of the chancel. The tower also was found.’ It has been suggested that this means that the church was an aisled rotunda, recalling the royal symbolism of the palatine chapel at Aachen. Aethelwold himself is said to have built the altar table, which was made of gold and silver, decorated with the sculpted figures of the twelve apostles. It cost the enormous sum of three hundred pounds. Also attributed to Aethelwold was a gold-plated wheel which supported twelve lamps and from which were suspended little bells. Other treasures of the church included three crosses of gold and silver, each four feet in length, and texts to adorn the church made of silver and precious stones. Most of these treasures were destroyed or dispersed after the Norman Conquest...”

Once, as Abbot Aelfric relates, “the king came to the monastery to plan himself the structure of the buildings, and he measured out all the foundations of the monastery with his own hand, exactly as he had determined to erect the walls. Then the abbot invited him to dine in the refectory with his men. The king agreed immediately; and since there were several Northumbrians with him at the time, they all came with the king to the feast. The king was merry, and ordered mead to be supplied in abundance

to the guests, having closed the doors so that no one could hurry away and leave the drinking at the royal banquet. The whole day the servers drew drink for the revellers in full measure, and yet a span's depth remained until the Northumbrians were swinishly drunk and withdrew in the evening."

Once a brother named Aelfstan (the future Bishop Aelfstan I of Ramsbury) was ordered by the saint to provide food for the builders of the monastery. He very zealously prepared meat every day for the workmen, and personally served them, kindling the fire, fetching water and cleaning the vessels, while the abbot thought that he did all this with the help of a servant. One day, while the abbot was wandering around the monastery as was his custom, he was Aelfstan standing by a boiling cauldron, preparing food for the workmen. Then, entering the kitchen, he saw all the vessels spotless and the floor swept. Going up to Aelfstan, he said joyfully: 'My brother, you have robbed me of this obedience which you practise without my knowledge. But if you are as much of a soldier of Christ as you seem, put your hand in the boiling water and draw out a bit of food for me from the bottom.' Without hesitating, Aelfstan put his hand to the bottom of the cauldron and drew out a hot morsel, feeling no heat from the boiling water. When the saint saw this, he ordered Aelfstan to put down the food and reveal the miracle to no one.

Another time, the saint was working on the building when a huge post fell on him and threw him into a pit, breaking nearly all his ribs on one side. If the pit had not received him, he would have been completely crushed. However, with the help of God he recovered.

On November 29, 963, before the building at Abingdon was completed, Aethelwold was consecrated Bishop of Winchester by St. Dunstan at the king's request.

On arriving at his see, Aethelwold found the Old Minster occupied by secular clergy, who, as Wulfstan writes, "were involved in wicked and scandalous behaviour, victims of pride, insolence and riotous living to such a degree that some of them did not think fit to celebrate the Divine Liturgy in due order. They married wives illicitly, divorced them, and took others; they were constantly given to gourmandising and drunkenness.' With King Edgar's permission, he expelled these clerics, and replaced them with monks from Abingdon. "Now it happened," writes Abbot Aelfric, "that while the monks who had come from Abingdon were standing at the entrance to the church, the clerics inside were finishing the Divine Liturgy and singing the communion hymn: 'Serve ye the Lord with fear, and rejoice in Him with trembling. Lay hold of instruction, lest at any time the Lord be angry, and ye perish from the righteous way.' As if they were saying: 'We could not serve God, nor observe His discipline; you at least act so that you not perish like us.' And the monks, hearing the singing, said to each other: 'Why are we waiting outside? Look, we are exhorted to enter.'"

St. Aethelwold also came, together with a thegn of King Edgar's called Wulfstan of Dalham. Wulfstan gave the clerics the royal ultimatum: either give place to the monks or become monks yourselves. The clerics, no lovers of the monastic life, decided to leave, although three of them, Edsige, Wulfsige and Wilstan, later accepted the monastic tonsure.

"Such ruthless action," writes Prescott, "in pursuit of introducing new standards of religious life earned Aethelwold enemies, and there was afterwards at least one attempt to murder him. According to Wulfstan, the expelled canons plotted to poison Aethelwold and recover their old places. They poisoned Aethelwold while he was entertaining guests in his own hall. He managed to stagger to his bed, but became completely paralysed. [However,]... by bringing to mind declarations of Christ, such as that 'if believers drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them', Aethelwold found that the pain and paralysis caused by the poison gradually disappeared. He returned to the hall showing no signs of his terrible experience. The canons, recognising that they could not defeat Aethelwold, fled."

However, they had not yet given up the fight. They appealed to the king, who in turn referred the matter to St. Dunstan, who then asked the king to convene a Council in Winchester. This took place in about the year 970 in the presence of the king and queen, nobles and clergy.

The final decision was announced by St. Dunstan: "This Old Minster was founded as a habitation for monks. Let those who benefit from its revenues live henceforth as true monks." It is said that during the Council, when the possibility of restoring the secular clergy to the Old Minster was being discussed, a cross spoke from the wall: "Far be it from you! You have done well; to change again would be wrong."

Besides this, the Council decided on the establishment of a slightly modified form of the Rule of St. Benedict, the *Regularis Concordia* (Agreement of the Rules), for all the monastics of England. Up to that time, there had been different versions of the rule in different parts of the country. But now a single Rule was agreed on to ensure that "all be of one mind as regards monastic usage... lest differing ways of observing the customs of one rule and one country should bring their holy conversation into disrepute". The monks were to be under the patronage of the king, and the nuns - of the queen.

Composed in about 973, writes Ryan Lavelle, "the *Regularis Concordia*,... was intended as a rulebook and liturgical guide for English monks and nuns, but it was also a bold statement of the relationship between God, the king and a Christian people. The king and queen were seen as protectors of monks and nuns in the temporal world, while, in return, the souls of the West Saxon royal family were protected with prayers by the same monks and nuns. The positions of the king and

queen were therefore inextricably linked with the survival of Christianity in the kingdom. This was part of a process of legitimising royal power to an extent that was hitherto unparalleled in Anglo-Saxon England. The king had become part of the ecclesiastical order in a coronation ceremony that made him God's representative on earth. The original meaning of Christ's name, Christus meant 'the anointed [king]', and the inauguration of Edgar used an ordo (an order of service) that put Edgar on a similar level - directly anointed by God. The monastic reform movement gave this a new impetus..."

King Edgar supported Aethelwold's reforms in Winchester, not only in the Old Minster, but also in the New Minster, as well as in the women's Nunnaminster.

"The three abbeys," writes Eleanor Duckett, "stood on adjoining lands, the New Minster a little to the north of the Old, and the Nuns' Minster a little on the east. Trouble was constant among them. They were jealous of possessions; they disputed the lines of their boundaries; they declared respectively that they could not sing their office in the proper manner because of the noise of chanting from their monastic neighbours. King Edgar at Aethelwold's petition issued an order for an exact division among them and even tore down the houses of private citizens nearby in order that space might be given for the monks of Winchester 'for living more peacefully in God's service, removed from the clamour of townspeople'. Such action was hard for the townspeople, yet Aethelwold in the end also did them untold good. With extraordinary imagination and practical skill he made his engineers and their workmen conduct a sorely needed supply of water by channels through the streets of Winchester to cloisters and to private homes alike."

The influence of the holy bishop extended far beyond the bounds of Winchester. He probably helped to reform the monasteries at Milton (Dorset), St. Neot's (Cambridgeshire) and Chertsey (Surrey). With the help of the king, he also revived three monasteries in the East - Peterborough, Ely and Thorney. Land was bought and cleared, abbots of stricter discipline imported, and the veneration of forgotten local saints revived.

Duckett has described the re-founding of Thorney thus: "This 'Isle of Thorns' in the midst of the waters of the great marsh had once been, it was said, the home of three hermits, Tancred and Torhtred, and their sister, Tova, who settled to her prayer a little distance from them, in the heart of the thickets. They were following, we may think, in the line of a few adventurers in religion who had come in the seventh century from Medeshamstede [Peterborough], having gained permission from their abbot, Saxulf, to retreat into this deeper solitude. In the time of these brothers and their sister the Danes arrived to destroy. The tradition of Aethelwold relates that he bought the ruins the Danes had left from their owner, Aethelflaed [Ethelfleda], that he installed some monks - and the number is given as twelve - and built for them in 972-3 an abbey with its church, dedicating the altar at the east end to our Lady, the

west end to Saint Peter, and a chapel in the north transept to Saint Benedict. This account points to an altar at either end, after Carolingian fashion.”

To Ely, which Edgar and Aethelwold refounded as a monastery for men, another Abingdon monk Brihtnoth, was brought as abbot. Ely was the home of the incorrupt relics of St. Etheldreda, and those of her holy sisters Sexburga and Ermenhilda, to which Brihtnoth wanted to add those of the fourth sister, St. Withburga. So, after fasting and prayer, he and some of his monks went to East Dereham in Norfolk, where St. Withburga had struggled, and removed her body, much to the displeasure of the monks and citizens of Dereham.

But Brihtnoth never allowed church-building to get in the way of almsgiving. Thus during a famine he ordered the treasures of the Church to be broken down to make money for the poor. “What is lifeless metal,” he said, “compared with bodies and souls created and redeemed by God?”

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On July 15, 971 there took place one of the most splendid events – from both a material and a spiritual point of view – in English Orthodox history: the translation of the relics of St. Swithun. For over a hundred years after his repose in 862, St. Swithun’s memory was forgotten, and, as he had wished, people walked over his grave on their way to the Old Minster in Winchester without knowing who it was they were stepping on. But the Lord did not wish this great light to remain hidden under a bushel; and in 971 his relics were translated into the cathedral to the accompaniment of a greater outpouring of miracles than had ever been seen in Orthodox England.

About twenty years later, this event was recorded by Abbot Aelfric:-

“For three years before the saint was translated into the church from the stone coffin which now stands inside the new building, he appeared in a vision to a certain faithful blacksmith, wonderfully arrayed, and said: ‘Do you know the priest Aedsige, who with other priests was driven out of the old monastery by Bishop Aethelwold for their misconduct?’ The smith then answered the venerable Swithun as follows: ‘I knew him long ago, sir, but he left this place, and I do not know for certain where he is living now.’ Then the holy man said again to the old smith: ‘He is now living in Winchcombe. This is the truth. And now I adjure you in the name of Christ: go quickly and give this message, that Swithun the bishop has commanded him to go to Bishop Aethelwold and say that he must himself open my grave and bring my bones inside the church; for he has been counted worthy that in his time I should be made known to men.’ Then the smith said to him: ‘O sir, Aedsige will not believe my words.’ Then the bishop said again: ‘Let him go to my grave and pull a ring out of the coffin; and if the ring yields at the first tug then he will know for certain that I

have sent you to him. If the ring will not come away easily, then he will by no means accept what I say. And after that tell him that he must amend his ways in accordance with the will of the Lord, and hasten single-mindedly to eternal life. And tell everyone that as soon as they open my grave they will find such a valuable hoard that their precious gold will be as nothing in comparison.' Then holy Swithun vanished from the smith's sight.

"However, he did not dare to tell anyone about this vision, fearing to be regarded as an untruthful messenger. So the holy man spoke to him again, and yet a third time, and severely reproved him for not acting in obedience to his commands. Then at last the smith went to his burial-place, and, albeit fearfully, took hold of the ring, crying out to God: 'O Lord God, the Creator of all things, grant me, a sinner, to pull this ring out of the lid, if he who spoke to me three times in a dream is really lying here inside.' Then he pulled the iron out of the stone as easily as if it had stood in sand, and wondered greatly at what had happened. Then he put it back in the hole and pressed it in with his foot. Again it stuck so firmly that no one was able to pull it out. The smith went away awestruck, and in the market-place he met a serf of Aedsige's, to whom he related exactly what Swithun had commanded him to report it to his master.

"The serf consented, but at first did not dare to tell his master, until he felt that no good would come from concealing the saint's command. Then he told him in order what Swithun had commanded. Now at that time Aedsige avoided Bishop Aethelwold and all the monks who were in the minster because of his ejection by then. So he did not obey the saint's command, although the saint was a blood-relative of his. Within two years, however, he retreated to that same monastery, and by the grace of God became a monk, continuing there until he departed this life. Blessed is Almighty God, Who humbles the proud while exalting the humble to high estate, and corrects the sinful while always preserving the good who hope in Him.

"Again, there was a certain poor peasant, awfully hunch-backed and bent over in consequence, to whom it was revealed in a dream that he would obtain bodily health and recovery from his crippled state at Swithun's sepulchre. And so he arose joyfully in the morning, crept on two crutches to Winchester and sought the saint as he had been instructed, praying for his health on bended knee. Then he was healed by the holy bishop, so that no trace of the hump which had oppressed him could be seen. At that time the monks did not know about St. Swithun, thinking that some other saint had healed the man. But the peasant said that it was Swithun who had healed him, for he knew best about the matter.

"A certain man was afflicted with a very distressing disease, so that he could hardly open his eyes or utter a word, but lay in torment thus, despairing of his life. Then all his friends wanted to carry him to the New Minster, to [the relics of] St. Judoc, so that he could recover his health there. But someone told them that it would

be better to take the sick man to the Old Minster, to Swithun's grave. This they did, and that night they kept vigil at the grave with him, praying to Almighty God to grant the sick man health through St. Swithun. The sick man also watched until daybreak. Then he fell asleep, and it seemed to all of them as if the tomb was rocking, while to him it seemed as if someone was dragging one of his shoes off his feet. Suddenly he awoke, healed by the holy Swithun. They looked carefully for the shoe, but no one could find it. So they returned home with the man who had been healed.

“Through the power of God eight sick men were miraculously healed at the holy tomb before the body was removed from it.

“After these signs, King Edgar desired the holy man's exhumation, and told the venerable Aethelwold to translate it with great pomp. Then Bishop Aethelwold, accompanied by abbots and monks, took up the saint and bore him into the church of St. Peter. There he remains in honour, working miracles. Then within three days four sick men were healed by the holy man; and there were few days within the next five months in which at least three sick people were not healed – sometimes five or six, or seven or eight, ten or twelve, sixteen or eighteen. Within ten days two hundred men had been healed, and so many within twelve months that no one could count them. The cemetery was filled with cripples, so that the people could hardly get into the minster. And within a few days they were all so miraculously healed that one could not find a sick man in the whole of that vast crowd.

“At that time there lived in the Isle of Wight three women, two of whom had been blind for nine years, and the third had never seen the light of the sun. With some difficulty they obtained a dumb guide and came to the saint, and watched there for one night, and were healed, both the blind woman and the dumb guide. Then the boy told the sacristan, saying that he had never been able to speak before, and asking for the appointed hymn of praise to be sung.

“At about the same time a certain bondwoman was caught and sentenced to be flogged for some very minor fault. She was put in custody until the morning, when she was to be severely beaten. All night she lay awake, weeping and calling on the holy Swithun to help her, the wretched one, praying that through the power of God he would deliver her from the cruel stripes. When dawn broke, and they began to sing the Praises, the fetters on her feet suddenly fell off, and she ran, with hands still bound, to the church and the blessed saint, in accordance with his will. Then her lord came after her and freed her, loosing her bonds, for the sake of St. Swithun.

“A certain nobleman had lain crippled by paralysis for many years, being unable to move from his bed. Then he said that he wanted to travel to Winchester, if only in his horse-litter, and pray for his healing. While he was saying this to his servants and friends, he was cured. Nevertheless, he made his way to the saint on foot, travelling in front of the company for the whole journey, and earnestly thanked the saint for his

recovery.”

On one day, twenty-five men suffering from various diseases came to the saint, imploring him to help them. Some were blind, some lame, some deaf and some dumb. They were all healed at the same time through the saint’s intercession.

There was a certain very rich nobleman who went suddenly blind. He travelled to Rome to pray to the holy Apostles for a cure. For four years he stayed in Rome, but was not healed. Then he heard of St. Swithun, and of the miracles he had wrought since he had left England. Travelling back in haste, he came to the saint and was healed there, returning home with perfect sight.

“Another man,” continues Abbot Aelfric, “had been blind for seven whole years. He had a guide who led him everywhere. One day he went out, but the guide became angry and left him. At a loss how to return home, the blind man cried out to God and St. Swithun in great anguish. He was immediately healed and returned home joyfully without a guide, for which his relatives thanked God fervently.

“Then the venerable and blessed Aethelwold, who was the bishop of Winchester at that time, commanded all the monks who were living in the monastery to go in procession to the church and praise the saint with hymns, and in this way to magnify God because of the great saint every time a sick man was healed. This they did immediately, and sang the *Te Deum* so often – sometimes three, sometimes four times in a night – that they came to hate getting up to do this, as they wanted to go on sleeping. At length they gave up the chanting altogether, for the bishop was busy with the king and had no means of knowing that they were not chanting the *Te Deum* continually. Then St. Swithun himself came, wonderfully adorned, to a certain good man, and said: ‘Go now to the Old Minster and tell the monks that God very much dislikes their murmuring and sloth, for they see God’s wonders among them every day but will not praise Christ with chanting as the bishop told the brethren to do. And tell them that if they do not sing the hymn, immediately the miracles will cease. However, if they sing the *Te Deum* every time a miracle is performed and a sick man is healed, then so many miracles will be wrought among them that no one will be able to remember so many miracles having been wrought in his lifetime by anyone. Then the man awoke from that joyous sleep, lamenting that he could no longer see the bright light which he had seen around St. Swithun. He arose, however, and went quickly to Bishop Aethelwold, and told him all that had happened. Aethelwold then immediately sent from the king’s court to the monks, and told them to sing the *Te Deum* as he had commanded, with the warning that anyone who neglected this would heavily atone for it by seven days’ continuous fasting. From that time they always observed this custom, as we ourselves have very often seen; for we have not infrequently sung this hymn with them...”

St. Swithun’s translation linked the beginning of the English Autocracy, under his

pupil King Alfred, with its zenith under King Edgar. And the contrast between the humility of his death and burial with the glory of his translation mirrored the progress of the Autocracy from humility to glory.

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The third major figure in the monastic revival was St. Oswald, Bishop of Worcester and Archbishop of York. The son of Danish convert parents, and the nephew of St. Oda of Canterbury, he spent a certain time in a monastery in Winchester before going for five or six years to the Benedictine monastery of Fleury-on-Loire. There he acquired a thorough knowledge of Benedictine monasticism and the writings of the Holy Fathers, distinguishing himself by his humility, obedience and the austerity of his life.

In 958, when St. Oda was dying, he called his nephew, who was now a priest, to his bedside. But when Oswald arrived at Dover from France, he heard that the saint had already reposed. He decided not to return to Fleury, but to go north to York, where another relative of his, Oscetel, was archbishop. Oscetel introduced him to St. Dunstan, and he, much impressed, introduced him to the king. And so, supported by both king and primate, he was elected to the bishopric of Worcester in 961. There he soon became the object of great love and veneration by the citizens.

Eleanor Duckett writes: "The Cathedral at Worcester was dedicated to Saint Peter. Since it was very small, it soon could not hold the people who came flocking to hear this new pastor preach. Outside it, on a side, level tract of ground, stood a little stone shrine, with a cross of top, marking the burial-place of Wilfred and his wife Alta, benefactors of Saint Peter's. To this open space Oswald moved his congregation and taught as best he could, standing beside the old tomb. Soon the crowds compelled the building of a new and larger church; and when at last this was ready, the bishop consecrated it in honour of Mary, Mother of God. Then the little Saint Peter's, which before Oswald's coming had seen secular clergy in its choir, offered its services in union with this more splendid cathedral."

Meanwhile, in 962, Oswald had founded his first monastery, at Westbury-on-Trim, establishing in it, and later in Worcester, the regular Benedictine discipline. This was the first of several monasteries that he founded or re-founded in the Severn valley. At Westbury, as well as at the restored monastery of Winchcombe, he placed his disciple Germanus as abbot. And at Pershore he installed an abbot named Fordbriht, who had been trained under St. Dunstan at Glastonbury and St. Aethelwold at Abingdon. Pershore was enriched by some relics of St. Edburga, and was henceforth dedicated to SS. Mary, Peter and Paul, and Edburga.

But Oswald's most famous foundation was outside his diocese, deep in the fen-country of Huntingdonshire - Ramsey. Here, in 971, he introduced monks from

Westbury and the famous scholar Abo of Fleury (who wrote the *Vita Edmundi*), and translated the relics of St. Felix of Dunwich and the holy Martyr-Princes Ethelbert and Ethelbriht of Kent. The land was donated by the pious alderman of East Anglia, Aethelwine.

Once both Oswald and Aethelwine came to a feast at Ramsey monastery. "There is an ancient tradition," writes Oswald's biographer, an anonymous monk of Ramsey, "that the whole of the main body of the congregation processed barefoot to the church of the Blessed Ever-Virgin Birth-Giver of God Mary, which custom was followed by the chief man [Aethelwine] as he walked with us with joyful heart together with his soldiers, the monks and the boys. But next to the church to which we had to go was a bridge, which we crossed on the way out. So on the way back we wanted to go quickly home by sailing across in a boat together with the precious relics. When the Liturgy was over, the prelate blessed the people; and we hastened to return home. But the boat was overloaded. When we were in the middle of the deep lake, and were about to sink, and the prelate was standing on the bank surrounded by his own people, he heard the sound of voices: 'Saint Benedict, help us!' On hearing this, he asked the reason, and on ascertaining it he raised his holy right hand and said, trusting in the Lord: 'May the blessing of Christ come upon us from above.' His clear voice came to the ears of the most merciful Redeemer more speedily than you could have finished the verse; and all were brought safely to land."

In 972, the saint was made archbishop of York while retaining the bishopric of Worcester until his death – a unique situation that testified to the honour in which he was held. This appointment gave him a vast sphere of influence, but also great responsibilities and difficulties in a province where, as we have seen, Christianity was still struggling for predominance over paganism. Since St. Oswald was of Danish parentage, and, moreover, related to Oscetel, he was well equipped to continue the English Autocracy's tradition of racial reconciliation and missionary activity. However, the fact that he did not found a single monastery in his northern diocese shows the difficulty of the task he faced; and during the anti-monastic reaction during the reign of Edward the Martyr this diocese suffered as much as any. Thus in a memorandum on the estates of York, he states: "I, Archbishop Oswald, declare that all these lands which Archbishop Oscetel obtained in Northumbria, and which my lord granted me for St. Peter's when he was at Nottingham, together with these other lands which are entered here besides, I had them all until [?] ascended. Then St. Peter was robbed of them. May God avenge it as He will."

11. EDWARD THE MARTYR AND THE ANTI-MONASTIC REACTION

Saints Dunstan, Aethelwold and Oswald, the three great monastic founders and reformers, who occupied the three most important episcopal sees in the country, strengthened the spiritual life of the English nation immeasurably. However, they also strengthened the Autocracy that held the kingdom together. But the murder of King Edgar's son Edward was to signal the beginning of the end both of the English Orthodox Church and of the English Autocracy...

King Edgar married twice, producing a son from each marriage. When he died in 975, the partisans of his second son, Aethelred, argued that he should be made king in preference to his elder half-brother Edward, on the grounds that Edgar had not been anointed when he begat Edward in 959 or 960, and that his first wife, Edward's mother, had *never* been anointed, so that the throne should pass to the younger son, who had been born "in the purple" when both his parents were anointed sovereigns.¹⁶⁵ The conflict was settled when the archbishop of Canterbury, St. Dunstan, seized the initiative and anointed St. Edward. In this way, through her stewardship of the sacrament of royal anointing, the Church came to play the decisive role in deciding the question of succession.¹⁶⁶

Many troubles met the young king on his accession. The root of them was the fact that in the previous reign the white clergy had been expelled from the monasteries in which they had been living unlawfully, had been replaced by real monks, and were now seeking to be re-established in their former place. Also, the nobles coveted the lands which King Edgar had given to the monasteries. Now the English kings of the tenth century created a powerful landowning aristocracy; but its estates were scattered in different parts of the kingdom, so a powerful all-English king was in its interests, and aristocratic separatism, the bane of so many autocratic kingdoms, did not raise its head for most of the century. But the envy of the nobles, combining with the resentment of the expelled white clergy, built up during the reign of King Edgar and erupted into violence at the beginning of the reign of King Edward.

A great famine was raging through the land. At the same time, beginning in the West and spreading to the East, a violent attack was stirred up against the holy monasteries by a prominent nobleman named Aelfhere. Many of the monasteries which King Edgar had founded were destroyed, and the monks forced to flee.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵ The two boys' grandmother, St. Elgiva, before her death as an abbess in 944, correctly interpreted a prophetic dream in which the careers of her grandsons Kings Edward the Martyr and Ethelred the Unready were intimated, together with the pagan invasions that came near the end of the century (William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, 13).

¹⁶⁶ 'Passio et Miracula Sancti Edwardi Regis et Martyris', in Christine Fell, *Edward King and Martyr*, University of Leeds, 1971.

¹⁶⁷ *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, D, 975.

Thus according to a contemporary monastic writer: "The whole kingdom was thrown into confusion, the bishops were agitated, the noblemen stirred up, the monks shaken with fear, the people terrified. The married clergy were glad, for their time had come. Abbots, with their monks, were expelled, and married clergy, with their wives, were introduced [in their place]."¹⁶⁸

However, King Edward and Archbishop Dunstan stood firm in a series of stormy councils attended by all the leading men of Church and State.

Thus at one council, which took place at Kirtlington, Oxfordshire, after Pascha, 977, the tension was so great that the king's tutor, a bishop, died suddenly during the proceedings. Then, at another council in Calne, Wiltshire, when the white clergy were renewing their complaints, St. Dunstan said: "Since in my old age you exert yourselves to the stirring up of old quarrels, I confess that I refuse to give in, but commit the cause of His Church to Christ the Judge." As he spoke the house was suddenly shaken; the floor of the upper room in which they were assembled collapsed, and the enemies of the Church were thrown to the ground and crushed by the falling timber. Only the beam on which the archbishop was sitting on a beam did not move.

In all this turmoil King Edward stood firm together with the archbishop in defence of the Church and the monasteries. For this reason some of the nobles decided to remove him and replace him with his weaker younger brother. They seized their opportunity on March 18, 979, when the king was out hunting with dogs and horsemen near Wareham in Dorset. Turning away from this pursuit, the king decided to visit his young brother Aethelred, who was being brought up in the house of his mother at Corfe Castle, near Wareham. He took a small retinue with him, but suddenly, as if playing a joke on him, his retinue broke up and went off in all directions, leaving him to continue on his way alone.

When Aethelred's mother, Queen Aelfthryth, heard from her servants that the young king was approaching, she hid the evil design in her heart and went out to meet him in an open and friendly manner, inviting him into her house. But he declined, saying that he only wished to see his brother and talk to him. The queen then suggested that while he was waiting he should have a drink. The king accepted. At that moment one of the queen's party went up to the king and gave him a kiss like Judas. For then, just as the king was lifting the cup to his lips, the man who had kissed him leapt at him from the front and plunged a knife in his body. The king slipped from the saddle of his horse and was dragged with one foot in the stirrup until he fell lifeless into a stream at the base of the hill on which Corfe Castle stands.

¹⁶⁸ Anonymous, "Vita Oswaldi", in J. Raine, *Historians of the Church of York*, Rolls Series, 1874, vol. I. Cf. D.J.V. Fisher, "The Anti-Monastic Reaction in the Reign of Edward the Martyr", *Cambridge Historical Journal*, 1952, X, pp. 254-270.

The queen then ordered that the holy body be seized and hidden in a hut nearby. In obedience to her command, the servants took the body by the feet and threw it ignominiously into the hut, concealing it with some mean coverings.

Now there lived in that hut a woman blind from birth whom the queen used to support out of charity. While she spent the night there alone with the holy body, suddenly, in the middle of the night, a wonderful light appeared and filled the whole hut. Struck with awe, the poor woman cried out: "Lord, have mercy!" At this, she suddenly received her sight, which she had so long desired. And then, removing the covering, she discovered the dead body of the holy king. The present church of St. Edward at Corfe stands on the site of this miracle. The stream into which the holy king's body first fell was found to have healing properties. Many pilgrims who washed their eyes in the water recovered or improved their sight. These include two reported cases in modern times.

At dawn the next day, when the queen learned of the miracle, she was troubled and decided to conceal the body in a different way. She ordered her servants to take it up and bury it in a marshy place. At the same time she commanded that no one should grieve over the king's death, or even speak about it. Then she retired to a manor in her possession called Bere, about ten miles from Corfe. Meanwhile, such grief took hold of Aethelred over his brother's death that he could not stop weeping. This angered his mother, who took some candles and beat him with them viciously, hoping thereby to stem the flow of his tears. It is said that thereafter Aethelred so hated candles that he would never allow them to be lit in his presence.

When St. Dunstan, archbishop of Canterbury, heard the news he was greatly saddened by the death of his beloved spiritual son, and at the coronation of his half-brother, Aethelred, at Kingston he prophesied great sorrow for the English people in the coming reign. The prophecy was exactly fulfilled after Dunstan's death in 988, when the pagan Danes invaded England and eventually, in 1016, after over twenty years of bloody war, conquered the country.

The contemporary *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* expressed the universal horror felt by the English Orthodox people at this time: "No worse deed for the English was ever done than this, since first they came to the land of Britain. Men murdered him, but God exalted him; in life he was an earthly king, but after death he is now a heavenly saint. His earthly kinsmen would not avenge him, yet his Heavenly Father has amply avenged him. Those earthly slayers would have destroyed his memory upon earth; but the Heavenly Avenger has spread his fame abroad, in the heavens and upon the earth. Those who before would not bow in reverence to his living body, now humbly bend the knee to his dead bones. Now can we perceive that the wisdom of men, their

deliberations and their plots, are as nothing against God's purpose."¹⁶⁹

Almost a year passed, and it pleased Almighty God to make known the heavenly glory of the martyr-king. A pillar of fire was seen over the place where his body was hidden, lighting up the whole area. This was seen by some devout inhabitants of Wareham, who met together and raised the body from the place where it lay. Immediately a sweet, clear spring of healing water sprang up in that place. Then, accompanied by a huge crowd of mourners, the body was taken to the church of the Most Holy Mother of God in Wareham and buried at the east end of the church.

This first translation of the holy relics took place on February 13, 980.

Meanwhile, the queen's deceit and treachery were made known throughout the country, the fame of the innocent martyr-king increased, and many signs and miracles testified to his holiness. The nobleman Aelfhere, deeply repenting of his destruction of monasteries and opposition to the king¹⁷⁰, decided to have the body translated to a worthier resting-place. Bishops and abbots were invited, together with Abbess Wulfrida of Wilton and the nuns of Wilton monastery, who included St. Edith, the king-martyr's half-sister. A great number of laymen and women of Dorset also converged on Wareham.

Then the holy body was disinterred in the presence of the whole people and was found to be completely incorrupt. Seeing this, St. Dunstan and the other bishops led the people in hymns of praise to God, while St. Edith ran up to her brother's body and embraced it with tears of joy and sorrow combined. Then the body was lifted onto a bier and with a great procession of clergy and laity was taken to Shaftesbury, to the women's monastery founded in the ninth century by St. Edward's ancestor, King Alfred the Great, in honour of the Most Holy Mother of God. The procession began on February 13, 981 and arrived at Shaftesbury seven days later, on February 20. There the holy body was received with honour by the nuns and was buried with great ceremony on the north side of the altar.

On the way from Wareham to Shaftesbury, two poor men who were so bent over and paralyzed that they could hardly crawl on their hands and knees were brought close to the bier. Those carrying it then lowered the sacred body down to their level, and immediately in the sight of all they were restored to full health. A great shout rose to the heavens, and all together glorified the holy martyr.

On hearing of the miracles worked through the saint, Queen Aelfthryth was overcome by remorse and decided to go to him to ask forgiveness. But as she was riding to Shaftesbury with her servants, her horse suddenly stopped and refused to go further, nor would he be moved by blows of the whip and threats. Then the queen

¹⁶⁹ *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 979.

¹⁷⁰ William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, II, 9.

realized that she was held back by the force of her sins. Jumping off the horse, she prepared to continue her journey on foot. But again she was hurled back and could make no progress. Later, weeping bitterly over her sins, the queen retired to a convent at Wherwell, where “for many years she clothed her pampered body in hair-cloth, sleeping at night on the ground without a pillow, and mortifying her flesh with every kind of penance”.

During the following twenty years, many miracles were worked through the intercession of the holy martyr-king. Thus there was a woman living in a remote part of England, who had an infirmity of her legs and daily poured forth prayers for her health. One night St. Edward appeared to her in a dream and said: “When you rise at dawn, go without delay to the place where I am buried, for there you will receive new shoes that are necessary for your infirmity.” Waking early, the woman reported the dream to her neighbour; but she, disbelieving the vision, declared that it was imagination. And so the woman disobeyed the command of the saint. But he, appearing to her a second time, said: “Why do you spurn my command and so greatly neglect your health? Go then to my tomb and there you will be delivered.” She recovered her strength and said: “Who are you, lord? Where shall I find your tomb?” He replied: “I am King Edward, recently killed by an unjust death and buried at Shaftesbury, in the church of Mary, the blessed Mother of God.” The woman woke early, and thinking over what she had seen, took what was needed for her journey and made her way to the monastery. There she prayed for some time with humble heart to God and St. Edward, and was restored to health.

Great miracles continued to be worked at the tomb of the royal martyr, and in 1001 his brother Aethelred, who had succeeded him on the throne, granted the town of Bradford-on-Avon “to Christ and His saint, my brother Edward, whom, covered in his own blood, the Lord Himself has deigned to magnify by many signs of power.”¹⁷¹ At about the same time the tomb in which the saint lay began to rise from the ground, indicating that he wished his remains to be raised from the earth. In confirmation of this he appeared in a vision to a monk and said: “Go to the convent called by the famous name of Shaftesbury and take commands to the nun Ethelfreda who is in charge of the other servants of God there. You will say to her that I do not wish to remain any longer in the place where I now lie, and command her on my behalf to report this to my brother without delay.” Rising early, and perceiving that the vision he had seen was from God, the monk quickly made his way to the abbess as he had been commanded and told her in order all that had been revealed to him. Then the abbess, giving thanks to God, immediately told the whole story to King Aethelred, at the same time making known to him the elevation of the tomb. The king was filled with joy and would have been present at the elevation if he had been able. But, being prevented by the invasions of the Danes, he sent messengers to the holy bishops Wulfsige of Sherborne and Aelfsin of Dorchester-on-Thames, as well as to other men

¹⁷¹ J.M. Kemble, *Codex Diplomaticus Aevi Saxoni*, 1845-8, no. 706.

of respected life, instructing them to raise his brother's tomb from the ground and replace it in a fitting place. Following the king's command, those men joyfully assembled at the monastery with a vast crowd of laymen and women. The tomb was opened with the utmost reverence, and such a wonderful fragrance issued from it that all present thought that they were standing amidst the delights of Paradise. Then the holy bishops drew near, bore away the sacred relics from the tomb, and, placing them in a casket carefully prepared for this, carried it in procession to the holy place of the Saints together with other holy relics. This elevation took place on June 20, 1001.

St. Edward was officially glorified by an act of the All-English Council of 1008, presided over by St. Aelfheah (Alphege), archbishop of Canterbury. King Aethelred ordered that the saint's three feastdays (March 18, February 13 and June 20) should be celebrated throughout England. The church in which St. Edward's relics rested was rededicated to the Mother of God and St. Edward, and that part of the town was renamed "Edwardstowe" in honour of the saint.¹⁷²

The anti-monastic reaction petered out after King Edward's death, and "thenceforth," writes Stenton, "there is no sign of any anti-monastic feeling at court, and the reign of Aethelred II is marked by a series of new foundations, such as Cerne Abbas, Eynsham, and Burton on Trent, which prove that desire for the religious life was still strong in England. Each of the three original leaders of the monastic survival survived into Aethelred's reign. Aethelwold died in 984, Dunstan in 988, and Oswald in 992. They had no successors of equal eminence, but the men whom they trained were ready to carry on their work, and the future of the movement which they had led was secured by the religious houses which had arisen or came to new life under their influence. In 993, the year after Oswald's death, the abbots of eighteen monasteries are known to have attended King Aethelred's court.

"On the other hand, the names of these monasteries suggest, what other evidence proves, that the strength of the movement lay almost entirely in the southern half of England. Even here it had made little, if any, impression on the west midland shires which had formed the historic Mercia. Its remarkable progress in the eastern midlands had been made possible by the patronage of a small number of great men, such as Aethelwine of East Anglia and Byrhtnoth of Essex, whose interests were not merely local. The Anglo-Danish noblemen beyond the Welland, engrossed in their

¹⁷² Many miracles continued to be wrought at the tomb of St. Edward, and in the twelfth century his lung was still quivering... In 1904, an eleventh-century glass vessel containing a "shrunk, nut-like object" was found beneath a small marble slab in front of the high altar. The vase can still be seen in Winchester cathedral, but the relic, which may well have been St. Edward's lung, was thrown away... In the 1930s the relics of the saint were discovered in Shaftesbury abbey, and on September 16, 1984 they were translated to the Orthodox church of St. Edward at Brookwood, near Guildford. (J. Wilson-Claridge, *The Recorded Miracles of St. Edward the Martyr*, Brookwood: King Edward Orthodox Trust, 1984)

own concerns, seem to have ignored the new monasticism, and it was not until the twelfth century that the free peasantry of the northern Danelaw began to make gifts of land for religious purposes. Beyond the Humber, Oswald's attempt to restore monastic life at Ripon ended in failure and found no imitators. In this direction little advance was made between the age of Edgar and the Norman Conquest. In 1066 Crowland was the only monastery in the shires of Lincoln, Leicester, Nottingham, Derby, and York.

"But the effect of the monastic revival cannot be measured by the mere number of the religious houses to which it gave rise. Through the members of these houses who rose to bishoprics its influence was very rapidly extended over the whole body of the English Church. The series of such promotions, which begins in Edgar's reign, can be traced downwards almost continuously until the eve of the Norman Conquest. It is clear that a living tradition of Dunstan, Aethelwold and Oswald was preserved among the rulers of the English church for three-quarters of a century. It was in accordance with this tradition that a monastic order was established in at least two cathedrals which had previously been served by secular clergy. By the early part of the eleventh century, and at latest before the death of Archbishop Aelfric(995-1005), the community at Christ Church, Canterbury, had become entirely monastic. Wulfsgie, bishop of Sherborne (992-1001), replaced clerks by monks in his cathedral. There is no sign of any internal reaction against the work of Oswald and Aethelwold at Worcester and Winchester. The evidence is scanty, but it leaves little room for doubt that the monastic cathedral, which was a unique feature of the medieval English church, was in fact the creation of the tenth-century revival.

"The influence of the revival on the parochial clergy was direct and strong. Between 975 and 1066 every English diocese came for a time, if only for a short time, under the rule of a bishop who was a professed monk. Under the conditions of the age a monastic training was the best preparation that a bishop could receive for his pastoral work. It gave him a sense of discipline and order, respect for learning, and the opportunity of knowing men who were capable of sustained enthusiasm for an idea. It is clear that the monastic bishops of this period were anxious to instruct as well as rule their clergy. They held firmly to the ideal that the priest, through his ordination, was set apart from other men, and they regarded it as their duty to move their clergy towards a celibate way of life. In this... they were confronted by the stolid resistance of a clergy unwilling to accept a dictated conception of its calling, and their success was far from complete [in other words, the clergy remained, on the whole, married]...

"There can, in fact, be no question that the Benedictine reformation of the tenth century brought fresh vitality to the whole English Church. But its significance is misunderstood if it is dismissed as one of the many movements which have merely influenced a generation and then passed into history. It opened a new phase of English culture which survived the political [and spiritual] catastrophe of the

Norman Conquest, and contributed to the distinctive quality of medieval English civilization..."¹⁷³

¹⁷³ Stenton, op. cit., pp. 455-457.

12. THE RETURN OF THE NORTHMEN

Aethelred came to the throne on the murder of his half-brother, St. Edward the Martyr in 979. Quite apart from this sombre fact, Aethelred's earlier life did not portend well for the future. During his baptism by St. Dunstan, archbishop of Canterbury, writes Harriet O'Brien "as Aethelred was being plunged into the font, William [of Malmesbury] confides, the infant prince 'interrupted the sacrament by opening his bowels, at which Dunstan was much concerned - "By God and His Mother," he said, "he will be a wastrel when he is a man".' The Archbishop later presided at Aethelred's coronation. When Dunstan placed the crown on the child's head William notes that he 'could not restrain himself, and poured out in a loud voice the spirit of the prophecy with which his own heart was full. "Inasmuch," he said, "as you aimed at the throne through the death of your own brother, now hear the word of the Lord. Thus saith the Lord God: the sin of your shameful mother and the sin of the men who shared in her wicked plot shall not be blotted out except by the shedding of much blood of your miserable subjects, and there shall come upon the people of England such evils as they have not suffered from the time when they came to England until then".' Sure enough, writes William..., in the third year of Aethelred's reign 'there came to Southampton, a harbour near Winchester, seven ships full of pirates...'

"The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* actually maintain that this raid took place just a year after Aethelred's coronation at Kingston. And that not only was Southampton attacked by northern raiders (and most of the town dwellers killed or taken prisoner) but that Thanet in Kent was also ravaged, and Cheshire, too. So began the troubles that were to continue for the entire duration of Aethelred's reign..."¹⁷⁴

And yet, writes Levi Roach, "Aethelred's early years on the throne passed remarkably quietly. His mother Aelfthryth, Bishop Aethelwold of Winchester, the leading reformer of previous years, and Aelfhere of Mercia, the kingdom's senior ealderman (the equivalent of a continental count or duke, or a later English earl), led a *de facto* regency in his name. The deaths of the last two in 983 (Aelfhere) and 984 (Aethelwold) brought this to an end. With Aethelwold's passing, in particular, matters came to a head and over the next nine years Aethelred's mother disappears entirely from the record. Whether her departure from court was enforced is unknown, but either way the consequences of this sudden change are clear: new figures (particularly laymen) rose to favour and were able to use their new-found prominence to take lands and rights from the church. This was a move against the politics of Aethelred's previous guardians and against the legacy of his father. Of the four churches known to have suffered in these years, three were prominent centres of reform (Glastonbury, Abingdon and the Old Minster at Winchester, the latter two of which had been reformed by Bishop Aethelwold), while the fourth was Rochester,

¹⁷⁴ O'Brien, *Queen Emma and the Vikings*, London: Bloomsbury, 2006, pp. 53-54.

the bishopric of Aelfstan, an associate of Aethelwold and appointee of Edgar. It is clear that the young monarch was striking out on his own, defining himself against what had come before..."¹⁷⁵

"Subsequent chroniclers," writes Harriet O'Brien, "scathingly depict Aethelred II as a foolishly incompetent ruler, so ill-judged in his choice of tactical advisers for the nation's defence that he earned the epithet *Unraed*, meaning 'bad counsel'. Since the name Aethelred literally translates as 'noble counsel', Aethelred Unraed was a neat pun. But it was not to stand the test of time: long after Aethelred's death, and after the Norman Conquest, Anglo-Saxon ceased to be fully understood and *Unraed* was transliterated into 'Unready'. The slip was not entirely inapposite..."¹⁷⁶

The tragedy of King Aethelred's reign was that his virtues – the purity (so far as we know) of his private life, his protection (generally) of the Church, his support for the missionary effort to Scandinavia, and the justice of his code of laws – were overshadowed by his failure in respect of two of the basic duties of a king: even-handed justice in peace, and courageous leadership in war. The very fact that he came to the throne through the murder of his brother, too young though he himself was to have actively connived at it, was felt to cast a shadow of injustice and illegitimacy over his reign. This feeling was strengthened by his rapacious attitude towards the Church (of which he repented in his charter of 993¹⁷⁷), his adoption of the disastrous course of buying off the enemy (although it was in fact Archbishop Sigeric who first suggested it), his complaisant attitude towards the traitors Aelfric and Eadric, and his brutal injustice to his loyal Danish subjects in the St. Brice's Day massacre. These failures were not entirely his fault: it may have been as much his subjects' fickleness that led to his nervousness and injustice as his injustice that led to their disgust and fickleness. Nevertheless, his incapacity was one of the causes of the breakdown of that "symphony" between Church, State and people that allowed the pagan Cnut to triumph in 1016.

"Much that has brought the condemnation of historians on King Aethelred," writes Sir Frank Stenton, "may well be due in the last resort to the circumstances under which he became king. Throughout his reign he behaved like a man who is never sure of himself. His ineffectiveness in war, which is very remarkable in a king of his line, his acts of spasmodic violence, and the air of mistrust which overhangs his relations with his nobles, are signs of a trouble which lies deeper than mere incapacity for government. They suggest the reaction of a weak king to the consciousness that he had come to power through what his subjects regarded as the worst crime committed among the English peoples since their first coming to Britain."¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁵ Roach, "Ready to Rule", *History Today*, May, 2017, pp. 26-28.

¹⁷⁶ O'Brien, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

¹⁷⁷ Roach, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

¹⁷⁸ Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1971, p. 374.

It was only after St. Dunstan's death in 988 that, as he had himself prophesied, the deluge really came. "From the highest peace," wrote Osbern of Canterbury, "things were changed to insupportable war; from immense joy to indigence in all things. Finally the air itself was altered: heaven did not support the earth, nor the earth what was sown in it. The incursions of enemies left ugly marks everywhere: cities were destroyed, churches ravaged, and priests of the Lord swept off the face of the earth."¹⁷⁹

"When Saint Dunstan was translated to heaven" wrote Edmer of Canterbury, "immediately, as he had foretold, England was laid open to the incursion of foreign foes. The indolence of the king became known round about and the greed of those outside her borders, aiming rather at the wealth than the lives of the English, invaded the country by sea at one point after another and laid waste at first the villages and cities near the coast, then those further inland and in the end the whole province, driving the inhabitants in wretchedness from their homes. The king instead of meeting them in arms panic-stricken shamelessly offered them money suing for peace; whereupon they accepted the price [the *Danegeld*] and retired to their homes, only to return in still greater numbers and still more ruthless, from renewed invasion to receive increased rewards. In this way they obtained now ten thousand pounds of silver, then sixteen thousand, then twenty-four thousand, then thirty thousand, this King Aethelred lavishing all these sums upon them and grinding down the whole kingdom with crushing exactions."¹⁸⁰

There were some lights in the prevailing darkness. Thus at Watchet in Somerset in 988, and again at Maldon in Essex in 991, the English acquitted themselves well. At Maldon, Alderman Brihtnoth of Essex, who had defended the monasteries in King Edward's reign, was killed after a heroic resistance, and his body was recovered and buried by the monks of Ely, whose benefactor he had been.

The Danish raiders were given protection in Normandy, a new state of Viking origin that had adopted French culture. This protection annoyed the English and tensions between the two states were high. However, in 991 Pope John XV brokered a treaty between King Aethelred and Duke Richard I. In 1002 relations were further strengthened by the marriage between Aethelred and Emma, daughter of Richard I and sister of Richard II. Thus began the fateful relationship between Normandy and England, culminating in the Norman Conquest of England in 1066. For the marriage "entitled Aethelred to hospitality in Normandy when at last the Danes had conquered England. His sons by the marriage were educated in the duchy, and it was with a sense of obligation towards the Norman court that the elder of them [Edward] ultimately returned to England as king..."¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁹ Osbern, *Vita Dunstani*.

¹⁸⁰ Edmer, *Historia Novorum in Anglia*, translated by Geoffrey Bosanquet, London: Cresset Press, p. 4.

¹⁸¹ Stenton, *op. cit.*, p. 379.

In 993 the Vikings burned Romsey Abbey and drove out the nuns. However, Abbess Aelwina was warned in a vision of the impending disaster, and so was able to carry the abbey's valuables to safety. The monastery subsequently boasted one of the great lights of English monasticism, St. Aethelflaed (Ethelfleda), who became abbess in 1003.¹⁸²

In 994 came a famous victory, not so much of physical as of spiritual arms – the conversion of the famous warrior and Norwegian king, Olaf Tryggvason.

On the feast of the Nativity of the Mother of God (September 8) in that year, “came Olaf [of Norway] and Swein [of Denmark] to London with ninety-four ships, and kept up an increasing attack on the city, and they purposed, moreover, to set it on fire. But there they suffered greater loss and injury than they ever thought any garrison could inflict on them. But in this the holy Mother of God manifested her clemency to the garrison and delivered them from their foes. They went away, doing as much harm as any host was capable of doing in burning, harrying, and slaughter, both along the coast and in Essex, Kent, Sussex and Hampshire. Finally, they obtained horses and rode far and wide wherever they pleased, and continued to do unspeakable damage. Then the king and the councillors agreed to send to them, offering tribute and supplies, if they would desist from their harassment. This they agreed to, and the whole host came to Southampton, and there they took up winter quarters, and were provisioned from the whole kingdom of Wessex and paid sixteen thousand pounds. Then the king sent Bishop Aelfheah [of Winchester, the future hieromartyr archbishop of Canterbury] and Alderman Aethelweard to look for King Olaf, while hostages were sent to the ships; and Olaf was conducted with great ceremony to the king at Andover. The king stood sponsor for him at confirmation, and gave him royal gifts; and Olaf then promised, and also kept his word, that he would never again come to England with warlike intent.”¹⁸³

How did this dramatic Saul-like conversion come about? It seems that during the campaign of that year Olaf came to the Scilly Isles, where, according to *The Epitome of the Sagas of the Kings of Norway*, “lived a great friend of God, a hermit, famed for his excellent learning and various knowledge. Olaf was eager to test this, and dressed one of his retainers like a king, so that under the name of the king he might seek (the hermit's) advice. Now this was the answer he received: ‘You are no king, and my counsel to you is that you should be loyal to your king.’ When Olaf heard this answer, he was yet more eager to see him, because he no longer doubted that he was a true prophet, and in the course of his talk with him, and of the good man's exhortation, (the hermit) addressed him thus with words of holy wisdom and divine foreknowledge: ‘You will be,’ he said, ‘a famous king, and do famous deeds. You will

¹⁸² A fourteenth-century chronicle in H. Liveing, *Records of Romsey Abbey*, 1906; Rev. David Shearlock, *Romsey Abbey*, p. 7.

¹⁸³ Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, E, 994.

bring many peoples to faith and baptism, thereby profiting yourself and many others. And, so that you may have no doubts concerning this answer of mine, you shall have this for a sign. On the way to your ship you will fall into an ambush, and a battle will take place, and you will lose part of your company and you yourself will receive a wound, and through this wound you will be at the point of death, and be borne to the ship on a shield. Yet within seven days you will be whole from this wound, and soon you will receive baptism.”¹⁸⁴

The thirteenth-century Icelandic historian Snorri Sturlason describes the sequel: “Olaf went down to his ships and there he met foes who tried to slay him and his men. But the meeting ended as the hermit had told him, so that Olaf was borne wounded out to this ship and likewise was he well after seven nights. Then it seemed clear to Olaf that this man had told him the truth and that he was a true prophet from whom he had this foretelling. Olaf then went again to find the man, spoke much with him and asked carefully whence he had this wisdom by which he foretold the future. The hermit said that the God of Christian men let him know all he wished, and then he told Olaf of many great works of God and after all these words Olaf agreed to be baptized, and so it came about that Olaf and all his followers were baptized. He stayed there very long and learned the right faith and took with him from there priests and other learned men.”¹⁸⁵

Olaf became a zealous Christian whose conversion marked the beginning of the Christianization of his native Norway. For on his return to Norway he brought with him, according to the *Epitome*, “Bishop Sigurth [St. Sigfrid, enlightener of Sweden], who had been consecrated to preach the name of God among the nations, and other learned men, Thangbrand the Priest, Thormod and certain deacons besides. In order to preach Christianity he began by summoning an assembly at Most in Harthaland, and it was easy to carry it through, both because God aided him, and because the tyranny of Hakon the Bad had been hateful to the people. Then they received the Faith, and Olaf the kingdom. He was twenty-seven years old when he came to Norway and during the five years in which he bore the name of king in Norway he converted five lands, Norway, Iceland, the Shetlands, the Orkneys and, fifthly, the Faroes. He first built churches on his own chief estates, and put down heathendom and sacrificial feasts, and, to please the people, he introduced in their place certain solemn feasts, Christmas and Easter, bear-drinking at Johnsmas and an autumn ale-drinking at Michaelmas.”

¹⁸⁴ M. Ashdown, *English and Norse Documents*, Cambridge, 1930.

¹⁸⁵ *Heimskringla*, VII, 31. The existence of this hermit is an interesting witness to the continuing vitality of Celtic Christianity in Cornwall and the Scilly Isles, which remained Celtic in their language and culture for centuries after their absorption into the English kingdom in Athelstan’s time. If the hermit may be identified with the St. Lide (or Elidius) whose feast appears on a medieval calendar from Tavistock, then he may have been a bishop (Farmer, *op. cit.*, p. 246). But the fact that Olaf was only baptized by him and not confirmed – he was confirmed, as we have seen, by St. Aelfheah at Andover – seems to indicate that the hermit was not a bishop. For in the Western Church only bishops could perform the sacrament of confirmation (the equivalent of chrismation).

Olaf disappeared in a sea-battle against Swein of Denmark, Olaf of Sweden and Eric, son of Hakon the Bad. "There is no certain knowledge," says the *Epitome*, "of King Olaf's death. This much was seen, that, when the battle was to a great extent subsided, he was standing still alive on the raised deck of the long Serpent (a ship with thirty-two rooms), but when Eric was about to climb up into the prow to fetch him down, a light, as if it had been lightning, flashed upon him, and when the light passed the King himself was gone. Some men will tell that he escaped in a boat, saying that he had been seen since then in a certain monastery in Palestine."

According to Snorri's *Saga of Olaf Trygvason*, Olaf died many years later in the reign of Edward the Confessor. Now Edward greatly admired Olaf. So when he heard the news of his death, he read, in the presence of his whole court, the story of the battle on the Serpent, the escape of Olaf to Jerusalem and his settling in a Syrian monastery.¹⁸⁶

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In spite of the incursions of the Vikings, the life of the Old English kingdom continued in many ways almost unchanged.

In 995, pagan Vikings invaded again from Scandinavia, and the relics of St. Cuthbert had to be moved again. Bishop Aldhum and the monks removed them first south to Ripon, and then north again to a place to the east of Durham. On the way, however, the cart carrying the relics stuck fast and refused to move.

"After three days of fasting and prayer," writes C.J. Stranks, "St. Cuthbert revealed to the monks that he wished his shrine to be in the Dunholme. That was all very well, but where was the Dunholme? Nobody knew, until some of them happened to hear two dairy-maids talking about a lost cow which one of them said was in the Dunholme. They found the place to be a rocky tongue of land formed by a loop of the river Wear, a magnificent and impregnable site, covered with trees and brushwood except for a small plot in the middle. They had found the spot which was to be St. Cuthbert's final resting place.

"There, on the lofty place above the river, the monks made a rough shelter of boughs to protect the coffin while they put up a stronger wooden building which became known as the white church, but even this was not intended to be permanent. It lasted three years and during that time the whole population of the countryside

¹⁸⁶ C, 286, translated in Ashdown, *op. cit.* The Russian historian E.E. Golubinsky (*History of the Russian Church*, 1880) maintained, on the basis of this Saga, that Olaf was baptized in Byzantium and then persuaded St. Vladimir the Great Prince of Kiev to accept Christianity. See V.Z., 'O tom, gde i kogda krestilsa sviatoj-knyaz' Vladimir i o vremeni kreschenia Rusi', *Vestnik Russkogo Khristianskogo Dvizhenia*, 1988, I, no. 152, p. 13.

joined in building a massive stone cathedral, to be a place of honour worthy of so great a saint and his incorrupt body. Pilgrims poured in to venerate the marvel of a corpse which had defied decay for nearly three hundred years [and would continue to do so for several centuries more]...¹⁸⁷

It was in this period that Abbot Aelfric of Cerne Abbas in Dorset, the second most important writer in English Orthodoxy after the Venerable Bede, produced his sermons and lives of the saints in the English vernacular.¹⁸⁸ The writings of Archbishop Wulfstan of York are also important, especially his *Epistle of the Wolf to the English*. And it was in this period that several great saints reached their maturity, such as St. Wulfhilda of Barking (+September 9, 1000), St. Wulfsig of Sherborne (+January 8, 1002) and St. Aelfheah of Canterbury (+April 19, 1012), of whom more anon.

But the constant incursions were sapping the wealth and, more important, the morale of the English. And the situation was not helped by an act of political treachery by King Aethelred that has gone down in history as “the St. Brice’s Day Massacre”. Every year between 997 and 1001 the Danes had invaded, and on November 13, 1002, the king “ordered that all the Danish men in England were to be killed” on the grounds, as his counsellors told him, “the Danes would faithlessly take his life, and then all his counsellors, and possess his kingdom afterwards”. It is unlikely that this meant literally all the Danes in England, for in the Danelaw of Eastern England they were far too strong. It may have meant certain mercenaries who had entered the king’s service since 994 and had defected, leading to accusations of conspiracy.¹⁸⁹ However, many were killed in towns such as Oxford, Gloucester and London, including the Christian sister of King Swein of Denmark, Gunhildis, then living as a hostage in England.¹⁹⁰ Not surprisingly, her brother invaded the following year, determined on revenge...

Nor did Aethelred show significant remorse. Thus the massacre in Oxford, where in 2008 archaeologists discovered the remains of between 34 and 38 slaughtered Danes, was justified by the king two years later as follows: “Since a decree was sent out by me with the counsel of my leading men and magnates, to the effect that all the Danes who had sprung up in this island, sprouting like cockle amongst the wheat, were to be destroyed by a most just extermination, and thus this decree was to be put into effect even as far as death, those Danes who dwelt in the afore-mentioned town [Oxford], striving to escape death, entered this sanctuary of Christ [St. Frideswide’s

¹⁸⁷ Stranks, *The Life and Death of St. Cuthbert*, London: SPCK, 1964, pp. 32-33.

¹⁸⁸ See Carmen Acevedo Butcher, *God of Mercy: Aelfric’s Sermons and Theology*, Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2006.

¹⁸⁹ Roach, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

¹⁹⁰ Stenton, *op. cit.*, p. 380. Roach writes: “Recent excavations in Oxford and Dorset have uncovered the bodies of a number of men of probable Scandinavian origin who had been violently executed and, though much uncertainty remains, a case can be made for associating them with this event” (*op. cit.*, p. 30).

church], having broken by force the doors and bolts, and resolved to make refuge and defence for themselves therein against the people of the town and suburbs; but when all the people in pursuit strove, forced by necessity, to drive them out, and could not, they set fire to the planks and burnt, as it seems, this church with its ornaments and books. Afterwards, with God's aid, it was renewed by me."¹⁹¹

In 1003 and again in 1004 King Swein invaded England. However, he was defeated by the English under Ulfkell Snilling outside Thetford, and in 2005 withdrew to Denmark. In 1006 he returned and extracted 36,000 pounds in tribute from the demoralized English.

"Two years passed before England was attacked again. Each of them was marked by an important measure of state. In 1007, after an abeyance of nearly thirty years, the Mercian ealdormanry was revived and given to a thegn named Eadric Streona, whose origins are obscure, and were certainly far from eminent. His later conduct has given him an evil reputation, but his appointment was an intelligent attempt to provide for a better defence of central England by placing the whole of it under a single command. In 1008 the government undertook the formidable task of creating a new fleet of warships, furnished with armour for their crews. The preparations were organized on a national scale, and the fleet had been brought into existence by the early part of 1009. In anticipation of a Danish attack it was stationed off Sandwich, but before the Danes appeared a charge of treason was brought against one of its commanders. Before his trial the accused commander – a thegn of Sussex named Wulfnoth – seduced the crews of twenty ships from their allegiance, and took to piracy along the south coast. His accuser, who was a brother of Eadric Streona, followed him with eighty ships, but a storm drove them all on shore, they were afterwards burned by Wulfnoth's men. With a fleet thus weakened the king and his council declined to risk a general engagement; the ships which remained to them were brought into harbour at London, and 1 August the enemy occupied the deserted anchorage off Sandwich..."¹⁹²

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At this critical stage there appeared on the scene one of the greatest but least well-known of Englishmen – St. Aelfheah of Canterbury.¹⁹³ A severe ascetic and clairvoyant wonderworker who was also a very compassionate pastor, he had been ordained by St. Dunstan to the see of Winchester at the very young age of thirty in response to a vision from the holy Apostle Andrew. In 1006 he was elected as archbishop of Canterbury.

¹⁹¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St._Brice's_Day_massacre.

¹⁹² Stenton, *op. cit.*, p. 382.

¹⁹³ The following account is taken mainly from his *Vita* by Osbern of Canterbury, in H. Wharton, *Anglia Sacra*, 1691, II, pp. 122-147.

On his return from Rome, where he received the pallium, the new archbishop joined the king and his councillors to pass laws strengthening ecclesiastical discipline and penalizing traitors, with the death penalty introduced for those who would plot against the king's life. And in 1008, as we have seen, the day of St. Edward's martyrdom was proclaimed to be a feastday - another clear warning to potential traitors and king-killers.

However, the sad story continued, with indecision, incompetence and treachery the order of the day. Thus in 1009, "when the enemy was in the east, then our levies were mustered in the west; and when they were in the south, then our levies were in the north. Then all the councillors were summoned to the king, for a plan for the defence of the realm had to be devised then and there. But whatever course of action was decided upon it was not followed even for a single month. In the end there was no leader who was willing to raise levies, but each fled as quickly as he could; nor even in the end would one shire help another."¹⁹⁴

The elaborate plan of national self-defence worked out by King Alfred was in danger of collapsing, while the peaceful union between the English and the Danes who had settled in England, which had been the foundation-stone of English policy for over a century, looked as if it were degenerating into civil war...

In the autumn of 1011 the Danes besieged Canterbury and sacked it. They were helped, on the one hand, by Abbot Aelfmar of Canterbury, who, though he owed his life to St. Aelfheah, now turned against him and his fellow citizens; and, on the other, by Alderman Eadric Streona of Mercia. Eadric had come to be involved in the sack of Canterbury through his brother, a proud and cruel man who slandered the nobility of Canterbury in the king's presence and then violently burned their inheritance. But they rose up and killed him, burning down his house. Eadric demanded vengeance from the king for his brother's death; but the king refused, saying that his brother had been justly punished. Then Eadric, determined to avenge his brother, collected an army of ten thousand well-armed men. Realizing, however, that these forces were insufficient, he came to an agreement with the Danes whereby, in exchange for their help, they would retain the north of England in the case of victory while he held the south.

Meanwhile, St. Aelfheah had been preaching, redeeming captives, feeding the hungry and even converting many of the invaders. This was another reason why the Danes were eager to unite with Eadric against the men of Canterbury. And as they approached the city from Sandwich, the people fled to the cathedral, convinced that they were safe there.

The nobility, meanwhile, urged St. Aelfheah to flee. But he refused, saying that he

¹⁹⁴ *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, E, 979.

had no intention of being a hireling. Then he gathered the people together and exhorted them to have courage and patience, setting before them the triumphs of the martyrs. Finally, having blessed them and communicated them in the Holy Mysteries, he dismissed them in peace.

The enemy came and laid siege to the city. On the twentieth day, the saint sent to the Danes, exhorting them to desist from their purpose and warning them that when a father wishes to beat his sons, he afterwards throws the stick into the fire. In a similar way God would punish the Danes even after using them to chastize the English.

But the English traitors under Eadric were only the more incited to cruelty by the sight of their fellow countrymen's distress. They set fire to the houses, and soon, fanned by a strong south wind, the fire spread everywhere. Torn between whether to stay on the ramparts and defend the city, or rush down to their houses, the citizens finally chose the latter course. And soon they were dragging beloved wives and children out of the burning houses - only to see them immediately cut down by the swords of the enemy. For now that the ramparts were unguarded they were able (with Abbot Aelfmar's help) to enter unhindered, with such a terrible clamour of trumpets and voices that it seemed as if the city were being shaken to its foundations.

"No-one who was not a spectator of that calamity," writes the saint's biographer, Osbern of Canterbury, "would know how to describe the reality of it, and the wretchedness of its confusion of evils. Some had their throats cut, others perished in the flames, still more were thrown over the walls. Others, shameful to relate, were hung up by their private parts and expired thus. Ladies more distinguished than others by their nobility were dragged through the streets of the city because they could not produce treasures which they did not possess. Finally they were thrown into the flames and died. The cruelty was especially savage against those under age; while babes were ripped out of their mother's womb or pierced through with spears or crushed to pieces under waggon wheels...

"The venerable prelate, unable to bear so many deaths among his spiritual children, suddenly, while he was surrounded by a crowd of weeping monks in the church of the Saviour, slipped out of the hands of those restraining him, rushed to a place full of corpses, hurled himself amidst a dense mass of the enemy and with groans cried out:

"Have pity, have pity! And if you recognize yourselves to be men, put an end to your persecution of the innocent! Instead of these, take me, who, to increase the Christian people, despoiled you of many a soldier, and who, with unrestrained lips, always condemned the crimes of your impiety!"

Innumerable hands seized him, stopped his mouth, bound his hands, scratched

his face with their nails, punched and kicked him in the sides. The man of God uttered not a sound, but his lips moved as if he were speaking to God. Then he was forced to witness death after death in front of his very eyes so that he might suffer every torment, whether in his own person or in the persons of those whom he mourned.

Then the Danes came to the cathedral church of the Saviour. They set fire to it, and soon molten lead from the roof was seeping into the building. Covering their heads with their palls, the weeping monks ran out of all the doors of the building, only to be cut down by the swords of the soldiers waiting outside.

Out of the eight thousand inhabitants of Canterbury, only four monks and some eight hundred others survived the sack. The survivors, after suffering blows and wounds, were either judged worthy of being ransomed - these included Bishop Godwin of Rochester, Abbess Leofrun of St. Mildred's and all the clergy except Abbot Aelfmar of St. Augustine's monastery (not the traitor) - or were sold into slavery.

The archbishop had seen his people slaughtered, the city burned down and the cathedral church of Christ the Saviour profaned and devastated. Now he was bound and dragged through the north gate of the city. There lay the survivors with stocks on their feet and under military guard. On seeing him, they all groaned and wept and raised their hands to heaven in prayer. But then, as the saint stood strengthening their shattered souls in prayer, he was given a ferocious blow between the shoulders, so that his shoulder was cut open and blood poured over his whole body. Even the Danes were horrified. Then he was led from the city to the ships, from the ships to the prison, from the prison to the judge, and finally back to the prison, which was dark, narrow and full of frogs. There he remained under a guard of twelve soldiers for another seven months. The Danes offered him freedom in exchange for money from the Church's patrimony; but he refused.

And so, continues the account of Osbern of Canterbury, as Pascha of the year 1012 approached, the saint was still in prison, celebrating the Passion of Christ as he was able, in humility and contrition of heart.

"Then was he a captive," wrote the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, "who had been the head of England and of Christendom. There could misery be seen where often bliss was seen before, in that unhappy city, whence Christianity came first to us, and both spiritual and earthly bliss..."¹⁹⁵

Meanwhile, the wrath of God was falling upon the Danes. Two thousand of their soldiers fell ill of a terrible internal malady and died shortly after; while many others, similarly struck, awaited death. The Christians advised them to recognize their crime against Christ, to confess, weep and make amends to the archbishop. But they did

¹⁹⁵ *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, E, 1012.

not accept this advice, attributing their misfortunes to the instability of Chance rather than the will of God. But death reigned over all those who had planned to kill the archbishop: great numbers of them were attacked, tormented and wasted away by a terrible pain in the bowels. Meanwhile, a great fear of death overcame the living. Finally they ran to the captive saint, bewailed their sins with tears, and besought him to pray to God on their behalf.

It was Holy Thursday, the day on which the Lord gave His Most Pure Body and Blood to His disciples. St. Aelfheah was brought out of prison and honourably seated in the magistrate's chair. He told the Danes that their terrible cruelty did not merit them a pardon, but that he was determined to imitate the example of his Lord, Who gave holy bread even to the man who betrayed Him and forgave those who crucified Him.

"Therefore," he said, "forgetting the burning of the city, the injuries which have been inflicted upon myself, your past impiety, and the slaughter of the innocents, I shall intercede for my torturers as He interceded with the Father for those who crucified Him. So take this bread - it will immediately heal you. Only, when you have eaten and obtained health in accordance with your desire, give solemn thanks to the Saviour, or you will remain more guilty of blasphemy."

Then he blessed bread and gave to them. They were all healed. From Holy Thursday to Holy Saturday no-one died.

Seeing this, the Danes sent four of their military commanders to the saint. They thanked him, but then said that they would give him life and liberty in exchange for a ransom of sixty talents of silver weighing fifty pounds, together with his services in persuading the king to pay another two hundred talents as the price of a truce between the two nations. The saint refused, saying that the embassy was illegal and their demands impossible. They were mistaken if they thought he would rob the Church or betray the honour of his king and country to satisfy their avarice.

"It is not done," he said, "for a Christian to hand over Christian flesh to be devoured by pagan teeth."

The Danes came to him a second time, asking him - in a gentler manner this time - to affix his seal to an order authorizing the despoliation of the estates of the Church, in exchange for which he would be redeemed. Again the saint refused, citing the example of the holy Martyr Laurence of Rome, who, on being entrusted with the treasures of the Church, gave them away to the poor lest they should fall into the hands of the persecutors.

"If St. Laurence gave what was not theirs to the poor, how can I take what is theirs from the poor?"

Then they raged terribly, gnashing on him with their teeth, and decided to carry out the sentence that had been passed on him. New tortures were applied; but he remained immovable.

Then, in the night of Friday of Bright Week, the devil devised a different and subtler means of breaking the saint's resistance. Having caused the guards to fall into a light sleep, he appeared to him in the form of an angel of light, declaring that for the sake of the common good he was going to lead the saint out of the squalor of the prison.

"Fear not the stigma of cowardice," he said; "you are not more sublime than Peter, nor stronger than Paul. The one was delivered from prison by an angel, and the other was let down in a basket. Christ Himself slipped out of the hands of those who were going to stone Him, and commanded His disciples to flee in time of persecution."

Deceived by these words, the saint followed the deceiver out of the prison. But when they had crossed several water-logged fields in the thick darkness, the devil suddenly disappeared. Realizing his error, the saint groaned and threw himself down in the middle of the marshes, crying with tears to the Lord: "O Giver of life, O only Guide of the race of Adam, why hast Thou deprived me of Thy grace in my old age when Thou never didst leave me in the prime of life? Thou hast mercifully preserved me for so long, and dost Thou now cast me away in the extremity of life? O Thou Who art all I desire, all that I long to enjoy, what use is it to have triumphed in battle throughout the long day, but at the end of it to be conquered and deprived of the fruits of victory? Or what praise is it to have embarked on the voyage and escaped shipwreck in the middle of the sea, only to suffer the shipwreck of unexpected death on the shore? How many times have I found Thee to be my Saviour in the shipwrecks of life! Now, I beseech Thee, send me consolation in this snare of the devil, a helper in troubles and tribulations."

"At evening shall weeping find lodging, but in the morning rejoicing" (Psalm 29.5). And "the angel of the Lord shall encamp round about them that fear Him, and will deliver them" (Psalm 33.7). Thus it was for the man of God. For as dawn arose, a young man adorned in golden splendour stood before him, and asked him where he was fleeing to. The bishop replied that he was not fleeing, but had obeyed the voice of a Divine command.

"That was no Divine command," said the angel, "but a device of the devil. He did not wish so much to lead you out of prison as to seduce you once outside. Return, therefore, to your place, where a crown is laid up for you in heaven. Tomorrow the Father will honour you, and you will be eternally in the greatest honour in the heavens with His Son."

The saint therefore returned to the place of contest and joyfully awaited the hour in which he would receive his crown from God... The hour drew near, and a crowd of turbulent men burst into the prison, seized him, showered him with many blows, breaking his skull. Finally they thrust him into the place where all the refuse was thrown out and burned.

Most of the night had passed and on the Saturday after Pascha, April 19, 1012, was beginning to dawn. Suddenly St. Dunstan appeared to the man of God, his face and vestments shining gloriously, amidst sweet-smelling fragrance and the mellifluous chants of the saints. Stretching out his hands to St. Aelfheah, he announced to him his forthcoming death and the reward of eternal life laid up for him. Then his bonds were loosed, his wounds closed and his whole body was restored to perfect health.

On seeing these things, the guards were terrified. They told their fellows, who came rushing up to see the manifestation of God's grace. Then the leaders of the Danish army, seeing their men deserting in droves to the man of God, hastily passed the sentence of death upon him, lest they should lose more through him than through a multitude of external enemies. The saint was bound and led to the place of judgement under a large armed guard. A great crowd of the faithful followed him, weeping and mourning. But he besought them not to hinder his struggle against the prince of this world, but to help him by their prayers.

He was only an arrow's flight away when a vast murmur went through the whole council:

"Give us gold, bishop, or today you will be a spectacle to the world."

The bishop was silent for a while from exhaustion, and stood still, supported reverently by the hands of his own people. Then, having recovered his breath, he replied:

"I offer you the gold of Divine wisdom. Abandon the vanity which you love, and devote your zeal to the one living, true and eternal God. But if you obstinately despise the counsel of God which is announced to you through me, you will suffer a worse fate than the death of Sodom."

At that, the mob, unable to withstand the force of his words and foaming with rage, jumped up from their seats.

However, Thurkill, one of the Danish leaders, on seeing the wicked men gathering their weapons to kill the saint, ran up and said:

"Do not do this, I beg you. I will give to all of you with a willing heart gold and

silver and all that I have here or can get by any means, except only my ship, on condition that you do not sin against the Lord's Anointed."

Later, Thurkill, who had interceded for St. Aelfheah, together with forty-five of his ships transferred his allegiance from the Danes to the English and became a Christian. But the unbridled anger of his comrades, harder than iron or stone, was not softened by such gentle words. They knocked the saint down with the backs of their battle-axes, and then stoned him with the heads of oxen and showers of stones and blocks of woods.

But he, bending his right knee on the earth, prayed thus:

"O Lord Jesus, Only-begotten Son of the Most High Father, Who camest into the world through the womb of an incorrupt Virgin to save sinners, receive me in peace and have mercy on these men."

Then, falling to the earth and rising again, he said:

"O Good Shepherd, O only Shepherd, look with compassion on the sons of the Church, whom I, dying, commend to Thee."

Then a man named Thrum, whom the saint himself had received from the font of Holy Baptism, seeing him in agony and on the edge of death, took his axe and clove his head through, thereby releasing his soul to eternal glory.

Immediately one of the Danish leaders was crippled in his limbs, and realized that he had sinned against Christ's elect, as it is written: "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, saith the Lord" (Romans 12.19).¹⁹⁶

St. Aelfheah was martyred at Greenwich, to the east of London, on the south bank of the river Thames. And the leaders of the Danes now threw his body into the river. But then a crowd of people who had been taught by him took arms, determined to die rather than to allow the body through which they had received the mystery of Holy Baptism to be submerged in water. And so they guarded it, allowing it neither to be submerged nor to be buried. Then representatives of both parties met to resolve the dispute, and an agreement was reached.

The Danes said: "Look at this branch cut off from an ash-tree with neither sap nor bark. If we smear this with his blood and find it flowering in the morning, then we shall agree that we have killed a holy and righteous man, and you can bury him with honour. But if the wood remains dry, then we shall say that you have erred in your love for him and the decision about what to do with the body will be ours."

¹⁹⁶ Thietmar of Merseburg, *Chronicle*, viii, ch. 42, 43.

The next morning the dry wood was putting forth leaves. Seeing this, the Danes rushed to the holy body, embraced it with tears and groans, and then, taking it upon their shoulders, brought it to the tree in triumph. Here innumerable miracles took place: the sick were healed, the blind were given their sight, the deaf their hearing, the dumb their tongues. Then at the place of martyrdom a church was built (its Anglican successor still stands), and a multitude of leading Danes were baptized and received into the bosom of the Holy Church. Finally, Bishops Aednoth and Aelfhun and the citizens of London received his holy body, and brought it to London with all reverence, and buried it in St. Paul's church, where miracles continued to the martyr's glory.

13. THE VENGEANCE OF ST. EDMUND

In 1013, the Danes under King Swein again invaded England, and the whole country north of Watling Street surrendered to him. London, however, under the leadership of King Aethelred and Earl Thurkill, held out against him for some time. But when Swein turned northwards again, the whole nation accepted him as their undisputed king, and even the Londoners were forced to submit, while the king, the royal family and Bishop Aelfhun of London went into exile in Normandy.¹⁹⁷ At this critical juncture, still more critical than that which faced King Alfred in the winter of 877-878, an English saint again came to the rescue of the Christian people - this time, the holy Martyr-King Edmund.¹⁹⁸

Since the year 999, the incorrupt body of St. Edmund had been in the care of a monk named Aethelwine. In 1010, relates Abbot Sampson, when the Danes were ravaging East Anglia, St. Edmund's earthly kingdom, the saint appeared to Aethelwine and ordered him to place his body in a casket, put it on a cart and convey it to London. But the clerics were to remain in their places.

At dusk one day, as Aethelwine was proceeding to London, he came to the house of a priest named Edbriht, and asked hospitality for himself and his holy charge. The priest at first refused to give shelter to strangers; but eventually, after people protested, he allowed the monk to sleep in the open air on his land, while not allowing him into his house. So Aethelwine slept under the cart on which the martyr's body lay.

That night, however, a column of light was seen stretching up from the cart to heaven, and during the fourth watch of the night, the cart began to make a noise as if its wheels were turning. Startled by the noise, Aethelwine woke up and understood that the saint wished to move from there. Soon he was on his way, and when he was already some distance from the house, he looked back and saw that it was on fire - a just retribution for the priest's inhumanity.

Later that day, Aethelwine came to the crossing of the river Stratford, three miles from London, and wished to cross over. But part of the bridge had subsided into the river, and the whole structure was unsafe. The Danes threatened from the rear, and there was no other crossing; so Aethelwine resorted to prayer. Suddenly the cart began to move of its own will. The right wheel rolled over what remained of the bridge, while the left wheel passed through the air above the water as if it were dry land. Those who saw the miracle from the other side of the river praised God, and as the holy body approached the outskirts of London a great crowd of monks, clerics and nobles came to meet it. Taking it upon their shoulders, they moved towards the church of St. Paul, singing praises and rejoicing greatly.

¹⁹⁷ *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, E, 1013.

¹⁹⁸ This account is drawn from *Nova Legenda Anglie*, appendix II, pp. 595-602.

Between the Aldgate and the church of St. Paul eighteen people were cured of various maladies through the prayers of the saint. A woman who was confined to her bed with paralysis heard the clamour accompanying the passing of the saint and asked her servants what it signified.

"Don't you know," they said, "that St. Edmund, the king of the East Angles, who was innocently killed for Christ by the unfaithful and impious pagans, has come into this city and has given health to many?"

"Woe is me!" she cried, "that God has not counted me worthy to obtain mercy in his presence. For if I could just touch the edge of his bier, I am confident that I would be immediately healed of my infirmity."

So saying, she suddenly stood on her feet completely healed - the nineteenth cure to the glory of the saint that day. Realizing what had happened, she rushed into the crowd and with tears pressed her lips to the saint's bier.

Now the procession came to the church of St. Gregory, near St. Paul's. The holy body was let down and all the people prostrated in prayer to the saint. At this point a Dane who was curious to know what was happening came on the scene. Seeing the others prostrate in prayer, he proudly remained upright, and, drawing aside the veil which covered the body, he peered inside. Suddenly he was struck with blindness. Then, realizing his sin, he confessed it, promised amendment of life and faithfulness to God and St. Edmund, and implored forgiveness. All those present joined their prayer to his, and lo! his sight was restored. Then he took off his golden armlets and offered them to the saint. Moreover, he was as good as his word and led a pious life thereafter.

For almost three years the fame of the martyr spread far and wide through the miracles of healing, both bodily and spiritual, wrought through the intercession of the saint in London.

Then St. Edmund appeared in a vision to Aethelwine and ordered him to bring his body back to Bury St. Edmunds. Immediately the monk went to Bishop Alfhun with a request to leave, explaining that he had come to London rather as a pilgrim than as a permanent resident. The bishop acceded to his request, though reluctantly. But when Aethelwine, had gone, he hastened with three clerics to the church of St. Gregory. There they tried to lift the holy body in its reliquary onto their shoulders. But to no avail: the weight was insupportable. Four more men joined them, then twelve, then twenty-four. But after much sweat and labour they had not succeeded in moving the reliquary a single inch. Then the bishop with his men felt ashamed, realizing that their devotion, though pious, was contrary to the will of God and St. Edmund. When Aethelwine came up, however, and prayed in the presence of the saint, he was able with three of his companions to lift the reliquary as though it

weighed nothing.

So he set out on his journey, but not unnoticed as before. For a great crowd of clergy and people followed him in great sorrow as far as the Stratford bridge, and beyond it all the villages along the route poured out to meet the saint with great joy. Bridges were repaired and roads cleared. And, as in London, many miracles took place. Near Stapleford, the lord of the village gave hospitality to the saint and was cured of a chronic illness; whereupon he donated a manor to the saint in perpetuity. Finally, the holy treasure was received by the clerics of Bury St. Edmunds and placed with all devotion in its former resting-place. There, for centuries to come, miracles did not cease for those who sought with faith.

In 1014 the Danish King Swein came to Bury St. Edmunds, demanding tribute and threatening that if it was not paid he would burn the town with the townsfolk, destroy the church of the saint from its foundations and torture the clerics in various ways. But the townsfolk refused, trusting in the protection of St. Edmund. Nor did the tax-collectors dare to use force against them, for they had heard how the saint protected his own. So they hastened to the king and informed him of the rebellion against his authority. Meanwhile, not only the townsfolk of Bury St. Edmunds but also people from all over East Anglia hastened to the church of the saint to beseech him by prayers, fasting and almsgiving to free the land from the yoke that had been imposed upon it for ten years or more. Moreover, they asked Monk Aethelwine to make a special intercession for them at the shrine of the saint, that he would in his accustomed manner reveal a means of salvation for them through a nocturnal visitation.

That night, therefore, St. Edmund appeared to Aethelwine in his sleep, with joyful countenance and in shining white garments, and said: "Go to King Swein and tell him this from me: 'Why do you vex my little flock by imposing on them a yoke that no other king has imposed upon them? Tribute has never been demanded of, nor paid by, them at any time since my repose. Therefore correct this unjust sentence, lest, when you wish to, you will be unable to. For if you do not obey my admonition, you will soon know that you displease both God and myself; for you will discover that East Anglia has me as her protector.'"

So Aethelwine obediently sought out King Swein at Gainsborough, and humbly doing obeisance, delivered the saint's message, mixing soft words with the harsh. But the king refused to listen, ordered the monk out of his sight, and showered the saint with abuse, saying that he had no holiness. Seeing that the king had no fear of God nor reverence for the saint, Aethelwine sadly turned back.

Near Lincoln he was given hospitality for the night; and as he was sleeping peacefully, St. Edmund appeared to him and said:

"Why are you fearful and sad? Have you forgotten my words and incurred the

risk of falling into despair? Rise immediately and continue your journey; for before you will have reached its end, news about King Swein will delight you and all your compatriots."

Strengthened by this revelation, Aethelwine rose and set off on his way before dawn. As he was travelling he heard the sound of Danish horsemen behind him. One came up, greeted him, and said:

"By your leave, are you the priest whom I saw the day before yesterday delivering the orders of a certain king to King Swein?"

"I am."

"Alas, alas," he said, "how weighty was your threat! How true your prophecy! For the death of King Swein has left England glad and Denmark in mourning. The night after you left, the king went to bed happy and fearing nothing. The whole palace was sleeping soundly. Suddenly the king was woken up by an unknown soldier standing before him, a man of wondrous beauty and brandishing arms. Addressing the king by his own name, he said: 'Do you want tribute from St. Edmund's land, O king? Get up - here it is.' He got up but fell back on his bed, terrified at the sight of the arms, and began to cry out. Then the soldier went up to him, thrust him through with his lance and left. Hearing his cry: 'Help! Help! St. Edmund has come to kill me!', his men came rushing in and found him dead, covered in his own blood."

Marianus relates that at that moment in Essex, a pious man named Wulfmar who had been ill for three days with a disease that deprived him of the use of his tongue and of all his limbs, suddenly sat up on his bed in the presence of his parents and neighbours, and said:

"On this night and at this hour King Swein has been killed, pierced through with the lance of St. Edmund."

Saying this, he fell back on his bed and died.

When Aethelwine heard this news, he judged the time opportune to publish what he had previously covered in silence. The story then spread like wildfire throughout the province, inciting all the English to refuse to pay tribute. King Swein perished on the feast of the Meeting of the Lord (Candlemas, as it is called in the West), February 2, 1014, and his body was placed in salt and shipped back to Denmark.¹⁹⁹

Thus was the Scripture fulfilled: "The saints shall boast in glory, and they shall

¹⁹⁹ *Nova Legenda Anglie*, p. 602. According to the *Benedictine Breviary* (October 13, supplement), King Edward the Confessor, then a boy of twelve, also knew by revelation of Swein's death at this time.

rejoice upon their beds. The high praise of God shall be in their throat, and two-edged swords shall be in their hands, to do vengeance among the heathen, punishments among the peoples, to bind their kings with fetters, and their nobles with manacles of iron, to do among them the judgement that is written. This glory shall be to all His saints." (Psalm 149.5-9)

14. THE YEAR OF THE THREE KINGS

After the death of Swein, the Danish fleet chose his son, Cnut, as their king. But the English councilors, records the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, “both spiritual and secular, advised that King Aethelred should be sent for, saying that no lord was dearer to them than their rightful lord, if only he would govern his kingdom more justly than in the past. Then the king sent his son Edward hither with his messengers, with greetings to all the people, and said that he would be a gracious lord to them, and would put right all the things they hated, and would forgive everything that had been said or done against him, on condition that they all unanimously and without treachery returned to their allegiance. Then a complete and friendly agreement was reached and ratified by both sides with word and pledge, and they declared every Danish king outlawed from England for ever. Then during Lent of that year [1014] King Aethelred came home to his own people and was received with joy by them all.”²⁰⁰

“Embedded here in the prose of *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*,” writes David Starkey, “is the text, probably even the actual words, of a formal written agreement between the king and his people. It is the Anglo-Saxon Magna Carta. The circumstances in 1014, moreover, were very similar to those 200 years later. A political crisis and a foreign pretender brought the king, more or less naked, to the negotiating table. The throne would be his, but on conditions. The king agrees, since he has no choice. The terms and his consent to them are made public and the whole enshrined in a written document. The result is the first constitutional settlement in English history and it began a tradition which descends through Magna Carta, the Petition of Right and the Reform Acts, down to the present.”²⁰¹

Starkey also says that this agreement demonstrated the political maturity of the English people.²⁰² From an Orthodox point of view, however, it would be better to characterize it as the beginning of the end of the English Orthodox Autocracy through a descent into constitutionalism...

Nevertheless, if this moment of national reconciliation between king and people had been sustained, all might still have gone well. For in April, 1014 the young Cnut returned to Denmark, and did not return until August, 1015. However, the same story of almost unbelievable treachery repeated itself, and in 1015 Alderman Eadric deserted to Cnut with forty ships, as did Thorkell the Tall with nine ships. Then, in 1016, Cnut crossed the Thames at Cricklade, turned back to subdue the north and then marched on London for what promised to be the final death-blow.

²⁰⁰ *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, E, 1014.

²⁰¹ Starkey, *The Monarchy of England*, London: Chatto & Windus, 2004, p. 83.

²⁰² Starkey, in the second of his series of programmes entitled “Monarchy” and broadcast on October 25, 2004 on Channel 4 TV.

But King Aethelred was spared this final humiliation: “he departed this life on St. George’s day [April 23], after a life of much hardship and many difficulties. Then, after his death, all the councilors of England chose Edmund [Ironsides, his eldest son] as king, and he defended his kingdom valiantly during his lifetime.”²⁰³ The seven short months of Edmund Ironsides’s reign are among the most dramatic in English history, exceeded in drama and pathos only by the nine months of Harold Godwinson’s reign fifty years later. Moreover, the pattern of events was very similar in the two cases: great extremes of heroism and treachery, culminating in the crucifixion of a conquered country.

Treachery against the new king raised its head immediately after the *witan* proclaimed him king in London: astonishingly, the bishops and chief men of Wessex assembled and unanimously elected Cnut, the son of King Swein, as king. Meeting him at Southampton, writes Florence of Worcester, “they repudiated and renounced in his presence all the race of Aethelred, and concluded peace with him, swearing loyalty to him, and he also swore to them that he would be a loyal lord to them in affairs of Church and state.”²⁰⁴ Undaunted, King Edmund raised no less than five armies against the invader, and was finally killed, not by a Dane, but by the ubiquitous English traitor, Eadric Streona...

“During Rogation days [May 7-9], the [Danish] ships came to Greenwich, and within a short time went to London. They dug a great channel on the south bank and dragged their ships to the west side of the bridge, and then built earthenworks outside the borough so that no-one could go in or out, and attacked the borough repeatedly, but they withstood them valiantly. A little before this, Edmund had made his way out of the borough, and had taken possession of Wessex, and all the inhabitants submitted to him.”²⁰⁵ Like Alfred in 878, Edmund had recovered the whole of the south after being in a desperate defensive position.

It was probably during this battle for London that we read in a Scandinavian source of the military valour of the future king of England, Edward the Confessor: “Thorkel the Tall had taken the one part of the town; many of his host had fallen there. Then Earl Thorkel the Tall went to King Cnut to win the other part of the town, and as luck would have it, just saved his life, for Edward, King Ethelred’s son, struck at that time a blow which men have held in memory in after days. Thorkel thrust Cnut off his horse, but Edward smote asunder the saddle and the horse’s back. After that, however, the brothers had to take to flight, and Cnut exulted in his victory, and thanked King Olaf for his help.”²⁰⁶

²⁰³ *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, F, 1016.

²⁰⁴ Florence, *Chronicle*; quoted in Wood, *op. cit.*, p. 201.

²⁰⁵ *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, D, 1016.

²⁰⁶ *Flateyjarbok*, in M. Ashdown, *English and Norse Documents*, Cambridge, 1930, p. 179.

From now on, Edmund's fortunes were more mixed. After an initial success at Gillingham, he offered battle at Sherston in Gloucestershire. At first the English did well. But then Eadric, having cut off the head of a man who looked like Edmund, fixed it on a spear and carried it through the ranks in triumph, crying out to the English that they should surrender because, look!, their king was dead. Seeing the consternation of his troops, Edmund took off his helmet and showed himself to them. But the damage was done - what had looked like certain victory turned into a draw.

Eadric now pretended to desert to Edmund's side, and Edmund foolishly gave him an important command in the army. "No greater error of judgement was ever made than this," comments the *Chronicle*.²⁰⁷ For in the next battle, at Ashingdon in Essex, Eadric, commanding a contingent from Herefordshire and South Shropshire, took to flight from the beginning, which led to the flight of other detachment and eventually the total rout of the English.

"Many of the English leaders perished," writes Stenton, "- among them Ulfkell Snilling of East Anglia - and Edmund himself became a fugitive. But he had a reputation of the king which made a king formidable in disaster; the nickname Ironside by which he is always known shows that he was admired by the common people, and Cnut's advisers realized that it would be well to come to terms with him. On an island in the Severn near Deerhurst the two kings made a solemn compact of mutual friendship, fixed the sum of money that should be given to Cnut's army, and agreed to a division of England which gave Wessex to Edmund and the whole country beyond the Thames to Cnut. The men of London, who became Cnut's subjects by this treaty, were required to buy their own peace from his army, and his ships anchored in the Thames for the winter. It was a settlement which presaged future trouble, It imposed a divided allegiance to every nobleman who held land both in Wessex and Mercia. But before its instability could be proved, on 30 November 1016, Edmund died, and the West Saxons accepted Cnut as their king."²⁰⁸

According to the *Chronicle* of Florence of Worcester, "the perfidious alderman Eadric" was closely involved in drawing up this treaty.

And Edmund may in fact have been killed by two of his chamberlains who were secret accomplices of Eadric's. Adam of Bremen says that he was poisoned.²⁰⁹ He was buried beside his grandfather, Edgar the Peaceable, at Glastonbury.²¹⁰

²⁰⁷ *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, D, E, F, 1016.

²⁰⁸ Stenton, *op. cit.*, pp. 392-393.

²⁰⁹ Sarah Foot, "Ironside: Anglo-Saxon King", *BBC History Magazine*, April, 2016, p. 62.

²¹⁰ David Hume, *History of England*, London: Alexander Murray, 1871, vol. I, pp. 81-82. According to the *Liber Eliensis* (ed. E.O. Blake, Royal Historical Society of Camden, 1962, chapter 79), the murder took place in London, not Oxford, and was commemorated at Ely on November 29, not 30, as the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* asserts.

And so this year of the three kings saw the kingdom of England pass from the hands of the English Orthodox King Aethelred into the hands of the pagan Danish King Cnut - who, however, soon decided to adopt the faith of his vanquished foe.

15. CNUT, ENGLAND AND THE CONTINENT

The Danish conquest of 1016 was not such a severe blow to England as might have been expected, largely because, as we shall see, Cnut the Dane became, to all intents and purposes, a model English patriot and Christian king. However, it had a side-effect which was to prove much more damaging in the long run; for it compelled the two surviving sons of Aethelred by Queen Emma to flee to Normandy, thereby drawing that ambitious nation inexorably into the orbit of English politics. When the Danish yoke would be only a memory, it would be this Norman connection that would seal the fate of England for many centuries to come...

The startling transformation of Cnut did not take place immediately. First, after establishing a sworn relationship with all the leading men of England at London, he followed the advice of Alderman Eadric and exile Prince Edwy, brother of King Edmund Ironside and son of King Aethelred by his first wife, and later had him killed. According to Florence of Worcester, Eadric also advised the king "to kill the young aethelings [princes] Edward and Edmund; but because it would be a great disgrace for them to perish in England, he sent them after a short passage of time to the king of the Swedes to be killed."

The Swedish king, however, was a Christian, baptized by the English bishop St. Sigfrid²¹¹; and so he did not acquiesce in this demand, in spite of the treaty he had with Cnut. Instead, he "sent them to the king of the Hungarians, Solomon by name, to be preserved and brought up there..."²¹²

But Eadric, having repeatedly betrayed one anointed king, Aethelred, killed another, Edmund Ironside, and plotted against the lives of his family, now received his just deserts. "At the Lord's Nativity," writes Florence, "when [Cnut] was in London, he gave orders for the perfidious ealdorman Eadric to be killed in the palace, because he feared to be at some time deceived by his treachery, as his former lords Aethelred and Edmund had frequently been deceived; and he ordered his body to be thrown over the wall of the city and left unburied."²¹³

In July, 1017 King Cnut married Emma, King Aethelred's widow. To her sons in Normandy it must have come as a shock that their mother should marry the conqueror of their country and the murderer of their brothers, while letting them languish alone in exile. This may explain the difficult relations King Edward had with his mother at the beginning of his reign – as also the fact that neither of the brothers sought to recover their English inheritance while Cnut was alive.

²¹¹ See "The Life of the Holy Grand Princess Anna", *Living Orthodoxy*, January-February, 1983, p. 14.

²¹² Florence of Worcester, *Chronicle*; in Dorothy Whitelock, *English Historical Documents*, London: Eyre & Spottiswood, 1955, p. 286.

²¹³ *Ibid.* p. 284.

Cnut inflicted a final suffering on his new subjects by levying the largest Danegeld ever, £72,000, from the whole nation, with an extra £10,500 from his most formidable opponents, the citizens of London.

“Forty ships were retained,” writes Sir Frank Stenton, “in Cnut’s service, and then the remainder of the fleet sailed for Denmark. Its dismissal showed that Cnut intended to reign thenceforward as the chosen king of the English people, and soon afterwards, in a national assembly held at Oxford, his leading followers and Englishmen from all parts of the country came to an agreement about the terms on which they could live together. It was decided that the system of legal relationships which had prevailed in Edgar’s reign should form the basis of the new Anglo-Danish state, and an oath to observe ‘Edgar’s law’ was taken by all the members of the assembly. It is with the departure of the Danish fleet and the meeting at Oxford which followed it that Cnut’s effective reign begins...”²¹⁴

It was at the Oxford assembly that Cnut composed the last major law-code in Anglo-Saxon history...

Cnut introduced only one major change in the administration of the country: earls (the word is Scandinavian in origin) instead of aldermen governed the provinces, and the boundaries of the new earldoms did not coincide with the old provincial boundaries. This brought to the fore men such as Earl Godwin, the son of the Sussex thegn Wulfnoth who betrayed King Aethelred in 1009. He married a Danish princess, Gytha, and thereby became one of the few Englishmen in the inner circles of power...²¹⁵

²¹⁴ Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, Oxford University Press, 1971, p. 399.

²¹⁵ The twelfth-century Life of St. Nectan (in G.H. Doble, *The Saints of Cornwall*, Truro: Holywell Press, part 5, pp. 59-79) provides the following interesting account of how Godwin married Gytha in King HardaCnut’s reign. HardaCnut’s courtiers whispered against Godwin, accusing him of fraud and treason. And so the king decided to destroy Godwin by a cunning stratagem. He gave him a sealed letter and asked him to take them to Swein, sub-king of Galway. Now while Godwin was on his way to Swein, in the middle of the Irish sea, a great tempest arose. The passengers called upon God and His saints, and each implored the help of his special patron. But as soon as Godwin called on the name of St. Nectan, the sea became calm. Then the earl vowed to pay special honour to the martyr in future. Meanwhile, Godwin’s servant, a very prudent man, approached him and said: “I have long been silently thinking my lord, that perhaps we are bearing Uriah’s letters with us on this journey.” The earl replied that he could not imagine such a thing of the king. But his servant replied: “With your permission, I will examine the letters in such a way as neither to break the king’s seal nor to smudge the writing.” The earl agreed. The letter read as follows: “King HardaCnut to his relative Swein, greeting. When you have received this letter, take its bearer, Earl Godwin, who has been guilty of devising treachery against me, and secretly put him to death.” At the request of the earl, the servant wrote another letter with the king’s seal: “King HardaCnut to his relative Swein, greeting. I command and entreat you to give the bearer of these presents, my great friend Earl Godwin, the fairest and best of my nieces as a wife.” And so, when Godwin landed, he went to the sub-king, gave him the letter, and within a month married Gytha, and brought her back to England with him. The king was greatly astonished at this outcome, but he went to meet him and greeted him with the kiss of peace. He bestowed many presents upon his niece and treated the earl with the greatest respect as long as he

"The earls," writes H.P. Loyn, "became of such importance that the greatest of them, Harold Godwinson, became king in that ill-starred year 1066... [However,] they did not appear to constitute a major danger to the monarchy, though the careers of Godwin and Harold show the ever-present temptation open to the overmighty subject... There is no sign that the English ealdordom or earldom, was developing into a virtually independent principality bound by only nominal ties to a royal overlord, as was happening in the duchies and counties of contemporary France..."²¹⁶

Cnut's relationship to the Church was, perhaps surprisingly, warm and positive. Even before becoming king of England, he had displayed Christian sympathies by founding a convent at Coventry under an abbess named Osburga.²¹⁷ But after ascending the throne he went much further, paying special attention to the areas most ravaged by the Danes.

Thus at Ashingdon, the scene of his triumph over Edmund Ironside, he founded a church to pray for the souls of those killed in the battle; and the relics of St. Wendreda, which he had captured from the monks of Ely who had come to pray for Edmund's victory, were returned and enshrined at Canterbury.²¹⁸ He gave special privileges to Ely, composing a famous song occasioned by his delight on hearing the monks' chanting across the water.²¹⁹

Again, on June 8, 1023, St. Aelfheah's incorrupt body was placed on an adorned royal barge, in which King Cnut, Archbishop Aethelnoth of Canterbury and other bishops and earls, escorted it across the Thames first to Southwark and then to Rochester. Here the procession was joined by Queen Emma and her son, and "with much state and rejoicing and hymns of praise" the relics were conveyed to Canterbury. On June 15, the relics were enshrined by the bishops and clergy."²²⁰

Cnut's charter to Christchurch, Canterbury gives some idea of the genuineness of his faith: "Although we are laden with the burden of this mortal life and defiled with the transitory possessions of this world, yet may we purchase the eternal reward of the heavenly life with these crumbling riches, and therefore I, Cnut, by the grace of God King of England and of all its adjacent islands, lay the royal crown from my head upon the altar of Christ in Canterbury."

lived.

²¹⁶ Loyn, *Anglo-Saxon England and the Norman Conquest*, London: Longmans, 1962, p. 214.

²¹⁷ David Farmer, *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978, p. 302.

²¹⁸ *Liber Eliensis*, 196. On St. Wendreda, see Trevor Bevis, *Fenland Saints and Shrines*, March, Cambs.: Westrydale Press, 1981.

²¹⁹ *Liber Eliensis*, II, 85, 86.

²²⁰ Osborn, *Historia Translationis Corporis S. Elphegi*, in *Anglia Sacra*, vol. II, pp. 143-147.

His greatest contribution, however, was to the shrine of St. Edmund, who had so miraculously cut off the life of his father, Swein. To St. Edmund's monastery he gave a third of the whole of Suffolk, building a great dyke to guard its boundaries. And, supplementing the people's carucagium, a voluntary tax paid to the monastery in gratitude for St. Edmund's killing of Swein, he built a new stone church on the foundations of the old.

This church was consecrated on October 18, 1032, by Archbishop Aethelnoth; and in a brilliant procession the body of St. Edmund was translated into its jewel-encrusted new shrine. Among the celebrants was the monk who had guarded the saint's body for so many years, now Bishop Aethelwine of East Anglia. After the service, feeling his work done, he resigned his bishopric and retired to the monastery of Hulme.

Now the incorrupt body of St. Edith, sister of St. Edward the Martyr, lay in her monastery of Wilton. Once the king was at Wilton for Pentecost. As he was eating, he kept laughing, declaring that he did not believe that Edith was a saint in view of the lustful habits of her father in his youth. Archbishop Aethelnoth contradicted him, and immediately opened the tomb of the holy virgin. And she, sitting up in the coffin, was seen to attack the abusive king. Then he, petrified, fell to the earth as if dead. At length, recovering his breath, he blushed and asked forgiveness for his rudeness; and from that moment he held the saint in great honour. Thus once he was in trouble at sea. When he called on the name of St. Edith, the storm was suddenly stilled and he arrived safely at his chosen port.²²¹

Cnut's father Swein, writes Stenton, "who first appears in history as the leader of a heathen reaction in Denmark, had behaved as at least a nominal Christian in later life [if we except his invasion of Christian England!]. He had discountenanced heathenism in the Norwegian provinces under his overlordship, and it was remembered that he had given an estate in Scania to a wandering bishop from England, who had used it as a base for missionary work in Norway and Sweden. But Swein's tepid patronage of Christianity contrasts sharply with Cnut's enthusiastic devotion to the interests of the church in England. Accepting from its leaders the traditional English conception of the king as an agent appointed by God for the promotion of religion and the protection of its ministers, he identified himself with them in their task of restoring ecclesiastical authority among a people demoralized by thirty years of war. Through them he was brought into contact with the court of Rome, and thereby into intimacy with the members of a political circle which no one of his race had ever entered. He was the first Viking leader to be admitted into the

²²¹ See Goscelin, *Life of St. Edith*, P.L.155, pp. 111-116; A. Wilmart, "La Légende de Ste. Edith en Prose et Vers par le Moine Goscelin", *Analecta Bollandiana*, 1938, LVI, pp. 5-101, 265-307. A similar miracle happened to Archbishop Aldred of York when he was sailing on the Adriatic Sea. Having called upon her name, she appeared to him visibly and said: "I am Edith". Immediately the sea became calm.

civilized fraternity of Christian kings..."²²²

From 1030, after his defeat of St. Olaf of Norway (on which more anon), the king was "Cnut the Mighty", the ruler, directly or indirectly, of England, Denmark, Norway and part of Sweden; his daughter Gunnhild was married to the German Emperor Henry III; and his reputation on the continent was such that on his second pilgrimage to Rome, in 1031, he "procured from Pope John that the English quarter should be freed from all taxation and toll; and on his way there and back... he did away with many barriers on the way, where toll was exacted from pilgrims."²²³

This was not Cnut's first pilgrimage to Rome. In 1027 he had won other concessions from the Pope and the Emperor of which he wrote enthusiastically to his subjects at home: "I complained before the lord pope and said that it displeased me greatly that my archbishops were so much oppressed by the immensity of the sums of money which were exacted from them when according to custom they came to the apostolic see to receive the pallium. It was decided that this should not be done in future."²²⁴

And in general Cnut did much for the Church in England, not allowing any foreign powers, whether secular or ecclesiastical, to oppress her. For he saw no reason why his subjects should have any other king besides himself and God. As he put it: "Above all things, men are to love and worship one God, unanimously observe one Christianity, and love King Cnut with strict fidelity."

²²² Stenton, *op. cit.*, pp. 396-397.

²²³ Florence of Worcester, *Chronicle*; in Whitelock, *op. cit.*, pp. 287-288.

²²⁴ Whitelock, *op. cit.*, p. 417. It was probably in connection with these exactions that Archbishop Wulfstan of York (+1023) had openly warned the Pope against the sin of simony. See Dorothy Bethurun, "Regnum and sacerdotium in the early eleventh century," in Peter Clemons & Kathleen Hughes (eds.), *England before the Conquest*, Cambridge University Press, 1971

16. KING CNUT AND OLAF THE SAINT

One of the marks of a great Christian autocrat is his zeal, not only for the preservation of the Church in his domain, but for the enlightenment of his still unbaptized subjects. As the master both of England and of most of Scandinavia, Cnut had a great field of opportunity in this respect. However, it must be admitted that his record in this respect is mixed, largely because of his complex relationship with the evangelizer-king of Norway, Olaf the Saint.

Olaf, a descendant of the great King Harold Fairhair of Norway, had fought on the side of King Aethelred at the taking of London Bridge, and accompanied Aethelred from Norman exile to England in 1014.²²⁵ According to *The Saga of St. Olaf*, Olaf then joined Cnut's service and the two were at first great friends, but Cnut then became jealous of the younger man. In any case, in 1015 Olaf and the missionary bishop St. Sigfrid went to Norway, where Olaf succeeded in seizing the kingdom in spite of much opposition. First, by distributing money, and with the support of his kinsmen on the Opplands, he gained control of Ostland. Then, on Palm Sunday, March 25th, 1016, he conquered the country's principal chieftains, Sven Hakonsson Jarl, Einar Tambar skjelve, and Erling Skjalgsson, in the sea battle at Nesjar (between Larviksfjord and Lengesundsfjord). In the same year he was accepted as King at the Oreting in Trondelag.

He had a comparatively peaceful reign for almost 10 years, and during this period considerably advanced the unification of Norway. Olaf's work of unification assumed concrete form as territorial dominion over a kingdom which extended from Gautelven in the south up to Finnmark in the north, from the Vesterhav islands in the west to the forests towards Sweden in the east. Olaf was the first high king who secured real control over the inland areas of Trondelag and Opplandene. Moreover, he gained a foothold for the Norwegian national kingdom on the Orkney Islands and Hjaltland.

Olaf also laid the foundation for nationwide local government and introduced a certain division of labour among the royal housecarls. He installed sheriffs recruited from the nobility and the landed gentry throughout the country and tried by means of his year-men to keep control of the political activities of the sheriffs. According to Snorre a division of labour seems to have occurred in the King's household into actual housecarls (military functions), guests (police functions), house chaplains, and churls

²²⁵ The sources for St. Olaf's reign used here include: Stenton, op. cit., pp. 402-406; *Heinskringla. The Saga of St. Olaf; King Harald's Saga*, 82, translated by Magnusson & Palsson, Harmondsworth: Penguin books, 1966; Florence of Worcester, *Chronicle*; "The Life of the Holy Grand Princess Anna", *Living Orthodoxy*, vol. V, no. 1, January-February, 1983, pp. 14-18; *The Norwegian Encyclopaedia* and the *Svenska Uppslagsbok*, translated in *Living Orthodoxy*, vol. V, no. 3, May-June, 1983, pp. 27-30; David Farmer, *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978, pp. 300-301; Gwyn Jones, *A History of the Vikings*, London: The Folio Society, 1997.

(duties within the palace). Moreover, several titles of the masters of the King's court are known from this time: standard-bearer, King's Marshal, House Bishop.

With the aid of his English missionaries he succeeded in making Norway Christian. At the meeting of the Ting (Parliament) at Moster, Bomlo in Sunnhordland (1024), Norway acquired a nationwide ecclesiastical organization with churches and priests, a Christian legal system and a first organization of the Church's finances. Gwyn Jones writes: "The Christian law formulated at Moster was of prime authority; it was read out at the different Things, and there are confirmatory references to it in the oldest Gulathing Law." The king established peace and security for his people, remaking old laws and insisting on their execution, unaffected by bribes or threats. He built many churches, including one dedicated to St. Clement at the capital, Nidaros (Trondheim). All other faiths except Christianity were outlawed.

At the beginning of his reign St. Olaf did not enjoy good relations with Sweden; for the Swedish King Olof Skotkonung had seized a portion of Norway in about the year 1000. However, through the mediation of St. Anna, King Olof's daughter, it was agreed that St. Olaf should marry his other daughter Astrid, and relations between the two Christian kings were restored. In this way the foundations were laid for the Christianization of the whole of Scandinavia.

After the death of the King Olof in 1022, St. Olaf made an alliance with his son Anund Jacob against Cnut of England and Denmark. For Cnut's hatred had not been extinguished; and the jealousy of this Cain was destined both to open a fruitful mission-field and to provide a martyr's crown for the latter-day Abel. But in 1026 the allies were defeated by Cnut at Helgean in Skane, Sweden.

Then, as Florence of Worcester writes, "since it was intimated to Cnut, king of the English and Danes, that the Norwegians greatly despised their king, Olaf, for his simplicity and gentleness, his justice and piety, he sent a large sum of gold and silver to certain of them, requesting them with many entreaties to reject and desert Olaf, and submit to him and let him reign over them. And when they had accepted with great avidity the things which he had sent, they sent a message back to him that they would be ready to receive him whenever he pleased to come." So the next year (1028), "Cnut, king of the English and Danes, sailed to Norway with 50 great ships, and drove out King Olaf and subjected it to himself," appointing the Danish earl Hakon, son of Eirik Jarl, whom Olaf had banished in 1015, as his viceroy.

Olaf decided to flee to Sweden and thence to the court of his kinsman, Yaroslav of Kiev, whose father, the famous St. Vladimir, had given shelter to Olaf Tryggvason in his youth. And it was the same Olaf Tryggvason who appeared to his successor and namesake one night and said: "Are you sick at heart over which plan to take up? It seems strange to me that you are pondering so much, and similarly that you are thinking of laying down the kingdom which God has given you, and moreover that

you are thinking of staying here and taking a kingdom [Bulgaria] from kings who are foreign and strangers to you. Rather go back to your kingdom which you have taken as your inheritance and have long ruled over with the strength God has given you, and do not let your underlings make you afraid. It is to a king's honour to win victories over his foes, and an honourable death to fall in battle with his men. Or are you not sure whether you have the right in this struggle? You will not act so as to deny your true right. You can boldly strive for the land, for God will bear you witness that it is your own possession."

In 1029 Hakon died in a shipwreck in the Pentland Firth on his way home to Norway. This gave Olaf his opportunity. Early in 1030 he set off for Norway over the frozen Russian rivers. When the sea-ice broke, he sailed to Gotland with 240 men. King Anund of Sweden gave him 480 more, but when he faced Cnut's army at Stiklarstadir, he had no more than 3600 men (Swedes, Jamtlanders from Northern Sweden, Icelanders and his Norwegian companions) against a peasant army of 14,400 men - the largest army ever assembled in Norway.

Then, like Gideon, the saint decided to reduce his numbers by choosing only Christians to fight in his army. So he was eventually opposed by overwhelmingly larger forces. And as the sun went into total eclipse on July 29, 1030 (July 30, according to modern astronomers), his army was defeated and he himself was killed, as had been revealed to him in a vision just before the battle.

But immediately a great fear fell on the soldiers of Cnut's army. And then miracles began to be manifested at St. Olaf's body: a light was seen over it at night; a blind man recovered his sight on pressing his fingers, dipped in the saint's blood, to his eyes; springs of water with healing properties flowed from his grave; and then, to the chagrin of Cnut's first, common-law wife, the English Aelfgifu (Elgiva), and her son Swein, whom Cnut had placed in charge of Denmark, his body was found to be incorrupt. Soon the penitent Norwegians expelled the Danes, and recalled Olaf's son Magnus from Russia to be their king.

The incorruption of Olaf's body was certified by his loyal Bishop Grimkel, whose see was Nidaros (Trondheim). As we read in *St. Olaf's Saga*: "Bishop Grimkel went to meet Einar Tambaraskelver, who greeted the bishop gladly. They afterwards talked about many things and especially about the great events which had taken place in the land. They were agreed among themselves on all matters. The bishop then went into the market and the whole crowd greeted him. He asked carefully about the miracles which were related of King Olaf and learned a great deal from this questioning. Then the bishop sent word to Torgils and his son Grim at Stiklastad, calling them to meet him in the town. Torgils and his son did not delay their journey, and they went to meet the bishop in the town. Then they told him all the remarkable things which they knew and also the place where they had hidden the king's body. The bishop then sent word to Einar Tambaraskelver, and Einar came to the town. Einar

and the bishop then had a talk with the king and Elgiva and asked the king to allow them to take up King Olaf's body from the earth. The king gave permission, and told the bishop to do it as he wished. Then a great crowd assembled in the town. The bishop and Einar then went with some men to the place where the king's body was buried and had it dug up. The coffin had by this time almost risen out of the earth. In accordance with the advice of many, the bishop had the king buried in the ground beside St. Clement's church. It was twelve months and five days from the death of the king to the day his holy relics were taken up, the coffin having risen out of the earth and looking as new as if it had just been planed. Bishop Grimkel then went to the opened coffin of King Olaf, from which there proceeded a precious fragrance. The bishop then uncovered the king's face, and it was completely unchanged: the cheeks were red as if he had just fallen asleep. Those who had seen King Olaf when he fell noticed a great difference in that his hair and nails had grown almost as much as they would have done if he had been alive in this world all the time since his fall. King Swein and all the chiefs who were there then went to see King Olaf's body.

"Then Elgiva said: 'A body rots very slowly in sand; it would not have been so if he had lain in mould.'

"The bishop then took a pair of scissors and cut off some of the king's hair and also some of his beard (he had a long beard, as was the custom at that time). Then the bishop said to the king and Elgiva:

"Now the king's hair and beard are as long as when he died, and since then they have grown as much as you now see shorn off.'

"Then Elgiva answered: 'This hair will be a holy relic to me if it does not burn in the fire; we have often seen the hair of men who have lain longer in the earth than this man whole and unscathed.'

"The bishop then had fire brought in on a censer. He made the sign of the cross over it and put incense in it. Then he laid King Olaf's hair in the fire. And when all the incense had burned the bishop took up the hair from the fire and it was not burned. The bishop let the king and the other chiefs see it. Then Elgiva ordered them to lay the hair in unhallowed fire. But Einar Tambarskelver ordered her to be silent and said many hard words to her. Then the bishop declared, and the king agreed, and the people deemed, that King Olaf was truly holy. The king's body was then borne into St. Clement's church and placed over the high altar. The coffin was wrapped in a pall and over it was placed a beautiful cover. And then many miracles took place at the holy relics of King Olaf."

King Cnut did not oppose the veneration of St. Olaf, and churches dedicated to him were soon being built throughout the Viking world, from Dublin to the Orkneys to Novgorod. Forty ancient churches were dedicated to St. Olaf in Britain, and his

feast occurs on several English calendars.

17. THE MURDER OF PRINCE ALFRED

On the death of King Cnut in 1035, the throne of England passed to his son by Aelfgifu (Elgiva) of Northampton, Harold, while Denmark was ruled by his son by Queen Emma, Harthacnut. Initially, Emma hoped that her son Harthacnut would become king; and, supported by the powerful Earl Godwin of Wessex, she even had coins struck in Harthacnut's name at her base in Winchester, while the coins in currency north of the Thames bore Harold's name. However, when it became clear that Harthacnut was not going to come to England from Denmark, she turned to her sons in Normandy. She wrote to them to leave Normandy and join her at Winchester.²²⁶

Now Edward, as David Raraty says, "never regarded either Harthacnut or Harold as legitimate rulers, but had himself begun to use the royal style in Normandy, on Mont-St-Michel and Fécamp charters as early as the reign of Duke Robert."²²⁷ So he had no hesitation in responding to his mother's call. However, he was forced to return after a battle in the Southampton area.

Then came his brother Alfred. The murder of Prince Alfred – probably by Emma's former ally Earl Godwin at King Harold's instigation – was one of the excuses William of Normandy used for the invasion of 1066. The Abingdon manuscript of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (c. 1050) records: "Godwin prevented him [Alfred], and placed him in captivity, dispersing his followers besides, killing some in various ways. Some were sold for money, some cruelly murdered, some put in chains, some blinded, some mutilated and some scalped. No more horrible deed was done in this land after the Danes came and made peace with us."²²⁸ And in another chronicle we read that in 1040 Godwin admitted to the murder, but swore to King Harthacnut and all the chief men of the land "that it was not by his counsel or his will that his brother was blinded, but that his lord King Harold had ordered him to do what he did."²²⁹

Prince Alfred died from his wounds in the monastery of Ely, that great fortress of Anglo-Saxon Orthodoxy. The body was buried with great honour in the southern porch of the west end of the church, where "wondrously beautiful visions of lights often occur", wrote the monastery chronicle. And there were "many miracles..., as people report who even declare most repeatedly that they have seen them."²³⁰

²²⁶ However, the *Encomium Emma Reginae* claims, somewhat implausibly, that this letter was a forgery of Harold's. See Ian Walker, *Harold, the Last Anglo-Saxon King*, Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1997, p. 13.

²²⁷ David GJ Raraty, "Earl Godwine of Wessex: The Origins of his Power and his Political Loyalties", *History*, vol. 74, no. 240, February, 1989, p. 15.

²²⁸ *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, C, 1036.

²²⁹ Florence of Worcester, *Chronicle*.

²³⁰ *Liber Eliensis*, II, 90; *Encomium Emmae Reginae*. See the life of Prince Alfred in V. Moss, *The Saints of Anglo-Saxon England*, volume III, Seattle: St. Nectarios Press, 1997, pp. 83-88.

The years which followed Prince Alfred's murder, until his brother Edward ascended the throne, were among the most wretched in English Orthodox history. The Danish rule, which had been tolerable under Cnut, now became an oppressive yoke. In 1038 Archbishop Aethelnoth "the Good" died, followed, seven days later, by Bishop Aethelric of Selsey: "for he had besought God that he should not live long in this world after the death of his most beloved father, Athelnoth."²³¹ In the next two years these losses were compounded by the deaths of Bishops Aelfric of Elmham, Beorhtheah of Worcester, Beorhtmaer of Lichfield and Edmund of Durham, who were succeeded by men of much lower spiritual stature. Thus to York came Aelfric Puttoc, or the Hawk, who was angry when, in 1038, the vacant see of Worcester was not also given to him, as it had been, by an exceptional measure, to two of his predecessors. Instead the king gave it to a favourite of Godwin's, Lifing of Crediton, who now held three sees simultaneously. Nor was this the only case of sees held in plurality or through simony. Elmham was given to a king's chaplain, Stigand (later archbishop of Canterbury). "But he was afterwards ejected, and Grimcetel was elected for gold, and held then two dioceses."²³²

However, as the spiritual atmosphere darkened, a revelation was given to one of the last of the holy bishops – Brihtwald of Ramsbury. He was once weeping over the plight of the people, "and asked," records King Edward's anonymous biographer, "that God's mercy should look favourably upon them. At that time he passed the watches of his weeping in the monastery of Glastonbury, and weary after so many tears the man of God fell asleep. When lo! In the Holy of Holies he saw the blessed Peter, the first of the Apostles, consecrate the image of a seemly man as king, mark out for him a life of chastity, and set the years of his reign by a fixed reckoning of his life. And when the king even at this juncture asked him of the generations to come who would reign in the kingdom, Peter answered, 'The kingdom of the English is of God; and after you he has already provided a king according to His will.'"²³³

The "seemly man" marked out for a life of chastity (by which was probably meant marital fidelity, not virginity)²³⁴ was King Edward the Confessor. And the prophecy began to be fulfilled when King Harold's successor Harthacnut died suddenly while drinking at a marriage feast in 1042. Supported by the most powerful man in the realm, Earl Godwin, Prince Edward was recalled from exile.

²³¹ Florence of Worcester, *Chronicle*.

²³² Florence of Worcester, *Chronicle*.

²³³ Anonymous, *Vita Aedwardi Regis*. Bishop Berhtwald was buried at Glastonbury in 1045 after serving as a bishop for fifty years. According to William of Malmesbury, the vision took place during King Cnut's reign.

²³⁴ Peter Rex, *Edward the Confessor*, Stroud, 2008, chapter 14.

18. KING EDWARD THE CONFESSOR (1)

And so Edward was consecrated king of England in London at Pascha, 1043. "Great was the joy that the English had," writes an early French chronicler. "For the Danes had held them cheap, and often humiliated them. If a hundred of them met a single Dane, it would go badly for them if they did not bow to him. And if they met upon a bridge, they waited; it went badly for them if they moved before the Dane had passed. As they passed, they made obeisance, and whoever failed to do this was shamefully beaten if caught. So cheap were the English held. So much did the Danes insult them."²³⁵

Edward was a man, writes William of Malmesbury, "from the simplicity of his manners, little calculated to govern, but devoted to God, and in consequence directed by Him; for while he continued to reign, there arose no popular commotions which were not immediately quelled. There was no foreign war; all was calm and peaceable, both at home and abroad, which is the more an object of wonder, because he conducted himself so mildly that he would not even utter a word of reproach to the meanest person.... In the meantime, the regard which his subjects entertained for him was extreme, as was also the fear of foreigners; for God assisted his simplicity, that he might be feared who knew not how to be angry."²³⁶

And yet the inner fire was still there, though well controlled. "If some cause aroused his temper," writes William of Malmesbury, "he seemed terrible as a lion, but he never revealed his anger by railing. To all petitioners he would either grant graciously or graciously deny, so that his gracious denial seemed the highest generosity. In public he carried himself as a true king and lord; in private with his courtiers as one of them, but with royal dignity unimpaired. He entrusted the cause of God to his bishops and to men skilled in canon law, warning them to act according to the case, and he ordered his secular judges, princes and palace lawyers to distinguish equitably, so that, on the one hand, righteousness might have royal support, and, on the other, evil, when it appeared, its just condemnation. This good king abrogated bad laws, with his witan [parliament] established good ones, and filled with joy all that Britain over which by the grace of God and hereditary right he ruled."²³⁷

Indeed, in later centuries, when the English groaned under the exactions of their Norman kings, they appealed for a return to the just laws of the good King Edward. "In the exaction of taxes he was sparing, as he abominated the insolence of collectors: in eating and drinking he was devoid of the addiction to pleasure which his state allowed: on the more solemn festivals, though dressed in robes interwoven with gold,

²³⁵ Geffrei Faimar, *L'Estoire des Engleis*, lines 4766-79.

²³⁶ William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, 196; Lampeter: Llanerch Enterprises, 1989, p. 183.

²³⁷ William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum*, II, 13.

which the queen had most splendidly embroidered, yet still he had such forbearance as to be sufficiently majestic, without being haughty; considering in such matters rather the bounty of God than the pomp of the world. There was one secular enjoyment in which he chiefly delighted; which was hunting with fleet hounds, whose baying the woods he used with pleasure to encourage: and again, the flying those birds, whose nature it is to prey on their kindred species. In these exercises, after hearing Divine service in the morning, he employed himself whole days. In other respects he was a man by choice devoted to God, and lived the life of an angel in the administration of his kingdom: to the poor and to the stranger, more especially foreigners, and men of religious order, he was kind in invitation, munificent in his presents, and constantly exciting the monks of his own country to imitate their holiness. He was of middle height; his beard and hair swan-white; his countenance florid; fair throughout his whole person; and his form of admirable proportion."²³⁸

Moreover, according to the anonymous biographer, who learned it "from the joint testimony of good and fitting men", God glorified King Edward with the gift of miracles, which is confirmed by the other early biographers.

The only serious blot on the life of King Edward, according to his biographers, was his relationship with his mother, Queen Emma - although, as we shall see, he repented of his harshness towards her. In 1043, the king, with Earls Godwin, Leofric and Siward, came to Winchester and imprisoned her. Then, according to the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, they "deprived her of all her innumerable treasures, because she had been too strict with the king, her son, in that she had done less for him than he wished, both before his accession and afterwards..."²³⁹

However, as Frank Barlow writes, "Emma, when reduced to poverty and despair, had a dream in which [St. Mildred] promised to help her because she, with Cnut, had patronized the translation of St. Mildred from Thanet to St. Augustine's, Canterbury. Whereupon Emma borrowed 20s., sent it by means of her thegn [retainer], Aethelweard Speaka, to Abbot Aelfstan of St. Augustine's, and, miraculously, the king's heart was changed. Edward 'felt shame for the injury he had done her, the son acknowledged the mother, he restored her to her former dignity and he who had proclaimed her guilty begged her pardon.' Everything she had possessed was restored to her; her accusers and despoilers were confounded."²⁴⁰

Nor is this the only time that the queen was exonerated through the intercessions of the saints. Thus Canon Busby writes: "She had been accused of unchastity in

²³⁸ William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, 220. According to the anonymous biographer he was "of outstanding height", and adds the detail that he "had long translucent fingers" and "walked with eyes down-cast, most graciously affable to one and all".

²³⁹ *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, D, 1043. It seems that she was also accused of plotting with King Magnus of Norway.

²⁴⁰ Barlow, *Edward the Confessor*, London: Eyre Methuen, 1979, p. 77.

association with Bishop Alwyn [Aelfwine] of Winchester. In order to prove her innocence she was obliged to undergo the ordeal of walking over nine red-hot ploughshares placed on the pavement of the nave of the Cathedral. The Cathedral annalist says: 'The news was spread throughout the Kingdom that the Queen was to undergo this ordeal; and such was the throng of people who flocked to Winchester, that so vast a concourse on one day was never seen before. The King himself, Saint Edward, came to Winchester; nor did a single noble of the Kingdom absent himself, except Archbishop Robert, who feigned illness and, being inimical to the Queen, had poisoned the King's mind against her, so that if her innocence were proved he might be able to make his escape without difficulty. The pavement of the church being swept, there was placed upon it nine red-hot ploughshares, over which a short prayer was said, and then the Queen's shoes and stockings were drawn off, and laying aside her mantle and putting on her veil, with her garments girded closely round her, between two bishops, on either hand, she was conducted to the torture. The bishops who led her wept, and, though they were more terrified than she was, they encouraged her not to be afraid. All persons who were in the church wept and there was a general exclamation "O Saint Swithun, Saint Swithun, help her!" The people cried with great vehemence that Saint Swithun must hasten to the rescue. The Queen prayed: St. Swithun, rescue me from the fire that is prepared for me. Then followed a miracle. Guided by the Bishops she walked over the red-hot ploughshares, she felt neither the naked iron nor the fire.'"²⁴¹

Edward's suspicions of his mother may have been the result of her close links with Earl Godwin of Wessex, the murderer of his brother Prince Alfred. The king, as we have seen, owed the smoothness of his accession to the throne in large part to the support of Godwin, and it was probably in gratitude for this support that he had agreed to marry his daughter Edith. However, he had never really lost his distrust for the powerful earl, and in 1051 the latent tensions between the two men flared into open conflict.

The king had promoted to the see of Canterbury a Norman, Bishop Robert of London, in preference to Godwin's candidate (and relative), the Canterbury monk Aelfric. The new archbishop quarreled with Godwin, accusing him of encroaching on church lands in the Canterbury diocese. Then, in September, Count Eustace of Boulogne, the king's brother-in-law, came to Dover with a small detachment of men. A riot between the Frenchmen and Count Eustace's men ensued, in which several people were killed. Godwin took the side of the men of Dover, which was in his earldom, and, having with his sons assembled a large military force, demanded of the king that he give up Count Eustace and his companions. However, the king, supported by the forces of Earls Siward, Leofric and Ralph, refused... Through the

²⁴¹ Busby, *Saint Swithun*, Winchester, 1971. However, this story, recounted by the monk Richard of Devizes in the late twelfth century has been shown by Harriet O'Brien to contain many inaccuracies and anachronisms (*Queen Emma and the Vikings*, London: Bloomsbury, 2006, pp. 211-214).

mediation of Earl Leofric, a military confrontation was avoided, and it was agreed that the king and Godwin should meet in London. But before they could meet, Godwin, seeing that his support was waning, fled. Then the king and the witan ordered the banishment of him and his five sons. Moreover, the king renounced his queen, Godwin's daughter, although they were "as one person in double form", according to the anonymous *Life*, and she retired to the convent of Wherwell.

After Godwin's expulsion, the earldom of his eldest son Swein was given to Earl Odda, and it looked for a time as if King Edward would really be able to rule his kingdom through subordinates whom he trusted. But, even in exile, Godwin's power was still great. "If any Englishman had been told that events would take this turn," wrote the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, "he would have been very surprised, for Godwin had risen to such great eminence as if he ruled the king and all England."²⁴² So the next year Godwin attempted to win back his former position by force. Helped by his sons Harold and Leofwine, who had levied troops in Ireland and landed in the South-West, he marched on London. Once again, a military confrontation was avoided, and both sides disbanded their troops. But this time the advantage was with Godwin, and the king fully restored to him and his sons, except Swein, all the honours they had forfeited.²⁴³ The king took back his queen, while Archbishop Robert, mounting a horse and dropping his pallium in the process, fled to the continent. Peace was restored, but in circumstances so detrimental to the king's authority, and accompanied by the fickleness of so many people, that the omens for the future looked grim...

In the very year of Godwin's rebellion, 1052, a sign was manifested signifying the holiness of the royal line of Wessex of which King Edward was the heir, and the evil of those who would attempt to contest its authority. For the body of Edward's grandfather, King Edgar the Peaceable, was found to be incorrupt by Abbot Ailward of Glastonbury. Moreover, the irreverence with which the holy body was handled indicated how irreverently the royal authority of St. Edward was soon to be treated.

"For when," writes William of Malmesbury, "the receptacle which he had prepared seemed too small to admit the body, he profaned the royal corpse by cutting it. When the blood immediately gushed out in torrents, shaking the hearts of the bystanders with horror. In consequence his royal remains were placed upon the altar in a shrine, which he had himself given to this church, with the head of St. Apollinaris and the relics of the Martyr Vincent; which, having purchased at great price, he had added to the beauty of the house of God. The violator of the sacred body presently became distracted; and, not long after, as he was going out of the church, he met his death by a broken neck. But the display of royal authority did not cease with that: it

²⁴² *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, D, 1052.

²⁴³ Swein's crimes were too serious even for Godwin to have overlooked, including rape and murder. In 1053 he died of cold in Lycia, on the way back from a penitential pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

proceeded further, a blind lunatic being cured there..."²⁴⁴

At about the same time the relics of the Martyr-King Edmund of East Anglia were uncovered and found to be incorrupt by Abbot Leofsan of Bury St. Edmund's, which further helped to demonstrate the holiness of the royal rank that Godwin had so dishonoured by his actions.²⁴⁵

In 1053, however, when he was at the height of his power, Godwin himself died in dramatic circumstances that suggested Divine retribution. He choked on a piece of bread after swearing to the king: "Let God Who knows all things be my judge! May this crust of bread which I hold in my hand pass through my throat and leave me unharmed to show that I was innocent of your brother's death!"²⁴⁶

"Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, saith the Lord!"

²⁴⁴ William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, 160.

²⁴⁵ Rev. J.B. Mackinlay, *Saint Edmund King and Martyr*, London: Art & Book Company, 1893, pp. 187.

²⁴⁶ Ailred of Rievaulx, in David C. Douglas, *William the Conqueror*, London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1964, pp. 412-13.

19. THE SCHISM OF 1054 AND THE NORMANS

Unknown to the English, an event was taking place in the East – the schism between the Roman and Eastern Patriarchates - that was to have the most profound effect on the whole of the West. It was preceded and influenced by a hardly less important schism between the papacy and the leaders of secular society...

Church and State in the West were so deeply entangled with each other through the institution of feudalism that nobody, in either Church or State, could conceive of a return to the traditional system of the symphony of powers, which allowed for the relative independence of both powers within a single Christian society. Thus the Church wished to be liberated from “lay investiture”; but she did not want to be deprived of the lands, vassals and political power that came with investiture. The only solution, therefore, from the Pope’s point of view, was to bring the whole of Christian society, including its kings and emperors, into vassalage to the papacy...

But before undertaking this assault on the West, the papacy needed to secure its rear in the East, and in the south of Italy. There an upstart, newly Christianized people of Viking origin, the Normans, had carved out an independent dominion for themselves. They had even encroached on some lands given to the papacy by the Emperor. Leo declared a holy war against the Normans, promising “an impunity for their crimes” to all who answered his call (those who died in the battle were declared to be martyrs), and set off with himself at the head of the papal army. But at Civitate he was roundly defeated. Since the German Emperor could not come south to help him, Leo now decided to try and forge an alliance with the Byzantines against the Normans, and sent Cardinal Humbert and two others (one was the future Pope Stefan IX) to Constantinople as his envoys.

This was always going to be a difficult mission, because of tensions between Rome and Constantinople. In 1053, Patriarch Michael Cerularius had criticized certain liturgical practices of the Latins in a letter to Bishop John of Trania, asking that his views be conveyed to Pope Leo IX. The Pope replied: “In prejudging the case of the highest See, the see on which no judgement may be passed by any man, you have received the anathema from all the Fathers of all the venerable Councils... You, beloved brother of ours, whom we still call in Christ and primate of Constantinople, with extraordinary presumption and unheard-of boldness have dared openly to condemn the apostolic and Latin Church – and for what? For the fact that she celebrates the commemoration of the sufferings of Christ on unleavened bread. That is your imprudent abuse, that is your unkind boasting, when you, supposing that your lips are in heaven, in actual fact with your tongue are crawling on the earth and striving by your human reasonings and thoughts to corrupt and shake the ancient faith. If you do not pull yourself together, you will be on the tail of the dragon [cf. Revelation 12], by which this dragon overthrew and cast to the earth a third of the stars of heaven. Almost 1200 years have passed since the Saviour suffered, and do

you really think that only now must the Roman Church learn from you how to celebrate the Eucharist, as if it means nothing that here in Rome there lived, worked for a considerable period, taught and, finally, by his death glorified God he to whom the Lord said: 'Blessed are thou, O Simon, son of Jonah'..."²⁴⁷

"Then," continues A.P. Lebedev, "the Pope explained in detail why the Roman Church could not tolerate any instructions from other Churches, but remained the leader of all the rest. 'Think how senseless it would be to admit that the heavenly Father should conceal the rite of the visible sacrifice [of the Eucharist] from the prince of the apostles, Peter, to whom He had completely revealed the most hidden Divinity of His Son. The Lord promised to Peter, not through an angel, nor through a prophet, but with His own lips: 'You are Peter, and on this rock I will build My Church' (Matthew 16.16). But in the opinion of the Pope an important place in the question of the headship of the Roman high priest was occupied by the miracle-working power of Peter's shadow. This argument of the Pope in his favour was so original that we cite it in full. 'In Peter,' said the Pope, 'what is particularly remarkable is that the shadow of his body gave health to the infirm. Such power was given to none of the saints; even the Holy of holies Himself did not give the gift of healing from His own most holy body; but to His Peter alone He gave this privilege that the shadow from his body should heal the sick. Here is a great sign of the Church of the present and the future, that is, Peter has become the manager of both Churches and indicates their condition beforehand in himself: it is precisely the present Church which by the power of its visible sacraments and those that are still to come as it were by her shadow heals souls on earth, and presents to us an as yet invisible but firm image of truth and piety on earth.' Or here is one more cunning papal interpretation of one saying with which the Lord addressed Peter, and interpretation whose aim was to prove the overwhelming significance of the Roman high priests among the other bishops of the whole Church. The Pope takes the saying of the Lord: 'I have prayed for thee, O Peter, that thy faith should not fail, and when thou art converted strengthen thy brethren' (Luke 22.32).

"'By this the Lord showed,' says the Pope, 'that the faith of the other brethren will be subject to dangers, but the faith of Peter will remain without stumbling. Nobody can deny that just as the whole door is ruled by the hinge, so by Peter and his successors is defined the order and structure of the whole Church. And as the hinge opens and closes the door, while remaining itself unmoved, so Peter and his successors have the right freely to pronounce sentence on every Church, and nobody must disturb or shake their condition; for the highest see is not judged by anybody (summa sedes a nemine iudicatur).'"²⁴⁸

²⁴⁷ H. Bettenson and C. Maunder, *Documents of the Christian Church*, Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 106.

²⁴⁸ Lebedev, "Vek odinnadtsatij - Okonchatelnoe razdelenie Tserkvej (1053-1054gg.)" ("The 11th Century - the Final Division of the Churches"), <http://portalcredo.ru/site/index.php?act=lib&id=378>, pp. 23.

But the most interesting part of Leo's pretensions was his claim to have royal as well as priestly power.

Thus he not only tried, as Gilbert Dagron writes, "to impose obedience [on the Eastern Church] by multiplying the expected scriptural quotations... He also added that the rebels of the East should content themselves with these witnesses 'to the simultaneously earthly and heavenly power, or rather, to the royal priesthood of the Roman and apostolic see (*de terreno et coelesti imperio, imo de regali sacerdotio romanae et apostolicae sedis*).'"²⁴⁹

"Of much greater importance and interest in the given letter," continues Lebedev, "are the very new papal ideas about his secular lordship, which are developed by the Pope in his letter to Cerularius and which rely on a false document – the so-called *Donatio Constantini*. Setting out his superior position among the other hierarchs of the Church, the Pope, in order to humiliate the Church of Constantinople – the aim of the letter – he develops the thought that the Popes are immeasurably superior to the representatives of all the other Churches since they are at one and the same time both first priests and emperors. In the East, it would seem, nothing of the sort had ever been heard; and for that reason it is understandable how such a novelty would affect the Church of Constantinople!

"Since the time of Constantine the Great the Popes had become at the same time emperors, insinuated Leo to Cerularius. The Pope wrote: 'So that there should remain no doubt about the earthly [secular] power of the Roman high priest, and so that nobody should think that the Roman Church is ascribing to herself an honour that does not belong to her, we shall cite the proofs of from that privileged deed which the Emperor Constantine with his own hands laid upon the holy tomb of the heavenly key-bearer [Peter], and that the truth should be manifest and vanity disappear.' In this privileged deed Constantine, according to the words of the Pope, declared the following: 'We have considered it necessary, we together with all our rulers, the Senate, the nobles and the people of Rome, that, just as St. Peter was the vicar of the Son of God on earth, so the high priests, the heirs of the prince of the apostles, should retain the power to rule – and to an even more complete extent than is given to the earthly imperial dignity. That is, we are decreeing that reverent honour should be accorded both to our earthly imperial might, and in exactly the same way to the most holy Roman Church, and, so as more fully to exalt the see above our own earthly throne, we ascribe to her a royal power, dignity and honour. Moreover, we decree that the see of Peter should have the headship over the four sees of Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem and Constantinople and also over all the Church in the inhabited world; the high priest of this Roman see must be considered for all time to be higher and more glorious than all the priest of the whole world, and in relations to questions

²⁴⁹ Dagron, *Empereur et Prêtre* (Emperor and Priest), Paris : Éditions Gallimard, 1996, p. 247.

of Divine service and faith his judgement should rule over all.' Then Pope Leo describes what precisely Constantine bestowed upon his contemporary, Pope Sylvester, so as to exalt the papal altar. In the opinion of the Pope, it turns out that Constantine bestowed upon the Pope first of all the palace in Rome. The privileged deed, according to the letter of Pope Leo, said the following about this: 'We cede to the holy apostles themselves, the most blessed Peter and Paul, and through them to our father Pope Sylvester and all his successors who will be on the see of St. Peter to the end of the ages the Lateran palace, which is superior to all the palaces in the world.' Then the Emperor Constantine adorns, as the Pope puts it, the person of the Roman high priest with royal regalia. The deed, according to the words of Pope Leo, said this about that: 'We transfer to the Pope of Rome the diadem, that is the crown, from our own head, the garland that adorns the imperial neck, the purple chlamys, the scarlet tunic and all the other royal vestments. We entrust to him the imperial sceptre and all the other marks of distinction and the shoulder-belt - in a word, all the appurtenances of royal majesty.' The letter even informs us that the Emperor with his own hands want to place his crown on the Pope's head, but 'the Pope did not want to use a crown of gold, and for that reason the Emperor placed on him with his own hands his Phrygian wreath (*phrygium*), shining white and signifying the Resurrection of Christ.' In the words of Pope Leo, the Emperor Constantine, having adorned the Pope with royal regalia, in correspondence with this wanted to put the clergy who constituted his suite on a level with the royal courtiers. The deed, in the words of the letter, made the following legal ruling: 'We raise the most honourable clergy of every rank in the service of the Roman Church to the same height of power and brilliance as our Senate, and decree that they should be adorned as our patricians and consuls are adorned. In a word, just as there are various kinds of servants attached to the imperial dignity - bed-makers, doormen and guards, so must it be with the holy Roman Church. And more than that: for the sake of the greater brilliance of the papal dignity let the clergy travel on horses adorned with the whitest of materials, and let them wear exactly the same shoes as are worn by the senators. And in this way let the heavenly [papal] power be adorned like the earthly [imperial], to the glory of God.' In his concern for the person of the Pope and those close to him, according to the words of the Pope's letter, Constantine bestowed on Sylvester and his heirs a broad, de facto royal power over a whole half of the Roman kingdom: the Roman high priest became the Roman emperor. In the words of the Pope, the deed said the following on this score: 'So that the high priestly power should not decline, but should flourish more than the imperial power itself, we have decreed that besides the Lateran palace, the city of Rome, the provinces of Italy and all the western lands, and all the places and cities in them, should be transferred to our father Sylvester, so that he should have complete use of and dominion over them.'²⁵⁰

In the letter Leo sent to the Patriarch with Cardinal Humbert he continued his assault: "We believe and firmly confess the following: the Roman Church is such that

²⁵⁰ Lebedev, op. cit., pp. 3-5.

if any nation (Church) on earth should in its pride be in disagreement with her in anything, then such a Church ceases to be called and to be considered a Church – it is nothing. It will already be a conventicle of heretics, a collection of schismatics, a synagogue of Satan.”²⁵¹ This was hardly calculated to mollify the Byzantines, and things were made worse when Humbert called them pimps and disciples of Mohammed. As a consequence, they refused to enter into negotiations with the papal legates about an alliance against the Normans.

On July 16, 1054 the papal legates marched into the cathedral of Hagia Sophia and placed a bull of excommunication on the altar, anathematizing the Church of Constantinople and accusing her of every possible heresy in a “fantastically ignorant” document.²⁵² Four days later, on July 20, Patriarch Michael convened a Council which excommunicated the legates. “O you who are Orthodox,” said the Patriarch, “flee the fellowship of those who have accepted the heretical Latins and who regard them as the first Christians in the Catholic and Holy Church of God!” For, as he said a little later, “the Pope is a heretic.”²⁵³ Pope Leo IX had actually already died in April, 1054, so the papal anathema was technically invalid as not representing the will of a living Pope. However, although the next Pope, Stephen IX, wanted to send an embassy to Constantinople to repair the damage, he also died before the embassy could set off.

“No further missions were sent. Already, in the space of a few years, the mood in Rome had decisively shifted. What was at stake, many reformers had begun to accept, was nothing less than a fundamental point of principle. Cardinal Humbert had sounded out a trumpet blast on a truly decisive field of battle. The message that it sent to the rest of Christendom could hardly have been more ringing: no one, not even the Patriarch of the New Rome, could be permitted to defy the authority of the Pope...”²⁵⁴

The other Eastern Churches were informed of the decision, and accepted it. And so 1054 has conventionally been taken as the date of the severing of the branch, the moment when the Western Church finally fell away from the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. Many have doubted that this was the real cut-off point. Thus a Byzantine council of 1089 acted as if the schism of 1054 had not taken place.²⁵⁵

²⁵¹ Lebedev, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

²⁵² Alexander Dvorkin, *Ocherki po Istorii Vselenskoj Pravoslavnoj Tserkvi* (Sketches on the History of the Universal Orthodox Church), Nizhni-Novgorod, 2006, p. 618. Humbert wrote: “May Michael the neophyte...and all those who follow him... fall under the anathema, Maranatha...” Jean Comby (*How to Read Church History*, London: SCM Press, 1985, vol. 1, p. 133) supposes that “he did not know that Maranatha means ‘Come, Lord’, and is not a condemnation”. But he could simply have been quoting from I Corinthians 16.22.

²⁵³ *The Lives of the Pillars of Orthodoxy*, Buena Vista, CO: Holy Apostles Convent, 1990, p. 155.

²⁵⁴ Tom Holland, *Millenium*, London: Abacus Books, 2009, p. 280.

²⁵⁵ Aristides Papadakis, *The Orthodox East and the Rise of the Papacy*, Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1994, pp. 76-77.

Again, Dvorkin writes that “the popular consciousness of that time in no way accepted the schism as final: nobody pronounced a ban on mutual communion, and concelebrations of priests and hierarchs of the two halves of Christianity continued even after 1054. The name of the pope of Rome was commemorated in the diptychs of other Eastern Churches (at any rate, sometimes). In our [Russian] lists of saints there were western saints who died after 1054.”²⁵⁶ But the balance of evidence remains in favour of the traditional dating.²⁵⁷

The momentous event of the Great Schism was heralded in the heavens. “Arab and Chinese astronomers recorded the appearance of the bright Crab Supernova in 1054. At X-ray and gamma-ray energies above 30 KeV, the Crab is generally the strongest persistent source in the sky today.”²⁵⁸

In 1059 Pope Nicholas sealed the political break with Constantinople when he entered into alliance at Melfi with the Normans. This alliance was momentous because up to this moment the Popes had always turned for protection to the Christian Roman Emperor, whether of East Rome or of the “Holy Roman Empire” of the West. Indeed, the Pope had insisted on crowning the “Holy Roman Emperor” precisely because he was the papacy’s official guardian. For it was unheard of that the Church of Rome should recognize as her official guardian any other power than the Roman Emperor, from whom, according to the forged *Donation of Constantine*, she had herself received her quasi-imperial dignity and power. But just as, in the middle of the eighth century, the Papacy had rejected the Byzantines in favour of the Franks, so now it rejected the Germans in favour of the Normans, a nation of Viking origin but French speech and culture that had recently seized a large swathe of German and Byzantine land in Southern Italy. The Pope legitimized this robbery in exchange for the Norman leaders Richard of Capua and Robert Guiscard becoming his feudal vassals and swearing to support the Papacy. In addition, Robert Guiscard specifically promised: “If you or your successors die before me, I will help to enforce the dominant wishes of the Cardinals and of the Roman clergy and laity in order that a pope may be chosen and established to the honour of St. Peter.”²⁵⁹

“Thus after 1059 the Norman conquests were made progressively to subserve the restoration of the Latin rite and the extension of papal jurisdiction in southern Italy.”²⁶⁰ The losers here were both the German Emperor and the Emperor of New

²⁵⁶ Dvorkin, *op. cit.*, p. 619.

²⁵⁷ Cf. A. Barmin, “Sovremennaja istoriografija o datirovke tserkovnoj skhizmy mezhdju Zapadom i Vostokom khristianskoj ekumeny” (“Contemporary Historiography on the Dating of the Church Schism between the West and the East of the Christian Oikumene”), in D.E. Afinogenov, A.V. Muraviev, *Traditsii i Nasledie Khristianskogo Vostoka* (The Traditions and Heritage of the Christian East), Moscow: “Indrik”, 1996, pp. 117-126.

²⁵⁸ Dr. Jerjis Alajaji, personal communication, March 22, 2010.

²⁵⁹ Quoted in Professor David C. Douglas, *The Norman Achievement, 1050-1100*, London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1969, p. 132.

²⁶⁰ Douglas, *op. cit.*, p. 155.

Rome. And in 1061 Guiscard's younger brother Roger conquered Sicily from the Saracens, making sure to give a good share of the loot to the Pope. In exchange, Pope Alexander II granted Roger and his men "absolution for their sins".²⁶¹

Even before entering into alliance with the Normans in Italy, the Papacy had begun to forge close bonds with the Normans in their homeland in Northern France, whence the papal assault on that other fortress of old-style Orthodox Autocracy, England, would soon be launched. Thus in 1055, the year after Duke William of Normandy seized effective control of his duchy by defeating a coalition led by his lord, King Henry I of France, the old-fashioned (that is, Orthodox) Archbishop Mauger was deposed to make way for the more forward-looking Maurilius. He introduced "a new and extraneous element"²⁶² – that is, an element more in keeping with the ideals of the heretical, "reformed papacy" – into the Norman Church. Then, in 1059, papal sanction for the marriage between Duke William and Matilda of Flanders, which had been withheld by Leo IX at the Council of Rheims in 1049, was finally obtained. This opened the way for full cooperation between the Normans and the Pope. Finally, William supported the candidacy of Alexander II to the throne as against that of Honorius II, who was supported by the German Empress Agnes.²⁶³ The Pope now owed a debt of gratitude to the Normans which they were soon to call in...

²⁶¹ Tom Holland, *Millenium*, London: Abacus Books, 2009, p. 356.

²⁶² Douglas, *William the Conqueror*, London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1964, p. 121.

²⁶³ Jean-Paul Allard, "Byzance et le Saint Empire: Theopano, Otton III, Benzon d'Albe" ("Byzantium and the Holy Empire: Theophano, Otto II and Benzon of Alba"), in Germain Ivanov-Trinadtsaty, *Regards sur l'Orthodoxie* (Points of View on Orthodoxy), Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme, 1997, p. 55.

20. KING EDWARD THE CONFESSOR (2)

We now come to the affair of Archbishop Stigand, which was to have such fatal consequences for England. As we have seen, in 1052 Archbishop Robert fled to the continent, leaving his pallium behind. With the acquiescence of the king, but in face of the furious opposition of successive popes, Bishop Stigand of Winchester was allowed to take up the pallium and serve as archbishop in Robert's place.

The question now arose: was Stigand a true archbishop? And: if so, could the English Church be said to have been under the pope's jurisdiction during his archbishopric, that is, from 1052?

The fact that Stigand had not received his pallium from the pope may not have seemed important; for a generation before both Archbishop Wulfstan of York and King Cnut had protested against the supposed necessity of English bishops' travelling the long and difficult journey to Rome for the pallium. Moreover, it was an historical fact that before 735 no English archbishop had done this. But Archbishop Robert was still alive and had not been formally deposed...

Frank Barlow has shed some light on this problem. "Three aspects of the story need investigation," he writes. "Was England aware of Stigand's incapacity as archbishop, of his suspension from his episcopal office, and of his excommunication?"

"There is no doubt that during Edward's reign Stigand was not recognized as an archbishop except in 1058 after the receipt of his pallium [which, however, he received from an "anti-pope", Benedict X, thus forming the basis for another of the charges that the papal legates leveled against him in the council of 1070]. Until that year he consecrated no bishop. By 1061, when two bishops went to Rome for consecration, his incapacity was again notorious. The Normans, too, were either aware of the position or learned it in England. William, who needed traditional and legitimate coronation, must have disregarded Stigand with the greatest reluctance. But from 1067 to 1070 he seems to have been accorded full metropolitan respect by the Normans. Expediency or William's arbitrariness may have been the cause.

"On the other hand, there is no evidence that anyone regarded Stigand as suspended from his episcopal office. He appears in all the witness-lists to 'royal' diplomas. He is known to have blessed abbots in 1061, 1065, and 1066... There is no strictly contemporary evidence that he was at any time shunned by the English kings, prelates, or laity..."²⁶⁴

As we have seen, the Roman papacy had been anathematized by the Orthodox

²⁶⁴ Barlow, *The English Church, 1000-1066*, London: Longmans, 1979, pp. 305-06. On the other hand, in 1060 Earl Harold did not invite Archbishop Stigand, the natural choice, to consecrate his monastery at Waltham, preferring instead the "safer" Archbishop Cynesige of York.

Church in 1054, which meant that the papal anathemas that the Popes against Stigand were null and void. Thus Stigand's uncanonicity was providential; for it meant a loosening of the ties between England and Rome at precisely the moment when the latter was falling into heresy. Stigand had the other, not inconsiderable advantage that he was accepted by both sides in the near-civil war that had only just come to an end; so he could serve as a peacemaker between the king and Godwin's faction. King Edward's decision to support Stigand as against his friend Archbishop Robert and the pope himself may seem surprising in view of his close co-operation with Pope Leo in his reforming councils since 1049.²⁶⁵ It may be that he thought that the unity of the English Church and nation at this critical hour was the overriding priority – and if, so then in view of what happened after his death, we must believe that he was right. It was at this point that the king's reputation for holiness may have played a critical part in saving his nation; for however much the popes fulminated against Stigand, they never said a word against Edward, and were forced to wait until after his death before launching an anti-English crusade...

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²⁶⁵ Leo launched, as Barlow writes, "an attack on current ecclesiastical abuses and pressed it with spectacular effect in a series of councils held in the next three years. Bishops and abbots were interrogated and put on trial. Consciences were troubled, confessions made, and disciplinary action was taken. At the Rome synod of 1050 Hugh of Breteuil, bishop of Langres, made his sensational surrender to the pope following his condemnation for various sins at the council of Rheims in the previous year. At Rome and Vercelli (September 1051) Lanfranc of Pavia, the future archbishop of Canterbury, developed his charges against the teaching of Berengar of Tours on the doctrine of the Eucharist. At all these stirring councils English bishops were present. [King] Edward answered Leo's invitation to send representatives to Rheims by dispatching a bishop and two abbots. The delegation was sent 'so that they might inform the king of whatever was there decided in the interests of Christendom', and, according to the Ramsey chronicler the king ordered that whatever was said or done there should be written and a copy kept in the king's treasury under the care of Hugh the chamberlain. What is more, in that year, possibly after the council, Leo announced in a letter to Edward that he was going to send a legate to England to investigate among other things the unsatisfactory location of the English sees.

"The visit to Rheims was the prelude to exceptionally close Anglo-papal relations. In 1050 bishops Herman and Ealdred were at the Easter Council of Rome 'on the king's business'. In September Bishop Ulf was at the council of Vercelli. In the spring of 1051 Archbishop Robert went to Rome for the pallium. Among other ecclesiastical business transacted with the pope in these three years was the removal of the see of Crediton to Exeter and possibly the consolidation of the dioceses of Devon and Cornwall, the disputes over the elections to Dorchester and London, and probably the king's plan to rebuild Westminster Abbey. The abbot of Ramsey obtained at Rheims a papal privilege for his abbey, and the abbot of St. Augustine's papal permission to rebuild his monastery. There may also have been diplomatic exchanges about Flanders and the succession to the English throne, both matters of importance to the Emperor Henry III, the pope's patron.

"Although nothing was decreed at these councils which had not appeared in English ecclesiastical and royal legislation of the tenth and early eleventh centuries, the new attack must have jolted severely a church in which zeal was declining. The old ideals were presented again in a challenging form. A new wind was beginning to blow through the English Church. But it was stopped within three years by the appointment of Stigand to Canterbury..." (*The English Church*, pp. 301-02)

The traditionally turbulent Anglo-Danish North had been remarkably quiet during Godwin's rebellion. This had much to do, no doubt, with the firm hand of Earl Siward of Northumbria. However, in 1053 Earl Siward died and was buried in the church which he had dedicated to St. Olaf outside York. Since his son had been killed in a battle against King Macbeth of Scotland²⁶⁶, he was succeeded by one of Godwin's sons, Tostig. Then, in 1057, the good Earls Leofric and Odda, who had been the foremost defenders of the Church in the Midlands, also died.²⁶⁷

England's spiritual heart was beating more faintly now; and from now on pressure on the sickly organism from without – specifically, from Rome – began to increase. Although an Orthodox country from the beginning²⁶⁸, Anglo-Saxon England was now showing signs of heterodoxy. Thus it was at about this time that one of the bishops-elect, Walter of Hereford, decided to go to Rome to be consecrated.²⁶⁹ If, as seems likely, he was trying to avoid the "schismatic" Archbishop Stigand, then he avoided Stigand only to fall into the hands of the much more surely schismatic Pope Nicholas!

In 1061, the archbishop-elect of York, Aldred went to Rome for his pallium in the company of Earl Tostig of Northumbria and several other English nobles. But "he found Pope Nicholas at first no friend to his desires," writes William of Malmesbury, "for Aldred was not minded to give up [the see of] Worcester. Aldred was so bound by ties of love to Worcester that it was dearer to him than the dignity of the archbishopric. So, after long disputation, Aldred returned homeward and came to Sutri. Earl Tostig who was with him was threatening that for this [refusal by the pope] there would be no more paying of Peter's Pence from England." However, during their journey home, Aldred and Tostig "were attacked by robbers and stripped, to

²⁶⁶ On the real-life story behind Shakespeare's tragic hero, see Peter Berresford Ellis, *Macbeth*, London: Frederick Muller, 1980, chapter 8; Alphons Bellesheim, *History of the Catholic Church of Scotland*, Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1887, volume I, pp. 237-38.

²⁶⁷ Leofric had heavenly visions and prophesied the day of his death a fortnight before it happened (A.S. Napier, "An Old English Vision of Leofric of Mercia", *Philological Transactions*, 1908, pp. 180-187). His wife was the famous Lady Godiva.

The Annals of Pershore record of Odda that he took a vow of celibacy and died as a monk in order that no heir of his should ever again deprive the abbey of Pershore of its possessions (A.J. Robertson, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, Cambridge University Press, 1956, p. 458).

²⁶⁸ Signs of Orthodox, Byzantine influence even in the eleventh century include: (a) English bishops were buried, like their Byzantine counterparts, sitting on their episcopal thrones (see Goscelin's *Life of St. Wulsin*); (b) the holy Greek Archbishop Constantine came to spend his last days in the English monastery of Malmesbury (William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum*, V, 259); and (c) Greek Orthodox feasts – specifically, the Entrance of the Virgin into the Temple (November 21) and the Conception of the Virgin by St. Anne (December 9) were being introduced into the English Church calendar (F.A. Gasquet and Edmund Bishop, *The Bosworth Psalter*, 1908, pp. 43-52).

²⁶⁹ According to William of Malmesbury (*Gesta Pontificum Anglorum*, IV, 164), Bishop Walter was later killed by a woman whom he was trying to rape!

the great horror of beholders, and made their way back to Rome. Their sufferings so far melted the rigour of the apostolic see, that Aldred received the pallium of York, having pledged himself to resign Worcester provided that he could find a better priest in the diocese to put in his place."²⁷⁰

It is interesting to speculate what would have happened if Aldred had returned to England without the pallium. It is quite possible that, following the example of Stigand, and with King Edward's support, he would have assumed the archbishopric anyway, thus placing both of England's metropolitan sees in schism from Rome. But the robbers – and Pope Nicholas' sense of *realpolitik* – saved the day for Rome.

And to reinforce his authority in England, the pope now sent two cardinals with Aldred on his journey home – this was the first papal legation to England since the council of Chelsea in 787. They stayed with Prior Wulfstan at Worcester, and, impressed by his piety, suggested him for the bishopric of Worcester. "By these praises," we read in *Wulfstan's life* by William of Malmesbury, "they aroused the goodwill of King Edward in whom the trafficker in benefices and the covetous man never found anything to forward their designs. The Archbishops of Canterbury and York gave their support to the Cardinals, the one of kindness, the other of knowledge; both by their sentence. With them in praising Wulfstan were the Earls Harold and Elfgar, men more famed for warlike courage than for religion. They bestirred themselves vigorously in his cause, sending mounted messengers on Wulfstan's behalf, who rode many miles in little time to hasten on the matter. So [Wulfstan] was presented to the Court, and bidden to take upon him the office of Bishop. He earnestly withstood them, crying out that he was unequal to so great a charge, while all men cried that he was equal to it. So entirely was the whole people agreed, that it were not wrong to say that in all those bodies there was, concerning this matter, but one mind. But, to be brief, the cardinals and archbishops would have lost their labour, had they not pleaded against his unwillingness the duty of obeying the Pope. To that plea he must needs yield... So King Edward well and truly invested Wulfstan with the Bishopric of Worcester... Not long after he was consecrated at York by [Archbishop Aldred]: because Stigand of Canterbury was under the Pope's interdict."²⁷¹

The new Bishop Wulfstan was the one Englishman, besides the king himself, who, through his reputation for asceticism and miracle-working, and the power of his preaching, could have inspired his countrymen to rebel against the now schismatic papacy if he had chosen to do so. But it may be wondered whether the legates' choice of Wulfstan for the bishopric (although they did not consecrate him) made him, so to speak, "the pope's man" at this time. As we shall see later, he served his country well in 1066 when he galvanized support in the North for the new King Harold; but after 1066 he sadly succumbed to the new Norman-papist regime.

²⁷⁰ William of Malmesbury, *Vita S. Wulfstani*.

²⁷¹ William of Malmesbury, *Vita S. Wulfstani*, pp. 26-28.

Much depended now on the character of Wulfstan's close friend, Earl Harold, the new head of the Godwin clan and the most powerful man in England after the king. We have seen him supporting his father in rebellion against the king in 1051; but this may have been the result of family pressure rather than proof of a rebellious disposition. From 1052 he appears as completely loyal to the king, even as against the interests of his brothers; and the king appears to have trusted him in a way he never trusted his father. Unlike his father, he gave generously to the Church. And his religious feelings, already in evidence through his love for Bishop Wulfstan, were further stimulated by his healing through a holy relic which had been revealed some years earlier and had passed into the possession of his earldom.²⁷²

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King Edward was childless; so the question of who should succeed him became more pressing as he grew older. The king and his witan thought of Prince Edward, the son of King Edmund Ironside and the king's own nephew. After the Danish conquest of England in 1016, Edward and his family had gone into exile, first in Ladoga and Kiev in Russia²⁷³, and then in Hungary. When they heard that he was alive, the English immediately sent an embassy headed by Bishop Aldred to the German Emperor Henry III in order to secure the prince's return from Hungary. Aldred failed because of Henry's conflict with Hungary; but on the death of the emperor in 1056, the king tried again, sending, probably, Earl Harold, to perform this difficult and important task.

This time the mission was successful; but shortly after his arrival in England on August 31, 1057, Prince Edward died. Great was the sorrow of the English people, who suspected foul play: "We do not know for what reason it was so arranged that he could not see his kinsman, King Edward", said the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* pointedly.²⁷⁴ Many in the Norman faction suspected the Godwin family of removing another strong claimant to the throne.²⁷⁵ But since, as Walker argues²⁷⁶, it was Harold Godwinson who carried out the difficult task of getting Edward from Hungary to England, it is very unlikely that he would have had any hand in an assassination attempt. Moreover, Edward's son Edgar was always treated with honour by Harold.

²⁷² *Vita Haroldi*, chapter 2; translated by Walter de Gray Birch, London: Elliot Stock, 1885.

²⁷³ That an English prince should flee to this north Russian lake may cause surprise. However, the links between the "Varangians" of Russia, Scandinavia and England were already well-established in the tenth century, as we can see from the lives of Kings Olaf Trygvasson and Olaf the Saint of Norway, and of St. Anna of Novgorod, who was a Swedish princess baptized by an English bishop, St. Sigfrid. Also, several Russian historians accept the hypothesis that the ancient Russian monastery of Valaam on Lake Ladoga was founded by British (probably Celtic) monks.

²⁷⁴ *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, D, 1057.

²⁷⁵ See Gabriel Ronay, "Edward Aetheling: Anglo-Saxon England's Last Hope", *History Today*, January, 1984, vol. 34, pp. 34-51.

²⁷⁶ Walker, *op. cit.*, pp. 81-82.

In 1063 Earls Harold and Tostig conducted a highly successful campaign by land and sea to subdue Prince Gruffydd of North Wales, who had been encroaching on English territory. The subjection of the Welsh further enhanced the prestige of Earl Harold, who, as well as being the biggest landowner in the country and the king's brother-in-law, was now the king's most trusted and efficient servant. There must have been many at this time who thought that he, rather than the young and inexperienced Prince Edgar, should succeed the old King Edward.

But in 1064 Earl Harold made a great blunder. The story is related with variants and inconsistencies in the Norman sources and on the Bayeux tapestry, but is not related at all in the pre-Conquest English sources. Nevertheless, this much is clear: that Harold sailed from Bosham in Sussex on a mission to the continent, that he was storm-driven onto the coast of Ponthieu, where he was captured by Count Guy, that William of Normandy ransomed him from Guy and treated him kindly at first, but that later he was persuaded, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, to make an oath over a box of artfully concealed holy relics in Rouen that he would support William's claim to the English throne.

Now William's claim was based, in the first place, on his blood relationship to Queen Emma, King Edward's mother. But his case rested mainly on his assertion that in 1051 King Edward had promised him the throne on his death. The Norman sources further assert that in 1064 Harold was sent to Normandy by King Edward in order to confirm his earlier promise to William and in order that Harold should swear fealty to him.

Most modern historians doubt that King Edward made this promise. Not only is there no English evidence for it: such a testament had no precedent in English history²⁷⁷: the English sources are unanimous in asserting that King Edward nominated Harold as his heir on his deathbed. Thus Nicholas Higham writes: "The Bayeux Tapestry shows the old king, distinguished by his crown, shaggy hair and beard, as he extends his hand to his kneeling brother-in-law Harold. Edward's *Life*, written soon after, suggests Edward commended 'this woman [the queen] and all the kingdom to your protection'; and every version of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* offers something similar."²⁷⁸

Ian Walker writes: "We have seen that it is unlikely that any such promise [to William] was given by Edward, but rather that it was probably invented and imparted to William by Robert of Jumièges, Archbishop of Canterbury, following his exile in 1052. If this was the case, could Edward nevertheless have intended to make

²⁷⁷ George Garnett, *The Norman Conquest: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, 2009. pp. 26-39.

²⁷⁸ Higham, "1066. The Year of the Four Kings", *BBC History Magazine*, May, 2006, p. 46.

William his heir at this later date? This is highly unlikely. In 1051 Edward had no clearly established heir, although he did have a number of potential heirs, all with better qualifications than William. Now, he had secured a suitable and established heir in the person of his nephew, *Atheling* Edgar, and a reserve in Harold, the son of his deceased nephew, Earl Ralph. As a result of this change in circumstances the reasons adduced against the nomination of William as heir in 1051 apply with even greater force to any such nomination in 1064. He remained a man with only distant links to the English dynasty and little or no support in the country, although he was now secure in possession of his duchy and much more widely known and regarded than in 1051. In addition, William's recent conquest of Maine had resulted in the imprisonment and death of Edward's nephew, Count Walter of the Vexin. Count Walter died in suspicious circumstances while in William's custody, allegedly by poison, something unlikely to endear him to Edward. William of Poitiers hints that Edward was close to death and this was why he now sent Harold to pledge his kingdom. There is no support for this in English sources, which show that the king was still healthy enough to go hunting in autumn 1065. The suggestion that Edward intended William as his heir in 1064 seems less credible even than the case for this in 1051."²⁷⁹

Why, then, did Harold make the journey? One source suggests that he was on a fishing trip and simply landed up on the wrong side of the Channel. However, the eleventh-century Monk Edmer of Canterbury, using sources close to the family, has a more plausible story, namely, that Harold "asked leave of the king to go to Normandy to set free his brother and nephew who were being held there as hostages" (Godwin had given these hostages to the king after his abortive coup in 1051).

In support of this theory is the fact that Harold did return with one of the hostages, his nephew Hakon. William continued to hold Harold's brother, Wulfnoth...

Edmer continues: "The king said to [Harold]: 'I will have no part in this; but, not to give the impression of wishing to hinder you, I give you leave to go where you will and to see what you can do. But I have a presentiment that you will succeed in bringing misfortune upon the whole kingdom and discredit upon yourself. For I know that the Duke is not so simple as to be at all inclined to give them [the hostages] up to you unless he foresees that in doing so he will secure some great advantage to himself.'"²⁸⁰

The king's prophetic spirit did not fail him; and according to a twelfth-century tradition, a great blow was miraculously struck at the oak in Rouen where Harold made his oath to support William's claim to the throne – an oath, which, since he broke it when he became king, led to England's downfall. "For the oak, which was

²⁷⁹ Walker, *op. cit.*, pp. 91-92.

²⁸⁰ Edmer, *Historia Novorum in Anglia*, translated by Geoffrey Bosanquet, London: Cresset Press, p. 8.

once a tree of great height and beauty, ... is stated, wonderful to relate, to have shed its bark, and to have lost its greenness and its foliage. A sight well worth seeing, for a tree which a little time before was remarkable for the number and thickness of its leaves, shriveled up from the roots, as quickly as did the gourd of Jonah and the olive of that other prophet and all its branches became white."²⁸¹ Just as the Lord's withering of the fig tree signified the falling away of the Jewish synagogue, so the withering of the oak at Rouen signified the falling away of the English Church...

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In 1065 a serious rebellion against King Edward's rule broke out in the North. The cause appears to have been the unjust behaviour of Earl Tostig, Earl Harold's brother. According to the anonymous biographer, several members of the witan "charged that glorious earl with being too cruel; and he was accused of punishing disturbers more for desire of their property which would be confiscated than for love of justice." But the same author excused Tostig on the grounds that "such was the cruelty of that people and their neglect of God that even parties of twenty or thirty men could scarcely travel without being either killed or robbed by the multitude of robbers in wait."²⁸²

However, that there was probably some justice in the accusations appears from the fact that St. Cuthbert once intervened on behalf of a man condemned by Tostig, as Barlow describes in this summary of Simeon of Durham's account: "[Tostig] had succeeded in arresting a man named Aldan-hamal, a malefactor notorious for theft, robbery, murder and arson. The criminal was condemned to death, despite attempts by kinsmen and friends to bribe the earl; and while in fetters at Durham awaiting execution, when all efforts at rescue had failed, his conscience was smitten, he repented of his crimes, and he promised St. Cuthbert that if he could go free he would make full atonement. St. Cuthbert heard his prayer, struck off his fetters, and allowed him to escape into the church. The guards, under Tostig's thane Barcwith, went in pursuit and considered breaking open the doors of the cathedral, for freedom of sanctuary, they thought, would allow all thieves, robbers, and murderers to laugh in their faces. But Barcwith was immediately struck down by heaven for his impiety and within an hour or two died raving mad; and Earl Tostig, terrified by his fate, pardoned the criminal and, later, held him in esteem."²⁸³

The immediate cause of the rebellion appears to have been an extra tax imposed by Tostig on his earldom.²⁸⁴ The rebels seized York while Tostig was hunting with

²⁸¹ *Vita Haroldi*, chapter 9.

²⁸² Anonymous, *Vita Aedwardi Regis*.

²⁸³ Symeon of Durham, in Barlow, *The English Church*, pp. 257-258.

²⁸⁴ Just before the rebellion, in March, 1065, the relics of Martyr-King Oswin of Deira (Durham) had been discovered, and the holy Bishop Aethelwine of Durham had presented Countess Judith, Tostig's wife, with a hair of the holy martyr. Could this have been a prophetic warning not to rise up against

the king in Wiltshire, and proceeded to slaughter his officials and seize his treasury. They then summoned Morcar, younger brother of Earl Edwin of Mercia, and with him as their "earl" marched south to plead their case with King Edward, ravaging Tostig's lands on the way. Earl Edwin joined them at Northampton, and there Earl Harold also came as the emissary of King Edward.

Harold was in a most difficult position. His natural desire was to support his brother against the rebels. But that would have led to civil war, which Harold now drew back from, just as his father and King Edward had done during the earlier crisis of 1051-52. In his meeting with the king at Oxford he counseled agreeing to the terms of the rebels.

With great sorrow and reluctance, the king complied: Tostig was deposed, the rebels were pardoned and Morcar was confirmed as Earl of Northumbria. In the following month Earl Tostig and his wife fled to her brother, Count Baldwin of Flanders.²⁸⁵

Tostig was bitter that the king had not supported him against the rebels. But he especially blamed his brother Harold, claiming that the Northumbrians "had undertaken this madness against their earl at the artful persuasion of his brother, Earl Harold."²⁸⁶ Harold denied this on oath; and since he gained nothing from the affair except the undying enmity of his brother, who fought against him in 1066, he must be believed.

The most serious result of the rebellion was a breakdown in the health of the king, who had wanted to fight the rebels, but had been prevented by bad weather, his inability to raise enough troops and the reluctance of those around him to engage in civil war. "Sorrowing at this, he fell ill, and from that day until the day of his death he bore a sickness of the mind. He protested to God with deep sorrow, and complained to Him, that He was deprived of the due obedience of his men in repressing the presumption of the unrighteous; and he called down God's vengeance upon them..."²⁸⁷

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In the second half of his reign, as the situation within the country worsened, the holy King Edward turned more and more to heavenly pursuits, and his prophetic gifts manifested themselves in still greater abundance.

the lawful king? See the Life of St. Oswin in V. Moss, *Saints of England's Golden Age*, Etna, Ca.: Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies, 1997, pp. 93-96.

²⁸⁵ In this account I have followed Walker, *op. cit.*, pp. 103-114.

²⁸⁶ Anonymous, *Vita Aedwardi Regis*.

²⁸⁷ Anonymous, *Vita Aedwardi Regis*.

Once, at Holy Pascha, the king returned after the Divine Liturgy to his seat at the royal banquet in Westminster. "While the rest were greedily eating," writes William of Malmesbury, "and making up for the long fast of Lent by the newly provided viands, he, with mind abstracted from earthly things, was absorbed in the contemplation of some Divine matter, when presently he excited the attention of the guests by bursting into profuse laughter: and as none presumed to inquire into the cause of his joy, he remained silent as before, till satiety had put an end to the banquet. After the tables were removed, and as he was unrobing in his chamber, three persons of rank followed him; of these Earl Harold was one, the second was an abbot, and the third a bishop, who, presuming on their intimacy with the king, asked the cause of his laughter, observing that it seemed just cause for astonishment to see him, in such perfect tranquillity of mind and occupation, burst into a vulgar laugh while all others were silent. 'I saw something wonderful,' said he, 'and therefore I did not laugh without a cause.' At this, as is the custom of mankind, they began to inquire and search into the matter more earnestly, entreating that he would condescend to disclose it to them. After much reluctance, he yielded to their persevering solicitations, and related the following wonderful circumstance, saying that the Seven Sleepers in Mount Coelius [Ephesus] had now lain for two hundred years on their right side, but that, at the very hour of his laughter, they turned upon their left; that they would continue to lie in this manner for seventy-four years, which would be a dreadful omen to wretched mortals. For everything would come to pass, in those seventy-four years, which the Lord had foretold to His disciples concerning the end of the world: nation would rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there would be earthquakes in divers places, pestilences and famine, terrors from heaven and great signs; changes in kingdoms; wars of the Gentiles against the Christians, and also victories of the Christians over the pagans. Relating these matters to his wondering audience, he descanted on the passion of these sleepers, and the make of their bodies, thought totally unnoticed in history, as readily as though he had lived in daily intercourse with them. On hearing this, the earl sent a knight, the bishop a clergyman, and the abbot a monk, to Maniches the Emperor of Constantinople²⁸⁸, giving them at the same time what is called a holy letter, that the martyr-relics of the Seven Sleepers should be shown to the delegates of the king of England. It fell out that the prophecy of King Edward was proved by all the Greeks, who could swear that they had heard from their fathers that the men were lying on their right side, but after the entrance of the English into the vault, they published the truth of the foreign prophecy to their countrymen. Nor was it long before the predicted evils came to pass; for the Hagarenes, Arabs and Turks, nations averse to Christ, making havoc of the Christians [at the battle of Manzikert in 1071], overran Syria, Lycia and Asia Minor, altogether devastating many cities, too, of Asia Minor, among which was

²⁸⁸ There was no Emperor of Constantinople of that name. Probably a confusion has been made with the famous Byzantine general, George Maniches, whose campaign in Sicily at that time was well known in the West. (V.M.)

Ephesus..."²⁸⁹

Thus the reputation of King Edward, already renowned for his holiness in England and Western Europe, was beginning to spread even to the Orthodox East – whither so many exiled English families would soon have to flee.

On another occasion, as Ailred of Rievaulx tells the story, the king attended the service for the consecration of a church at Havering in Essex. As he was coming out of the church, a beggar met him and asked for alms. Edward did not have any money on him at the time; but since he never liked to send beggars away empty-handed, he gave him the costly ring which was on his finger. Some time later, some English pilgrims were in trouble near Bethlehem in the Holy Land. A beggar came up to them and asked them what the matter was. When they had explained it to him, he helped them. Then he gave them a ring and asked them to give it to their king in England, with a message from St. John that for his chaste life he was to inherit the joys of Paradise in six months' time. Edward received the message with joy, realizing that the beggar to whom he had given the ring was St. John the Evangelist and Theologian. And in six months' time he reposed in peace.²⁹⁰

The ring was found again when St. Edward's tomb at Westminster was opened in 1102. A sweet fragrance filled the church, and the body was found to be completely incorrupt. On the finger of his hand was the ring.²⁹¹

In 1163 the tomb was opened again. Frank Barlow writes: "They saw, a little obscured by the mortar and dust which had fallen down, the saint wrapped in a cloth of gold, at his feet purple shoes and slippers, his head and face covered with a round mitre, likewise embroidered with gold, his beard, white and slightly curled, lying neatly on his breast. Joyfully they called over the rest of the party, and as they cleared out the dirt from the tomb, they explored everything gently with their hands. To their relief nothing had changed. The body was still intact and the vestments were only a little dulled and soiled. Six of the monks lifted the body, laid it on a carpet, wrapped it in a precious silk cloth, and placed it in a wooden coffin or feretory, which they had prepared. Everything they found with the body was transferred to the new shrine, except the ring, which Laurence [the abbot of Westminster] removed to preserve as a

²⁸⁹ William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, 225.

²⁹⁰ Ailred, *Vita Sancti Edwardi*, P.L. CXCIV, col. 769. There is another, orally transmitted story about King Edward which may be related to the English pilgrims of this story. Once the king was on horseback near a hunting lodge of his on the southern border of Windsor forest. Suddenly a spring of water gushed out from under the horse's hooves. Realizing that this was a sign from God, the king dismounted and ordered that a well be constructed over the spring in the shape of Jacob's Well at Samaria in the Holy Land. The well continues to exist to this day in the grounds of Sutton Place, Jacobs Well, near Woking, Surrey, and near it a Catholic church dedicated to St. Edward with a statue of the saint wearing a ring on his finger. Could it be that the king, who had never been to the Holy Land himself, constructed the well on the basis of the description given him by the pilgrims?

²⁹¹ Barlow, *Edward the Confessor*, p. 269.

memorial and as a sign of his personal devotion to the saint.”²⁹²

And so the holy king approached his departure from this life. One more public act of his reign remained to be performed: the dedication of his favourite project, the Abbey of St. Peter at Westminster. This act was of great symbolic importance; for according to tradition, the original church built on the site in St. Mellitus’ time had been dedicated, not by hand of man, but by angels²⁹³; and now the last man of truly angelic life in the land of the Angles, King Edward, came to lay the last stone in the edifice of Anglo-Saxon Christianity. Built to atone for his inability to keep a vow he had made to go on pilgrimage to Rome, it became the last monument of English Orthodoxy before its engulfment by the papist heresy.

A great assembly of men from all parts of the land assembled to celebrate Christmas and then the dedication of the church to Christ. Then, as the Monk Sulcard relates, “on Christmas Eve itself, the most kindly king began to get worse. Concealing the fact, however, he spent Christmas day both in the church and in the palace rejoicing with his nobles. But on the morrow, when he could hide it no longer, he began to rest apart, and sent messengers to bid his court be of good cheer and to carry out the dedication of his monastery through fitting persons.”²⁹⁴

The dedication of the abbey church took place on Holy Innocents Day, 1065, as the innocent sufferer lay on his deathbed. The anonymous biographer, writing from eye-witness testimony, continues the story: “When King Edward, replete with faith, perceived that the power of the disease was forcing him to his end, with the commendation and prayers of the most important of God’s faithful he resigned himself to the funeral rites...

“While he slept those in attendance felt in his sleeping body the travail of an unquiet soul, and woken by them in their terror, he spoke these words. (Up till then, for the last two days or more, weakness had so tired him that when he spoke scarcely anything he said had been intelligible.) ‘O eternal God,’ he said, ‘if I have learned those things which have been revealed to me from Thee, grant also the strength to tell them. But if it was only an illusion, let my former sickness burden me according to Thy will.’ And then, as they who were present testify, he used such resources of eloquence that even the healthiest man would have no need of more.

“‘Just now,’ he said, ‘two monks stood before me, whom I had once known very well when I was a young man in Normandy, men of great sanctity, and for many years now relieved of earthly cares. And they addressed me with a message from

²⁹² Barlow, *Edward the Confessor*, p. 282.

²⁹³ For the story, see V. Moss, *Saints of England’s Golden Age*, Seattle: St. Nectarios Press, pp. 59-60.

²⁹⁴ Sulcard, *The History of Westminster*, translated by Frank Barlow in his edition of the *Vita Aedwardi Regis*.

God.

""Since," they said, "those who have climbed to the highest offices in the kingdom of England, the earls, bishops and abbots, and all those in holy orders, are not what they seem to be, but, on the contrary, are servants of the devil, on a year and one day after the day of your death God has delivered all this kingdom, cursed by Him, into the hands of the enemy, and devils shall come through all this land with fire and sword and the havoc of war."

"Then I said to them, "I will show God's designs to the people, and the forgiveness of God shall have mercy upon the penitents. For He had mercy on the people of Nineveh, when they repented on hearing of the Divine indignation."

"But they said, "these will not repent, nor will the forgiveness of God come to pass for them."

""And what," I asked, "shall happen? And when can a remission of this great indignation be hoped for?"

""At that time," they answered, "when a great tree, if cut down in the middle of its trunk, and the part cut off carried the space of three furlongs from the stock, shall be joined again to the trunk, by itself and without the hand of man or any sort of stake, and begin once more to push leaves and bear fruit from the old love of its uniting sap, then first can a remission of these great ills be hoped for."

"When those who were present had heard these words – that is to say, the queen, who was sitting on the floor warming his feet in her lap, her brother, Earl Harold, and Rodbert, the steward of the royal palace and a kinsman of the king, also Archbishop Stigand and a few more whom the blessed king when roused from sleep had ordered to be summoned – they were all sore afraid as men who had heard a speech containing many calamities and a denial of the hope of pity. And while all were stupefied and silent from the effect of terror, the archbishop himself, who ought either to have been the first to fear or give a word of advice, with folly at heart whispered in the ear of the earl that the king was broken with age and disease and knew not what he said. But the queen, and those who had been wont to know and fear God in their hearts, all pondered deeply the words they had heard, and understood them quite otherwise, and correctly. For these knew that the Christian religion was chiefly dishonoured by men in Holy Orders, and that... the king and queen by frequent admonition had often proclaimed this."²⁹⁵

King Edward died on January 5, 1066. The first part of his prophecy was fulfilled exactly; for one year and one day after his death, on January 6, 1067, the feast of

²⁹⁵ Anonymous, *Vita Aedwardi Regis*.

Epiphany or Twelfth Night, Duke William of Normandy, having defeated the English Orthodox at Hastings and been crowned as the first Roman Catholic king of England, set off on the three-and-a-half-year campaign that destroyed the face of the country - the Antichrist had come to England!

Modern historians have accused King Edward of weakness. Humility and chastity in the midst of a corrupt and adulterous generation are not properly thought of as signs of weakness, but rather of great spiritual strength and grace. However, let us concede that St. Edward had a certain weakness: like Tsar-Martyr Nicholas II, whom he resembled so closely, his weakness was that he trusted people too much, and was constantly being betrayed by them.

In 1013 he and his father had been betrayed by the people when they drove him into exile in Normandy. In 1016 the people had again betrayed his brother King Edmund, forcing him into exile again. In 1017 his mother had married his country's conqueror and abandoned him with his brother Prince Alfred in a foreign land. In 1036 his brother had been murdered, and only a few years later, in 1045, he had been forced to marry the daughter of his brother's murderer. He had trusted Archbishop Robert, who was the only man to share his perception of the danger posed by Earl Godwin - but the people forced the expulsion of Robert and the reinstatement of Godwin. He had trusted Earl Harold, but Harold refused to fight against his rebellious brother Tostig. He had trusted the English people when they recalled him from exile in 1043, thereby ending the hated Danish yoke; but the people had often, like the stiff-necked Israelites, longed to return to the spiritual Egypt, as when the Northumbrians, demanded a return to the laws of the Danish Cnut.

And yet as the English Moses lay on his deathbed there were still a few, those who had been his closest attendants, who wept for him. To these he said, as the anonymous biographer recounts it: "'Do not weep, but intercede with God for my soul, and give me leave to go to Him. For He will not pardon me that I should not die Who would not pardon Himself that He should not die.' Then he addressed his last words to the queen who was sitting at his feet, in this wise, 'May God be gracious to this my wife for the zealous sollicitude of her service. For she has served me devotedly, and has always stood close to my side like a beloved daughter. And so from the forgiving God may she obtain the reward of eternal happiness.' And stretching forth his hand to his governor, his brother, Harold, he said, 'I commend this woman and all the kingdom to your protection. Serve and honour her with faithful obedience as your lady and sister, which she is, and do not despoil her, as long as she lives, of any honour she got from me. Likewise I also commend these men who have left their native land for love of me, and have up till now served me faithfully. Take from them an oath of fealty, if they should so wish, and protect and retain them, or send them with your safe conduct safely across the Channel to their own homes with all that they have acquired in my service. Let the grave for my burial be prepared in the minster in the place which shall be assigned to you. I ask that you

do not conceal my death, but announce it promptly in all parts, so that all the faithful can beseech the mercy of Almighty God on me, a sinner.' Now and then he also comforted the queen, who ceased not from lamenting, to erase her natural grief. 'Fear not,' he said, 'I shall not die now, but by God's mercy regain my strength.' Nor did he mislead the attentive, least of all himself, by these words, for he has not died, but has passed from death to life, to live with Christ.

"And so, coming these and like words to his last hour, he took the Viaticum from the table of heavenly life and gave up his spirit to God the Creator on the fourth [more accurately: the fifth] of January... Then could be seen in the dead body the glory of a soul departing to God. For the flesh of his face blushed like a rose, the adjacent beard gleamed like a lily, his hands, laid out straight, whitened, and were a sign that his whole body was given not to death but to auspicious sleep. And so the funeral rites were arranged at the royal cost and royal honour, as was proper, and amid the boundless sorrow of all men. They bore his holy remains from his palace home into the house of God, and offered up prayers and sighs and psalms all that day and the following night. Meanwhile, when the day of the funeral ceremony dawned, they blessed the office of the interment they were to conduct with the singing of masses and the relief of the poor. And so, before the altar of St. Peter the Apostle, the body, washed by his country's tears, is laid up in the sight of God. They also cause the whole of the thirtieth day following to be observed with the celebration of masses and the chanting of psalms and expended many pounds of gold for the redemption of his soul in the alleviation of different classes of the poor. Having been revered as a saint while still living in the world, as we wrote, at his tomb likewise merciful God reveals by these signs that he lives with Him as a saint in heaven. For at the tomb through him the blind receive their sight, the lame are made to walk, the sick are healed, the sorrowing are refreshed by the comfort of God, and for the faith of those who call upon Him, God, the King of kings, works the tokens of His goodness."²⁹⁶

²⁹⁶ Anonymous, *Vita Aedwardi Regis*. St. Edward's body still lies in Westminster Abbey. The papist church celebrates his memory on the day of his repose, January 5, and the day of his translation, October 13.

21. KING HAROLD AND THE NORMAN CONQUEST

The rule of St. Edward brought with it peace and prosperity - but a drastic decline in the moral condition of the people. In this respect, his reign was similar in its significance to that of Tsar Nicholas II. Edward presided over an unprecedented expansion of the Church's influence, which spread from England to Scandinavia, evangelized by English missionaries; and in 1066 there were probably over 10,000 churches and chapels for a population of 1.5 million, with 400 churches in Kent alone.²⁹⁷ But, again like Tsar-Martyr Nicholas, the departure of King Edward, betrayed by many of his subjects, ushered in the fall of the nation and the triumph of the Antichrist.

Thus Edmer of Canterbury wrote of the monks of Christ Church, Canterbury, that they lived "in all the glory of the world, with gold and silver and various elegant clothes, and beds with precious hangings. They had all sorts of musical instruments, which they liked playing, and horses, dogs and hawks, with which they were wont to walk. They lived, indeed, more like earls than monks."²⁹⁸

Again, "several years before the arrival of the Normans," wrote the Anglo-Norman historian William of Malmesbury, "love of literature and religion had decayed. The clergy, content with little learning, could scarcely stammer out the words of the sacraments; a person who understood grammar was an object of wonder and astonishment. The monks mocked the Rule by their fine clothes and wide variety of foods. The nobility, devoted to luxury and lechery, did not go to church in the morning like Christians, but merely, a casual manner, attended Mattins and the Liturgy, hurried through by some priest, in their own chambers amidst the caresses of their wives. The common people, left unprotected, were prey to the powerful, who amassed fortunes by seizing their property or selling them to foreigners (although by nature this people is more inclined to self-accumulation of wealth)... Drinking bouts were a universal practice, occupying entire nights as well as days... The vices attendant on drunkenness, which enervate the human mind, resulted."²⁹⁹ William mentions that there were some good clergy and laymen. Nevertheless, even allowing for some exaggeration, the general picture of decline is clear.

If the curse of God on a sinful people was the ultimate cause of the tragedy, the proximate causes are to be sought in the lust for power of England's external enemies,

²⁹⁷ Loyn, H.R. *Anglo-Saxon England and the Norman Conquest*, London: Longmans, 1970, p. 254; G. Ward, *Archaeologica Cantiana*, vol. XLV, p. 89. However, as regards monasteries, writes Peter Rex, "there are far fewer new foundations between 1020 and 1066 than earlier... There are only three: Abbotsbury (Orc), Coventry (Leofric) and Waltham (Harold)." (*The Last English King. The Life of Harold II*, Stroud: The History Press, 2008, p. 74)

²⁹⁸ Edmer, *Life of St. Dunstan*; quoted in Antonia Gransden, "1066 and All That Revisited", *History*, September, 1988, p. 48.

²⁹⁹ William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, slightly modified from the translation in Gransden, *op. cit.*

and in particular Duke William of Normandy and the Pope of Rome.

Duke William claimed that the kingdom of England had been bequeathed to him by King Edward. As we have seen, however, it was to Earl Harold, not William, that the king bequeathed the kingdom on his deathbed, and this election was confirmed by the Witan immediately after King Edward's death. But William pointed to three facts in defence of his claim and in rejection of Harold's.

First, there was the murder of Prince Alfred in 1036, which almost everybody ascribed to Earl Godwin, the father of Harold.³⁰⁰ However, Harold could not be blamed for the sin of his father, although that is precisely what William of Poitiers did. And there is ample evidence that King Edward had trusted Harold in a way that he had never trusted his father.

Secondly, there was the uncanonical position of Archbishop Stigand, who had been banned by the Pope and who, according to the Norman sources (but not according to the English) had crowned and anointed Harold as king.³⁰¹ William made out that the English Church, as well as being led by an uncanonical archbishop, was in caesaropapist submission to a usurper king.

The irony is that William's own archbishop, Maurilius, had been uncanonically appointed by the Duke, who exerted a more caesaropapist control over his Church than any European ruler before him. But the Pope was prepared to overlook this indiscretion (and the other indiscretion of his uncanonical marriage) in exchange for his military support against the Byzantine empire and England. Thus from 1059 the Normans were given the Pope's blessing to conquer the Greek-speaking possessions of the empire in Southern Italy in the name of St. Peter. And when that conquest was complete, they went on to invade Greece (in the 1080s), and then, during the First Crusade, the Near East, where they established the Norman kingdom of Antioch. For the Normans were the Bolsheviks of eleventh-century Europe, the military right arm of the totalitarian revolution that began in Rome in 1054.

Thirdly, and most seriously in the eyes of eleventh-century Europeans, Harold had broken the oath of fealty that he had taken to William in 1064. Now all the

³⁰⁰ He himself declared that it had not been by either his counsel "or desire that the king's brother had been deprived of his eyes, but that he had only obeyed the commands of King Harold his master" (in Rex, *op. cit.*, p. 27).

³⁰¹ See Ian Walker, *Harold. The Last Anglo-Saxon King*, Sutton Publishing, 2006, p. 138. According to Benton Rain Patterson (*Harold & William: The Battle for England 1064-1066*, Stroud: Tempus, 2002, pp. 60-62), both Stigand and Aldred were present at the coronation, but it was Aldred who poured the chrism on the new king's head. Nicholas Brooks (*The Early History of the Church of Canterbury*, Leicester University Press, 1996, p. 307) also believes that Aldred carried out the ceremony. Geoffrey Hindley points out that on the Bayeux Tapestry Stigand "stands to one side of the enthroned King Harold, not wearing his pallium but displaying it to the spectator. Evidently he had not conducted the coronation" (*A Brief History of the Anglo-Saxons*, London: Robinson, 2006, p. 335).

evidence suggests that this oath was taken under duress, which invalidated it according to the first law in the Code of King Alfred the Great.³⁰² Nevertheless, there can be no doubt that this sin weakened his position...

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When Harold was crowned king, William sent a formal protest to him, which was rejected. William now set about preparing to invade England and depose Harold. Having won the support of his nobles and clergy for his plans, he turned to Abbot Lanfranc of Bec for advice as to whether the Pope would support him.

One of his arguments would have been Harold's perjury, and therefore his unsuitability to be king from the Church's point of view. Also, as Patterson writes, "William perhaps would add to his list of allegations: Harold was a man of flagrantly corrupt morals, a fornicator who had brought children into the world without the benefit of a church-sanctioned marriage; he lived openly with a woman [Edith Swan Neck] who was not his wife; he lived in disdain for and in rebellion against the church's requirements for a Christian family. Surely the Pope did not wish to have such a man as king of England.

"Furthermore, William may have claimed, Stigand, the archbishop - or so-called archbishop - who supposedly heard King Edward designate Harold as his successor, was no more than Harold's family retainer. He was a fraudulent archbishop, illegally appointed while Robert of Jumièges, who was lawfully appointed, still held the office but was forced out of England by Harold and his father. Stigand was appointed solely at the demand of Harold's family, William might have claimed, in order to have him serve Harold's family's ends. The duke might have asked whether Stigand was an example of the church appointments Harold could be expected to make? Could the Pope be willing to place into the hands of a morally corrupt self-server the future of the church in England?

"Lanfranc, familiar with the church's affairs, might have offered some ammunition of his own. Harold and his brothers had persisted in supporting Stigand even though he was under a cloud of suspicion. Harold and his brothers had consistently resisted the reforms that Rome had asked the church in England to make..."³⁰³

The result of this meeting was that, as Professor Douglas writes, "at some undetermined date within the first eight months of 1066 [William] appealed to the papacy, and a mission was sent under the leadership of Gilbert, archdeacon of Lisieux, to ask for judgement in the duke's favour from Alexander II. No records of the case as it was heard in Rome have survived, nor is there any evidence that Harold

³⁰² Michael Wood, *In Search of the Dark Ages*, London: Penguin books, 1994, p. 53.

³⁰³ Patterson, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

Godwineson was ever summoned to appear in his own defence. On the other hand, the arguments used by the duke's representatives may be confidently surmised. Foremost among them must have been an insistence on Harold's oath, and its violation when the earl seized the throne. Something may also have been alleged against the house of Godwine by reference to the murder of the *atheling* Alfred in 1036, and to the counter-revolution of 1052. The duke could, moreover, point to the recent and notable ecclesiastical revival in the province of Rouen, and claim that he had done much to foster it. For these reasons, the reforming papacy might legitimately look for some advantage in any victory which William might obtain over Harold. Thus was the duke of Normandy enabled to appear as the armed agent of ecclesiastical reform against a prince who through his association with Stigand had identified himself with conditions which were being denounced by the reforming party in the Church. Archdeacon Hildebrand, therefore, came vigorously to the support of Duke William, and Alexander II was led publicly to proclaim his approval of Duke William's enterprise."³⁰⁴

Frank McLynn argues that Harold's alleged perjury was "irrelevant because, even if Harold did actually swear the most mighty oath on the most sacred relics, this neither bound Edward in his bequest nor the witan in its ratification; whatever Harold said or did not say, it had no binding power in the matter of the succession."³⁰⁵

In any case, it was the argument concerning Stigand's uncanonicity "that most interested Alexander. William pitched his appeal to the papacy largely on his putative role as the leader of the religious and ecclesiastical reform movement in Normandy and as a man who could clean the Augean stables of church corruption in England; this weighed heavily with Alexander, who, as his joust with Harald Hardrada in 1061 demonstrated, thought the churches of northern Europe far too remote from papal control. It was the abiding dream of the new 'reformist' papacy to be universally accepted as the arbiter of thrones and their succession; William's homage therefore constituted a valuable precedent. Not surprisingly, Alexander gave the proposed invasion of England his blessing.

"Some have wondered why Harold did not send his own embassy to counter William's arguments. Almost certainly, the answer is that he thought it a waste of time on two grounds: the method of electing a king in England had nothing to do with the pope and was not a proper area for his intervention; and, in any case, the pope was now the creature of the Normans in southern Italy and would ultimately do what they ordered him to do. Harold was right: Alexander II blessed all the Norman marauding expeditions of the 1060s.

"But although papal sanction for William's 'enterprise of England' was morally

³⁰⁴ Douglas, *William the Conqueror*, p. 187.

³⁰⁵ McLynn, *1066: The Year of the Three Battles*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1998, p. 182.

worthless, it was both a great propaganda and diplomatic triumph for the Normans. It was a propaganda victory because it allowed William to pose as the leader of crusaders in a holy war, obfuscating and mystifying the base, materialistic motives of his followers and mercenaries. It also gave the Normans a great psychological boost, for they could perceive themselves as God's elect, and it is significant that none of William's inner circle entertained doubts about the ultimate success of the English venture.

"Normandy now seemed the spearhead of a confident Christianity, on the offensive for the first time in centuries, whereas earlier [Western] Christendom had been beleaguered by Vikings to the north, Hungarians to the east and Islam to the south. It was no accident that, with Hungary and Scandinavia recently Christianized, the Normans were the vanguard in the first Crusade, properly so called, against the Islamic heathens in the Holy Land."³⁰⁶

This wider potential gain from an alliance with William seems to have been the pope's main motive for his blessing of the invasion. Harold's perjury and Stigand's uncanonicity were useful excuses, but no more. After all, papal legates had sat with Stigand at a council in 1062, before the invasion, and again at Winchester, after the invasion, in 1070; and he had consecrated Remigius as Bishop of Dorchester in 1067. Alexander clearly overlooked these minor misdemeanours. But the chance of gaining control over the Churches both of Normandy and England if William won, and of a fruitful long-term partnership in the East – that was another matter.³⁰⁷

Alexander finally showed his support for William by giving him, as William of Poitiers writes, "a banner as a pledge of the support of St. Peter". Peter Rex explains that "there was a developing policy of bestowing such banners on those whose activities the papacy wished to endorse. Benedict IX, as early as 1043, had sent to Emperor Henry III, as an endorsement of his campaign against the Hungarians, a *Vexillum ex beati Petri parte*. During the expedition of Pope Leo IX against the Normans in the Papal States in 1053, to defend the Church's territories against their savagery, he had fought under the banner of St. Peter. This was part of a trend towards increasing the use of force, a kind of papal militarism according to some, which included the sending of papal legates and the bestowal of papal approval for military action in support of the papacy. Robert Guiscard was given a banner by Nicholas II in 1059, and others had gone to the Patarine leader Erkembald of Milan and to Roger of Sicily in 1063. Even the leaders of the Barbastro campaign in Spain had received one in 1064, so the gift of a banner to Duke William was by no means a singular event. The trend eventually culminated in the launching of the First

³⁰⁶ McLynn, *op. cit.*, pp. 182-183. The word "crusade" is not inapt in this context. As Fr. John Romanides writes, "William landed on the shores of Britain carrying the papal banner at the head of what was essentially the army of the first Crusade" ("Fr. John Romanides on Robin Hood and Orthodoxy").

³⁰⁷ Walker, *Harold. The Last Anglo-Saxon King*, Sutton Publishing, 2006, pp. 167-169.

Crusade. It was associated with a warlike rhetoric which referred to supporters of the papacy as 'Militia of St. Peter'; the faithful were regarded as soldiers in the service of St. Peter. The arrival of the Reform Party at Rome had been the turning point; they stood for the idea of holy war and sought to put it into practice.

"The bestowal of a banner on William remained a little ambiguous, and he rejected the idea that he had become a papal vassal. The Normans used the gift to promote the idea that the Conquest of England had been a sort of holy war, visiting God's verdict on Harold..."³⁰⁸

"It is quite impossible to understand the events of 1066," writes Simon Schama, "without comprehending the immense significance of the religious and Roman dimension. Between them, William and Lanfranc [abbot of Bec, future archbishop of Canterbury] had managed to convert a personal and dynastic feud into a holy war, and once this was known, many of the nobles who had fought shy of the original proposal flocked to William's sanctified banner. There were not just Normans, but also Bretons and Flemings. The matter of England had now become the cause of Christian Europe, and nothing good could come of this for its new king..."³⁰⁹

The Norman Conquest was indeed a kind of holy war, the first Crusade of the Reform Papacy against the Orthodox Church. However, it is unlikely that William obtained the support of other major European powers for his invasion of England, as William of Poitiers claims. "It is highly unlikely, for example," writes Ian Walker, "that Swein of Denmark gave his backing to William's enterprise. He would be more likely to welcome Harold's accession since the latter might favour aiding his Danish cousin against his Norwegian enemies, as had his father Earl Godwine. It should be noted here that Swein had just emerged from a long and bloody war with Norway and was fearful of further trouble. In this context, William of Poitiers contradicts himself when he later speaks of the Danes sending troops to assist Harold against the Normans. This contradiction somewhat undermines our confidence in the further claim made by Poitiers that the Emperor Henry IV provided his own endorsement for William's claim. This seems unlikely. Henry IV or his regents, since he was still in his minority. Had many other concerns and the contemporary Annals of Corvey compiled in that royal monastery in Saxony were to describe William in 1066 as removing the 'legitimate' King of England (Harold) and seizing his kingdom. What these diplomatic 'successes' described by Poitiers seem to represent is nothing more than the fact that neither Swein nor Henry IV were in a position to interfere directly in William's plans."³¹⁰

Hildebrand was almost certainly reminding William of his support for him at this point when he wrote, on April 24, 1080: "I believe it is known to you, most excellent

³⁰⁸ Rex, *The Last English King. The Life of Harold II*, Stroud: The History Press, 2008, p. 211.

³⁰⁹ Schama, *A History of Britain 1*, London: BBC Publications, 2003, p. 84.

³¹⁰ Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 167.

son, how great was the love I ever bore you, even before I ascended the papal throne, and how active I have shown myself in your affairs; above all how diligently I laboured for your advancement to royal rank. In consequence I suffered dire calumny through certain brethren insinuating that by such partisanship I gave sanction for the perpetration of great slaughter. But God was witness to my conscience that I did so with a right mind, trusting in God's grace and, not in vain, in the virtues you possessed."³¹¹

"Gilbert returned to Rouen," writes Patterson, "bearing not only the great good news [of William's victory] but the papal banner, white with a red cross, which the Pope had given him to present to Duke William, allowing the duke to go to war beneath the symbol of the church's authorisation.

"Gilbert also carried to the duke another gift from the Pope, a heavy gold ring blessed by the holy father and containing, in a tiny compartment covered by the hinged, engraved top of the ring, one of the most sacred relics the Pope could give, an enormously powerful token of divine favour to be borne by the duke into battle – a hair believed to be from the holy head of St. Peter himself..."³¹²

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So at the beginning of 1066 Duke William began to gather a vast army from all round Western Europe in preparation for what became, in effect, the first crusade of the heretical Papacy against the Orthodox Church.

What would have happened if William had lost the case in Rome? John Hudson speculates that "the reformers in the papacy, who had backed William in his quest for the English throne, might have lost their momentum. Normandy would have been greatly weakened..."³¹³ The papacy, too, would have been weakened, dependent as it was on its Norman allies; which raises the intriguing possibility that the whole course of European history might have changed radically for the better, with a possible turning away of the papacy from the anti-Byzantine course and back towards its roots in Orthodox Christianity. And so the dramatic story of that fateful year of 1066 was to decide the destiny of the Western Christian peoples for centuries to come. For if the English had defeated the Normans, it is likely not only that the Norman conquests in the rest of Europe would never have taken place, but also that the power of the heretical papacy would have gone into sharp decline, enabling the forces of true Romanity to recover.

But Divine Providence judged otherwise. For their sins, the Western peoples were counted unworthy of the pearl beyond price, Holy Orthodoxy, which they had

³¹¹ Hildebrand, in Harriet Harvey Wood, *The Battle of Hastings*, London: Atlantic Books, 2008, p. 139.

³¹² Patterson, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

³¹³ Hudson, "The Norman Conquest", *BBC History Magazine*, vol. 4, № 1, January, 2003, p. 23.

bought with such self-sacrificial enthusiasm so many centuries before.

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The anonymous biographer writes that King Harold was handsome, graceful and strong in body; and although he is implicitly critical of Harold's behaviour in 1065 during the Northumbrian rebellion (probably reflecting the views of Queen Edith), he nevertheless calls him wise, patient, merciful, courageous, temperate and prudent in character. That he was both strong and courageous is witnessed not only by his highly successful military career but also by his pulling two men out of the quicksand during his stay with William in 1064.

The fact that he was admired by most Englishmen is shown by his ascending the throne without opposition, although he was not the strongest candidate by hereditary right.³¹⁴ A Waltham chronicler, writing after King Harold's death, wrote that he was elected unanimously; "for there was no one in the land more knowledgeable, more vigorous in arms, wiser in the laws of the land or more highly regarded for his prowess of every kind".³¹⁵ Only after his death did anyone put forward the candidacy of Prince Edgar – and that only half-heartedly. Thus on the English side there was general agreement that, in spite of his broken oath, he was the best man to lead the country.

Harold was both hated and admired by the Normans. Thus William of Poitiers admitted that he was warlike and courageous. And Ordericus Vitalis, writing some 70 years after the conquest, says that Harold "was much admired for his great stature and elegance, for his bodily strength, for his quick-wittedness and verbal facility, his sense of humour and his honest bearing." Whatever his personal sins before he became king, he appears to have tried hard to atone for them once he ascended the throne. Perhaps under the influence of Bishop Wulfstan, he put away his mistress and the mother of six of his children, the beautiful Edith "Swan-neck", and entered into lawful marriage with the sister of Earls Edwin and Morcar, Alditha.³¹⁶

Then, as Florence of Worcester writes, he "immediately began to abolish unjust laws and to make good ones; to patronize churches and monasteries; to pay particular reverence to bishops, abbots, monks and clerics; and to show himself pious, humble

³¹⁴ English tradition did not insist that the next king should be the nearest male kin. At the Council of Chelsea in 787 it was decreed that "kings are to be lawfully chosen by the priests and elders of the people, and are not to be those begotten in adultery or incest". Paul Hill writes: "What mattered more to the succession [than being the eldest son of the king] was the nomination by the existing monarch of his heir and the military and political strength of those brave enough to challenge him. The support of the Witan, or High Council of the country, was also a considerable bonus for any prospective candidate" (*The Road to Hastings*, Stroud: Tempus, 2005, p. 13).

³¹⁵ Quoted in Wood, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

³¹⁶ On Harold's "marriage", *more Danico*, to Edith, and in general on his personal life and character, see Walker, *op. cit.*, chapter 8., and Rex, *op. cit.*

and affable to all good men. But he treated malefactors with great severity, and gave general orders to his earls, ealdormen, sheriffs and thegns to imprison all thieves, robbers and disturbances of the kingdom. He laboured in his own person by sea and by land for the protection of his realm."³¹⁷

Although there had been no open opposition to his consecration as king, one source indicates that "the Northumbrians, a great and turbulent folk, were not ready to submit", just as they had not been ready to submit to King Edward.³¹⁸ Harold needed to be sure that he had the support of the turbulent North. So early in the year he enlisted the aid of Bishop Wulfstan on a peacemaking mission to Northumbria.

"For the fame of [Wulfstan's] holiness," writes William of Malmesbury, "had so found a way to the remotest tribes, that it was believed that he could quell the most stubborn insolence. And so it came to pass. For those tribes, untameable by the sword, and haughty from generation to generation, yet for the reverence they bore to the Bishop, easily yielded allegiance to Harold. And they would have continued in that way, had not Tostig, as I have said, turned them aside from it. Wulfstan, good, gentle, and kindly though he was, spake not smooth things to the sinners, but rebuked their vices, and threatened them with evil to come. If they were still rebellious, he warned them plainly, they should pay the penalty in suffering. Never did his human wisdom or his gift of prophecy deceive him. Many things to come, both on that journey and at other times, did he foretell. Moreover he spake plainly to Harold of the calamities which should befall him and all England if he should not bethink himself to correct their wicked ways. For in those days the English were for the most part evil livers; and in peace and the abundance of pleasant things luxury flourished."³¹⁹

In the spring and summer, as Halley's comet blazed across the sky, the two armies massed on opposite sides of the Channel. While William built a vast fleet to take his men across the Channel, King Harold kept his men under arms and at a high degree of alert all along the southern English coast. By September, William was ready...

However, adverse winds kept him in French ports. King Harold, meanwhile, was forced to let his men go home to bring in the harvest. The English coast was now dangerously exposed...

Pierre Bouet has argued that it was not only adverse winds that kept William in the French ports, but a secret agreement with the Norwegian King Harald Hardrada ("the Ruthless"). Professor François Neveux explains: "This wait [on the French coast] was not in fact due to chance, and a very satisfactory explanation has been

³¹⁷ Florence of Worcester, *Chronicle*; translated in D.C. Douglas & G.W. Greenway (eds.) *English Historical Documents*, London: Eyre & Spottiswood, vol. II, p. 212.

³¹⁸ William of Malmesbury, *Vita Wulstani*, p. 33.

³¹⁹ William of Malmesbury, *Vita Wulstani*, p. 34.

provided recently by Pierre Bouet. William demonstrated a keen sense of strategy, and even a certain Machiavellian cunning. He was not unaware that Harold's army was waiting for him on the beaches. An immediate landing would have led to a bloodbath. But Harold could not keep his troops conscripted indefinitely, especially not the *fyrd*, which was composed of local peasants. William had calculated correctly: on 8 September, Harold discharged his fleet and part of his army and withdrew to London, leaving the coast undefended. He was presumably convinced that William had delayed the invasion until the following spring. But William was still waiting, because he knew that another invasion of England was just then under way.

"We have no knowledge of the relations between William and the King of Norway. Had they negotiated a division of the Kingdom of England? It is not impossible. What is quite likely is that the two pretenders to the throne had made contact. The intermediary may have been Tostig, who had broken with his brother Harold and was now cooperating with his worst enemies, including the King of Norway. We know that Tostig travelled between Norway and Flanders several times during this period, and may also have visited Normandy. Such journeys by sea could have been quite rapid, and information circulated freely between the English Channel and the North Sea. Harald and William were both sly old foxes. Although united against Harold, they were rivals for the kingdom. A joint attack was in both their interests, as it would force Harold to divide his forces. They also knew that whoever attacked first would be at a disadvantage, because Harold's troops would still be fresh. In this game, William had a significant trump card: the climate of Normandy allowed him to wait longer than his partner and rival. In fact, Harold Hardrada did attack first."³²⁰

King Harald Hardrada of Norway invaded Northumbria with the aid of the English King Harold's exiled brother Tostig. According to the medieval Icelandic historian Snorri Sturluson, as the Norwegian Harald was preparing to invade England, he dreamed that he was in Trondheim and met there his half-brother, St. Olaf. And Olaf told him that he had won many victories and died in holiness because he had stayed in Norway. But now he feared that he, Harald, would meet his death, "and wolves will rend your body; God is not to blame." Snorri wrote that "many other dreams and portents were reported at the time, and most of them were ominous."³²¹

After defeating Earls Edwin and Morcar at Gate Fulford on September 20, the Norwegian king triumphantly entered York, whose citizens mainly not only surrendered to him but agreed to march south with him against Harold.³²² This betrayal, in the same city in which St. Constantine the Great, had been proclaimed

³²⁰ Neveux, *A Brief History of the Normans*, London: Constable & Robinson, 2008, pp. 134-135.

³²¹ Sturluson, *King Harald's Saga*, 82; translated by Magnusson & Palsson, Harmondsworth: Penguin books, 1966. Harald of Norway was married to the Kievan princess Elizabeth - another example of the extensive links between the Varangians of Russia and other parts of North-West Europe.

³²² R. Allen Brown, *The Normans and the Norman Conquest*, Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1985, p. 135.

emperor by the Roman legions, was probably decisive in sealing the fate of Orthodox England. It may also be the reason why it was precisely Northumbria that suffered most from William the Conqueror's ravages in 1066-1070...

However, on September 25, after an amazingly rapid forced march (twenty miles a day) from London, the English King Harold arrived in York, and then on to Stamford Bridge, where the Norwegians and rebel English and Flemish mercenaries were encamped. After a long battle in which both sides suffered huge losses, the Norwegian army was destroyed in what Robert Tombs calls "perhaps the most complete annihilation in medieval military history. Hardrada and Tostig were both killed and their army of several thousand men was almost wiped out. This was an event of European importance, as it ended the era of great Viking invasions."³²³

Harriet Harvey Wood confirms this judgement: "If it had not been for what happened so soon afterwards, Stamford Bridge would be remembered as a battle of the highest significance in its own right. The death of Harald Hardrada, the legendary and most feared warrior of his time, and the destruction of his army, marked the end of the Viking age that had influenced so much of Europe, from Byzantium to the Atlantic. It also marked the end of centuries of assault on England; although there were to be sporadic and local attacks thereafter, mainly from Sweyn Estrithson, there would be nothing on the scale of what had gone before. Under any circumstances, it was a remarkable achievement for the last Anglo-Saxon king of England, one that the bones of Alfred, Edward the Elder and Aethelred would have saluted; in the peculiar circumstances of 1066, it was astonishing. But it was not achieved without damage. The Norwegian army may have been virtually destroyed, but they took many Englishmen with them. Between the men lost by Edwin and Morcar at Gate Fulford and those killed and wounded at Stamford Bridge, the fighting strength of the kingdom was much diminished..."³²⁴

The 'C' manuscript of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* ends on the high point of the victory at Stamford Bridge, the last great victory of Orthodox Christianity in the West. But Divine Providence decreed that "the end was not yet"...

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On October 1, while he was celebrating his victory in York, King Harold heard that William, having set out from France on September 27, had landed at Pevensey on the south coast the next day. Although, from a military point of view, he would probably have done better to rest and gather together a large force from all round the country while drawing William further away from his base, thereby stretching his lines of communication, Harold decided to employ the same tactics of forced marches and a lightning strike that had worked so well against the Norwegians. So he

³²³ Tombs, *The English and Their History*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2015, p. 43.

³²⁴ Wood, *op. cit.*, p. 157.

marched his men back down to London.

On the way he stopped at Waltham, a monastery he had founded and endowed to house the greatest holy object of the English Church - the Black Cross of Waltham.

Several years before, this Cross had been discovered in the earth in response to a Divine revelation to a humble priest of Montacute in Somerset. It was placed on a cart drawn by oxen, but the oxen refused to move until the name "Waltham" was pronounced. Then the oxen moved, without any direction from men, straight towards Waltham, which was many miles away on the other side of the country. On the way, 66 miracles of healing were accomplished on sick people who venerated it, until it came to rest at the spot where King Harold built his monastery.³²⁵

Only a few days before, on his way to York, King Harold had stopped at the monastery and was praying in front of the Black Cross when he received a message from Abbot Aethelwine of Ramsey. King Edward the Confessor had appeared to him that night and told him of Harold's affliction of both body and spirit - his anxiety for the safety of his kingdom, and the violent pain which had suddenly seized his leg. Then he said that through his intercession God had granted Harold the victory and healing from his pain. Cheered by this message, Harold received both the healing and the victory.³²⁶

But it was a different story on the way back south.

Harold "went into the church of the Holy Cross and placed the relics which he had in his capella on the altar, and made a vow that if the Lord granted him success in the war he would confer on the church a mass of treasures and a great number of clerics to serve God there and that he himself would serve God as His bought slave. The clergy, therefore, who accompanied him, together with a procession which went before, came to the doors of the church where he was lying prostrate, his arms outstretched in the form of a cross in front of the Holy Cross, praying to the Crucified One.

"An extraordinary miracle then took place. For the image of the Crucifixion, which before had been erect looking upward, when it saw the king humble himself to the ground, lowered its face as if sad. The wood indeed knew the future! The sacristan Turkill claimed that he himself had seen this and intimated it to many while he was collecting and storing away the gifts which the king had placed on the altar. I received this from his mouth, and from the assertion of many bystanders who saw the head of the image erect. But no one except Turkill saw its bending down. When they saw this bad omen, overcome with great sorrow, they sent the senior and most

³²⁵ The story is recounted in the twelfth-century manuscript, *De Inventione Crucis*, translated in V. Moss, *Saints of Anglo-Saxon England*, op. cit., volume III, pp. 55-66.

³²⁶ *Vita Haroldi*, chapter 10.

distinguished brothers of the church, Osegood Cnoppe and Ailric Childemaister, in the company to the battle, so that when the outcome was known they might take care of the bodies of the king and those of his men who were devoted to the Church, and, if the future would have it so, bring back their corpses..."³²⁷

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On October 5, Harold was back in London with his exhausted army. Common sense dictated that he stay there until the levies he had summoned arrived; but instead, to the puzzlement of commentators from the eleventh to the twentieth centuries, he pushed on with yet another a forced march of fifty to sixty miles south, with little rest and no reinforcements. What was the reason for this crucial tactical blunder?³²⁸

David Howarth has argued convincingly that the reason was that Harold now, for the first time, heard (from an envoy of William's) that he and his followers had been excommunicated by the Pope and that William was fighting with the pope's blessing and under a papal banner, with a tooth of St. Peter encrusted in gold around his neck. "This meant that he was not merely defying William, he was defying the Pope. It was doubtful whether the Church, the army and the people would support him in that defiance: at best, they would be bewildered and half-hearted. Therefore, since a battle had to be fought, it must be fought at once, without a day's delay, before the news leaked out. After that, if the battle was won, would be time to debate the Pope's decision, explain that the trial had been a travesty, query it, appeal against it, or simply continue to defy it...

"... This had become a private matter of conscience. There was one higher appeal, to the judgement of God Himself, and Harold could only surrender himself to that judgement: 'May the Lord now decide between Harold and me'. He had been challenged to meet for the final decision and he could not evade it; in order that God might declare His judgement, he was obliged to accept the challenge in person.

"He left London in the evening of 12 October. A few friends with him who knew what had happened and still believed in him: Gyrth and his brother Leofwine, his nephew Hakon whom he had rescued from Normandy, two canons from Waltham already nervous at the miracle they had seen, two aged and respected abbots who carried chain mail above their habits, and - perhaps at a distance - Edith Svanneshals, the mother of his sons. He led the army, who did not know, the remains of his housecarls and whatever men of the fyrd had already gathered in London. The northern earls had been expected with contingents, but they had not come and he could not wait. He rode across London Bridge again and this time down the Dover road to Rochester, and then by the minor Roman road that plunged south through the

³²⁷ *De Inventione Crucis*, chapter 21.

³²⁸ For the view that this was not in fact a blunder, see Walker, *op. cit.*, pp. 169-174.

Andredeswald - the forest now yellow with autumn and the road already covered with fallen leaves. The men of Kent and Sussex were summoned to meet at an ancient apple tree that stood at the junction of the tracks outside the enclave of Hastings. Harold reached that meeting place late on Friday 13, ready to face his judgement; and even while the army was forming for battle, if one may further believe the *Roman de Rou*, the terrible rumour was starting to spread that the King was excommunicated and the same fate hung over any man who fought for him."³²⁹

The only military advantage Harold might have gained from his tactics - that of surprise - was now lost: William had been informed of his movements.

And so it was William who, early on the morning of October 14, "came upon him unexpectedly before his army was set in order," as the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (D, 1066) says. Nevertheless, as William of Poitiers writes, Harold was able to mass his men in "a human fortress" that was to prove very difficult for William's army to break down. "The battle was unusually hard fought and the invaders were suffering heavily from the axes and spears of Harold's men. When William's horse was speared and he was thrown to the ground, the Normans thought he was dead and started to run. William rallied them by pulling back his helmet to show his face and shouting unanswerably that 'if you run you'll all die'. What finally won for William were his armoured cavalry, the close-range shooting of his archers - the two arms that were establishing themselves as dominant in medieval warfare, neither of which the English had - and the numbers and freshness of his warriors. According to another French chronicler, Guy of Amiens, William sent four mounted warriors through the fray to kill Harold, and they cut him to pieces; the Embroidered Bayeux Tapestry seemed to show him with an arrow in his eye; and later the Anglo-Norman historian William of Malmesbury combined the stories to show him shot by an arrow and then dismembered on the ground. However it happened, Harold and his two brothers Gyrth and Leofwine were killed, as were three of Edward the Confessor's nephews. The English nobility was smashed: 'Just as the forest is cut down by the axe, so the English forest was destroyed.' Perhaps 3,500 English and 2,500 Normans were dead."³³⁰

A feature of the battle was the participation of monks and clergy on both sides. This was, of course, contrary to canon law.³³¹ But it was characteristic of the new

³²⁹ Howarth, *1066: The Year of the Conquest*, Milton Keynes: Robin Clark, 1977, pp. 164-165. Patterson (*op. cit.*, pp. 158-159) confirms the story of the excommunication, adding that it was conveyed to Harold by the English-speaking monk Hugh Margot of Fecamp abbey.

³³⁰ Tombs, *op. cit.*, p. 44. "This alternating victory, first of one side and then of the other, continued as long as Harold lived to check the retreat; but when he fell, his brain pierced by an arrow, the flight of the English ceased not until night" (William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*).

³³¹ "An item concerning warfare. Know, that the secular power is quite difference from the spiritual. For it becomes good secular [i.e. lay] men to be defenders of the Church and flock of Christ. But it concerns spiritual [clergy and monks] men to be intercessors for all the people of God. A soldier of Christ ought not to use human arms, as many testimonies declare. Let us begin with that of Our God

medieval confusion of the clerical and the lay estates.

As the Anglo-Norman historian William of Malmesbury said, the English "were few in numbers, but brave in the extreme". Even the Normans admitted that the battle had been close. But God judged in favour of the Normans, said *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, "because of the nation's sins".³³²

The chronicler says that Harold died "with those men who wished to stand by him"? Why this intriguing phrase? *Because many did not wish to stay with him when they learned of the Pope's anathema.* And yet many others stayed, including several churchmen. Why did they stay, knowing that they might lose, not only their bodies, but also, if the anathema was true - their eternal souls? Very few probably knew about the schism of 1054 between Rome and the East, or about the theological arguments - over the Filioque, over unleavened bread at the Liturgy, over the supposed universal jurisdiction of the Pope - that led to the schism. Still fewer, if any, could have come to the firm conclusion that Rome was wrong and Constantinople was right. That Harold had perjured himself in coming to the throne was generally accepted - and yet they stayed with him.

In following Harold, the English who fought and died at Hastings were following their hearts rather than their heads. Their hearts told them that, whatever the sins of the king and the nation, he was still their king and this was still their nation. Surely God would not want them to desert these at the time of their greatest need, in a life-and-death struggle against a merciless invader? Perhaps they remembered the words of Archbishop Wulfstan of York: "By what means shall peace and comfort come to God's servants and God's poor, but through Christ and through a Christian king?"³³³ Almost certainly they were drawn by a grace-filled feeling of loyalty to the Lord's Anointed; for the English were exceptional in their continuing veneration for the monarchy among the peoples of Western Europe.

and Lord Jesus Christ, Who, when He chose to Suffer the torment of the Cross for mankind, and was under custody of the soldiers, forbade Peter to fight with the sword. And if he had not allowance to fight on account of the injury offered to his Lord, what is more agreeable to God saveth not only by the spear and sword? Know that God saveth not only by the spear and sword, but rather by assiduous prayers, and other divine services. Martius also, the holy confessor Christ, when he was commanded by Julian the apostate to bear the military arms, said that he was a soldier of Christ, and therefore could not fight. We have also a useful example from the book of Exodus, viz., while Joshua fought with Amalek, Moses did not fight with weapons, but prayed to God with his hands stretched out toward heaven; and the people of Israel overcame; but when he let down his hands Amalek prevailed. By these and many other examples it is declared that the Bishop, Priest, Deacon, or Monk, should bear no arms in battle, but those only of which it is read, "Above all, taking the shield of faith, by which ye may quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one; take also the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God." (Volume 1, page 220 of Johnson's translation of Canonical Excerpt 160 [161] of Archbishop Egbert of York).

³³² *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, D, 1066.

³³³ Wulfstan, *The Institutes of Polity*, 2; translated in Michael Swanton (ed.) *Anglo-Saxon Prose*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1993, p. 188.

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After Hastings, William could claim that God had decided between him and Harold in his favour. And yet even his Norman bishops were not so sure. Thus in a conciliar enactment of 1070, Ermenfrid of Sion, the papal legate, led them in imposing penances on all of William's men who had taken part in the battle - in spite of the fact that they had fought with the Pope's blessing! The doyen of Anglo-Saxon historians, Sir Frank Stenton, calls this "a remarkable episode"³³⁴, and it requires an explanation... Such an explanation consists in the fact that William's actions just after the battle were unprecedentedly cruel and impious, even by the not very civilized standards of the time. Thus he refused to give the body of King Harold, which had been hideously mutilated by the Normans, to his mother for burial, although she offered him the weight of the body in gold. Eventually, the monks of Waltham, with the help of Harold's former mistress, Edith "Swan-neck", found the body and buried it, as was thought, in Waltham.

However, there is now compelling evidence that the mutilated remains discovered in a splendid coffin in Godwin's family church at Bosham on April 7, 1954 are in fact the body of the last Orthodox king of England. In fact, two royal coffins were found on that date. One was found to contain the bones of a daughter of King Cnut, who had drowned at a young age. The other, "magnificently furnished" coffin contained the bones of a middle-aged man, but with no head and with several of the bones fractured. It was supposed that these were the bones of Earl Godwin, the father of King Harold.

For several years no further attention was paid to this discovery. Recently, however, a local historian, John Pollock, has re-examined all the evidence relating to the bones in the second coffin and has come to the conclusion that they belong to none other than King Harold himself. Pollock points out, first, that they could not belong to Earl Godwin, because, according to the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, Godwin was buried in Winchester, not Bosham. Secondly, the bones are in a severely mutilated state, which does not accord with what we know about Godwin's death. However, this *does* accord with what we know about King Harold, for he was savagely hacked to pieces by four knights at Hastings. As the earliest account of the battle that we have, by Guy, Bishop of Amiens, says: "With the point of his lance the first (William) pierced Harold's shield and then penetrated his chest, drenching the ground with his blood, which poured out in torrents. With his sword the second (Eustace) cut off his head, just below where his helmet protected him. The third (Hugh) disembowelled him with his javelin. The fourth (Walter Giffard) hacked off his leg at the thigh and hurled it far away. Struck down in this way, the dead body lay on the ground."

³³⁴ Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971, p. 653. See also J.E. Cross, "The Ethic of War in Old English", in Peter Clemons & Kathleen Hughes (eds.), *England before the Conquest*, Cambridge University Press, 1971, p. 282.

Moreover, the Bayeux Tapestry clearly shows the sword of one of the knights cutting into the king's left thigh - and one of the bones in the coffin is precisely a fractured left thigh bone. Thirdly, although the sources say that Harold was buried in the monastery he founded at Waltham, his body has never been found there or anywhere else. However, the most authoritative of the sources, William of Poitiers, addresses the dead Harold thus: "Now you lie there *in your grave by the sea*: by generations yet unborn of English and Normans you will ever be accursed..." The church at Bosham is both by the sea and not far from the field of battle...

Therefore the grieving monks who are said to have buried King Harold's body at Waltham, could in fact have buried it in his own, family church by the sea at Bosham. Or, more likely, William himself buried it at Bosham, since the church passed into his possession, and he is said to have ordered its burial "on the sea-shore". But this was done in secret, because the Normans did not want any public veneration of the king they hated so much, and the Church could not tolerate pilgrimages to the grave of this, the last powerful enemy of the "reformed Papacy" in the West. And so the rumour spread that Harold had survived the battle and had become a secret hermit in the north - a rumour that we can only now reject with near-certainty.³³⁵

³³⁵ Pollock, *Haroldus Rex*, Bosham: Penny Royal Publications, 1996. In 2003 a petition that the remains be exhumed so that their identity could be established through scientific means, including DNA testing, was rejected by the Chancellor of the Diocese of Chichester. See <http://www.bosham.org/bosham-magazine/history/King-Harold-remains.htm>.

22. THE HARROWING OF THE NORTH

After his victory at Hastings, William the Conqueror made slow, S-shaped progress through Kent, Surrey, Hampshire and across the Thames at Wallingford to Berkhamstead north of London. As he was approaching London, near St. Alban's, the shrine of the protomartyr of Britain, he found the road blocked, according to Matthew of Paris, "by masses of great trees that had been felled and drawn across the road. The Abbot of St. Albans was sent for to explain these demonstrations, who, in answer to the king's questions, frankly and fearlessly said, 'I have done the duty appertaining to my birth [he was of royal blood] and calling; and if others of my rank and profession had performed the like, as they well could and ought, it had not been in thy power to penetrate into the land so far.' Not long after, that same Frederic was at the head of a confederacy, determined, if possible, to compel William to reign like a Saxon prince, that is, according to the ancient laws and customs, or to place... Edgar Atheling in his room. William submitted for a time, and, in a great council at Berkhamstead, swore, upon all the relics of the church of St. Albans, that he would keep the laws in question, the oath being administered by Abbot Frederic. In the end, however, the Conqueror grew too strong to be coerced by any measures, however nationally excellent or desirable, and he does not seem to have cared much about oath breaking, unless it was *he* who had enacted the oath, - the unhappy Harold, for instance, found *that* no light matter - and so William became more oppressive than ever. St. Albans, as might have been anticipated, suffered especially from his vengeance, he seized all its lands that lay between Barnet and Londonstone, and was with difficulty prevented from utterly ruining the monastery. As it was, the blow was enough for Frederic, who died of grief in the monastery of Ely, whither he had been compelled to flee."³³⁶

In November the Conqueror stayed in Canterbury, from which Archbishop Stigand had fled in order to join the national resistance in London. One night, St. Dunstan was seen leaving the church by some of the brethren. When they tried to detain him he said: "I cannot remain here on account of the filth of your evil ways and crimes in the church."³³⁷

On December 6, 1067, it was burned to the ground...

William continued his march, systematically devastating the land as he passed through it. Early in December he was in Southwark, burnt it, and drove off Prince Edgar's troops at London Bridge.

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³³⁶ Translated in *Old England: A Pictorial Museum of Regal, Ecclesiastical, Baronial, Municipal and Other Popular Antiquities*, 1845, reprinted by Arno Press, New York, 1978, p. 195.

³³⁷ Osbern of Canterbury, *Vita Dunstani*; in Stubbs, *Memorials of St. Dunstan*, Rolls series, 1874, p. 142.

Important defections from the English side began to take place. The first was Edith, King Edward's widow and King Harold's sister, who gave him the key city of Winchester. Then Archbishop Stigand submitted to him at Wallingford. And at Berkhamstead, according to the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, "he was met by Bishop Aldred [of York], Prince Edgar, Earl Edwin, Earl Morcar, and all the best men from London, who submitted out of necessity."

Finally, on Christmas Day - how fateful has that day been, both for good and ill, in English history! - he was crowned king by Archbishop Aldred. "And William gave a pledge on the Gospels, and swore an oath besides, before Aldred would place the crown on his head, that he would govern this nation according to the best practice of his predecessors if they would be loyal to him."³³⁸

The Londoners also suffered from their new master. During William's coronation service, Archbishop Aldred first asked the English in English if it was their will that William be made king. They assented. Then Geoffrey, bishop of Coutances, addressed the Normans in French with the same question. When they, too, assented, those who were standing guard outside the Abbey became alarmed because of the shouting, and started to set fire to the city.

Professor Allen Brown writes: "Orderic Vitalis, in a vivid passage, describes how panic spread within the church as men and women of all degrees pressed to the doors in flight, and only a few were left to complete the coronation of King William, who, he says, was 'violently trembling'. For William this must indeed have been the one terrifying moment of his life... He believed implicitly in his right to England, and God had seemed to favour that right and to deliver His judgement on the field of Hastings. And now, at the supreme moment of anointing and sanctification at his coronation, when the Grace of God should come upon him and make him king and priest, there came a great noise, and the windows of the abbey church lit up with fire, and people fled all about him. It must have seemed to him then that in spite of all previous signs and portents he was wrong, unworthy, that his God had turned against him and rejected both him and his cause, and it is no wonder that he trembled until the awful moment had passed and the world came right again."³³⁹

After the festivities, and after giving instructions for the building of wooden castles all over the land, William returned to Normandy taking all the chief men of England with him as hostages.

"'When the castles were built, they filled them with devils and wicked men... they levied taxes on the villages... they robbed and burned.' Thousands of colonists

³³⁸ *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, D, 1066.

³³⁹ Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 158.

followed in their wake. There was a prolonged free-for-all at the local level as the victors advanced up to the still fluid and disputed northern and western marchlands.”³⁴⁰

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“At first,” writes François Neveux, “the new king hoped that he could win round his former adversaries. He considered that he had been quite within his rights to conquer the country, since he had been promised the throne by the previous king, Edward. ‘God’s judgement’ having favoured him, he assumed that the English would all rally to him without any problem... At first, William presented himself as the successor of the Anglo-Saxon kings, not only Edward, but Harold also. He drafted a number of documents in Old English, and made an effort to learn the language of his new people. This attitude may be glimpsed in the Bayeux Tapestry, which is one of the first testimonies we possess of these events. In it, Harold is referred to as ‘king’, just as he is in a number of charters. He is even singled out and praised for his bravery. The Latin commentary is very neutral, and may be read in both a pro-English and a pro-Norman light. This early line only lasted a few years, until it came up against the harsh reality of Anglo-Saxon rebellions...”³⁴¹

In December, 1067, William returned to England, and quickly put down rebellions in Kent and Hertfordshire. Then a more serious rebellion broke out in Exeter, led by King Harold’s mother Countess Gytha and her older grandsons. Thither William marched with a combined army of Normans and Englishmen, and after a siege of eighteen days the city surrendered; which was followed by the submission of the Celts of Cornwall, and the cities of Gloucester and Bristol.

Meanwhile, in the North resistance was gathering around Earl Morcar, who had been allowed to return from Normandy with Earl Waltheof of Bamburgh; and there was a threat of interventions by King Malcolm of Scotland, who was sheltering Prince Edgar and had married his sister Margaret, and by King Swein of Denmark. After spending Pascha, 1068 at Winchester, William marched swiftly north and built castles in Warwick and York, where he received the submission of the local magnates and secured a truce with the Scottish king. Then he turned southward to secure the submission of Lincoln, Huntingdon and Cambridge.

But on January 28, 1069, the Norman, Robert Cumin, whom William had appointed earl of Northumbria north of the Tees was attacked in the streets of Durham and burnt to death in the house of Bishop Aethelwine. This was followed by an uprising in York, and Prince Edgar prepared to move from Scotland.

However, as Marc Morris writes, William “wasted no time in returning to England

³⁴⁰ Tombs, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

³⁴¹ Neveux, *The Normans*, Philadelphia: Running Press, 2008, p. 139.

to crush this revolt, raising the siege and dispersing the rebels. On this occasion there were no submissions. In expectation of further trouble, he ordered a second castle to be constructed on the opposite bank of the Ouse, and left William FitzOsbern in command of the city."³⁴² Gospatric was appointed as earl. Then, in the early summer of 1069, he returned to Normandy.

Almost immediately, however, a Danish fleet of about 240 ships sailed into the Humber. It seems that the English were now prepared to accept the Danish king Swein as their own king; for the Danes were joined by Edgar, Gospatric and Earl Waltheof.

First they destroyed the Norman garrison at York, Waltheof "cutting of their heads one by one" as they tried to escape.³⁴³ Then they encamped on the southern shore of the Humber, fortifying the Isle of Axholme. This was the signal for other uprisings in Dorset, in the fens under Hereward the Wake, and in the Welsh Borders under Edric the Wild. "The Danes were welcomed by the local people, and helped Hereward recapture Peterborough in 1070 – but they then departed with the abbey treasures".³⁴⁴

The rebels were defeated and the Danes were paid to return home. The consequences of this last major uprising against William's rule were described by the great French historian Thierry: "The conquering army, whose divisions covered a space of a hundred miles, traversed this territory... in all directions, and the traces of their passage through it were deeply imprinted. The old historians relate that, from the Humber to the Tyne, not a piece of cultivated land, not a single inhabited village remained. The monasteries which had escaped the ravages of the Danish pagans, that of St. Peter near Wear, and that of Whitby inhabited by women, were profaned and burned. To the south of the Humber, according to the early narrators, the ravage was no less dreadful. They say, in their passionate language, that between York and the eastern sea, every living creature was put to death, from man to beast, excepting only those who took refuge in the church of St. John the archbishop [of York, +721], at Beverley. This John was a saint of the English race; and, on the approach of the conquerors, a great number of men and women flocked, with all that they had most valuable, round the church dedicated to their blessed countryman, in order that, remembering in heaven that he was a Saxon, he might protect them and their property from the fury of the foreigner. The Norman camp was then seven miles from Beverley. It was rumoured that the church of St. John was the refuge of the rich and depository of the riches of the country. Some adventurous scouts, who by the contemporary history are denominated knights, set out under the command of one Toustain, in order to be the first to seize the prize. They entered Beverley without resistance; marched to the church-yard, where the terrified crowd were assembled; and passed its barriers, giving themselves not more concern about the Saxon saint

³⁴² Morris, "The Anglo-Saxons' Last Stand", *BBC History Magazine*, January, 2017, p. 37.

³⁴³ Ann Williams, *The English and the Norman Conquest*, Woodridge: Boydell, 1995, p. 57.

³⁴⁴ Tombs, *op. cit.*, pp. 45-46.

than about the Saxons who invoked him. Toustain, the chief of the band, casting his eye over the groups of English, observed an old man richly clad, with gold bracelets in the fashion of his nation. He galloped towards him with his sword drawn, and the terrified old man fled to the church: Toustain pursued him; but he had scarcely passed the gates, when, his horse's feet slipping on the pavement, he was thrown off and stunned by the fall. At the sight of their captain half dead, the rest of the Normans turned round; and their imaginations being excited, hastened full of dread to relate this terrible example of the power of John of Beverley. When the army passed through, no one dared again to tempt the vengeance of the blessed saint; and... the territory of his church alone remained covered with habitations and produce, in the midst of the devastated country...

"... Famine, like a faithful companion of the conquest, followed their footsteps. From the year 1067, it had been desolating some provinces, which alone had then been conquered; but in 1069 it extended itself through the whole of England and appeared in all its horror in the newly conquered territories. The inhabitants of the province of York and the country to the north, after feeding on the horses which the Norman army abandoned on the roads, devoured human flesh. More than a hundred thousand people, of all ages, died of want in these countries."³⁴⁵

According to the Norman writer Ordericus Vitalis, "So terrible a famine fell upon the people, that more than 100,000 Christian folk of both sexes, young and old alike, perished of hunger... Nowhere else had William shown such cruelty. Shamefully he succumbed to this vice, for he made no effort to restrain his fury and punished the innocent with the guilty... My narrative has frequently had occasion to praise William, but for this act which condemned the innocent and guilty alike to die by slow starvation, I cannot commend him..."³⁴⁶

Marc Morris adds: "Another 12th-century writer, John of Worcester, reported that people were reduced to eating horses, dogs, cats and even human flesh. Simeon of Durham, adding to John's account, asserted that the land between York and Durham lay uncultivated for the next nine years, its deserted villages haunted only by wild beasts and robbers."³⁴⁷

This was surely the first genocide in European history...

"It is sometimes objected that these 12th-century chroniclers are too late to be credible, and that more closely contemporary accounts are not as sensational or as

³⁴⁵ Thierry, *History of the Conquest of England by the Normans*, London: Dent, 1840, vol. I, pp. 214-217.

³⁴⁶ Ordericus, *Ecclesiastical History*.

³⁴⁷ "So great a famine prevailed that men, compelled by hunger, devoured human flesh, that of horses, dogs and cats, and whatever custom abhors... It was horrific to behold human corpses decaying in the houses, the streets and the roads." (in Jim Bradbury, *The Battle of Hastings*, Stroud: The History Press, 2010, pp. 168, 176). (V.M.)

judgmental. But there is enough earlier evidence to corroborate the claims of earlier writers. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, a telegraphically terse account for this period, reports that William went to Yorkshire in 1069 and 'ruined it completely'. William of Jumièges, who was possibly writing his *Deeds of the Norman Dukes* at the behest of the Conqueror himself, described how the king 'massacred almost the whole population, from the very young to the old and grey'.

"Marianus Scotus, writing in Germany in the 1070s, reported that famine in England had caused people to resort to cannibalism, substantiating the account of John of Worcester. Most compelling of all, the late 11th-century chronicler at Evesham Abbey in Worcestershire penned a haunting picture of starving refugees turning up in great numbers at the abbey gates, only to die from exhaustion, or 'through eating food too ravenously' – a line that recalls the tragic fate of some of those liberated from Nazi concentration camps. 'Every day,' the Evesham chronicler lamented, 'five or six people, sometimes more, perished miserably, and were buried by the prior of this place.'...

"In the chronicles that cover the northern shires – and, most especially, Yorkshire – the word that occurs time and again in 'waste' (Latin: *vasta*). And the counties with the most waste were those of northern England and the Welsh Marches, harried by William in 1069-70, and also Sussex, which had been ravaged during the Hastings campaign. But the overwhelming majority of waste was concentrated in Yorkshire, which accounted for more than 80 percent of the total for all of England. Other shires had recovered their values by the time of the survey, but in Yorkshire almost two-thirds of all holdings were still described as waste in 1086. Since 1066 the shire had lost more than 80,000 oxen and 150,000 people.." from a total population in the whole of England of about two million.³⁴⁸

Professor Douglas writes: "An eleventh-century campaign was inevitably brutal, but the methods here displayed were widely regarded as exceptional and beyond excuse, even by those who were otherwise fervent admirers of the Norman king... 'I am more disposed to pity the sorrows and sufferings of the wretched people than to undertake the hopeless task of screening one who was guilty of such wholesale massacre by lying flatteries. I assert moreover that such barbarous homicide should not pass unpunished.' Such was the view of a monk in Normandy. A writer from northern England supplies more precise details of the horrible incidents of the destruction, and recalls the rotting and putrefying corpses which littered the highways of the afflicted province. Pestilence inevitably ensued, and an annalist of Evesham tells how refugees in the last state of destitution poured into the little town. Nor is it possible to dismiss these accounts as rhetorical exaggeration, for twenty years later *Domesday Book* shows the persisting effects of the terrible visitation, and

³⁴⁸ Morris, "'The Conqueror Massacred Almost the Whole Population, from the Very Young to the Old and Grey'", *BBC History Magazine*, November, 2019, pp. 26-27; "'What the Normans did for Us'", *BBC History Magazine*, November, 2016, p. 34.

there is evidence that these endured until the reign of Stephen...³⁴⁹

So terrible was the slaughter, and the destruction of holy churches and relics, that the Norman bishops who took part in the campaign were required to do penance when they returned home. But the Pope who had blessed this unholy slaughter did no penance. Rather, he sent his legates to England, who, at the false council of Winchester in 1070, deposed Archbishop Stigand and most of the English bishops, thereby integrating the "rebellious" land into his religious empire. For the Norman Conquest was, in effect, the first crusade of the "reformed" Papacy against Orthodox Christendom. As Professor Douglas writes: "It is beyond doubt that the latter half of the eleventh century witnessed a turning-point in the history of Western Christendom, and beyond doubt Normandy and the Normans played a dominant part in the transformation which then occurred... They assisted the papacy to rise to a new political domination, and they became closely associated with the reforming movement in the Church which the papacy came to direct. They contributed also to a radical modification of the relations between Eastern and Western Europe with results that still survive. The Norman Conquest of England may thus in one sense be regarded as but part of a far-flung endeavour..."³⁵⁰

Before leaving events in the north, we should not forget to mention the influence of the greatest saint of the north, St. Cuthbert (+687). After the violent death of William's appointee, Robert Comin, in Durham, another expedition was sent by William to restore order. But St. Cuthbert's power, which had terrified unholy kings in the past, had not abandoned his people. For the expedition, writes C.J. Stranks, "was turned back by a thick mist, sent for the protection of his people by St. Cuthbert, when the army reached Northallerton. Then the king himself came. The frightened monks [led by Bishop Aethelwine of Durham] decided to take refuge at Lindisfarne and, of course, to take the body of their saint with them. When they reached the shore opposite to the island night had fallen and there was a storm raging. It looked as if their way was blocked, for the sea covered the causeway. They were tired and frightened and at their wits' end, when miraculously, as it seemed to them, the sea withdrew and the path to the island lay open...

"Their stay was not long, for they were back in Durham by the beginning of Lent, 1070. Two years later William the Conqueror himself felt the saint's power. He was staying in Durham for a little while on his way home from Scotland in order to begin building the castle there. Perhaps he had heard of the flight to Lindisfarne, for he thought it necessary to take an oath of the monks that St. Cuthbert's body was really at Durham. But he was still not convinced, and ordered that the tomb should be opened on All Saints' Day, threatening that if the body was not there he would execute all the officers of the monastery. The day arrived. Mass was begun, when suddenly the king was seized by a violent fever. It was obvious that the saint was

³⁴⁹ Douglas, *William the Conqueror*, p. 221.

³⁵⁰ Douglas, *William the Conqueror*, pp. 6-7.

angry at his temerity. William left the church, mounted his horse and never looked back until he had crossed the Tees and was safely out of the Patrimony of St. Cuthbert..."³⁵¹

"Judgement begins at the House of God" (I Peter 4.17), and God's judgement was indeed very heavy on the formerly pious English land, especially on the North, which had refused to help Harold and which was devastated with extraordinary cruelty by William... But then God takes His vengeance even on the instruments of His wrath (Isaiah 10.15). Thus when William was dying, as the Norman monk Ordericus Vitalis recounts, his conscience tormented for his deeds: "I appoint no one my heir to the crown of England, but leave it to the disposal of the eternal Creator, Whose I am, and Who ordereth all things. For I did not obtain that high honour by hereditary right, but wrested it from the perjured King in a desperate battle, with much effusion of human blood; and it was by the slaughter and banishment of his adherents that I subjugated England to my rule. I have persecuted its native inhabitants beyond all reason. Whether gentle or simple, I have cruelly oppressed them; many I unjustly disinherited; innumerable multitudes, especially in the county of York, perished through me by famine or the sword. Thus it happened: the men of Deira and other people beyond the Humber called in the troops of Sweyn, king of Denmark, as their allies against me, and put to the sword Robert Comyn and a thousand soldiers within the walls of Durham, as well as others, my barons and most esteemed knights, in various places. These events inflamed me to the highest pitch of resentment, and I fell on the English of the northern shires like a ravening lion. I commanded their houses and corn, with all their implements and chattels, to be burnt without distinction, and large herds of cattle and beasts of burden to be butchered wherever they were found. It was thus that I took revenge on the multitudes of both sexes by subjecting them to the calamity of a cruel famine; and by so doing - alas! - became the barbarous murderer of many thousands, both young and old, of that fine race of people. Having, therefore, made my way to the throne of that kingdom by many crimes, I dare not leave it to anyone but God alone, lest after my death worse should happen by my means..."³⁵²

But this confession evidently was not enough to expiate his guilt in the eyes of God. For, as Thierry writes, following Ordericus Vitalis, the horrific events surrounding his burial showed that the wrath of God on this "eleventh-century Bolshevik" and servant of papism was on him still. "His medical and other attendants, who had passed the night with him, seeing that he was dead, hastily mounted their horses, and rode off to take care of their property. The serving-men and vassals of inferior rank, when their superiors had fled, carried off the arms, vessels, clothes, linen, and other movables, and fled likewise, leaving the corpse naked on the floor. The king's body was left in this situation for several hours... At length some of the clergy, clerks and monks, having recovered the use of their

³⁵¹ Stranks, *The Life and Death of St. Cuthbert*, London: SPCK, 1964, pp. 34-35.

³⁵² Ordericus Vitalis, *Ecclesiastical History*; translated in Douglas & Greenway, *op. cit.*, pp. 286-287.

faculties, and collected their strength, arrayed a procession. Clad in the habits of their order, with crosses, tapers, and censers, they approached the corpse, and prayed for the soul of the deceased. The Archbishop of Rouen, named Guillaume, ordered the king's body to be conveyed to Caen, and buried in the basilica of St. Stephen, the first martyr, which he had built in his lifetime. But his sons, his brothers - all his relatives - were afar off: not one of his officers was present - not one offered to take charge of his obsequies; and an obscure countryman named Herluin, through pure good nature, and for the love of God (say the historians), took upon himself the trouble and expense. He hired a cart and attendants, had the body conveyed to the port on the Seine, from thence on a barge down the river, and by sea to Caen. Gilbert, Abbot of St. Stephen's, with all his monks, came to meet the coffin; and was joined by many clerks and laymen; but a fire suddenly appearing, broke up the procession... The inhumation of *the great chief - the famous baron* - as the historians of the time call him - was interrupted by fresh occurrences. On that day were assembled all the bishops and abbots of Normandy. They had the grave dug in the church, between the altar and the choir; the mass was finished, and the body was about to be lowered, when a man rose up amid the crowd, and said, with a loud voice - 'Clerks, and bishops, this ground is mine - upon it stood the house of my father. The man for whom you pray wrested it from me to build on it his church. I have neither sold my land, nor pledged it, nor forfeited it, nor given it. It is my right. I claim it. In the name of God, I forbid you to put the body of the spoiler there, or to cover it with my earth.' He who thus lifted up his voice was Asselin son of Arthur; and all present confirmed the truth of his words. The bishops told him to approach; and, making a bargain with him, delivered to him sixty sols as the price of the place of sepulture only, and engaged to indemnify him equitably for the rest of the ground. On this condition it was the corpse of the vanquisher of the English was received into the ground dug for its reception. At the moment of letting it down, it was discovered that the stone coffin was too narrow; the assistants attempted to force the body, and it burst. Incense and perfumes were burned in abundance, but without avail: the people dispersed in disgust; and the priests themselves, hurrying through the ceremony, soon deserted the church..."³⁵³

³⁵³ Thierry, *op. cit.*, pp. 320-322.

23. THE ECCLESIASTICAL REBELS

The Church had been the mainstay of the monarchy in Anglo-Saxon England right until the death of King Harold at Hastings. Moreover, the Church was a major landowner. It was therefore understandable that the Normans should pay close attention to its leaders.

The brother bishops Aethelric and Aethelwine were among the last ecclesiastical opponents of the Norman-papist conquest of England. They were successively bishops of the northern English see of Durham, where the relics of the great saints of north, St. Oswald, St. Cuthbert and St. Bede resided.

Aethelric was a monk at Peterborough Abbey before Bishop Edmund of Durham brought him to Durham to instruct the Durham monks in the monastic life. He was consecrated Bishop of Durham on January 11, 1041 at York. After the death of Earl Siward of Northumbria, Aethelric's protector, in 1055, and the appointment of the violent and unpopular Earl Tostig in his place, conditions deteriorated in the northern province, and Aethelric, under pressure from the unruly monks of Durham, was forced to resign his see and retire to Peterborough Abbey in 1056.

He was replaced by his brother Aethelwine. In 1059, St. Aethelwine went with Earl Tostig, Archbishop Cynesige of York and King Malcolm III of Scotland to the court of King Edward the Confessor. In 1065 he oversaw the translation of the relics of Martyr-King Oswine of Deira to his cathedral in Durham. Æthelwine, like his brother, was unpopular with the clergy of his cathedral, mainly because he was an outsider and had been installed in office without any input from the cathedral chapter. In 1065, the monks of Æthelwine's cathedral chapter were leaders in the revolt against Earl Tostig, which was successful, forcing Tostig to flee abroad, although Æthelwine remained as bishop.

After the Norman conquest, the brother-bishops initially submitted to William. Æthelwine also brought word from King Malcolm that the Scottish king wished to live in peace with the new English king. King William sent Æthelwine back to Malcolm's court with William's terms, which were accepted.

However, the relationship of both brother-bishops to William changed in 1069, when the Northumbrians rebelled against the Normans and King William marched north to subdue them in the horrific campaign of genocide that we have just described, which left the north devastated for generations. Æthelwine solemnly cursed the invader in the burned-out core of York cathedral on September 11, 1069, and then fled with many Northumbrian treasures (including the body of St. Cuthbert), first to Lindisfarne, and then to Scotland.

As Orderic Vitalis wrote, "the English groaned aloud for their lost liberty and plotted ceaselessly to find some way of shaking off a yoke that was so intolerable and unaccustomed" ... In 1071 the last remnants of the English resistance, led by Earls Edwin, Morcar and Siward and joined by Bishop Aethelwine, sought refuge in the island monastery of Ely in East Anglia. There, under the leadership of Hereward the Wake, they made frequent sallies against William's men. At Pascha 1071, William attacked Peterborough, plundered its treasures, and then proceeded to Ely, which became the scene of the last stand of the Free English.

However, Hereward's men put up a strong resistance, and the "most Christian" King William then resorted to a most infamous tactic - he called in a *witch*, put her onto a tower over the fens and ordered her to cast spells on the English. But this, too, failed to work - the English launched a successful counter-attack, and the witch fell from her tower and broke her neck. Finally, it was through the abbot and monks (with the connivance of Earl Morcar) that William conquered the stronghold; for, considering it "their sacred duty," as the *Book of Ely* put it, "to maintain their magnificent temple of God and St. Etheldreda", they came to terms with William, and in exchange for promises that their lands would be restored and confirmed, they guided the Normans secretly into the rebel stronghold.³⁵⁴

Hereward and his men escaped; but others did not. As Kightly writes, many must have wondered "whether surrender had been such a good idea after all. 'The king caused all the defenders to be brought before him, first the leaders and then anyone else of rank or fame. Some he sent to perpetual imprisonment' - among them the deluded Morcar, Siward and Bishop Aethelwine - 'others he condemned to lose their eyes, their hands or their feet' - William rarely hanged men, preferring to give them time for repentance - 'while most of the lesser folk he released unpunished.' Then, to ensure that Ely would not trouble him again, he ordered that a castle be built in the monastic precinct (where its mound still stands)..."³⁵⁵

"Next, going to the abbey, 'he stood as far as possible from the tomb of the holy Etheldreda, and threw a gold piece to her altar: he dared not go any closer, because he feared the judgement of God on the wrong he was doing to her shrine.' And well he might, for though the monks kept their estates and their English abbot, King William soon found an excuse to levy an immense fine on them, so that they were forced to sell almost all the adornments of their church: when their payment proved a few coins short, he increased his demands still further, and they lost the few treasures that remained. 'But even after all this,' mourns the *Ely Book*, 'no one believed that they would be left in peace' - and nor were they."³⁵⁶

³⁵⁴ Charles Kightly, "The English Resistance", in *Folk Heroes of Britain*, London: Thames & Hudson, 1982, pp. 133-134. See also Morris, *op. cit.*

³⁵⁵ Kightly, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

³⁵⁶ Kightly, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

The fates of the rebels were various. After further adventures, Hereward was eventually reconciled with William... But Aethelwine was caught, outlawed and imprisoned in Abingdon. He died of hunger in the winter of 1071-72.

Meanwhile, his brother Aethelric, who had been living in retirement in Peterborough, was brought from there, condemned for "piracy" and imprisoned in Westminster Abbey. There he lived for two more years "in voluntary poverty and a wealth of tears"³⁵⁷, and was never reconciled with William. He died on October 15, 1072, was buried in the chapel of St. Nicholas, and was very soon considered a saint, miracles being wrought at his tomb.³⁵⁸ For "those who had known him when living," writes William of Malmesbury, "transmitted his memory to their children, and to this day [c. 1120] neither visitors nor supplicants are wanting at his tomb."³⁵⁹

Another English leader, Earl Waltheof, should be mentioned. He had joined the rebellion of the Northumbrians in 1069, but then submitted to William and married his daughter Judith, accepting the earldom of Northumbria. "After the capture of Ely," writes Peter Rex, he "was given many of the estates forfeited by the rebels. He was to remain in office until his involvement in the Rising of the Earls in 1075."³⁶⁰ He was beheaded at Winchester on May 31, 1076, just as he finished praying: "... and lead us not into temptation." "And then, goes the story, in the hearing of all, the head, in a clear voice, finished the prayer, 'But deliver us from evil. Amen.'" He was buried at Crowland, and according to Abbot Wulfketyl of Crowland many miracles took place at his tomb, including the rejoining of his head to his body.³⁶¹ However, veneration of him as a saint was not permitted by the Norman authorities: Abbot Wulketyl was tried for idolatry (!) before a council in London, defrocked, and banished to Glastonbury...

Bishop Wulfstan of Worcester meekly accepted the Conqueror's rule; and he was now sent to pacify Chester, being the only bishop to whom the people of that north-western province, the last to be conquered by the Normans, would be likely to listen. His surrender, more than any other, signified the end of the English resistance. For while bands of fugitives continued to struggle in different parts of the country, Wulfstan was the last Englishman of nation-wide renown around whom a national resistance could have formed.

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³⁵⁷ William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum*, III, 131.

³⁵⁸ *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, D, 1073; E, 1072.

³⁵⁹ William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum*, III, 131.

³⁶⁰ Rex, *The English Resistance*, Stroud: Tempus, 2004, p. 184. However, Ordericus Vitalis and Lanfranc considered him innocent. Bradbury thinks he was guilty of failing to reveal the conspiracy of which he was aware (*op. cit.*, p. 172).

³⁶¹ William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum*; Scott, *op. cit.*, p. 204.

The formal capitulation of the English Church to the Roman Catholics took place in 1070. In the week after Pascha, writes Thierry, "there arrived in England, pursuant to William's request, three legates from the apostolic see, viz. Ermenfeni, Bishop of Sienna, and the cardinals John and Peter. The Norman founded his great designs on the presence of these envoys from his ally the pope; and kept them about him for a whole year, honouring them (says an old historian) as if they had been angels of God. In the midst of the famine, which in many places was destroying the Saxons by thousands, brilliant festivals were celebrated in the fortified palace of Winchester; there the Roman priests, placing the crown afresh on the head of the foreign king, effaced the vain malediction which Eldred [Aldred], Archbishop of York had pronounced against him.

"After the festivals, a great assembly of the Normans, laymen or priests, enriched by the lands of the English, was held at Winchester. At this assembly the Saxons were summoned to appear, in the name (of the authority) of the Roman church, by circulars, the style of which might forewarn them of the result of this great council (as it was called) to themselves. 'Although the church of Rome,' said the envoys, 'has a right to watch the conduct of all Christians, it more especially belongs to her to inquire into your morals and way of life - you whom she formerly instructed in the faith of Christ - and to repair in you the decay of that faith which you hold from her. In order to exercise over your person this salutary inspection, we, ministers of blessed Peter the apostle, and authorised representatives of our lord, Pope Alexander, have resolved to hold a council with you, that we may inform ourselves of the bad things which have sprung up in the vineyard of the Lord, and may plant in it things profitable both for the body and for the soul.'

"The true sense of these mystical words was, that the conqueror, in accordance with the pope, wished to strip the whole body of the higher clergy of English origin; and the mission of the legates from Rome was to give the colour of religion to a measure purely political. The prelate whom they first struck was Stigand, Archbishop of Canterbury, who had dared to appear in arms against the foreigner, and had refused to anoint him king. These were his real crimes; but the sentence which degraded him was grounded on other causes - on more *honest* pretexts (to use the language of the old historians). Three ecclesiastical grievances were found against him, which rendered his ordination null and void. He was turned out of the episcopacy - first, for having taken the archbishopric during the life of the Norman Archbishop Robert, whom the Saxons had driven away; secondly, for having said mass in the pontifical habit or pallium worn by the said Robert, and left by him at Canterbury; lastly, for having received his own pallium from the hands of Benedict X, who had been degraded, and afterwards excommunicated, by a victorious competitor. As soon as the friend of King Harold and of his country was, according to the language of the time, *struck by the canonical axe*, his lands were seized and divided between the Norman king, the Norman queen, and the Bishop of Bayeux. The same blow was aimed at those English bishops who could not be reproached

with any violation of the canons. Alexander prelate of Lincoln, Egelmar prelate of East Anglia, Egelric prelate of Sussex, several other bishops, and the abbots of the principal monasteries, were degraded all at once. When the sentence of degradation was pronounced against them, they were compelled to swear on the Gospel that they considered themselves as deprived of their dignities lawfully, and for ever; and that, whoever their successors might be, they would not protest against them. They were then conducted by an armed guard into some fortress or monastery, which became their prison. Those who had formerly been monks were forcibly taken back to their old cloisters, and it was officially published, that, disgusted with the world, it had pleased them to go and revisit the friends of their youth. Thus it was that foreign power mingled derision with violence. The members of the Saxon clergy dared not to struggle against their fate: Stigand fled into Scotland; Egelsig, an abbot of St. Augustine's, embarked for Denmark, and was demanded as a *fugitif du roi*, by a rescript from the Conqueror. Only one bishop, Egelwin [Aethelwine] of Durham, when on the point of departing into exile, solemnly cursed the oppressors of his country; and declared them separated for ever from the communion of Christians, according to the grave and gloomy formula in which that separation was pronounced. But the sound of these words fell in vain on the ear of the Norman: William had priests to give the lie to priests, as he had swords to ward off swords...³⁶²

Having silenced the last true bishops, the papists now turned to the monks. Few were those, like Frederic of St. Albans, who resisted them. Among the few were three who occupied a dependency of Ely's at St. Neot's, Huntingdonshire. When the Norman Gilbert of Clara came to expel them, they refused to move, and could not be expelled either by hunger or the lash. Finally, they were physically transported across the Channel to the Norman monastery of Bec, where they remained in prison, as far as we can surmise, to the end of their lives.³⁶³

Again, at Stone near Stafford on the Trent, as Thierry writes, "there was a small oratory, where two nuns and a priest passed their days in praying in honour of a Saxon saint called Wolfed."³⁶⁴ All three were killed by one Enisant, a soldier of the conquering army,... 'that his sister whom he had brought with him might have the church.'³⁶⁵

In 1083 it was the turn of the most venerable of England's holy places, Glastonbury, to suffer the ravages of the "Christian" pagans. The occasion was an argument between the monks and their new Norman abbot, Thurstan, who insisted on substituting a new form of chanting from Dijon for the old-style Gregorian

³⁶² Thierry, *op. cit.*, pp. 234-236.

³⁶³ Thomas of Ely, *Historia Coenobii Eliensis*, II, 28, 19.

³⁶⁴ Probably St. Wulfhad, a Mercian prince who, together with his brother St. Rufinus, was martyred by the pagan Mercian king in the seventh century. See V. Moss, *Saints of England's Golden Age*, Etna, Ca.: Center for Traditionalist Studies, 1997, pp. 108-128.

³⁶⁵ Thierry, *op. cit.*, p. 224.

chanting to which the monks were accustomed. According to William of Malmesbury, the monks refused to accept the chant of William of Fécamp because "they had grown up in the practice of the Roman Church". This shows that the Old English Church preserved the old traditions of Orthodox Rome, which had now been superseded on the continent; they were now "the last of the Romans".

"The monks made an amicable complaint to him [Thurstan] about it, and asked him to rule them justly and have regard for them, and in return they would be faithful and obedient to him. The abbot, however, would have none of it, but treated them badly, threatening them with worse. One day the abbot went into the chapter, and spoke against the monks, and threatened to maltreat them. He sent for laymen, who entered the chapter fully armed against the monks. Not knowing what they should do, the monks were terrified and fled in all directions. Some ran into the church and locked the doors against them, but their pursuers went after them into the monastic church, determined to drag them out since they were afraid to leave. Moreover a pitiful thing took place there that day, when the Frenchmen broke into the choir and began pelting the monks in the direction of the altar where they were. Some of the men-at-arms climbed up to the gallery, and shot arrows down into the sanctuary, so that many arrows stuck in the cross which stood above the altar. The wretched monks lay around the altar and some crept underneath, crying aloud to God, desperately imploring His mercy when none was forthcoming from men. What more can we find to say except to add that they showered arrows, and their companions broke down the doors to force an entrance, and struck down and killed some of the monks, wounding many therein, so that their blood ran down from the altar on to the steps, and from the steps on to the floor. Three of the monks were done to death, and eighteen wounded."³⁶⁶

William of Malmesbury writes that one of the arrows pierced an image of the crucified Lord, which suddenly gushed blood. "At this sight the perpetrator of the crime became unbearably confused and at once became mad, so that when he got outside the church he fell to the ground, broke his neck and died. As soon as the others saw this they hastened to leave the monastery lest they should suffer similar punishments. But the rod of Divine justice did not allow them to escape retribution since it knew that they had been accomplices in the perpetration of evil. For some were affected internally and some externally, either their minds or their bodies being rendered impotent, and they paid a just penalty."³⁶⁷

Thus did the Normans dare to do what even the pagan Saxons and Danes had not dared: to defile the oldest and holiest shrine of Britain, the meeting-place in Christ of Jew and Greek, Roman and Celt, Saxon and Dane...

³⁶⁶ *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, E, 1083.

³⁶⁷ William of Malmesbury, *De Antiquitate Glastonie Ecclesie*, 78, in the translation by John Scott, Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1981, p. 159.

Even the holy relics of the English saints were not spared desecration. For, as Thierry writes, "the hatred which the clergy of the conquest bore to the natives of England, extended to the saints of English birth; and in different places their tombs were broken open and their bones scattered about."³⁶⁸

Thus Archbishop Lanfranc refused to consider St. Aelfheah of Canterbury a hieromartyr, although the truth of his martyrdom was witnessed by his incorrupt body; and he demoted St. Dunstan's day to the rank of a third-class feast, and "reformed" certain other feasts of the English Church.³⁶⁹

Again, as George Garnett writes, "Warin, abbot of Malmesbury, piled up the relics of many local saints 'like a heap of rubbish, or the remains of worthless hirelings, and threw them out of the church door'. He even mocked them: "'Now,'" he said, "let the most powerful of them come to the aid of the rest!"' Paul, the new abbot of St. Alban's and Lanfranc's nephew, destroyed the tombs of former abbots, whom he described as 'yokels and idiots', and even refused to transfer to the new church the body of the abbey's founder, King Offa of Mercia."³⁷⁰

However, the English saints were not inactive in their own defence. In 1077, the monastery of Evesham passed into the control of a Norman abbot named Walter, who, on the advice of Lanfranc, decided to subject the local saints' relics to ordeal by fire. But not only did the holy relics not burn: the fire even refused to touch them. Moreover, when Walter was carrying the skull of the holy Martyr-Prince Wistan (+849), it suddenly fell from his hands and began gushing out a river of sweat. And when they came to the relics of St. Credan, an eighth-century abbot of Evesham, they were all terrified to see them shining as gold.³⁷¹ Then the monks of Evesham, heartened, went on the offensive: they took the relics of their major saint, Bishop Egwin of Worcester (+709), on a fund-raising tour of the country, during which

³⁶⁸ Thierry, *op. cit.*, p. 244.

³⁶⁹ Lanfranc abolished many of the old feasts of the Anglo-Saxon Church, including the feasts of the Presentation to the Temple and the Conception of the Virgin, which had been introduced in the 1030s. "The first definite and reliable knowledge of the feast in the West comes from England; it is found in a calendar of Old Minster, Winchester (*Conceptio Sancte Dei Genetricis Marii*), dating from about 1030, and in another calendar of New Minster, Winchester, written between 1035 and 1056; a pontifical of Exeter of the eleventh century (assigned to 1046-1072) contains a *benedictio in Conceptione S. Mariae*; a similar benediction is found in a Canterbury pontifical written probably in the first half of the eleventh century, certainly before the Conquest. These episcopal benedictions show that the feast not only commended itself to the devotion of individuals, but that it was recognized by authority and was observed by the Saxon monks with considerable solemnity. The existing evidence goes to show that the establishment of the feast in England was due to the monks of Winchester before the Conquest (1066). The Normans on their arrival in England were disposed to treat in a contemptuous fashion English liturgical observances; to them this feast must have appeared specifically English, a product of insular simplicity and ignorance." (<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07674d.htm>)

³⁷⁰ Garnett, *The Norman Conquest: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, 2009, p. 12.

³⁷¹ W.D. Macray, *Chronicon Abbatiae de Evesham*, Rolls series, 1863, pp. 323-324.

miracles were reported as far afield as Oxford, Dover, Winchester and the river Trent.³⁷²

Another such incident is recorded by John Hudson: "Possibly in the middle of the 12th century, a writer at Abingdon, Berkshire, described with great relish the fate of the monastery's first new abbot after the Conquest, Adelelm, a monk from Jumièges. The abbot displayed a marked disrespect for pre-Conquest saints, notably planning to replace the church built by St. Aethelwold. Once, while dining with his relatives and friends, Adelelm was abusing Aethelwold, saying that the church of English rustics should not stand but be destroyed. After the meal he left to relieve himself, and there cried out. Those who came running found him dead. Clearly the writer saw such a death as fitting."³⁷³

In the decades that followed, the discoveries of the incorrupt relics of several English saints proved the sanctity of the old traditions, leading to a "restoration" of their veneration in the Anglo-Norman Church. These saints included St. Mildburga at Much Wenlock in 1079, St. Theodore at Canterbury in 1091, St. Edmund at Bury St. Edmunds in 1095, St. Edward the Confessor at Westminster in 1102, St. Cuthbert at Durham in 1104, St. Aelfheah at Canterbury in 1105 and St. Etheldreda at Ely in 1106.³⁷⁴

Gradually, however, as the pre-revolutionary days of Anglo-Saxon England receded - or rather, were violently blotted out - from the popular memory, the old traditions were lost. William of Malmesbury could still write, early in the twelfth century: "Does not the whole island blaze with so many relics that you can scarcely pass a village of any consequence without hearing the name of some new saint?" But then he added: "And of how many have all records perished?"³⁷⁵

Moreover, as George Garnett writes, "within fifty years of 1066 every English cathedral church and most major abbeys had been razed to the ground, and rebuilt in a new continental style, known to architects as 'Romanesque'... In a very literal sense, this rebuilding was one aspect of the renewal of the English church to which Duke William appears to have pledged himself early in 1066, in order to secure papal backing for the Conquest. No English cathedral retains any masonry above ground which dates from before the Conquest. Wulfstan, bishop of Worcester, was the only

³⁷² Macray, *op. cit.*, pp. 55-60.

³⁷³ Hudson, "The Norman Conquest", *BBC History Magazine*, vol. 4, no. 1, January, 2003, p. 22.

³⁷⁴ Susan Ridyard has argued against the older view that the Normans swept away the cults of the Anglo-Saxon Saints. See her article, "Condigna Veneratio: post-Conquest attitudes to the saints of the Anglo-Saxons", in R. Allen Brown (ed.), *Anglo-Norman Studies IX: Proceedings of the Battle Conference 1986*, Boydell, 1987, pp. 179-206. See also Emma Mason, "Nationalism and National Cults in England and on the Continent between the Tenth and the Twelfth Centuries", *The Historian*, N 44, Winter, 1994, pp. 9-10.

³⁷⁵ William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, from the translation in Douglas & Greenway, *op. cit.*, p. 290.

English bishop to survive the wholesale renewal (or, differently expressed, purge) of the English hierarchy during the first decade of the reign, and its replacement with prelates of continental – chiefly Norman – extraction. He was said to have wept as he watched the demolition of the old cathedral church at Worcester: ‘We wretches destroy the work of the saints, thinking in our insolent pride that we are improving them... How many holy and devout men have served God in this place!’ He was not simply giving voice to nostalgia. To an Englishman, it seems, a church was itself a relic, sanctified by those who had once worshipped in it...³⁷⁶

But all this could have been borne if only the English themselves had kept their faith, and their membership of the One True Church. However, on August 29, 1070, the Day of the Beheading of St. John the Forerunner and a strict fast day in the Orthodox Church, the first Roman Catholic archbishop of Canterbury, Lanfranc of Bec, was consecrated in the place of Stigand. Truly the forerunners of Christ, the preachers of repentance, had fallen in England.

Immediately Lanfranc demanded, and eventually obtained, a profession of obedience from the archbishop-elect of York, Thomas, in spite of the fact that York had been a separate ecclesiastical province throughout the history of the English Church.

The Anglo-Saxon text of the Parker (A) text of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* ends at this point, continuing in Latin. For truly, the English Church had now become Latin both in language and in theology...³⁷⁷

Lanfranc also set about reforming the canon law of the English Church to bring it into line with the new code of the Roman papacy. In this he received the full support of William, who said: "I have ordained that the episcopal laws be amended, because before my time they were not properly administered in England according to the precepts of the holy canons."

These new canons, which had already been put into effect in Normandy and other parts of Western Europe, concerned such matters as the respect due to the Roman see, simony, the separation of secular and ecclesiastical courts, and the marriage of the clergy.

It was the latter decree that caused the greatest disturbance, both on the continent and in England; and sadly we find the English Bishop Wulfstan on the side of the uncanonical onslaught on Holy Matrimony. Thus we read that "the sin of incontinence he abhorred, and approved continence in all men, and especially in clerks in holy orders. If he found one wholly given to chastity he took him to himself

³⁷⁶ Garnett, *op. cit.*, pp. 10-11.

³⁷⁷ However, the Peterborough manuscript of the Chronicle continues in English until the year 1154, "like a gesture of defiance to the alien regime" (Hindley, *op. cit.*, p. 247).

and loved him as a son. Wedded priests he brought under one edict, commanding them to renounce their fleshly desires or their churches. If they loved chastity, they would remain and be welcome: if they were the servants of bodily pleasures, they must go forth in disgrace. Some there were who chose rather to go without their churches than their women: and of these some wandered about till they starved; others sought and at last found some other provision...³⁷⁸

For his obedience to the king, and strict enactment of the papal decrees, Wulfstan received great honour from the world, and by the 1080s he was one of the very few bishops of English origin still in possession of their sees. But we can only lament the fall of a great ascetic and wonderworker, who was reduced to separating by force those whom God had lawfully joined together. If only he had paid heed to the true canons accepted by the Seven Ecumenical Councils on the marriage of the clergy.³⁷⁹ If only he had paid heed to the correspondence of the great eighth-century English apostle of Germany, St. Boniface, in which he would have read that Pope Zachariah, in a letter to Boniface, upheld the marriage of priests.³⁸⁰

And even if the English Church in its latest phase did at times declare against the marriage of priests, as in Aethelred's code of 1008, at other times it was explicitly permitted, as in Archbishop Wulfstan's *Law of Northumbrian Priests*; and *never* were lawfully married priests forced to separate from their wives in pre-Conquest England. But there was an unbalanced streak in Wulfstan's asceticism which combined an almost Manichean zeal for chastity with some surprising improprieties.³⁸¹ And he had a papist understanding of obedience that ignored the word: "Neither is a wicked king any longer a king, but a tyrant; nor is a bishop oppressed with ignorance a bishop, but falsely so called."³⁸² However, it must be said in Wulfstan's favour that once, during a synod held at Westminster in the king's presence, he defied Lanfranc's order that he give up his pastoral staff and ring on the grounds that he was supposedly "an ignorant and unlearned man".

The story is told by Ailred of Rievaulx (in Cardinal Newman's paraphrase) that he rose up and said that he would give up his staff only to King Edward the Confessor, who had conferred it upon him. "With these words he raised his hand a little, and drove the crosier into the stone which covered the sacred body: 'Take this, my master,'

³⁷⁸ William of Malmesbury, *Vita Wulfstani*.

³⁷⁹ Thus: "If anyone shall maintain, concerning a married priest, that it is not lawful to partake of the oblation when he offers it, let him be anathema" (*Council of Gangra, canon 4*). And: "Since we know it to be handed down as a rule of the Roman Church that those who are deemed worthy to be advanced to the diaconate or the priesthood should promise no longer to live with their wives, we, preserving the ancient and apostolic perfection and order, will that lawful marriages of men who are in holy orders be from this time forward firm, by no means dissolving their union with their wives, nor depriving them of their mutual intercourse at a convenient time" (*Sixth Ecumenical Council, canon 13*).

³⁸⁰ R. Emerson, *The Letters of Saint Boniface*, New York: Octagon Books, 1973, p. 84.

³⁸¹ William of Malmesbury, *Vita Wulfstani*, III, 8.

³⁸² *Institutions of the Apostles*, VIII, 19.

he said, 'and deliver it to whom thou will'; and descending from the altar, he laid aside his pontifical dress, and took his seat, a simple monk, among the monks. But the staff, to the wonder of all, remained fast embedded in the stone. They tried to draw it out, but it was immovable. A murmur ran through the throne; they crowded round the spot in astonishment, and you might see them in their surprise, approaching a little, then stopping, stretching out their hands and withdrawing them, now throwing themselves on the floor, to see how the spike was fastened in the stone, now rising up and gathering into little groups to gaze. The news was carried to where the synod was sitting. Lanfranc sent the Bishop of Rochester to the tomb, to bring the staff; but was unable to withdraw it. The archbishop in wonder, sent for the king, and went with him to the place; and after having prayed, tried to move it, but in vain. The king cried out, and Lanfranc burst into tears... When the archbishop had withdrawn his deposition, Wulfstan withdrew the staff from the tomb...³⁸³

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Who was the real ruler of the English Church at this time - William or the Pope? In order to answer that question we need to turn to the revolution in Church-State relations that was taking place on the continent of Europe.

At almost the same time that the English autocracy was being destroyed, the Byzantine Empire suffered a disastrous defeat at the hands of the Seljuk Turks, Manzikert in 1071. Most of Anatolia, the heartland of Byzantine strength, was conceded to the Turks. In the same year, the last Byzantine stronghold in southern Italy, Bari, fell to the Normans, after which Byzantium was never again able to exert significant influence on events in the West. As Orthodox autocracy reeled under these hammer blows from East and West, a new form of despotism, Christian in form but pagan in essence, entered upon the scene.

Joseph Canning writes: "The impact of Gregory VII's pontificate was enormous: for the church nothing was to be the same again. From his active lifetime can be traced the settling of the church in its long-term direction as a body of power and coercion; the character of the papacy as a jurisdictional and governmental institution... There arises the intrusive thought, out of bounds for the historian: this was the moment of the great wrong direction taken by the papacy, one which was to outlast the Middle Ages and survive into our own day. From the time of Gregory can be dated the deliberate clericalisation of the church based on the notion that the clergy, being

³⁸³ Newman, *Lives of the English Saints*, 1901, London: Freemantle, volume 5, pp. 34-36. In the early thirteenth century, during his struggle with the Pope for control of the English Church, King John adopted Wulfstan as his patron, "believing that St. Wulfstan maintained that only kings could appoint and dismiss bishops, a useful view at a time when the papal appointment of Stephen Langton undermined the exercise of royal prerogative" (Mason, *op. cit.*, p. 11).

morally purer, were superior to the laity and constituted a church which was catholic, chaste and free. There was a deep connection between power and a celibacy which helped distinguish the clergy as a separate and superior caste, distanced in the most profound psychological sense from the family concerns of the laity beneath them. At the time of the reform papacy the church became stamped with characteristics which have remained those of the Roman Catholic church: it became papally centred, legalistic, coercive and clerical. The Roman church was, in Gregory's words, the 'mother and mistress' (*mater et magistra*) of all churches."³⁸⁴

Hildebrand, Pope Gregory VII, was a midget in physical size.³⁸⁵ But having been elected to the papacy "by the will of St. Peter" in 1073, he set about ensuring that no ruler on earth would rival him in grandeur. Having witnessed the Emperor Henry III's deposition of Pope Gregory VI, with whom he went into exile, he took the name Gregory VII in order to emphasize a unique mission: as Peter de Rosa writes, "he had seen an emperor dethrone a pope; he would dethrone an emperor *regardless*."

"Had he put an emperor in his place, he would have been beyond reproach. He did far more. By introducing a mischievous and heretical doctrine [of Church-State relations], he put himself in place of the emperor... He claimed to be not only Bishop of bishops but King of kings. In a parody of the gospels, the devil took him up to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world, and Gregory VII exclaimed: These are all mine.

"As that most objective of historians, Henry Charles Lea, wrote in *The Inquisition in the Middle Ages*: 'To the realization of this ideal [of papal supremacy], he devoted his life with a fiery zeal and unshaken purpose that shrank from no obstacle, and to it he was ready to sacrifice not only the men who stood in his path but also the immutable principles of truth and justice.'

"... The Bishop of Trier saw the danger. He charged Gregory with destroying the unity of the Church. The Bishop of Verdun said that the pope was mistaken in his unheard-of arrogance. Belief belongs to one's church, the heart belongs to one's country. The pope, he said, must not filch the heart's allegiance. This was precisely what Gregory did. He wanted all; he left emperors and princes nothing. The papacy, as he fashioned it, by undermining patriotism, undermined the authority of secular rulers; they felt threatened by the Altar. At the Reformation, in England and elsewhere, rulers felt obliged to exclude Catholicism from their lands *in order to feel secure*...

³⁸⁴ Canning, *A History of Medieval Political Thought, 300-1450*, London & New York: Routledge, 1996, pp. 96, 97.

³⁸⁵ Like another forerunner of the Antichrist, Napoleon, who said: "If I were not me, I would like to be Gregory VII." (De Rosa, *Vicars of Christ*, London: Bantam Press, 1988, p. 66).

“The changes Gregory brought about were reflected in language. Before him, the pope’s traditional title was Vicar of St. Peter. After him, it was Vicar of Christ. Only ‘Vicar of Christ’ could justify his absolutist pretensions, which his successors inherited in reality not from Peter or from Jesus but from *him*.”³⁸⁶

Gregory’s position was based on a forged collection of canons and a false interpretation of two Gospel passages: Matthew 16.18-19 and John 21.15-17. According to the first passage, in Gregory’s interpretation, he was the successor of Peter, upon whom the Church had been founded, and had plenary power to bind and to loose. And according to the second, the flock of Peter over which he had jurisdiction included all Christians, not excluding emperors. As he wrote: “Perhaps [the supporters of the emperor] imagine that when God commended His Church to Peter three times, saying, ‘Feed My sheep’, He made an exception of kings? Why do they not consider, or rather confess with shame that when God gave Peter, as the ruler, the power of binding and loosing in heaven and on earth, he excepted no-one and withheld nothing from his power?” For “who could doubt that the priests of Christ are considered the fathers and masters of kings, princes and all the faithful?” This meant that he had power both to excommunicate and depose the emperor. Nor did the emperor’s anointing give him any authority in Gregory’s eyes. For “greater power is conceded to an exorcist, when he is made a spiritual emperor for expelling demons, than could be given to any layman for secular domination”. Indeed, “who would not know that kings and dukes took their origin from those who, ignorant of God, through pride, rapine, perfidy, murders and, finally, almost any kind of crime, at the instigation of the devil, the prince of this world, sought with blind desire and unbearable presumption to dominate their equals, namely other men?”³⁸⁷

Hildebrand’s attitude to political power was almost Manichaeism in its negative intensity. Indeed, as de Rosa writes of a later Pope who faithfully followed Hildebrand’s teaching, “this was Manichaeism applied to relations between church and state. The church, spiritual, was good; the state, material, was essentially the work of the devil. This naked political absolutism undermined the authority of kings. Taken seriously, his theories would lead to anarchy.”³⁸⁸

Of course, the idea that the priesthood was higher than the kingship was not heretical, and could find support in the Holy Fathers. However, the Fathers always allowed that emperors and kings had supremacy of jurisdiction in their own sphere, and had always insisted that the power of secular rulers comes from God and is worthy of the honour that befits every God-established institution. What was new, shocking and completely unpatristic in Gregory’s words was his disrespect for the kingship, his refusal to allow it any dignity or holiness – still more, his proto-communist implication that *rulers had no right to rule* without the Pope’s blessing.

³⁸⁶ De Rosa, op. cit., pp. 65, 66.

³⁸⁷ Quoted in Canning, op. cit., pp. 91-93.

³⁸⁸ De Rosa, op. cit., p. 69.

The corollary of this, of course, was that *the only rightful ruler was the Pope*. For “if the holy apostolic see, through the princely power divinely conferred upon it, has jurisdiction over spiritual things, why not also over secular things?” Thus to the secular rulers of Spain Gregory wrote in 1077 that the kingdom of Spain belonged to St. Peter and the Roman Church “in rightful ownership”. And to the secular rulers of Sardinia he wrote in 1073 that the Roman Church exerted “a special and individual care” over them – which meant, as a later letter of 1080 demonstrated, that they would face armed invasion if they did not submit to the pope’s terms.

Again, in 1075 he threatened King Philip of France with excommunication, having warned the French bishops that if the king did not amend his ways he would place France under ban: “Do not doubt that we shall, with God’s help, make every possible effort to snatch the kingdom of France from his possession.”³⁸⁹ This was no empty threat - Gregory had the ability to compel submission. He demonstrated this when he wrote to one of King Philip’ vassals, Duke William of Aquitaine, and invited him to threaten the king. The king backed down...

This power was again demonstrated in Gregory’s famous dispute with Emperor Henry IV of Germany. It began with a quarrel between the pope and the emperor over who should succeed to the see of Milan. This was the see, significantly, whose most famous bishop, St. Ambrose, had excommunicated (but not deposed) an emperor, but had also declared that Rome had only “a primacy of confession, not of honour”.³⁹⁰ Gregory expected Henry to back down as King Philip had done. But he did not, no doubt because the see of Milan was of great importance politically in that its lands and vassals gave it control of the Alpine passes and therefore of Henry’s access to his Italian domains. Instead, in January, 1076, he convened a Synod of Bishops at Worms which addressed Gregory as “brother Hildebrand”, demonstrated that his despotism had introduced mob rule into the Church, and refused all obedience to him: “Since, as you publicly proclaimed, none of us has been to you a bishop, from now on you will be Pope to none of us.”³⁹¹

Gregory retaliated in a truly revolutionary way. In a Synod in Rome in February he declared the emperor deposed. Addressing St. Peter, he said: “I withdraw the whole kingdom of the Germans and of Italy from Henry the King, son of Henry the Emperor. For he has risen up against thy Church with unheard of arrogance. And I absolve all Christians from the bond of the oath which they have made to him or shall make. And I forbid anyone to serve him as King...”

³⁸⁹ I.S. Robertson, “Gregory VII and the Soldiers of Christ”, *History*, vol. 58, no. 193, June, 1973, pp. 174-175.

³⁹⁰ St. Ambrose, *Liber de Incarnationis Dominicae Sacramento*, 4.32, col. 826.

³⁹¹ Henry Bettenson and Chris Maunder, *Documents of the Christian Church*, Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 113.

By absolving subjects of their oath of allegiance to their king, Gregory “effectively,” as Robinson writes, “sanctioned rebellion against the royal power...”

It is not going too far to say, therefore, that the democratic, anti-monarchical revolutions of western history originated with Pope Gregory VII... This was made clear by his *Dictatus Papae* (1976), which left no doubt about the revolutionary political significance of his actions, and which must be counted as one of the most megalomaniac documents in history: "The Pope can be judged by no one; the Roman church has never erred and never will err till the end of time; the Roman Church was founded by Christ alone; the Pope alone can depose bishops and restore bishops; he alone can make new laws, set up new bishoprics, and divide old ones; he alone can translate bishops; he alone can call general councils and authorize canon law; he alone can revise his own judgements; he alone can use the imperial insignia; he can depose emperors; he can absolve subjects from their allegiance; all princes should kiss his feet; his legates, even though in inferior orders, have precedence over all bishops; an appeal to the papal court inhibits judgement by all inferior courts; a duly ordained Pope is undoubtedly made a saint by the merits of St. Peter."³⁹²

Robinson continues: “The confusion of the spiritual and the secular in Gregory VII’s thinking is most marked in the terminology he used to describe the laymen whom he recruited to further his political aims. His letters are littered with the terms ‘the warfare of Christ’, ‘the service of St. Peter’, ‘the vassals of St. Peter’..., Military terminology is, of course, commonly found in patristic writings... St. Paul had evoked the image of the soldier of Christ who waged an entirely spiritual war... [But] in the letters of Gregory VII, the traditional metaphor shades into literal actuality... For Gregory, the ‘warfare of Christ’ and the ‘warfare of St. Peter’ came to mean, not the spiritual struggles of the faithful, nor the duties of the secular clergy, nor the ceaseless devotions of the monks; but rather the armed clashes of feudal knights on the battlefields of Christendom...”³⁹³

This was power politics under the guise of spirituality; but it worked. Although, at a Synod in Worms in 1076, some bishops supported Henry, saying that “the bishops have been deprived of their divine authority”, and that “the Church of God is in danger of destruction”, Henry began to lose support, and in 1077 he was forced to march across the Alps and do penance before Gregory, standing for three days in the snow outside the castle of Canossa. Gregory restored him to communion, but not to his kingship...

It was at Canossa, according to Tom Holland, that “the foundations of the modern Western state were laid, foundations largely bled of any religious dimension. A piquant irony: that the very concept of a secular society should ultimately have been

³⁹² Gregory VII, in R.W. Southern, *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970, p. 102.

³⁹³ Robinson, *op. cit.*, pp. 177, 178.

due to the papacy. Voltaire and the First Amendment, multiculturalism and gay weddings: all have served as waymarks on the road from Canossa..."³⁹⁴ This is a perceptive and important comment. Canossa, as the centre of that momentous chain of events that began with the schism of 1054 and culminated in the First Crusade of 1098-99, represented the birth of new Europe, a new civilization that would become the *global* civilization in the twentieth century. This civilization, while religious externally ("Reform papism" in the eleventh century, "human rights" in the twenty-first) was profoundly secular internally. Interventionist and expansionist, it would impose its own ideas and culture, and ultimately its political control, over the whole world. Led by the Normans in the beginning (the first king of Jerusalem, Bohemond, was a Norman, a kind of pan-European pop star), other nations would take over the lead in later centuries; but the basic lineaments of the new civilization were already clear...

Soon rebellion began to stir in Germany as Rudolf, Duke of Swabia, was elected anti-king. For a while Gregory hesitated. But then, in 1080, he definitely deposed Henry, freed his subjects from their allegiance to him and declared that the kingship was conceded to Rudolf.

However, Henry recovered, convened a Synod of bishops that declared Gregory deposed and then convened another Synod that elected an anti-pope, Wibert of Ravenna. In October, 1080, Rudolf died in battle. Then in 1083 Henry and Wibert marched on Rome. In 1084 Wibert was consecrated Pope Clement III and in turn crowned Henry as emperor. Gregory fled from Rome with his Norman allies and died in Salerno in 1085.³⁹⁵

"I have loved righteousness and hated iniquity, therefore I die in exile," said Gregory as he lay dying. But a monk who waited on him replied: "In exile thou canst not be, for God hath given thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession." This Scripture refers to Christ, not a simple man. But then such distortion and blasphemy was becoming commonplace now...For, as Archimandrite Justin Popovich put it: "Human history has had three main falls: that of Adam, that of Judas, and that of the Pope... The fall of the Pope consists in seeking to replace the God-man with man."³⁹⁶

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Less spectacular than his struggle with Henry, but no less instructive, was Gregory's contest with King William I of England. As we have seen, William had conquered England with Hildebrand's blessing. And shortly after his bloody pacification of the country he imposed the new canon law of the reformed papacy

³⁹⁴ Holland, *Millenium*, London: Abacus Books, 2009, p. xxii.

³⁹⁵ Canning, *op. cit.*, pp. 90, 91.

³⁹⁶ Popovich, *The Orthodox Church and Ecumenism*, Thessalonica, 1974, pp. 180-181.

upon the English Church. This pleased Gregory, who was therefore prepared to overlook the fact that William considered that he owed his kingdom to his sword and God alone: "The king of the English, although in certain matters he does not comport himself as devoutly as we might hope, nevertheless in that he has neither destroyed nor sold the Churches of God [!]; that he has taken pains to govern his subjects in peace and justice [!!]; that *he has refused his assent to anything detrimental to the apostolic see*, even when solicited by certain enemies of the cross of Christ; and that he has compelled priests on oath to put away their wives and laity to forward the tithes they were withholding from us - in all these respects he has shown himself more worthy of approbation and honour than other kings..."

The "other kings" Gregory was referring to included, first of all, the Emperor Henry IV of Germany, who, unlike William, did not support the Pope's "reforms". If William had acted like Henry, then there is no doubt that Pope Gregory would have excommunicated him, too. And if William had refused to co-operate with the papacy, then there is equally no doubt that the Pope would have incited his subjects to wage a "holy war" against him, as he did against Henry. For, as an anonymous monk of Hersfeld wrote: "[The Gregorians] say that it is a matter of the faith and it is the duty of the faithful in the Church to kill and to persecute those who communicate with, or support the excommunicated King Henry and refuse to promote the efforts of [the Gregorian] party."³⁹⁷

But William, by dint of brute force within and subtle diplomacy without, managed to achieve the most complete control over both Church and State that any English ruler ever achieved, while at the same time paradoxically managing to remain on relatively good terms with the most autocratic Pope in history. For totalitarian rulers only respect rivals of the same spirit. Thus did the papocaesarist totalitarianism of Hildebrand beget the caesarapist totalitarianism of William the Bastard...

The absolute nature of William's control of the Church was vividly expressed by Edmer of Canterbury: "Now, it was the policy of King William to maintain in England the usages and laws which he and his fathers before him were accustomed to have in Normandy. Accordingly he made bishops, abbots and other nobles throughout the whole country of persons of whom (since everyone knew who they were, from what estate they had been raised and to what they had been promoted) it would be considered shameful ingratitude if they did not implicitly obey his laws, subordinating to this every other consideration; or if any one of them presuming upon the power conferred by any temporal dignity dared raise his head against him. Consequently, all things, spiritual and temporal alike, waited upon the nod of the King... He would not, for instance, allow anyone in all his dominion, except on his instructions, to recognize the established Pontiff of the City of Rome or under any circumstance to accept any letter from him, if it had not first been submitted to the

³⁹⁷ Quoted in Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 177.

King himself. Also he would not let the primate of his kingdom, by which I mean the Archbishop of Canterbury, otherwise Dobernia, if he were presiding over a general council of bishops, lay down any ordinance or prohibition unless these were agreeable to the King's wishes and had been first settled by him. Then again he would not allow any one of his bishops, except on his express instructions, to proceed against or excommunicate one of his barons or officers for incest or adultery or any other cardinal offence, even when notoriously guilty, or to lay upon him any punishment of ecclesiastical discipline."³⁹⁸

Again, in a letter to the Pope in reply to the latter's demand for fealty, William wrote: "I have not consented to pay fealty, nor will I now, because I never promised it, nor do I find that any of my predecessors ever paid it to your predecessors." And in the same letter he pointedly called Archbishop Lanfranc "my vassal" (i.e. not the Pope!).³⁹⁹

On the other hand, he agreed to the Pope's demand for the payment of "Peter's Pence", the voluntary contribution of the English people to Rome which had now become compulsory - for to squeeze the already impoverished English meant no diminution in his personal power. The Popes therefore had to wait until William's death before gradually asserting their personal control over the English Church. In any case, William had already broken the back of the English people both physically and spiritually; and the totalitarian structure of Anglo-Norman government, combining secular and ecclesiastical hierarchies under the king, needed only the man at the top to change to make it a perfectly functioning cog in the ruthless machine of the "Vicar of Christ".

³⁹⁸ Edmer, *Historia Novorum in Anglia*; translated by Geoffrey Bosanquet, London: Cresset Press.

³⁹⁹ Douglas & Greenway, *English Historical Documents*, Eyre & Spottiswoode, p. 647.

24. THE SURVIVAL OF ENGLISHNESS

The scene towards the end of William's reign in 1087 is one of almost unrelieved gloom. As Edmer writes: "How many of the human race have fallen on evil days! The sons of kings and dukes and the proud ones of the land are fettered with manacles and irons, and in prison and in gaol. How many have lost their limbs by the sword or disease, have been deprived of their eyes, so that when released from prison the common light of the world is a prison for them! They are the living dead for whom the sun - mankind's greatest pleasure - now has set. Blessed are those who are consoled by eternal hope; and afflicted are the unbelieving, for, deprived of all their goods and also cut off from heaven, their punishment has now begun..."⁴⁰⁰

For some time, the more sensitive of the English felt that they were indeed "cut off from heaven", having lost their inheritance in the Orthodox Church and kingdom. Thus an anonymous English poet wrote in the early twelfth century: "The teachers are lost, and many of the people, too."⁴⁰¹ Later, less religious generations of English have also felt that much was lost as a result of "1066 and all that". As Harriet Harvey Wood writes, "one fact is undisputed: it wiped out overnight a civilisation that, for its wealth, its political arrangements, its arts, its literature and its longevity, was unique in Dark Age Europe, and deserves celebration. In the general instability, lawlessness and savagery of the times, Anglo-Saxon England stood out as a beacon."⁴⁰²

This civilization was a variant of *Orthodox Autocracy* - otherwise known as Romanity or Byzantinism. It was replaced by a *feudal monarchy*. As R.H.C. Davies explains, feudal monarchy was "a New Leviathan, the medieval equivalent of a socialist state. In a socialist state, the community owns, or should own, the means of production. In a feudal monarchy, the king did own all the land - which in the terms of medieval economy might fairly be equated with the means of production.

"The best and simplest example of a feudal monarchy is to be found in England after the Norman Conquest. When William the Conqueror defeated Harold Godwineson at the battle of Hastings (1066), he claimed to have established his legitimate right to succeed Edward the Confessor as King of England, but, owing to Harold's resistance, he was also able to claim that he had won the whole country by right of conquest. Henceforward, every inch of land was to be his, and he would dispose of it as he thought fit. As is well known, he distributed most of it to his Norman followers, but he did not give it to them in absolute right...

⁴⁰⁰ *Liber Confortarius*; translated in Barlow, *The English Church 1000-1066*, p. 29.

⁴⁰¹ At about the same time the famous scholar Abelard of Paris noted: "The Fathers were guided by the Holy Spirit, but we are not" (quoted by Fr. Andrew Phillips, *Orthodox Christianity and the English Tradition*, p. 19).

⁴⁰² Wood, *The Battle of Hastings*, London; Atlantic Books, 2008, p. 2.

“Apparently as the result of one day's fighting (14 October, 1066), England received a new royal dynasty, a new aristocracy, a virtually new Church, a new art, a new architecture and a new language.”⁴⁰³

The Conqueror's ownership of the land was established in *Domesday Book*, which thereby became the record of the day of doom of the Orthodox Christian autocracy in the West. As Professor Neveux writes, “Like Christ on the Day of Judgement examining the actions of all men, the King of England would know all the inhabitants and all the properties in his kingdom... No other document of this kind has been preserved in Western Europe, nor was any ever made...”⁴⁰⁴

“Domesday was a good word for it,” writes Melvyn Bragg. “Twenty years after the Battle of Hastings, William sent out his officers to take stock of his kingdom. The monks of Peterborough were still recording the events of history in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and they noted, disapprovingly, that not one piece of land escaped the survey, ‘not even an ox or a cow or a pig’. William claimed all.

“There are two volumes of the Domesday Book (one called Little Domesday, the return from East Anglia) and they show how complete the Norman takeover of English land was and how widespread their influence and their language. Half the country was in the hands of just one hundred and ninety men. Half of that was held by just eleven men.”⁴⁰⁵

“By the time the date for Domesday Book was compiled in 1086,” writes Marc Morris, “the elite had been almost completely wiped out: of the 500 or so top individuals listed in the survey as tenants of the king, only 13 had English names, and of 7,000 or so subtenants, no more than 10 percent were natives. The aristocracy of Anglo-Saxon England had been almost completely swept away – killed in battle, driven into exile or forced to exist in suppressed circumstances.

“In their place was a new ruling class drawn from the continent.”⁴⁰⁶

Harriet Harvey Wood writes: “We have the testimony of Domesday Book that by 1086 only 8 per cent of English land remained in the hands of those who had owned it in 1066. William of Malmesbury in the following century confirmed that England had become ‘the residence of foreigners and the property of strangers; at the present time there is no Englishmen who is either earl, bishop, or abbot; strangers all, they prey upon the riches and vitals of England...”⁴⁰⁷

⁴⁰³ R.H.C. Davies, *The Normans and their Myth*, London: Thames & Hudson, 1976, p. 103.

⁴⁰⁴ Neveux, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

⁴⁰⁵ Bragg, *The Adventure of English*, London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2003, pp. 38-39. For comparison's sake, we may note that about one-third of modern Russia's wealth is in the hands of 110 billionaires.

⁴⁰⁶ Morris, “What the Normans did for Us”, *BBC History Magazine*, November, 2016, p. 34.

⁴⁰⁷ Wood, *op. cit.*, p. 205.

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Robert Tombs has summed up the new, in essence totalitarian, system well: "Social, economic and political control of the land and its people – what in the eighteenth century would retrospectively be termed the 'feudal system' – was given a more centralized and rigorous form after the Conquest swept away many existing rights and eliminated the English thegns. The Conqueror at once granted land – 'fiefs', or 'fees' – to his barons in return for their services, military and political, symbolized by the ceremony of homage, a public oath of allegiance. They in turn granted it to their own followers, for similar allegiance and services: England's 50,000 square miles could supply about 7,500 knights' fees of on average six or seven square miles. At the lowest level, 'natives', 'Anglici', 'rustics', 'serfs', 'villeins' (the words overlapped) were allotted land and protection in return for rent, labour and other services. Many thousands of previously free English landholders became legally subject to the new lords. Recalled an early historian, 'it was even disgraceful to be called English.' Over 70 percent of tenants were villeins, holding 15-40 acres or 'cottagers', with five acres or less; and many of the former employed paid labourers or slaves.

"All land and all men were now legally part of this hierarchy, which was buttressed by an ideology of lordship, duty and loyalty, of which the cult of chivalry and the Arthurian romances would later be the most idealized example. In theory, it gave rights as well as duties to all (even, to a limited extent, to villeins). 'Glanvill' (the 1180s treatise on law traditionally attributed to Henry II's Chief Justice, Ranulf Glanvill) stated that 'the bond of trust in lordship should be mutual'. However unequal the relationship, it did give some protection to dependants, and established a principle of reciprocity. The most unpopular landlords were not barons but monks: the monasteries were efficient and impersonal exploiters with long memories and clear consciences. The military foundation on which feudalism was supposedly based – service in arms was the prime duty owed – was never fully applied, and money was always a substitute. Towns and their inhabitants were always partly outside it.

"The English version of this 'feudal system' was unlike that elsewhere in Europe. The post-Conquest Crown recognized no powers or rights independent of the king. Nor did barons possess large continuous territories, but only scattered holdings. England escaped the trend that tormented the Continent: central authority did not fragment, but was strengthened. Great barons could never create autonomous and warring principalities. They had no jurisdiction over their vassals higher than that of the king's judges. A French historian comments that 'the great success of medieval England was to combine an early centralization of justice with recognition of local liberties, buttressed by popular juries.'

“What about the majority of the population? Pre-Conquest society was later idealized as embodying ‘Anglo-Saxon liberties’,⁴⁰⁸ but it was nevertheless... subject to heavy taxation and compulsory labour, and about 12 percent of the people were slaves – a status that the Normans gradually abolished in England, then in Wales and later in Ireland. It was also exposed to invasion and internal conflict. Even so the Conquest was disastrous for English peasants as a whole, through the direct effects of war, greater impositions, and the subjection of many thousands of freemen to serfdom. The luckier ones managed to remain as free tenants (14 percent of those listed in Domesday Book), or held subordinate positions as estate managers, foresters, huntsmen and minor royal officers. The Conquest may have increased a common sense of Englishness among the subject population: the old divide between Dane and Saxon seems to have disappeared. Many must have realized that their personal fate was linked with that of the country. When testifying about local affairs, jurors in the twelfth century sometimes spoke of ‘the Conquest of England’ or referred to the time ‘before the Normans conquered England’. In some places, the customary rights of Anglo-Saxon days were successfully claimed, and long after 1066 peasants appealed to privileges granted by the Confessor, Canute or even Offa.

“There were two groups of Englishmen, and some women, who retained power, wealth or status. The first group were townspeople. Although the Conquest led to an influx of urban immigrants, the English remained a strong presence, including among the most prominent groups – moneyers, goldsmiths, moneylenders (among them there were also Jewish communities), merchants and royal officers. They were the only significant English group whose wealth and influence could approach that of the French landed magnates, with whom some of them mixed even at the level of the royal court. There were occupational hazards, however: in the 1120s many moneyers were castrated and had their right hands cut off by Henry I for debasing the currency. The second group were churchmen. As we have noted, the highest ranks of the clergy – commanding immense economic and political as well as spiritual power – were close to Englishmen. But the lower levels – parish clergy, cathedral canons, archdeacons, monks, nuns, hermits and anchoresses – remained strongly and sometimes predominantly English in background and culture. Their oral teaching (mostly in English) and writings) in English, Latin and French) maintained English religious and cultural traditions. Some, notably William of Malmesbury (c. 1090 – c. 1142), librarian of Malmesbury Abbey, and Henry of Huntingdon (c. 1088- c. 1157), hereditary clergyman-squire of Little Stokely and archdeacon of Huntingdon, both of mixed French and English parentage, were responsible... for writing a new English history which helped to define the post-Conquest nation...

⁴⁰⁸ The Anglo-Saxon liberties were invoked during the Civil War, at the time of the “Glorious Revolution” of 1688, and again by Edmund Burke during the French Revolution. It is significant that fighters against contemporary absolutism should invoke the Anglo-Saxon monarchy, which surely indicates that the Anglo-Saxon monarchy was not absolutist. (V.M.)

“The Normans built the grandest, the most experimental, the most expensive buildings in a variety of styles, surpassing the greatest on the Continent. The new Winchester Cathedral (begun in 1079) was the longest in western Europe; London’s White Tower (c. 1080) was the biggest keep in western Europe; Westminster Great Hall (1097) was the largest secular covered space; Norwich castle (c. 1100) was the most ambitious secular building in northern Europe; Christ Church priory, Canterbury, possessed the greatest glass windows in all Europe. Probably more cut stone than in the Pyramids was used in this, the most concentrated construction effort in England between the Romans and the Victorians, amounting to the greatest per capita investment ever seen in England until the Industrial Revolution. Quite a lot, built in haste, fell down... But what remained was stupendous, matched then only by Rome itself, Constantinople and Kiev...”⁴⁰⁹

And yet these vast stone structures, so different from the much humbler, cosier and mainly wooden structures of the Anglo-Saxons, symbolized as nothing else the complete subjection of the native population. Perhaps the most striking of all is Durham cathedral (c. 1093-1140), built as if to crush England’s greatest saint, St. Cuthbert, whose relics repose in the cathedral, and who had forced even William the Conqueror to flee. This was truly the English equivalent of the pyramids, which could only have been built by a horrendous use of slave labour and the impoverishment of England’s northernmost and poorest province.

Tombs continues: “Buildings and lands came to embody new family identities. Wealthy Anglo-Saxons had spread bequests widely among relatives to maintain the cohesion of an extended clan, very conscious of far-flung degrees of kinship. Norman wealth went into stones and mortar: according to William of Malmesbury, the Saxons had lived richly in ‘mean and despicable’ houses, while the Normans lived frugally ‘in noble and splendid mansions’. The practice grew of transmitting land where possible to a single male heir by primogeniture – a social revolution. The family became smaller and more vertical, and attached to a particular place. Names and titles reflected this change. Unlike in Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian societies, which used Christian names and patronymics (e.g. Harold Godwinson) or identifying names based on characteristics or occupation (Thorkell the Tall, Eadric the Steersman), the Norman elite adopted permanent family names derived from land, castle or ancestor (Hubert de Vaux, Roger de Chateaufort, Richard Fitzerald). For the rest, individual nicknames (from place, job, physique – John Wood, Robert Smith, Thomas Becket) in time became permanent family surnames.

“There was no greater cultural conquest than in language. Working shortly before 1066, a thousand writers and copyists of English have been identified. This may sound few, but it is several times the number writing Italian texts in Renaissance Italy. The Normans eradicated written English as the language of government and

⁴⁰⁹ Tombs, *op. cit.*, pp. 51-53.

undermined it as the language of literature, and spoken English ceased to be the language of elite society. This change was confirmed by England's attachment to the Angevin empire in 1154. It was long believed that English largely disappeared except as a peasant dialect. Walter Scott, in *Ivanhoe* (1819), made the famous point that English became the language of the farmyard (swine, ox, calf) and French that of the table (pork, beef, veal). But this does not mean that English was crude, and French sophisticated. As we have seen, Old English and Irish were the most developed of Europe's vernaculars. English had a standardized writing from the late tenth century, whereas French had no written literature at all until – ironically – it was pioneered in post-Conquest England..., perhaps in imitation of Anglo-Saxon literature. Replacing English required two languages: Latin, for legal, administrative, ecclesiastical, commercial and intellectual contexts; French for verbal communication among the new elites. The sophistication of English government drove a high level of lay literacy. 'Unless a man knows French he is little thought of,' wrote the chronicler Robert of Gloucester in about 1290; 'but low-born men keep to English and to their own speech still'.

"Spoken English thus survived. Moreover, it soon predominated in everyday speech: the Normans needed it to communicate with the great majority of the population. Often within a generation, smaller landlords not only became bilingual in French and English – except among the highest nobility and at court – probably became their first language. Knowledge of French remained an essential social attribute, but noble children had to be sent to France to learn it properly. Bilingualism became a mark of 'English' identity among the descendants of the Normans. Trilingualism (with Latin) was the norm for the educated. In practice, there was a hybridization, or 'creolization', with the languages being mixed together, creating huge changes in vocabulary and grammar. French and Latin words were imported into English, though more slowly than Scott's example might suggest. For example, in the popular verse history of Britain, Layamon's *Brut* (c. 1200), a rare example of non-religious literature in English, there were only 250 French loan-words in 30,000 lines.

"So written English too survived. It retained certain grass-roots legal functions. In important monastic outposts, notably Worcester, Hereford, Winchester, Canterbury, Peterborough and Exeter, which we can properly call patriotic, it was propagated as the way of teaching the people. The monks of Peterborough Abbey were the last who continued to write the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, until 1154; but they stopped using formal English in 1121, when it was replaced by a local dialect – a sign of how quickly the old formal language was forgotten. By the end of the century, very few could still read it. In 1230, a monk at Worcester was trying to learn it – the West Midlands seem to have maintained a tradition – but by 1300 Old English had become an 'ydioma incognita'. Yet English, in older and newer forms, continued to be written in religious centres such as Worcester and Hereford. Even after the Conquest, the production and use of vernacular texts was rarely paralleled anywhere in medieval Europe. These

were not luxury products, but were for everyday use in prayer, preaching and ritual, and hence for the mass of the people English remained the intimate language of belief and salvation. This is one of the things that prevented it, changing though it inevitably was, from becoming a dying peasant dialect. The French-speaking elite often mocked it as uncouth, and so using and writing it was somewhat subversive. One Worcester scribe left a list of the notable churchmen who 'taught our people in English'; and he added, 'not dim, their light: it fair glowed'.

"English continued in place-names, though little in personal names. There is perhaps nothing that distances us more instinctively from the pre-Conquest English than names: Ealdgyth, Aelfgifu, Colswein, Eadric, Waltheof (even if a few were revived during the Romantic period – Karl Marx called one of his sons Edgar). Our names since the 1100s have been overwhelmingly Norman, a personal form of cultural conquest through snobbery: William (which became the most common), John, Richard, Robert, Margaret, Mary, Emma. In a significant conciliatory gesture, the sons of Henry III were christened Edward and Edmund, signaling a link with the pre-Conquest monarchy; and the former became King Edward I in 1272."⁴¹⁰

Tombs concludes: "The Conquest thus began to transform much of English culture. But it is likely that Latin, the common language of [Western] Christendom, would in any case have been increasingly used in legal, devotional and intellectual matters, as was happening across Europe: even before 1066, despite the prominence of the vernacular, there was more writing in Latin than in English. Choices of names would also probably have changed, as elsewhere in Europe, as the Church encouraged more uniform devotions. French would have come into greater use among the educated and the fashionable, especially in courtly and chivalric literature. This was not only because of the Conquest; the peak of borrowing from French came three centuries after 1066, a consequence of the cultural magnetism of Paris and the other great French cities, which affected all of western Europe.

"There was a dazzling literary revival in England in the century following the Conquest – but in Latin and French. It was probably the English tradition of vernacular writing that encouraged the development of writing in French. Some of the earliest works of French literature came from England or had English connections. The famous *Chanson de Roland*, an epic poem of Charlemagne's battles against the Saracens, was first written down in England in the early twelfth century."⁴¹¹

⁴¹⁰ Tombs, *op. cit.*, pp. 54-56. However, the very fact that this King Edward was called "the first" when there were at least three King Edwards before him shows the Normans' anti-Saxonism...

⁴¹¹ It was written between 1040 and 1115. There is a single extant manuscript of the *Song of Roland* in Old French held at the Bodleian Library at Oxford. This copy dates between 1129 and 1165 and was written in Anglo-Norman. (V.M.)

The first historical work in French was Geoffrey Gaimar's history of the English, the *Estoire des Engleis* (c. 1136-37), an accessible work in fashionable French verse based on the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. English authors – or authors in England, often of mixed Anglo-Norman families – attained a European influence greater than ever before, and rarely equaled since.

“Their most important works were histories or historical romances in Latin – the first major works of English history since Bede 400 years before. William of Malmesbury's *Gesta Regum Anglorum* (c. 1126) was a continuous history of England from the arrival of the Saxons to Henry I, and Henry of Huntingdon's *Historia Anglorum* went from the mythical arrival of the Trojan hero Brutus to 1154, just before the author's death. The most extraordinary of these works went beyond English history, Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* (c. 1136), ‘one of the supreme achievements of the historical imagination’, which transformed English visions of the past. As noted earlier, Geoffrey and his emulators plunged into legend and fantasy to create a prestigious new common Anglo-British epic. It became one of the most popular historical works in the European Middle Ages, far more widely read even than Bede, and is the only historical work known to have been in the possession of great nobles. It also produced popular spin-offs. The Jerseyman Wace, a monk in Caen, produced in 1155 a popular French version of the sage, called the *Roman de Brut* (Brutus), which, among other things, added the story of Arthur's Round Table. Significantly, he often translated *Britannia* as *Engleterre*. Layman (‘Lawman’) prepared his English translation of *Brut* in the early 1200s – an oddity, as even patriotic writings (such as the *Roman de Waldef* – about Earl Waltheof) were usually in French. Walter Map, a Herefordshire priest at Henry II's court, wrote a French version of the Grail and Lancelot stories (c. 1180). A later prose version of *Brut* was very widely read in Latin, French and above all English – more copies survive than of any other medieval manuscript, and it was repeatedly printed by Caxton after 1480.

“Thus for more than two centuries English after 1066 almost ceased to be the language of secular literary culture, as the elite no longer commissioned major works in English. A rare exception, such as Layamon's *Brut*, was perhaps an early sign of a new appetite for literature in English. But especially in the religious sphere English writing – sermons, psalms, saints' lives, poetry, songs – continued as one element of a bilingual or trilingual culture. One of the most famous pieces of early music – ‘Sumer is icumen in / Lhude sing cuccu’ – is a song written down in Reading Abbey in about 1250, using the same tune as a hymn. English did not therefore decline into a merely spoken range of peasant dialects, as was traditionally thought...”⁴¹²

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⁴¹² Tombs, *op. cit.* pp. 56-57.

Fr. Andrew Phillips describes how ripples from the Norman Conquest spread through Continental Europe. Thus "Alsin, Abbot of St. Augustine's at Canterbury, took refuge in Norway. Sweden, where English missionaries had long been at work was another destination and perhaps Finland too. It was, however, Denmark which proved to be the most popular destination. It was from here that King Swein had thought to mount invasions in 1070 and 1075. These were supported in England, especially in the North and the East where Danish sympathies were strong...

"Many churchmen also fled abroad, their places taken by the feudal warrior-bishops and clergy of the Normans, such as Odo of Bayeux, who fought at Hastings. Scandinavia seems to have been their main destination.

"Other exiles went to the Continent, to Flanders, France and Italy. King Harold's daughter, Gytha, moved further still. She was to marry the Grand-Prince of Kiev, Vladimir, and lived in Kiev, then a great centre of Christian civilization. Here, having been made welcome, she gave birth to several children, of whom the eldest son was named Harold [in baptism] like his grandfather, but also received the Slavic name, Mstislav.⁴¹³

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Stephen Lewis writes: "Gytha was a useful asset to King Sweyn. Probably around 1074 or 1075 he arranged her marriage with Vladimir Monomakh, the prince of Smolensk in western Russia. From the prince's point of view that was an advantageous match, giving him a wife who was a king's daughter, and an alliance with King Sweyn against the Poles. From Gytha's perspective, too, it was a good match. Prince Vladimir was young, rich and handsome.

"Whatever the precise circumstances and details, before his death in about 1075, King Swein did arrange for his young charge Gytha to be betrothed to the Kievan Rus' prince of Smolensk, Vladimir. The early Danish chronicler Saxo Grammaticus wrote in Book 11 of his *Historia Danica*: 'After the death of Harold, his two sons immediately fled with their sister to Denmark, Sweyn, forgetting the deserts of their father, as a relative received them under the custom of piety and gave the daughter in marriage to the king of the Ruthenians (Rutenorum) Waldemar (who was also called Jarizlauus by his own people). He (Harold) obtained from the daughter a grandson who after the manner of our time became his successor both by lineage and

⁴¹³ Harold Mstislav became Great Prince of Kiev in succession to his father (1126-1132). He was given two baptismal names, Harold and Theodore, and was given the title "the Great" for the excellence of his rule, so much so that he is counted among the saints. See N.M. Karamzin, *Predania Vekov*, Moscow: Pravda, 1989, pp. 177-179. The *Patericon* of St Pantaleon Cloister in [Cologne](#) says that "Gytha the Queen" died as a nun on 10 March. A year later Vladimir Monomakh married another woman (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gytha_of_Wessex) (V.M.)

by name. Thus the British and the Eastern blood being united in our prince caused the common offspring to be an adornment to both peoples.'

"Early Norwegian sources don't mention the three siblings seeking refuge with Swein, but the *Fagrskinna* and *Morgkinskinna* both mention Gytha's marriage to Vladimir. After telling the story of the death of King Harold Godwinson and his brothers, the *Fagrskinna*, which is a catalogue of the kings of Norway, goes on: 'After these five chieftains there were no more of Jarl Gothini's (Earl Godwin's) family left alive, as far as we can tell, apart from King Haraldr's daughter Gytha.... Gytha, King Haraldr's daughter, was married to King Valdamarr (Vladimir), son of King Jarizleifr (Jaroslav) and of Ingigerthr, daughter of King Olafr soenski.'

"It then goes on to tell more of what became of Gytha and Vladimir's children. The *Morkinskinna* tells much the same story.

"Actually Saxo Grammaticus and the two Norwegian sources are somewhat confused here. Vladimir was the son of Vsevolod and not Jaroslav (who was his grandfather, and who died in 1052).

"Under the year 1076, the *Russian Primary Chronicle* says, 'in this year, a son was born to Vladimir, he was Mstislav, and was a grandson of Vsevolod.'...

"Most likely Gytha and her young husband Vladimir were able to communicate in Danish. Vladimir, like his father Prince Vsevolod, is known to have spoken several languages, and Gytha, being a member of an Anglo-Danish family, the Godwins, likely spoke Danish as well as English. Emma Mason writes: 'There were no problems of communication, since her husband was an accomplished linguist. His dynasty had Scandinavian origins and his grandmother was Swedish. Probably he could converse with Gytha in the Norse tongue.'

"While Vladimir and his father continued fighting, he and Gytha had several more children. Many of his children were later to be married into other princely families, as was the way throughout Europe. Mstislav/Harold followed his father in becoming Grand Prince of the Kiev Rus' when Vladimir died in 1125. As both Norse and Russian sources tell us, Prince Harold married Princess Christina Ingesdottir of Sweden in 1095. Christina was the daughter of King Inge I of Sweden. Through his daughter Euphrosyne, Mstislav/Harold is an ancestor of King Edward III of England and hence of all subsequent English and British Monarchs...

"Conventionally it is said that Vladimir had three wives. But did he? As mentioned, the *Primary Russian Chronicle* mentions the death of two of his wives, under the years 1107 and 1126. We know that Gytha was Vladimir's first wife, but who were the others? No names are found, just two dates of death. We know that Vladimir had several more children after the birth of Vyacheslav in about 1083. These

children are usually assigned to an unknown putative second wife, who Vladimir is purported to have married after the death of Gytha. But there is no evidence whatsoever for the existence of this second, of three, wives: no name, no record of a marriage and no death. So it might very well be that these later children were Gytha's as well?

"That Vladimir did take another wife after Gytha seems reasonably clear, because, as mentioned, there are two entries for the death of a wife of Vladimir, in both 1107 and 1126. The name of this later wife who died in 1126 is often said to have been Anna, a daughter of Aepa Ocenevich, Khan of the Cumans, but there seems no evidence for this. It has been suggested that this attribution for the second/third wife most likely results from a misreading of the 1107 entry in the *Primary Russian Chronicle*, which states, 'and Volodimer (Vladimir) took the daughter of Aepa for Jurij [his son]'. It clearly says that it was Jurij (who died in 1157) who married Aepa's daughter, and not Vladimir. It's unlikely that father and son married two sisters...

"All the evidence seems to support the view that Gytha died in 1107." ⁴¹⁴

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Fr. Andrew continues: "Possibly the greatest emigration, however, was elsewhere; the Old English were attracted above all by the almost mystical name of Constantinople, fixed they believed, as Constantine had believed before them, at the middle of the Earth, joining East and West (which Kipling wrongly said would never meet). It is certain that from the Conquest on, and especially during the 1070's but right on into the middle of the twelfth century, huge numbers of English emigrated to the New Rome. Moreover, this emigration was an emigration of the elite of the country. The great scholar Sir Frank Stenton has discovered that several noble families simply disappeared after the Conquest and they were not all killed at Hastings - they emigrated. It was particularly the young who left to seek a better future elsewhere. In historical terms this emigration is comparable only to the emigration of the Russian elite and nobility in 1917 when confronted by the Bolshevik terror. So great was this emigration, especially it seems from the West Country, the Fens and East Anglia, and so long did it continue, that we must assume that it occurred with the approval of William I and his successors. It seems almost certain that it was their method of ridding themselves of the rebellious Old English ruling class and their supporters among the people. Exile, organised by the State, was after all a bloodless elimination of those who opposed William and the new order. It is no coincidence that the exodus continued right into the twelfth century. Why did they choose Constantinople? First, because probably already in the Confessor's reign (let us not forget that he was also half-Norman) discontented elements seem already to

⁴¹⁴ Lewis, "Gytha of Wessex", *History*, February 5, 2014.

have left for Constantinople where the Emperor needed men to fight in his armies, especially against the Turks, who posed a threat in the East. Secondly, many Danes and other Scandinavians (such as Harold Hardrada) had formed the elite 'Varangian Guard' there and found fame and fortune; news of this had certainly reached England. Thirdly, what was the future for a young English noble in Norman England? We know that in 1070 a certain Ioannis Rafailis, an Imperial agent or 'prospatharios' came to England recruiting for the Imperial Army. Young Englishmen and Anglo-Danes, especially those of noble birth, would certainly have been attracted. All the more so, since though the Emperor faced the Turks in the East, in the West, especially in Southern Italy, Sicily and Dalmatia, he faced the hated Normans; what better way for an Englishman of avenging himself? Fourthly, there were those who did not like the new order in the Church or in the State under the Normans. Spiritually they could find refuge in Constantinople and the freedom to continue to live in the ritual and the spirit of the Old English Church in the imperial Capital. Perhaps unconsciously their instincts and feelings drew them to that City which symbolised the unity of Christendom through the Old English period and which had had so many connections with the Apostles of the English, Gregory and Augustine...⁴¹⁵

The contribution of the English exiles was immediately felt. Thus Stephen Lowe writes: "Nikephoros Bryennios, writing in the first half of the twelfth century, describes a palace coup in 1071. Emperor Romanos Diogenes owed his position to being stepfather to the legitimate Emperor Michael VII Doukas. After Romanos was defeated and captured by Seljuk Turks at the disastrous battle of Manzikert, Michael seized the throne on his own account. Varangian guards were used as bullyboys to over-awe the opposition, and Bryennios implies that these palace guards were Englishmen 'loyal from of old to the Emperor of the Romans'."⁴¹⁶

In 1075, continues Phillips, "a fleet of 350 ships (according to another source 235) left England for exile in 'Micklegarth', the Great City, Constantinople. The commander of this fleet was one Siward (or Sigurd), called Earl of Gloucester. It is not impossible that he is identical with Siward Barn who had taken part in the

⁴¹⁵ Phillips, *Orthodox Christianity and the Old English Church*, pp. 29-30. A.A. Vasiliev (*History of the Byzantine Empire*, Madison, Milwaukee and London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1952, vol. II, p. 484) writes: "In the eighties of the eleventh century, at the beginning of the rule of Alexius Comnenus, as the English historian Freeman emphasized in his very well-known work on the conquest of England by the Normans, some convincing indications of the Anglo-Saxon emigration into the Greek Empire were already evident. A western chronicler of the first half of the twelfth century [Ordericus Vitalis] wrote: 'After having lost their liberty the Anglians were deeply afflicted... Some of them shining with the blossom of beautiful youth went to distant countries and boldly offered themselves for the military service of the Constantinopolitan Emperor Alexius.' This was the beginning of the 'Varangian-English bodyguard' which, in the history of Byzantium of the twelfth century, played an important part, such as the 'Varangian-Russian Druzhina' (Company) had played in the tenth and eleventh centuries."

⁴¹⁶ Lowe, "Ancestral Trust: The English in the Eastern Roman Empire", *Medieval History Magazine*, № 13, September, 2004, p. 11.

Fenland uprising of 1071 with Hereward. With him sailed two other earls and eight high-ranking nobles. If, at a conservative estimate, we accept the figure of 235 ships and place forty people in each ship, this would indicate an exodus of nearly 10,000 people, and this was only one group - albeit by far the largest - which left these shores after 1066... When they arrived in Constantinople they found the city under siege and, we are told, thereupon relieved the inhabitants, scattering the Turks before them. This 'relief', and it occurred, earned the gratitude of the Emperor and the English were granted lodging and places in the Imperial Army. The English were particularly valued since they were mostly young, many were of noble birth and they all loathed the Normans. The elite showed such loyalty that they entered the Imperial Household and formed the Emperor's bodyguard. Their exemplary loyalty to the Emperor of the Romans echoed the loyalty of the Old English to the Pre-Conquest Papacy, to St. Gregory the Great, Pope of the Romans.

"We read of English troops fighting at Dyrrachium (Durazzo) in 1081, where they suffered heavy losses against the Normans. Again in the 1080's the Emperor granted the English land on the Gulf of Nicomedia, near Nicaea to build a fortified town known as Civotus.⁴¹⁷ We are told that from the great fleet of 1075 some 4,300 English settled in the City itself, which at that time was the most populous, advanced and cosmopolitan city in the world. Further we read that the English sent priests to Hungary, which was then in close contact with Constantinople, for them to be consecrated bishops, since the English preferred the Latin rite to the Greek rite of 'St. Paul'. According to the sources, far more English than the 4,300 who settled in the city went further still. With the blessing of Emperor Alexis, these went on to recolonise territories lost by the Empire. It is said that they sailed on from the city to the North and the East for six days. Then they arrived at 'the beginning of the Scythian country'. Here they found a land called 'Domapia', which they renamed New England. Here they founded towns and having driven out the invaders, they reclaimed them for the Empire. Moreover, they renamed the towns 'London', 'York' and called others after the towns where they had come from...

"After painstaking research it has been discovered that medieval maps... list no fewer than six towns with names suggesting English settlements. These settlements on maps of the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries are located along the northern coast of the Black Sea. One of the names appears as 'Susaco', possibly from 'Saxon'. Another town, situated some 110 miles to the east of the straits of Kerch near the Sea of Azov appears variously as 'Londia', 'Londin' and 'Londina'. On the twelfth century Syrian map the Sea of Azov itself is called the 'Varang' Sea, the Sea of the Varangians, a name used for the English in Constantinople at this period. It is known that in the thirteenth century a Christian people called the 'Saxi' and speaking a language very similar to Old English inhabited this area, and that troops of the 'Saxi' served in the Georgian army in the twelfth century. There seem to be too many coincidences for us to think

⁴¹⁷ Called "Chevetogne" in the West. According to Ordericus Vitalis, the English were given lands in Ionia, where a town was built for them (Thierry, *op. cit.*, p. 230). (V.M.)

that the Sea of Azov was not then the first 'New England'."⁴¹⁸

Concerning this expedition of 1075, Lowe writes: "They sailed to Gibraltar, captured Minorca and Majorca, and then went on to Sicily. They sailed to Miklagard (Constantinople) ruled at that time by Kirjalax (Alexios I), and arrived in the nick of time to save the City from a seaborne invasion by heathens. In gratitude the Emperor gave them permission to re-take a land to the north across the sea, taken from him by the heathens. If they could win it back, it would be theirs. Some stayed in the Emperor's service, most went to this land, and re-took it. They called it England, and gave English names such as London and York to cities they captured and to new ones they built... The land in question is possibly the Crimea, which the Empire had lost not long before."⁴¹⁹

Phillips continues: "As for those thousands of Old English who settled in the Great City itself, they may have lived in a quarter known as 'Vlanga' [from 'Varangian'], near the Sea of Marmara..."⁴²⁰

In the thirteenth-century *Edwardsaga* we read that Earl Sigurd of Gloucester and his men reached Constantinople "and set the realm of the Greek King free from strife. King Alexius the Tall [Comnenus, 1081-1118) offered them to abide there and guard his body as was the wont of the Varangians... but it seemed to earl Sigurd that it was too small a career to grow old there... They begged the king for some towns of their own... [The Emperor assigned some lands in the north, if they could re-conquer them.] Sigurd and his men came to this land and had many battles there and they took possession and gave it a name and called it England and they gave names to the towns that were there and called them London and York."⁴²¹

Lowe continues: "Joscelin's *Miracula Sancti Augustini Episcopi Cantuariensis* tells of an Englishman of high rank from Canterbury who 'obtained such favour with the emperor and empress... that he received a dukedom over wise soldiers and a large part of the auxiliaries'. He married a rich woman of high family, and had a church built in Constantinople dedicated to Saints Nicholas and Augustine of Canterbury. This church was popular with the English in Byzantium and became the chapel of the Varangians."⁴²²

⁴¹⁸ Phillips, *op. cit.*, pp. 30-32.

⁴¹⁹ Lowe, *op. cit.*, p. 14. Other researches indicate that the English conquered land further on the southern shore of the Sea of Azov, and held it for centuries against Tatar onslaughts. Caitlin Green, "The Medieval 'New England'", <http://www.caitlingreen.org/2015/05/medieval-new-england-black-sea.html>. See also A. A. Vasiliev, "The Opening Stages of the Anglo Saxon Immigration to Byzantium in the Eleventh Century," *Seminarium Kondakovianum* 9 (1937).

⁴²⁰ Phillips, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

⁴²¹ *Edwardsaga*, in M.J. Cohen and John Major, *History in Quotations*, London: Cassel, 2004, p. 108.

⁴²² V.G. Vasilevsky (*Works*, St. Petersburg, volume 1, p. 275) has described the history of another church dedicated to the Mother of God: "The saga links a miracle of St. Olaf, who appeared in support of his brother [Harald Hardrada], with the story about the building of a church in honour of this Norwegian

Another report tells of a monk of Canterbury named Joseph, who visited Constantinople in about 1090, on his return from a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. He found there a number of his own countrymen, and recognised friends of his own among them. They were now in the Imperial household, and were friends of the officer in charge of guarding holy relics. The *Historia Monasterii de Abingdon* records that in the reign of Henry I, an Englishman named Ulfric (from Lincoln in the Danelaw) arrived on a mission from Emperor Alexios – the purpose is not stated, but it may have been a further attempt to hire mercenaries.

“The Byzantine chronicler Kinnamos, writing about 1180-3 of the actions of Emperor John II at the battle of Beroe of 1122, describes ‘the axe-bearers who stood around him (they are a Brittanic people who of old served the Roman Emperors)...’ *Inglinoi* [English] were present at the disastrous battle of Myriokephalon in 1185 (?). However, by this late stage these Englishmen, whom Emperor Manuel describes as ‘some of the leading men of the nobility of England’ were more likely to have been Anglo-Normans than Saxon exiles.

“In 1204 the Frankish army of the Fourth Crusade, diverted from its original aim to attack Muslim Egypt, instead besieged and captured Christian Constantinople. Niketas Choniates was a Roman chronicler of the fighting that led to the City’s fall. He writes that an attempted landing near the Palace of Vlachernai was repulsed by Pisan mercenaries and ‘the axe-bearing barbarians’.

“The Frankish eyewitness and chronicler Robert de Clari describing the battle tells

king in Constantinople. Immediately after they returned to Micklegarth, the Varangians carried out the vow they had made to build a large church, but the Emperor put obstacles in the way of its consecration and Harald had to devote considerable labour to overcome this stubbornness, etc. It goes without saying that neither in the Byzantine nor in any other sources do we find a trace of evidence that there ever existed in Tsargrad a church dedicated to the Norwegian Olaf, as the saga affirms. Other Scandinavian sources - the saga of Olaf in its shortest edition and the homily on the day of the holy martyr-king both belong to the second half of the 12th century - do not say that the church built in honour of Olaf was called by his name. They represent the event in a somewhat different light. The Byzantine emperor himself, being threatened by pagan enemies, turned in prayer to St. Olaf for protection and gave a vow to build a church in Constantinople 'in the name of the saint and in honour of the Holy Virgin'. But when it came to carrying out his vow it turned out that the Greek emperor did not consider himself or his Church bound to accept the definition of the Norwegian assembly which in 1031 recognised King Olaf, who had been slain in battle, as a saint. The church was built in honour and in the name of the Holy Virgin... The Varangians only helped in its construction and adornment. In this form the story seems much more probably, if not with regard to the reason, at any rate with regard to the consequence, that is, the construction of a Varangian church of St. Mary. It is here that we learn of the 'Varangian Theotokos'."

Phillips writes: “We also know of a convent dedicated to the Mother of God, called Panagia Varangiotissa. This was recorded until at least 1361 and from its name it may well have been founded by an Englishwoman. One of the English exiles, probably a certain Coleman, 'vir sanctus', a holy man educated at St. Augustine's in Canterbury, founded a basilica in the City and had it dedicated to St. Nicholas and St. Augustine of Canterbury." Its ruins survive to this day (V.M.)

of the 'English, Danish and Greeks' defending the towers 'with axes and swords'. The Frankish Crusader de Villehardouin reports the walls being manned by English and Danes - and that the fighting was very violent with axes and swords. One of the negotiators sent to the Emperor, de Villehardouin describes walking past Englishmen and Danes, fully armed with their axes, posted at the gate of the city and all the way along to the Palace.⁴²³

"There are few mentions of the Varangian Guard after the City's fall, and it is thought they dwindled to a shadow of their former glory. However, traces of the English Varangians still remained. Emperor Michael VIII (1261-1282) who recaptured Constantinople after the Frankish 'Empire' collapsed, refers to the active and repeated use of his '*Englinovarangoi*' in defending his reduced Byzantine realm.

"The fourteenth-century *De Officiis* of Pseudo-Codinus, states that English was used in the acclamation to the Emperor at the Imperial banquet at Christmas - after the Genoese, Pisans and Venetians, came the *Inglinisti*, clashing their weapons with a loud noise..."⁴²⁴

Perhaps the most lasting image of the English Orthodox in exile is Anna Comnena's description of their last stand against the Normans at the Battle of Durazzo (present-day Albania) in 1081. This was truly the last stand of the English Orthodox, fighting, as was appropriate, in the ranks of the Byzantine Emperor against the Roman Catholic invaders: "The axe-bearing barbarians from the Isle of Thule", as Anna called them, thrust back an attack on their part of the line, and then pursued the Normans into the sea up to their necks. But they had advanced too far, and a Norman cavalry attack threw them back again. "It seems that in their tired condition they were less strong than the Kelts [Normans]. At any rate the barbarian force was massacred there, except for survivors who fled for safety to the sanctuary of the Archangel Michael; all who could went inside the building: the rest climbed to the roof and stood there, thinking that would save their lives. The Latins merely set fire to them and burned the lot, together with the sanctuary..."⁴²⁵

Thus did the chant of the English Orthodox warriors, "Holy Cross! Holy Cross!" fall silent on earth. And thus did the Lord accept their sacrifice as a whole-burnt offering to Himself in heaven. As the *Old Roman Liturgy for the dead*, the native rite

⁴²³ John Godfrey writes of the battle for the city in 1204: "The Franks put up two ladders against a seawall barbican near Blachernae, and two knights and two sergeants, followed by fifteen men-at-arms, managed to get on top of the wall. They found themselves opposed by 'the English and Danes, and the fight which followed was hard and ferocious', says Villehardouin; and the courage of the Anglo- Danes put heart into the hesitant troops inside the barbican, who now threw themselves into the fray" (1204: *The Unholy Crusade*, Oxford University Press, 1980, p. 107). Phillips (*op. cit.*) notes that, according to de Clari, these English soldiers had their own priests in Constantinople. (V.M.)

⁴²⁴ Lowe, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

⁴²⁵ *Alexiad*, II, 11, 9; IV, 6; translated by E.R.A. Sewter, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1969, pp. 100, 96, 147-8.

the English, chants: "May Michael the standard-bearer lead them into the holy Light, which Thou didst promise of old to Abraham and his seed."

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So much for the survival of Englishness. What about Britishness? How did the other nations of the British Isles survive the Norman invasion of England?

Scotland welcomed many of the English exiles fleeing from William, but it proved to be a temporary and illusory refuge. For King Malcolm's wife Margaret, though a very pious woman and an English princess of the Old Wessex dynasty, became a spiritual daughter of Lanfranc, and hence the chief instrument of the normanization and papalization of the Scottish Church. However, according to Lucy Menzies, "it was not till the time of David I, son of Malcolm and Margaret, that the authority of the Church of Rome was fully accepted in Scotland and the Celtic Church, as such, disappeared from the mainland, the Culdees being driven out."⁴²⁶ Moreover, in spite of periodic Anglo-Norman invasions, Scotland survived as an independent nation-state until Cromwell's invasion in the 1650s and the union of England and Scotland in 1707.

Wales did not fare much better. William went on a "pilgrimage" to St. David's in 1081, and came to an agreement with the local King Rhys. However, in 1093 Rhys was killed, and the Normans gradually took over. It seems likely that the last independent Orthodox bishop in Britain was Rhyddmarch of St. Davids, son of Sulien the Wise, who reposed in 1096. The *Annals of St. Davids* say of him that he was "one without an equal or second, excepting his father, for learning, wisdom, and piety. And after Rhyddmarch instruction for scholars ceased at Menevia..."⁴²⁷ Southern Wales quickly came under Norman domination, and the north was conquered by King Edward I in the late thirteenth century.

Early in the next century the Irish, too, suffered a Papist "reformation", and, in 1172 - a Norman invasion. John of Salisbury describes how Ireland was graciously granted to Henry II of England by the English Pope Adrian IV: "At my solicitation he granted Ireland to Henry II, the illustrious King of England, to hold by hereditary right, as his letter to this day testifies. For all Ireland of ancient right, according to the *Donation of Constantine*, was said to belong to the Roman Church which he founded."⁴²⁸ Cromwell completed the subjugation of Scotland in the 1650s.

Thus perished that Church which had been so important in the evangelization of England, and which, in the person of St. Columbanus of Luxeuil, had given a classic

⁴²⁶ Menzies, *Saint Columba of Iona*, Felinfac: J.M.F. Books, 1920, p. 214.

⁴²⁷ A.W. Haddan and W. Stubbs, *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents Relating to Great Britain and Ireland*, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1871, volume I, p. 298.

⁴²⁸ John of Salisbury, *Metalogicus* (1156).

rebuke to a heretical Pope: "[If you err], then those who have always kept the Orthodox Faith, whoever they may have been, even if they seem to be your subordinates,.. shall be your judges.. And thus, even as your honour is great in proportion to the dignity of your see, so great care is needful for you, lest you lose your dignity through some mistake. For power will be in your hands just so long as your principles remain sound; for he is the appointed keybearer of the Kingdom of heaven, who opens by true knowledge to the worthy and shuts to the unworthy; otherwise if he does the opposite, he shall be able neither to open nor to shut..."⁴²⁹

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Returning, finally, to England, we may note that as late as 1383 John Wyclif demonstrated that a knowledge of what was the worst consequence of 1066 – the loss of the true, Orthodox faith, at the hands of the papacy – had not completely died out. "The pride of the Pope," he said, "is the reason why the Greeks are divided from the so-called faithful... It is we westerners, too fanatical by far, who have been divided from the faithful Greeks and the Faith of our Lord Jesus Christ..."⁴³⁰

But no action followed upon this correct intuition...

Occasional appeals were made to what was thought to be the faith of the Anglo-Saxon Church.⁴³¹ But there was little consciousness of the fact that the Norman Conquest marked an ecclesiastical, as well as a political, revolution. For England was now part of the great pseudo-Christian empire of the papacy, which, theoretically at least, had the power to depose her kings, close her churches (which it did in King John's reign) and enroll her soldiers in crusades against the Muslims and Orthodox Christians around the world. Little was said or done about returning to union with the Orthodox. Even the visit, in the early fifteenth century, of the Byzantine Emperor Manuel to England to enlist English help in the defense of Constantinople against the Turks failed to arouse interest in the ancestral faith and Church. For, as Edward Freeman wrote in his massive nineteenth-century history of the Norman Conquest, "so far from being the beginning of our national history, the Norman Conquest was the temporary *overthrow* of our national being..."⁴³²

⁴²⁹ G.S.M. Walker, *Sancti Columbani Opera*, 1970, Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, pp. 47, 49, 51.

⁴³⁰ Wyclif, *De Christo et Suo Adversario Antichristo* (On Christ and His Adversary, the Antichrist), 8; in R. Buddensig (ed.), *John Wiclif's Polemical Works in Latin*, London: The Wiclif Society, 1883, volume II, p. 672.

⁴³¹ See Christopher Hill, "The Norman Yoke", in *Puritanism and the Revolution*, London: Penguin Books, 1958, 1990, pp. 58-125.

⁴³² Freeman, E.A., *A History of the Norman Conquest of England*, Oxford, 1870-1879, p. 1.

CONCLUSION. THE ANGLO-SAXON AUTOCRACY

Let us summarize what the Autocracy meant to the English...

The monarchy had always been a sacred institution among the English. Both the king and the archbishop were "the Lord's Anointed" - the archbishop in order to minister the sacraments of salvation, and the king so that, as St. Bede wrote "he might by conquering all our enemies bring us to the immortal Kingdom".⁴³³ The king was sometimes compared to God the Father and the bishop - to Christ. Thus in his letter to Charlemagne Cathwulf compared the king to the Father and the bishop to the Son. He was the shepherd and father of his people and would have to answer for them at the Last Judgement. According to King Aethelred's law-code of 1014, "a Christian king is Christ's deputy in a Christian people".

The Church strongly preached the people's duty of loyalty to the king. Thus Abbot Aelfric wrote: "The people can choose whomever they like as king. But after he is consecrated as king, then he has dominion over the people, and they cannot shake off his yoke from their neck."⁴³⁴

For, as Archbishop Wulfstan of York wrote: "Through what shall peace and support come to God's servants and to God's poor, save through Christ, and through a Christian king?"⁴³⁵

"Indeed the pre-eminence of the monarchy, for all the political vicissitudes involving changes of dynasty, is the outstanding feature that strikes the careful student of eleventh-century England. To all who wrote or legislated, the king was supremely the symbol of the nation. It is sometimes forgotten how many sides of the life of the community were brought together under royal surveillance: the coinage, supervision of general administration of justice through shire and hundred and tithing, provision of good title to land by means of charters, and protection of the Church. It might be said of England in the tenth and eleventh centuries that king and community grew together. There is evidence of strong loyalty to the monarchy, and the Church helped to encourage this feeling. During the tenth century coronation rites were introduced that made the coronation of Edgar a splendid and symbolic moment in the life of the nation. The promises given by King Edgar at his coronation reappeared in the Coronation Charter of Henry I; indeed in essentials the ritual of this Anglo-Saxon ceremony remains the core around which has been constructed the elaborate detail of modern coronations..."⁴³⁶

⁴³³ St. Bede the Venerable, *Commentary on Acts*.

⁴³⁴ Abbot Aelfric, *Catholic Homily on Palm Sunday*.

⁴³⁵ Archbishop Wulfstan, *Institutes of Christian Polity* (1023).

⁴³⁶ Loyn, *Anglo-Saxon England and the Norman Conquest*, London: Longmans, 1962, p. 214.

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Although, as we have seen, King Aethelred at a low point in his reign considered some kind of constitutional arrangement with his people, there is no hint of democratism in Anglo-Saxon concepts of government. For, as Deacon Alcuin of York wrote, "the people should be led, not followed, as God has ordained... Those who say, 'The voice of the people is the voice of God,' are not to be listened to, for the unruliness of the mob is always close to madness."⁴³⁷

The killing of the king was seen as an especially heinous crime, which could be atoned only by the suffering of the whole nation. That is why the murder of St. Edward (and later, that of Prince Alfred, the brother of St. Edward the Confessor), as well as the expulsion of King Aethelred, were seen as so ominous, and closely connected with the disasters that followed them.

Thus in the eyes of Archbishop Wulfstan, "Aethelred's expulsion from his kingdom in 1013 seemed a crime heinous enough to account for the ills with which God was punishing the English."⁴³⁸

Indeed, according to the archbishop in his famous "Sermon of the Wolf to the English" (1014), it was disloyalty at every level of English society that led to the disasters suffered at the hands of the Danes: "For there are here in the land great disloyalties towards God and towards the state, and there are also many here in the country who are betrayers of their lords in various ways. And the greatest betrayal in the world of one's lord is that a man betray his lord's soul; and it is also a very great betrayal of one's lord in the world, that a man should plot against his lord's life or, living, drive him from the land; and both have happened in this country. They plotted against Edward and then killed him... Many are forsworn and greatly perjured, and pledges are broken over and again; and it is evident in this nation that the wrath of God violently oppresses us..."⁴³⁹

However, the veneration due to the Lord's Anointed went together with definite responsibilities on his part. St. Dunstan had close personal relationships with six kings, and crowned and anointed three of them, probably playing an important part in the composition of the rite itself.⁴⁴⁰ At the coronation of King Aethelred in Kingston in 979⁴⁴¹, he said: "The Christian king who fulfills these obligations earns for himself

⁴³⁷ Deacon Alcuin of York, *Letter 132*, to Charlemagne, *M.G.H., Ep. Kar. Aevi*, vol. II, p. 199.

⁴³⁸ Dorothy Bethurum, "Regnum and sacerdotium in the early eleventh century", in Peter Clemons and Kathleen Hughes (eds.), *England before the Conquest*, Cambridge University Press, 1971, p. 133.

⁴³⁹ Archbishop Wulfstan, "The Sermon of 'Wolf' to the English", in Michael Swanton, *Anglo-Saxon Prose*, London: Dent, 1975, pp. 118, 119.

⁴⁴⁰ Eleanor Duckett, *Saint Dunstan of Canterbury*, London: Collins, 1955, p. 108.

⁴⁴¹ The stone upon which King Aethelred was crowned can still be seen in the centre of Kingston (meaning, of course, "king's stone") in Surrey. So the root of true kingship, drenched in the true anointing chrism of the Orthodox monarchy, still exists in this land.

worldly honour, and the eternal God is merciful to him, both in the present life and in the eternal life that never ends. But if he violates that which was promised to God, then things will immediately get worse among this people, and in the end the worst will happen, unless he takes steps to put things right in his lifetime. Ah! dear lord, examine yourself carefully and bring to mind frequently, that at God's judgement you will have to produce and lead forth the flock of which you have been made the shepherd in this life, and then give an account of how you have looked after that which Christ purchased with His own Blood.

"The duty of an anointed king is that he judge no man unjustly, defend and protect widows and orphans and strangers, forbid stealing, correct unlawful intercourse, and annul and altogether forbid incestuous unions, extirpate witches and magicians, drive out of the land killers of relatives and perjurers, feed the needy with alms, have old and wise and sober men as counselors, and install righteous men as stewards. For in the day of judgement he will have to give an account for whatever injustice they have committed which is his responsibility."⁴⁴²

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The success of the Anglo-Saxon kingdom can be attributed above all to its respect for *the law*, both God's and the king's. Respect for the church canons was instilled in the English from the time of St. Theodore "the Greek", who composed a famous *Penitential* based on the canons. And the English imitated his respect for the law; for when St. Theodore himself violated the canons by trying to break up the diocese of York without the permission of its incumbent, St. Wilfrid, the Englishman appealed three times to Rome - and his complaint was each time upheld. Again, while the English archbishops always travelled to Rome for their *pallia*, and veneration for Rome remained high among the English until 1066, this did not prevent English bishops from disputing some of the papacy's decisions on canonical grounds.⁴⁴³

R. van Caenegem writes that "the Anglo-Saxons founded the most solid and best administered kingdom of the western world. Their kings were great law-givers and this tradition was in no way diminished after legislation had lapsed on the Continent. On the contrary, the voluminous and numerous dooms (some of which are unfortunately lost) of Ine, Offa, Alfred the Great, Edward the Elder, Athelstan,

⁴⁴² William Stubbs, *Memorials of St. Dunstan*, Rolls series, 1874, pp. 356-357.

⁴⁴³ Thus when an English nobleman contracted an uncanonical marriage and was excommunicated by St. Dunstan, he appealed successfully to the pope. But Dunstan, as his name ("firm rock") implied, was firm as a rock: "I am not to be moved," he said, "even by the threat of death, from the authority of my Lord." In this way the saint demonstrated his truly Orthodox consciousness and freedom from the papist heresy that sought to place the Pope's authority above that of Christ and the Universal Church. Nor did the king try to persuade him to disobey the Lord of lords. And so the nobleman came to repentance, and appeared before Dunstan barefoot and with a candle in his hand; whereupon he was released from his ban.

Edmund, Edgar, Aethelred the Unready and Cnut form a collection of texts unique in Europe, bearing witness to an equally unique tradition of royal, national law-giving in England right through the Anglo-Saxon period (Liebermann 1898-1916).

“The nation-wide administration of justice was equally impressive. There was a network of hundred and shire courts, topped by the witenagemot and receiving decisive impulses from the crown, inter alia by means of the writs, which were often addressed to such local gatherings. There were also franchisal courts belonging to lords... Finally the comparative excellence of royal administration should be mentioned. England enjoyed a high measure of internal peace and order (staving off enemies from overseas was another matter): private warfare and adulterine castles (or which there were a few under the Confessor, built by Norman knights) were practically unheard of, and practices such as tithing and frankpledge guaranteed a measure of public safety that must have astounded people on the other side of the Channel. The efficiency of the royal writing-office has already been mentioned. Equally efficient was the new network of local royal officials, the sheriffs, who had no equals on the Continent. These ‘counts of the shire’ had nothing to do with hereditary regional princes, but were real appointees of the crown. The royal mint was also one of the wonders of Europe because of its monopolistic position, its efficiency and its enormous output. National defence was centrally directed and general military service, in the local and the national fyrð, was never abandoned in favour of the feudal formula of the army of professional knights: the disaster of October 1066 should not obscure the fact that English armies had successfully resisted the Danes in the ninth and tenth centuries and that King Harold had, a few weeks before Hastings, destroyed a powerful army led by the king of Norway. The foundation of a solid national monarchy was a notable Anglo-Saxon achievement and its consequences were far reaching. When in the twelfth century the rebirth of the state became a general European phenomenon, the existence of these Anglo-Saxon antecedents gave Norman and Angevin England an advantage which goes a long way towards explaining England’s pioneering role in this European development...”⁴⁴⁴

Harriet Harvey Wood writes: “Because of the length of time that the Anglo-Saxon rule lasted, it was naturally not the same throughout, but there were, none the less, consistent threads running through the period. The kingdoms of the seventh-century Ine and the tenth-century Athelstan were indeed very different in many respects, but those over which Athelstan and Edward the Confessor ruled were not in essence very dissimilar. The Domesday Book (1086), one of William’s most famous (and, it must be said, most valuable) achievements, aimed to take a snapshot picture of England ‘on the day King Edward was alive and dead’, 5 January 1066; many of the institutions that it records as having existed then and that survived the conquest

⁴⁴⁴ Van Caenegem, “Government, Law and Society”, *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought*, c. 350 – c. 1450, Cambridge University Press, 1991, pp. 184-185.

have been shown to go far back in history, many of them to a time well before King Alfred or even King Ine. It has been surmised that some of the most important elements of them, for example the system of hundreds, the local government units into which the shires were broken down for administrative and tax purposes, may well go back to a common Indo-European culture, for traces of it have been noted in Carolingian France also. Many of them survived into the future as well. The shire structure itself continued through the conquest unaltered and untampered with until 1974. A retiring prime minister, resigning his parliamentary seat in the early years of the twenty-first century, still had to apply for the stewardship of the Chiltern hundreds of Stoke, Desborough and Burnham in Buckinghamshire.

“The system of justice meant that wherever a man lived, he was rarely in a district so remote that he did not have access to a court of law: the king’s court, the shire court, the hundred court. The involvement of the different ranks of the people in the different levels of the national administration of justice also a unifying factor, and gave the public at large a voice in national affairs that could never have been imagined in, say, Normandy during the reign of autocrats such as Duke William or his father. There were written law-codes in England from the time of King Aethelberht of Kent in the sixth century... In considering why the Angevin kings were to prove more effective legislators in England than in their homeland of Anjou, Patrick Wormwald suggests that this could be because in the tenth and eleventh centuries, English kings had laid down the law as no other western rulers did. Henry II, he points out, made law like no other twelfth-century king because he inherited a system of royal justice that was already uniquely well developed...”⁴⁴⁵

Crimes against the Church or her servants were seen as crimes against the king, and duly punished. The king saw it as his duty to look after the Church and enforce her laws with secular penalties. And yet the relationship between Church and State in England was “symphonic”, not caesaropapist; for the kings did nothing without consulting their bishops and senior nobles – all meetings of the witan were attended by bishops as well as nobles. Indeed, according to Archbishop Wulfstan, it was the monarchy that depended on the faith and the Church, not the other way round. “It is true what I say: should the Christian faith weaken, the kingship will immediately totter.”⁴⁴⁶

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Thus, as Loyn writes, “the pre-eminence of the monarchy, for all the political vicissitudes involving changes of dynasty, is the outstanding feature that strikes the careful student of eleventh-century England.”⁴⁴⁷ But this pre-eminence was conditional on faithfulness to the Church and Orthodoxy. And so, as Frank Barlow

⁴⁴⁵ Wood, *The Battle of Hastings*, London: Atlantic, 2008, pp. 58-60.

⁴⁴⁶ Wulfstan, *The Institutes of Polity*, 4.

⁴⁴⁷ Loyn, op. cit., p. 214.

says, "a true theocratic government was created, yet one, despite the common charge of confusion against the Anglo-Saxon Church, remarkably free of confusion in theory. The duality of the two spheres was emphatically proclaimed. There were God's rights and the king's rights, Christ's laws and the laws of the world. There was an independent ecclesiastical jurisdiction under the control of the bishop, but there was also the helping hand of the secular power which the church had invoked and which it could use at its discretion."⁴⁴⁸

Everything changed after 1066. First and most important, the faith of the people changed: true, Orthodox Christianity was destroyed and the heresy of Roman Catholicism took its place. Secondly, the main support of Orthodoxy, the Anglo-Saxon autocracy, was also destroyed, and all contact between England and the homeland of Autocracy, the Orthodox East, was gradually severed.

The symphony of powers between Church and State disappeared, being replaced, first by the despotism of the Norman monarchy, and then by the despotism of the Pope. Today we have democracy instead of despotism. But the despotism of the European Union lurks in the wings, and even closer, in the very constitution of the land; while Autocracy is now nowhere to be found.

Our only hope lies in the fulfillment of St. Edward the Confessor's prophecy about the restoration of the broken off limb of English religion and statehood to the original trunk from which it was cut off in 1066 - the religion and statehood of the Orthodox Christian East... Light will come from the East. We must be ready to catch the first rays of that glorious Dawn...

⁴⁴⁸ Barlow, *The English Church, 1000-1066*, London: Longmans, 1979, p. 141.

APPENDIX. THE FLOWERING BRANCH

An Exercise in Prophetic Interpretation

The time is very early in 1066, the most dramatic and fateful year in the whole of English and British history. The place is the palace of Westminster in London, where all the chief men of the land are gathered for the twelve-day feast of Christmas and for the consecration of King Edward's great new church dedicated to the Apostle Peter. And perhaps also to elect a new king: for the good King Edward, renowned for his gifts of prophecy and miracle-working, and known in later ages as "the Confessor" to distinguish him from his holy uncle, King Edward the Martyr (+978), is dying childless.

There could hardly have been a more dangerous time for the kingdom to be without an obvious heir. First, there has just been a semi-rebellion of the northern province of the country, Northumbria, against their Earl Tostig, a scion of the most powerful family in the land, the Godwins, and brother of Edward's Queen Edith. When Edward's chosen mediator, Earl Harold, the senior member of the Godwin family, decided in favour of the Northumbrians and against his brother Tostig, the furious earl fled the kingdom, vowing revenge. Secondly, there were several foreign contenders for the English throne, among them the Danish King Swein, the Norwegian King Harald Hardrada, the greatest warrior of the age, and - Duke William "the Bastard" of Normandy. Thirdly, and most seriously, the English Church was in a kind of semi-schism from its Mother Church in Rome because the canonical English primate, the Norman Archbishop Robert of Canterbury, had run away from his see, and King Edward had given his pallium (omophorion) to the English Bishop Stigand. Rome would not act against England as long as the revered King Edward was alive; but anything was possible after his death...

King Edward fell into a coma. What happened next was recorded by an unknown monk of Canterbury, writing only shortly after the events he describes, of which he may even have been an eye-witness: "When King Edward, replete with faith, perceived that the power of the disease was forcing him to his end, with the commendation and prayers of the most important of God's faithful he resigned himself to the funeral rites..."

"While he slept those in attendance felt in his sleeping body the travail of an unquiet soul, and woken by them in their terror, he spoke these words. (Up till then, for the last two days or more, weakness had so tired him that when he spoke scarcely anything he said had been intelligible.) 'O eternal God,' he said, 'if I have learned those things which have been revealed to me from Thee, grant also the strength to tell them. But if it was only an illusion, let my former sickness burden me according to Thy will.' And then, as they who were present testify, he used such resources of eloquence that even the healthiest man would have no need of more.

“‘Just now,’ he said, ‘two monks stood before me, whom I had once known very well when I was a young man in Normandy, men of great sanctity, and for many years now relieved of earthly cares. And they addressed me with a message from God.

“‘Since,” they said, “those who have climbed to the highest offices in the kingdom of England, the earls, bishops and abbots, and all those in holy orders, are not what they seem to be, but, on the contrary, are servants of the devil, on a year and one day after the day of your death God has delivered all this kingdom, cursed by Him, into the hands of the enemy, and devils shall come through all this land with fire and sword and the havoc of war.”

“Then I said to them, “I will show God's designs to the people, and the forgiveness of God shall have mercy upon the penitents. For He had mercy on the people of Nineveh, when they repented on hearing of the Divine indignation.”

“But they said, “these will not repent, nor will the forgiveness of God come to pass for them.”

““And what,” I asked, “shall happen? And when can a remission of this great indignation be hoped for?”

““At that time,” they answered, “when a great tree, if cut down in the middle of its trunk, and the part cut off carried the space of three furlongs from the stock, shall be joined again to the trunk, by itself and without the hand of man or any sort of stake, and begin once more to push leaves and bear fruit from the old love of its uniting sap, then first can a remission of these great ills be hoped for.”

“When those who were present had heard these words – that is to say, the queen, who was sitting on the floor warming his feet in her lap, her brother, Earl Harold, and Rodbert, the steward of the royal palace and a kinsman of the king, also Archbishop Stigand and a few more whom the blessed king when roused from sleep had ordered to be summoned – they were all sore afraid as men who had heard a speech containing many calamities and a denial of the hope of pity. And while all were stupefied and silent from the effect of terror, the archbishop himself, who ought either to have been the first to fear or give a word of advice, with folly at heart whispered in the ear of the earl that the king was broken with age and disease and knew not what he said. But the queen, and those who had been wont to know and fear God in their hearts, all pondered deeply the words they had heard, and understood them quite otherwise, and correctly. For these knew that the Christian religion was chiefly dishonoured by men in Holy Orders, and that... the king and queen by frequent admonition had often proclaimed this.”

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King Edward died on January 5, 1066. The next day he was buried and his brother-in-law, Harold, was crowned with the agreement of all the chief men of the kingdom and of Edward himself - but not of Duke William, who, supported by Pope Alexander II, declared him a usurper and starting gathering a huge army to invade England. The nine years and nine days of King Harold's reign were filled to the brim with activity of all kinds, and especially - war. Four times the king had to summon his forces from all over England to defend the land against various external threats. King Swein was seen off; King Hardrada and Tostig were crushed in the great battle of Stamford Bridge in September - the last victory of Orthodox Christianity over Viking paganism. However, in October the exhausted Harold was defeated and killed at Hastings by William, fighting under a papal banner and with some relics of St. Peter around his neck. After devastating the south-east, William entered London and on January 6, 1067, exactly one year and one day after King Edward's death, he was crowned as the first Catholic king of England. Then he set off on the terrible three-and-a-half-year campaign that destroyed English Orthodox civilization and has been called the first European genocide. The Antichrist had come to England!

So the first part of King Edward's prophecy had been fulfilled with precision. But what of the second part? What does the tree signify? And what is the meaning of the branch, and its reunification with the trunk?

It is usually thought - by those few who believe in the prophecy, not dismissing it as the ravings of a comatose madman - that the return of the branch to the trunk means the marriage, in the year 1100, of King William's fourth son, Henry I of England, to Matilda, daughter of King Malcolm of Scotland and his wife Margaret, a princess of the Old English dynasty of King Alfred the Great and Edward the Confessor, on the grounds that the trunk of the tree represents the Old English dynasty while Matilda represents the branch of that dynasty that returned to power in England through her marriage to Henry I after a journey of three "furlongs" - that is, three decades, or generations, of English kings.

However, there is a major problem with this interpretation, namely: what, if anything, changed as a result of this marriage? And the answer is: nothing important. The Norman dynasty was followed by another French-speaking dynasty, that of the Plantagenets; there was no real return of the Anglo-Saxon monarchy, and English traditions remained trampled upon. So the prophesied "remission of the great evils" brought upon the country by the Norman-Papist conquest of 1066 simply did not take place. Nor, from a spiritual point of view, *can* it take place unless and until the English return to the faith of their Anglo-Saxon forbears - which, in spite of an increased interest in Anglo-Saxon England, and a growth in the number of Orthodox Christians in the country, still seems a distant prospect...

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Let us ponder another interpretation... The trunk represents Orthodox monarchism. Its splitting in half represents the war between the old regime under King Harold and its successor under King William. The branch is Harold's daughter Gytha, and its travelling "three furlongs" - the flight of King eastwards in three stages: first to Flanders, then to Denmark, and finally to Kiev. The reunification of the branch with the trunk represents the reunification of Orthodox monarchism in its Eastern and Western variants through the marriage of Gytha to the future Great Prince Vladimir Monomakh of Kiev.

Let us look at this story more closely...

Now the history contains many "rags to riches" stories, demonstrating how God can raise anyone He chooses from the dung-hill to the heights of earthly power and glory. Among these, one of the most dramatic is that of Princess Gytha. When her father was killed at Hastings on October 14, 1066, defending his kingdom against the Roman Catholic Duke William of Normandy, she and her whole family were in danger of extinction by the cruel and vengeful William. But God not only protected her life. He raised her to the throne of the Great Principedom of Kiev, marrying her to Great Prince Vladimir Monomakh, - a marriage celebrated in modern times by an epic poem in Russian -through whom she united the blood of the English Royal Family to that of the Russian Riurik dynasty.

We know very little about Princess Gytha's early life. She was born probably in the late 1040s to Earl Harold Godwinson, later King Harold II, and his common-law wife, Edith "Swan Neck", a beautiful and wealthy English aristocrat. Although Harold and Edith were not married in church, but more danico, "in the Danish way", such marriages had a legal status, and there is every indication that it was a loving and stable relationship, producing many children, which only ended early in 1066, when King Harold, to please the Church and probably also for political reasons, married Alditha, the sister of Earls Edwin and Morcar.

Gytha's grandparents were Earl Godwin of Wessex and Countess Gytha. Godwin was an Englishman from Sussex who fought bravely for King Edmund Ironside until his death on the field of battle in 1016 at the hands of the Danes under King Cnut "the Great", who then subdued the whole of England. But Cnut respected his new dominion; he was baptized and did his best to unite the English and the Danes. Thus he promoted Godwin and married him to his sister-in-law Gytha. In the years that followed, the Anglo-Danish Godwin family increased in power and wealth under both Danish and English kings. Godwin's daughter Edith married King Edward the Confessor, and his son Harold became king on Edward's death in January, 1066.

A portrait of Countess Gytha can still be seen in a stained-glass window of her family's church of St. Nectan at Stoke in North Devon. It was there that St. Nectan's

fragrant relics were uncovered, following a revelation to the local priest, in the first half of the eleventh century. St. Nectan appears to have become the family's protector; for one of St. Nectan's miracles was worked on behalf of Earl Godwin.

The Normans viciously attacked the Godwin family, falsely accusing King Harold of being a usurper and finally killing him at Hastings - "because of the sins of people", as the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* puts it. The grieving Countess Gytha, accompanied by Edith Swan-neck, pleaded with William to give her her son's body in exchange for its weight in gold. William refused...

The formidable old countess now proceeded to organize the resistance to the usurper King William from her estates in the south-west of England, and especially from the ancient Roman city of Exeter. But it was difficult for her: not only Harold, but also her other sons Earls Gyrth and Leofwine had been killed at Hastings, and she had only her grandsons Godwine and Edmund left to lead the armies. In 1067, Exeter fell after a long siege, and the Dowager-Queen Edith, King Harold's sister, surrendered to William; while Queen Alditha, King Harold's wife, fled to Chester, another old Roman city in the north of England, with her baby son Harold. Meanwhile, probably the nearest adult claimant to the English throne, Edgar the atheling, whose family had spent some time in Valaam, in the north of Russia, during Cnut's reign, fled to King Malcolm (the victor over the famous King Macbeth) in Scotland.

The grandsons continued the struggle, however. Their ultimate failure, writes Ian W. Walker, "was due in the main to William's reaction to the very real threat they posed. His campaign in the south-west decisively nipped their schemes in the bud. Subsequently, they were forced to base themselves abroad and use mercenary troops, making it difficult for them to win any real support in England. Another significant factor was their failure to win the support of their cousin, Swein of Denmark, who was clearly intent on pursuing his own claim to the throne rather than supporting that of his cousins. The fact that many of Harold's key supporters had fallen at Hastings, and that the Normans controlled a large part of the family lands in the south-east severely handicapped them. The brothers' inexperience in warfare was also a contributory factor to their failure, although the long defence of Exeter and their victory over Eadnoth [the *staller*, who had served the Godwins, but changed sides after Hastings] suggest this was not decisive. Perhaps if either Gyrth or Leofwine, with their greater authority and experience, had survived the battle at Hastings things might have been different.

"The brothers' bid for the throne was over, but this was not the end of the story. A considerable amount is known about the fate of the remnants of King Harold's family after their final withdrawal from England in 1069. The elderly Countess Gytha, with Harold's sister Gunnhild, probably settled in quiet retirement at St. Omer in Flanders, where Count Baldwin VI apparently received them charitably as

relatives of] his aunt Judith [wife of Earl Tostig Godwinson, killed with the Norwegian King Harald at Stamford Bridge in 1066] and in spite of their rivalry with his brother-in-law, William of Normandy. Countess Gytha's remaining treasure may have helped to persuade Baldwin to provide them with refuge. Thereafter, the royal ladies performed good works, and the death of the king's sister, Gunnhild, was recorded at Bruges in 1087. She bequeathed a psalter with Anglo-Saxon glosses to St. Donation's in Bruges and this book, known as 'Gunnhild's Psalter', was still there in the sixteenth century. She also donated a collection of religious relics to St. Donation's, most notably the mantle of St. Bridget. A copy of [Abbot] Aelfric's works donated to St. Bertin's may, perhaps, have been a legacy of Countess Gytha.

"It seems likely that King Harold's sons escorted these ladies to Flanders, as it would have been rather risky for them to navigate the Norman-controlled Channel alone...The presence of these exiles must have caused King William considerable unease. Indeed, the arrival of this group in Flanders, perhaps in late 1069 or early 1070, may have prompted William to depose Bishop Aethelric of Sussex on 24 May 1070, in case he became a fifth column in support of their return. He was, after all, a relative of the family and based in the ancient family heartland just across the Channel from them. Therefore, it became imperative to remove him for political reasons. It seems likely that this was the reason for Papal concern about this particular deposition, as expressed in a number of later Papal letters. On 16 July 1070 Baldwin VI died and a succession dispute broke out between his infant sons, supported by King William, and his brother, Robert the Frisian. This dispute ended on February 22, 1071 at the battle of Cassel, the victory falling to William's enemy, Robert, who became the uncontested Count of Flanders. The threat of a descent by Harold's sons on Sussex from a hostile Flanders may have contributed to the unusual organization of the Norman castellanries in the Sussex rapes.

"It was probably from Flanders, where they had accompanied or followed the ladies of the family, that King Harold's sons, Godwine and Edmund, journeyed to the court of their cousin, Swein of Denmark, accompanied by their sister Gytha. This is recorded by Saxo Grammaticus, who, although writing much later, seems to portray a not improbable situation and whose account is perhaps confirmed by two independent sources. The latter record an embassy to Denmark by Godwine the younger, mistakenly identified as Harold's brother rather than his son, which sought King Swein's aid against William. The brothers may have hoped that their arrival in Denmark would finally secure Swein's backing for their restoration. If so, they were swiftly disillusioned, as Swein's own recent invasions of England had proved fairly disastrous and he was in no hurry to repeat them. Thereafter Swein's death in 1074 or 1076 ushered in a period confusion, which was not fully resolved until well into the next century. The final fate of Godwine and Edmund is unknown, but Gytha, according to later Scandinavian sources, was sent by Swein to marry the Russian Prince of Smolensk, Vladimir *Monomakh*. The date of the event is unclear but it probably occurred in 1074 or 1075. It has been objected that no Russian source records

the name of Vladimir's first wife and Vladimir's own testament records her only as the mother of his son George. However, this is not unusual and many women are unnamed in Russian sources, including Vladimir's own Byzantine mother, and the fact of the marriage appears to be generally accepted.

"Prince Vladimir was then around twenty-six years old and ruler of the city of Smolensk in Western Russia. He held an important but not key position in the complex hierarchy of Russian princes. At this time, Russia consisted of a series of principalities each based on a major city and each ruled by a member of the dynasty of St. Vladimir. The principalities were arranged in a rough hierarchy with Kiev at the summit, usually ruled by the senior prince. Vladimir probably welcomed his marriage as providing him with a royal connection. It also brought with it an alliance with the Danes, which might prove very useful in dissuading the neighbouring Poles from invading Russia.

"The marriage proved fruitful and in 1076 Mstislav, the first of a number of sons, was born to Gytha in Novgorod. Two years later, Vladimir was promoted to the position of Prince of Chernigov, following the expulsion of his cousin, Oleg, from the city. He successfully ruled this, the second city in Russia and an important bastion, for some sixteen years, defending it against a series of attacks from the steppe nomads. Finally, in 1094, he was expelled by Oleg with the aid of nomad allies and he moved to his father's city of Pereyaslavl. It is likely that Gytha accompanied her husband throughout this period and shared his successes and failures. She appears to have provided him with a large number of children, perhaps as many as eight sons and three daughters. In this respect, Gytha appears to have been as fruitful as her mother, Edith 'Swan-neck', and her grandmother and namesake, Gytha...

"Gytha died on 7 May 1107 before her husband attained the pinnacle of his career by becoming Grand Prince of Kiev in 1113. The eldest of her sons, Mstislav, born in Novgorod in 1076, was widely known in the Norse world by her father's name, Harold. He went on to succeed his father as Grand Prince of Kiev in 1125, ruling the city until his own death in 1132."⁴⁴⁹

Great Prince Mstyslav-Harold also has the name of Theodore (perhaps his name in Holy Baptism), and is numbered among the saints of the Russian Church, being commemorated on April 15.

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Let us now return to King Edward's prophecy, and examine whether the interpretation of the branch and its fruit as Princess Gytha and her progeny is viable.

⁴⁴⁹ According to the St. Petersburg historian S.V. Tsvetkov, a Gospel book brought by Gytha to Kiev is preserved in Kiev (private communication to S.V. Shumilo).

There are two obvious objections to it. The first is that the association of the prophecy with the distant country of Russia seems far-fetched and artificial; the second is that the “remission of the great evils” spoken of in the prophecy has not been fulfilled in any obvious way.

In answer to the first objection, let us first pay heed to an interesting theory put forward by, among others, the Russian priest Fr. Stefan Krasovitsky. This theory consists in the assertion that in the eleventh century most of northern Europe, in a vast arc stretching from Kievan Rus’ in the East to Scandinavia in the north to England in the West, was in fact a single cultural area comprising three ethnic groups, the Russians, the Scandinavians and the Anglo-Saxons, united by a single warrior elite of Scandinavian origin – known as “Northmen” in both England and Russia, but better known as “Vikings” today – who had conquered the Russians in the East and the Anglo-Saxons in the West. The cultural unity of the area was strengthened by the Christianization of its pagan elements – Scandinavia by English missionaries and its trio of Christian Olafs (Olag Trygvasson of Norway, Olaf the Saint of Norway and Olof Skotkonung of Sweden, father of St. Anna of Novgorod), and Russia by the Byzantines.

Much has been made of the fact that Russia, unlike Western Europe, derived its faith from the Eastern Orthodox, while England and Scandinavia later came under the religious control of the Roman Catholic papacy. This is indeed a very important fact – caused in no small part by William of Normandy’s destruction of Anglo-Saxon Orthodoxy after the Battle of Hastings, which had a knock-on effect for the whole of Western Europe. But in the period we are discussing, England – and therefore also its ecclesiastical dependency, Scandinavia – was an Orthodox country in full communion and constant contact with the Eastern patriarchates. This meant that in the period in question England and Scandinavia were united as never before – not only culturally, but also religiously. Perhaps the best proof of that is that after 1066 English warriors and aristocrats migrated in large numbers to Constantinople and (in the person of Princess Gytha) to Russia – but not at all to the ancient haunt of English exiles, Old Rome.

Therefore just as it was natural for the Russian Orthodox after 1917 to emigrate to other Orthodox countries such as Greece, Bulgaria and Serbia, so it was natural for Gytha after 1066 to emigrate to Russia. There, in spite of obvious differences, she would have felt cultural and religious affinities. She might even have been able to speak the Scandinavian language of the elites, if not the Slav language of the lower classes.

Moreover, there were clear precedents for Gytha’s decision. In 1028, when he was driven out of his Norwegian kingdom by King Cnut, St. Olaf, of Norway decided to flee to Sweden and thence to the court of his kinsman, Yaroslav of Kiev. Moreover, a generation earlier, King Olaf Tryggvason had been given refuge by St. Vladimir of

Kiev. Perhaps the closest precedent is that of St. Anna of Novgorod. The daughter of King Olof Skotkonung of Sweden, and baptized by an English bishop, St. Sigfrid of Vaxjo, she married Prince Vladimir Yaroslavovich of Novgorod, thereby making the same transition from Western Orthodox monarchism to Eastern Orthodox monarchism that Gytha made a little later.

The symbolism of the flowering of the branch can also be successfully interpreted in accordance with this interpretation. For the marriage of Vladimir and Gytha did produce fruit – their six children. Moreover, in the person of their eldest son Mystislav the fruit was truly holy. Thus the “bearing of fruit from the old love of its uniting sap” represents Gytha’s bearing of good fruit in the person of her eldest son, St. Theodore-Mystislav-Harold, Great Prince of Kiev, whose triple-barreled name – Greek, Russian and English - represents not only the three blood-lines he inherited from his parents, but also the continuing vitality of Christian name in its three historical manifestations – the First Rome in the West, the Second in Constantinople and the Third Rome in Russia.

However, as with the first interpretation, so with this second one, a formidable problem is presented by the phrase “remission of great evils”. What could this refer to? As we have seen, there was certainly no remission of great evils in England. Nor is it at all clear that anything of the sort happened in Russia. So let us turn, finally, to a third possible interpretation that will, hopefully, make sense of the whole of King Edward’s prophecy...

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The third interpretation is as follows. The great tree represents the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, the Orthodox Church. Until 1054 this Church in East and West was one. However, in 1054 it was split in two by the mutual anathemas exchanged by Pope Leo IX of Rome and Patriarch Michael Cerularius of Constantinople. In the West those who wished to escape the Roman Catholic menace and remain in Orthodoxy had to flee eastwards, to Byzantium or Russia. However, for a long time this migration was undertaken only by a handful of people – Princess Gytha and St. Anna of Novgorod are two early examples; St. Anthony the Roman, St. Macarius the Roman, St. Procopius of Lubeck and the holy Royal Martyrs Tsaritsa Alexandra and Grand Duchess Elizabeth are later examples. However, in the twentieth century this trickle of migrants became a flood. Western Orthodoxy was reborn. Only what was needed now to be reunited with the trunk of the Orthodox Church was not a physical migration but a spiritual one. For many tens of thousands of Eastern Orthodox Christians migrated to the West, where westerners could join them without leaving their homelands.

Very many westerners have made this spiritual voyage without being preached to, but only as a result of their personal researches and intuition or a personal meeting

with Christians of the Eastern Orthodox Church. This effortless conversion is what is meant by the words of the prophecy that the branch will be rejoined to the trunk “by itself and without the hand of man or any sort of stake”. As for the distance of “three furlongs” that the branch departs from the tree, this may signify the three religious revolutions, or heretical upheavals, that have taken the Western peoples further and further away from Orthodoxy: first the Roman Catholic revolution of the late eleventh century, then the Protestant revolution of the sixteenth century, and then the Ecumenist revolution of the twentieth century. Indeed, it has been only since the foundation of the ecumenical movement after the First World War that the conversion of Western heretical Christians to Orthodoxy has begun to take place on a large scale. Indeed, this conversion has been a powerful witness in itself to the falseness of the ecumenist heresy: far from accepting that they are already in the True Church, and that the Church can embrace all kinds of contradictory beliefs within itself, these western converts have witnessed by their words and actions that the Truth is only in Orthodoxy and that they are prepared to abandon their former beliefs and churches in order to join it.

As for this branch putting forth leaves and bearing fruit, as the prophecy indicates, this has only just begun. Nevertheless, some green leaves are already discernible: by common consent, the American Fr. Seraphim Rose and the Chilean Jose Munoz were exceptional Orthodox Christians. We may hope that in the not so distant future there will be further spiritual fruits in more and more Western Orthodox Christians. And then the last part of the prophecy – the “remission of great evils”, that is, the removal of heresy and all the evils of contemporary western civilization – will be fulfilled...

Of course, this third interpretation of St. Edward’s prophecy is as speculative as the first two. But it has the advantage over the first two of accounting for more parts of the prophecy. Moreover, would it not be appropriate that the last recognized saint of the West should on his deathbed pronounce a prophecy about the resurrection of Western Orthodoxy?

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