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## Monasticism in Anglo-Saxon England: an analysis of selected hagiography from Northumbria written in the years after the Council of Whitby

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MONASTICISM IN ANGLO-SAXON ENGLAND: AN ANALYSIS OF SELECTED  
HAGIOGRAPHY FROM NORTHUMBRIA WRITTEN IN THE YEARS AFTER THE  
COUNCIL OF WHITBY

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
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in

The Department of History

By  
Carrie Couvillon  
B.A., Southeastern Louisiana University, 2000  
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For my parents,  
Buster and Sheryl Couvillon,  
whose love and support has given  
me the chance to continue my education.  
Thank you both for everything.

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## ABSTRACT

Hagiography, writings about saints, was generally a means of venerating a saint's life. An author of hagiography wrote to advance his own salvation as well as to educate his audience on the proper practice of Christianity. Anglo-Saxon hagiography written in the years after the Council of Whitby in 664, however, also showed more support for the Roman tradition as opposed to Celtic Christianity. In an era when Christians in England were divided both culturally and religiously, unification under a single tradition as the one true representative of the faith was essential. This paper is an analysis of four important hagiographical works from the late-seventh and early-eighth centuries; the *Lives of Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow* by Bede, the *Anonymous Life of Ceolfrith*, the *Life of Wilfrid* by Eddius Stephanus, and the *Life of Cuthbert* by Bede. The hagiography covers this transitional period in Anglo-Saxon England when most of the Celtic monks in and around the kingdom of Northumbria resisted the switch to Roman monasticism. The *Lives* written about Benedict Biscop, Ceolfrith, Wilfrid and Cuthbert reveal how the transition began and progressed in the years after the synod.

## CHAPTER 1: CHRISTIANITY IN ANGLO-SAXON ENGLAND

Monasticism in Anglo-Saxon England during the seventh and eighth centuries could be attributed to some of the key figures in monastic history. Western monasticism, as a whole, had been evolving since the time of the desert fathers, but, in the seventh century, monasticism in England confronted a dilemma that brought to question the truest representation of the Christian faith. The two main monastic traditions were the Celtic and the Roman, and both had a vast array of loyal followers who believed they were representing the 'true faith' of Christianity. These two factions met and clashed in the northwestern region of Britain, more specifically the kingdom of Northumbria. Once a decision was made in favor of one tradition over the other, the face of western monasticism was irreversibly changed.

Britain had ceased being a province of the former empire in the fifth century when Emperor Honorius recalled all his troops in the northwestern frontier. Everything 'Roman' seemed to disappear, when the imperial troops left and the Saxon invaders moved in, even Christianity which had spread throughout the Roman world. This view, however, is not completely accurate, and Christianity never disappeared from Britain. The story of St. Patrick is only one instance that shows how Christianity survived in Britain before Pope Gregory the Great reestablished the Roman Church's authority in Britain at the end of the sixth century. A more precise explanation of what happened to Christianity in Britain would be that it was overpowered by the religious practices of the Saxon 'invaders,' who were pagan. The missionaries sent by Pope Gregory were the beginning steps to reestablishing Christian dominance in Britain. It was not an easy task, but with the added influence of the Irish and Frankish missionaries Christianity spread throughout the country

in less than a century.<sup>1</sup> With the exception of a few pagan practices that were still connected to the Anglo-Saxon warrior culture, Christianity once again became the primary religion in Britain.

Celtic monasticism developed in Ireland in the sixth century in the regions along the coast of the Irish Sea, west Britain and east Ireland. It was in this area that a vastly different form of Latin Christianity emerged. The Latin culture that came out of this region was strictly based upon the Latin texts that were available to the Irish at the time.<sup>2</sup> What the Irish and Welsh had was “the Bible and a selection of vivid texts of Latin Christian literature of the late fourth and early fifth centuries – the cultural debris of a ravaged Roman province, that had been preserved in western Britain and Wales after the collapse of Roman society in large areas of the island.”<sup>3</sup> Out of these limited resources a different kind of Latin emerged.

It was a type of Christianity that developed from the texts alone, a “Christianity of the mind.”<sup>4</sup> The differences that developed were mainly because of the Irish’s dependence upon these texts, some of which were two hundred years old. The problem with this is that Continental Europe in the sixth century was speaking a different Latin than it had been two centuries earlier. The Irish and Welsh off in their own corner of the world ended up teaching themselves Latin from these older texts in order to communicate with one another,

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<sup>1</sup> D.H. Farmer and J.F. Webb, *The Age of Bede* (London: Penguin Group, 1965), 14.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom* (Oxford and Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 239.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 240.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 241.



particularly in regards to their Christian beliefs.<sup>5</sup> Also, since Ireland was located outside the sphere of the former empire, they “owed little or nothing to Rome.”<sup>6</sup>

The argument over which tradition was the truer representation of Christianity sparked a debate that caused contention between Roman and Celtic Christians. The followers of both traditions claimed their faith represented the truer path, but there could be only one ‘true faith.’ The Council of Whitby in 664 adjourned in favor of the Roman tradition, but the council’s decision did not bring an end to the Celtic tradition in Britain, or its monasticism. Some Celtic monasteries in northern Britain, like Iona and Lindisfarne, remained loyal to their Celtic ideals and held on to them for quite some time. There were even a few among the followers of Roman monasticism who recognized some good qualities within the Celtic tradition of Christianity. Celtic monasticism had “austerity, learning, calligraphy, [and a] pioneer missionary endeavor,”<sup>7</sup> and even Bede showed approval of Celtic saints like Aidan.<sup>8</sup> Since all aspects of the Celtic tradition could not be erased from monastic life, a main concern of the hagiographers was to cement Roman authority in Britain after the synod at Whitby made its decision.

Hagiography by definition is “writings about the saints.”<sup>9</sup> In Christianity, the title of *saint* was given to a holy man or woman “who had lived a life of heroic virtue and then been posthumously judged by God to be worthy of entrance into the kingdom of heaven. In theory all who resided in the divine court were saints, but in practice Christian churches accorded a relatively small number of people the title of saint and, with it, public

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 239.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 240.

<sup>7</sup> D.H. Farmer, *Age of Bede*, 16.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Head, *Medieval Hagiography: An Anthology* (New York and London: Routledge, 2001), xiv.

veneration.”<sup>10</sup> Venerating saints was a fundamental part of medieval Christianity because “saints were, both during their lives and after their deaths, key members of the Christian community.”<sup>11</sup> By the seventh century, hagiography had become a popular means of recording and spreading the message of the ‘true faith.’ For the Roman Church, it was matter of convincing its faithful to hold true to their traditions. Also, by telling the stories of those people who were found worthy of veneration, authors of hagiography were able to convey to the people and their own brethren the highest order to living.

Hagiography is a glimpse into the ideal life medieval Christians sought to achieve, and it was written for various reasons. One of the more obvious is the immortalization of Christian saints and heroes, telling the stories of their lives to contemporaries and preserving them for future generations. Another reason was that by writing about saints, ecclesiastics were able to convey to their brothers and sisters the proper and ideal way of conducting their own ascetic and religious lives. These reasons are in correlation with Thomas Head’s statements in *Medieval Hagiography*. He says that a medieval writer of hagiography wrote “both to advance his own salvation and to educate his audience in the proper practice of Christianity.”<sup>12</sup> Head, however, also says that, “hagiography can tell us at least as much about the author and about those who used the text – their ideals and practices, their concerns and aspirations – as it does about the saints who are their subjects. Hagiography provides some of the most valuable records for the reconstruction and study of the practice of premodern Christianity.”<sup>13</sup> The hagiography written in the late-seventh

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., xiv.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., xiv.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., xiii.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., xiii.

and early-eighth centuries is important not only as records of these saints' lives, but also as a record of how this transition period in Northumbria affected monastic life. It tells us not only how these saints dealt with the transition, but also how the monks who were being forced to undergo this transition dealt with it. These works are also highly demonstrative of their author's ideals and opinions in regards to monastic life.

Each of the saints' lives that are being analyzed for this paper, the *Lives of Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow* by Bede, the *Anonymous Life of Ceolfrith*, the *Life of Wilfrid* by Eddius Stephanus, and the *Life of Cuthbert* by Bede, were written in the years after the synod at Whitby and come from that area in Anglo-Saxon England that was the most affected by this struggle between Celtic and Roman Christians, the northeastern kingdom of Northumbria. By looking at these *Lives*, I will show how this transition progressed in some of the Northumbrian monasteries, and I will show how the hagiography written during this transition period placed special emphasis upon the Roman tradition of Christianity.

When selecting these particular saints' lives, a main factor taken into consideration was the author himself. The authors of these works of hagiography were all monks who had either known the saint personally, or they spoke with others who had known the saint well. Bede entered the monastery of Wearmouth at the age of seven when his kinsmen put him into Biscop's care for an education. He later moved to Jarrow where he was placed under the supervision of Ceolfrith.<sup>14</sup> The anonymous author of the *Life of Ceolfrith* is also believed to have been a monk at Wearmouth.<sup>15</sup> Eddius was a monk from Ripon while Wilfrid was alive, and Eddius' first-hand knowledge of some of the events in the *Life of*

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<sup>14</sup> Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of English People*, ed. Judith McClure and Roger Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 293.

<sup>15</sup> Clinton Albertson, ed., *Anglo-Saxon Saints and Heroes* (Fordham: Fordham University Press, 1967), 245.

*Wilfrid* leads scholars to believe that he not only knew Wilfrid but twice accompanied him into exile.<sup>16</sup> As for the *Life of Cuthbert*, Bede did not know Cuthbert on a personal level, but he conducted a “thorough investigation of the whole of the saint’s glorious life, with the help of those who had actually known him.”<sup>17</sup> Bede used the anonymous *Life of Cuthbert* as a resource, but he also provided additional information to help fill in the shorter account done by the anonymous author.<sup>18</sup>

Northern Britain, particularly Northumbria, originally followed the Celtic tradition due to the influence of Aidan and his mission. The missionaries originally sent by Pope Gregory the Great eventually reached Northumbria after making their way north past Kent, which led to two different monastic traditions encountering each other in the same area, sometimes within the same household. The rivalry between the Celtic and Roman traditions reached its peak in 664. The four works of hagiography that are being analyzed illustrate the Roman Church’s efforts to unite England universally under a single tradition. One of their key features is the evidence they offer as to how monasticism in Anglo-Saxon England developed after Whitby. The objective was to persuade Christians to embrace the Roman traditions rather than the Celtic, since it was affecting critical matters of the Church such as the date of Easter, the proper tonsure, and the standing of bishops.

Roman dating for Easter prevailed over the Celtic one at Whitby, but the decision itself did not bring about a widespread transition. The Celtic monks may have begrudgingly accepted the Roman celebration of Easter, but they were not as easily

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>17</sup> Bede, “Life of Cuthbert,” in *The Age of Bede*, ed., D.H. Farmer (London: Penguin Group, 1965), 41.

<sup>18</sup> Bertram Colgrave, *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert: A Life by an Anonymous Monk of Lindisfarne and Bede’s Prose Life* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1940), 3.

persuaded to change their monastic beliefs and traditions. In the end, certain aspects of the Celtic world managed to prevail throughout Britain and what eventually developed within these monasteries was a kind of fusion between the two traditions.<sup>19</sup> A good example of this would be some of the religious art of the century that was done in the Celtic style.<sup>20</sup> The hagiography, however, does not offer examples to illustrate how much of the Celtic tradition still existed within Anglo-Saxon England, since the hagiographers were more concerned with writing to put greater influence upon the Church of Rome and the papacy as the true authority of Christianity, while still writing to ensure their own salvation and that of their audience.

## **The Origins of Monasticism**

The study of monasticism is about as complex as the study of Christianity itself. Monasticism developed with the rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire. In the empire, Christianity was a newly emerging religion, and its development was easier to control within the more densely populated cities, since “a civil-minded, secular aristocracy still resided in them.”<sup>21</sup> However, the greater the distance from the city of Rome itself, the more difficult it was to prevent radical new forms of Christianity from emerging. The people located in the rural areas were not only far away from the empire’s stronghold, but they were also more sparsely located, which made it harder to manage the development of this new religion.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> D.H. Farmer, *Age of Bede*, 15.

<sup>20</sup> Peter Brown, *Rise of Western Christendom*, 372.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 81.

Monasticism began in the deserts of Syria and Egypt after 270 A.D. as a new form of ascetic life. The word monasticism is derived from the Greek word *monachos*, “lonely one,” which is where modern English gets the word “monk.”<sup>23</sup> This new approach to an ascetic life came about after an Egyptian farmer named Antony went out into the desert and lived there for forty years. He “devoted his life to service and contemplation of God through a program of ‘discipline,’ consisting of celibacy, poverty, fasting, and the like.”<sup>24</sup> Antony was not the first ascetic to take up residence in the desert, but his popularity can be accredited to Athanasius, the Bishop of Alexandria. In 356, a year after Antony’s death, Athanasius wrote Antony’s biography, which was more than likely the first work of hagiography. The *Life of Antony* by Athanasius became popular almost immediately; it portrayed Antony as “the real founder of Christian monasticism.”<sup>25</sup> Antony was the model Christian hermit, an *eremites*, or “man of the desert.”<sup>26</sup> As the popularity of the *Life* spread many ascetics hoped to find their own spiritual transformations by following his example. They, therefore, abandoned city life and went to live in the desert in devotion to God.<sup>27</sup>

Antony’s asceticism was similar to the theology of Origen, a theologian from third-century Alexandria. Origen’s ideas were largely influenced by Platonic thinking, and his theology was based on the notion that before the time of Creation human souls were originally spiritual beings, or intelligences, collectively known as *nous*. The *nous* possessed free will and existed in union with God, but at some point they fell distant from God. The

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>24</sup> David Brakke, trans., “Life of St. Antony of Egypt,” in *Medieval Hagiography: An Anthology* (New York and London: Routledge, 2001), 1.

<sup>25</sup> Marilyn Dunn, *The Emergence of Monasticism: From the Desert Fathers to the Early Middle Ages* (Oxford and Malden: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 2000), 3.

<sup>26</sup> Peter Brown, *Rise of Western Christendom*, 81.

<sup>27</sup> David Brakke, trans., “Life of St. Antony of Egypt,” 1.

extent of the *nous'* alienation from God determined whether it would be born as an angel, human soul, or devil. Origen's theology upheld a tripartite division of human nature into body, soul, and spirit. The body, at one time good, was holding the soul captive inside it. An Origenist essentially believed that angels and demons constantly fought over souls, but they also believed in a soul's ability to reunite with God.<sup>28</sup>

For Antony, asceticism was based on "a constant struggle for self-knowledge, self-purification and through these the return of the soul to unity with God, in whose image it was created."<sup>29</sup> Antony also placed great emphasis on the Christ's role as savior. Christ came down to Earth for the salvation of human souls, and it would be through Christ that humans would be able to redeem their sins to God and return to their original state of being.<sup>30</sup> Antony's asceticism said that "the presence of Christ and his teachings will restore the unity shattered by man's sinfulness and fall, creating communion with Christ through the receiving of the 'Spirit of Adoption.' Yet while it is possible for the individual to purify the body and receive knowledge of the 'Spirit of Adoption,' the lasting achievement of the vision of God is possible only after death has freed the soul from the body."<sup>31</sup>

Antony and other early Christians pronouncing death as the final stage in which a worthy soul could be set free from its confinement helps explain why such emphasis was placed upon saints and their lives. Saints were recognized as having lived a virtuous life, but it was their death that ultimately reunited their soul with God. The stories of their lives

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<sup>28</sup> Marilynn Dunn, *Emergence of Monasticism*, 4.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

can be seen as indications of how other Christians can live virtuously in hopes of being reunited with God in heaven after death.

The *Life of Antony* by Athanasius had a profound impact upon the development of monasticism.<sup>32</sup> The strict ascetic ideal that Antony followed did not, however, appeal to everyone. Many married Christians in the fourth century, for instance, took offense to the stringent promotion of celibacy by ascetic enthusiasts. Roman aristocrats were especially apprehensive about noble men and women adopting the life of Christian ascetics, since this was leading to the decline of great patrimonies. Even within married life Christians were embracing asceticism.<sup>33</sup> There were also others, like Sulpicius Severus, who chose an ascetic life only after the death of a spouse.

Sulpicius Severus was the Gallic aristocrat who, in 396, wrote the *Life of Martin of Tours*. From his writing, Sulpicius obviously knew the *Life of Antony*. He also had access to other early hagiography and to the writings of the Latin Church Fathers, but at this point in time there was not a standard model for saints' lives.<sup>34</sup> Sulpicius' *Life of Martin* became the standard, and it is considered a classic work of Latin hagiography.<sup>35</sup> Martin of Tours was probably the first consecrated bishop in Gaul who was not an aristocrat. He was a soldier turned monk, who lived an ascetic life in the desert. Since Martin was a monk and not an aristocrat, the decision to appoint him to the episcopate was somewhat surprising, especially since many of his peers were opposed to his consecration; he was, however, very

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>34</sup> F.R. Hoare, trans., "Life of Martin of Tours," in *Soldiers of Christ: Saints and Saints' Lives from Late Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages*, eds. Thomas F.X. Noble and Thomas Head (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 2.

<sup>35</sup> Peter Brown, *Rise of Western Christendom*, 82-83.



popular with the people.<sup>36</sup> As an ascetic monk, Martin had given up worldly possessions and taken a vow of chastity, which was a complete contrast to the other Gallic bishops who were all married.<sup>37</sup> Some of them opposed his consecration by saying Martin was unfit to hold the position due to “his insignificant appearance, his sordid garments, and his disgraceful hair.”<sup>38</sup> Sulpicius believed that the Gallic bishops who opposed Martin joining their rank only disputed the idea because they “were so envious of his spiritual powers and his life as actually to hate in him what they missed in themselves but had not the strength to imitate.”<sup>39</sup> Martin of Tours was considered by many to be a holy and spiritual man, and his fellow bishops more than likely could not contend with the respect he was afforded.

Despite the opposition to Martin joining the episcopate from some of his fellow bishops, Sulpicius repeatedly shows the aristocracy’s acceptance of Martin. Noblemen of substantial rank within the Roman Empire sought him out. One such story is about the daughter of Arborius, a Roman senator. She was cured of an acute fever when her father placed a letter from Martin on her chest just as her fever became extremely high. The fever immediately lessened, and Arborius was so impressed by the miracle that he presented his daughter to Martin to have her life dedicated to the Church.<sup>40</sup> Sulpicius makes it a point to show how far-reaching Martin’s influence was within the Roman Empire despite the aversion some of his peers had toward him. Sulpicius was also trying to make the ascetic life more appealing to aristocrats, since he “utilized his own classical education and culture

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<sup>36</sup> Sulpicius Severus, “Life of Martin of Tours,” in *Soldiers of Christ: Saints and Saints’ Lives from Late Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages*, eds. Thomas F.X. Noble and Thomas Head (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 12.

<sup>37</sup> Marilyn Dunn, *Emergence of Monasticism*, 62.

<sup>38</sup> Sulpicius Severus, “Life of Martin of Tours,” 12.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

and attempted to present asceticism in an acceptable light to those who shared his cultural background.”<sup>41</sup> In his appeal to his peers it is interesting how Sulpicius made use of his classical education. He basically said that his writing to immortalize Martin was much greater than the effort put forth by the classic authors like Homer to immortalize the ancient heroes of Greece. Sulpicius believed that men like Hector and Socrates were wrong in trusting “their immortality to the memories of men.”<sup>42</sup> For Sulpicius it was “the duty of man to seek enduring life rather than enduring remembrance and to seek it, not by writing or fighting or philosophizing, but by a life of devotion, holiness, and piety.”<sup>43</sup> Martin of Tours exemplified all three of these characteristics, and Sulpicius clearly wanted the prominence of Martin to outshine the great heroes of lore.

The *Life of Martin* is important to the development of monasticism for various reasons. For one, it shows just how diverse opinions could be about asceticism, which is represented in the aristocratic bishops’ reaction to Martin’s consecration. Sulpicius, however, made it clear that Martin was successful in recruiting monks from the upper classes.<sup>44</sup> Another reason for its importance is that Martin’s own life was a progression from solitary to communal life.<sup>45</sup> Life within a monastery among brethren was then becoming the norm. By the fifth century, some bishops were showing an interest in monastic life and started taking measures in its organization.<sup>46</sup> Thus, differing ideals for monastic life began appearing.

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<sup>41</sup> Marilyn Dunn, *Emergence of Monasticism*, 63.

<sup>42</sup> Sulpicius Severus, “Life of Martin of Tours,” 5.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>44</sup> Marilyn Dunn, *Emergence of Monasticism*, 63.

<sup>45</sup> F.R. Hoare, trans., “Life of Martin of Tours,” 14.

<sup>46</sup> Marilyn Dunn, *Emergence of Monasticism*, 64.

The *Rule* written by Bishop Augustine of Hippo is the first known rule of western monasticism.<sup>47</sup> Augustine's asceticism was different from Antony's. It was not influenced by the self-transformation in Origenist theology; instead Augustine developed his theology around "the Gospel message of renunciation and his own experiences."<sup>48</sup> Augustine's *Rule* put emphasis on a religious community that was centered on "the bonds of mutual love rather than governed by a hierarchy of officials and through obedience before love."<sup>49</sup> Within his *Rule*, Augustine only identified two officials, a superior and a priest. Augustine also distinguished grace as the 'element' by which "contemplation and mutual charity [were] possible."<sup>50</sup> Divine grace later became a fundamental part of Augustine's theology.

Along with Augustine, another influential writer on monastic and ascetic life was Jerome. Augustine and Jerome, two of the great theologians of their time, had differing opinions in regards to Antony's Origenist theology. Jerome's approach to Antony's writings was more of an explanation of them, while Augustine had a more monastic approach to these same writings. Jerome recognized that Origen wrote his theology to combat Marcionism in the third century, so he did not label it a heresy like other fifth-century theologians. He did, however, oppose and question some of the fundamental issues raised in regard to Origenist beliefs in the fifth century. At this time, many theologians were seeking the "definition and uniformity of doctrine,"<sup>51</sup> and began questioning Christian theologies that had contrasting ideals.

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 68.

One of the major controversies of the time was the debate on Pelagianism. For the first time, the Christian beliefs of grace and free will were brought under serious question. Pelagius' theology believed in the fundamental good of the human condition and in turn disregarded the notions of Original Sin and predestination. It was also in direct opposition to Augustine's theology that revolved around the concept of grace. Augustine said that humans were born into sin and could only be redeemed through God's divine grace, but Pelagius believed that humans could live a sinless life as well as endeavor to follow God's commandments of their own free will. Pelagius was "optimistic about the potentialities of the human will,"<sup>52</sup> but Augustine and other theologians like him who strongly believed in Original Sin did not share Pelagius' faith in inherent goodness of mankind. For them, Pelagius and his followers were placing too much faith in humans and not enough faith in God.

Pelagianism was ultimately declared a heresy, but around 425 John Cassian established a middle ground between these theologies in his *Conferences*.<sup>53</sup> John Cassian was a monk and a theorist of monasticism who moved to Gaul after living a few decades in Egypt.<sup>54</sup> His *Conferences* showed that "an ascetic life which depends on the idea of spiritual progress also acknowledges divine grace. In his view of the monastic life this cooperation of grace, which strikes a spark of good in the human heart, combines with individual effort to move towards virtue."<sup>55</sup> Cassian, however, in *Conference Twenty Three* admitted that no

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>54</sup> Peter Brown, *Rise of Western Christendom*, 111.

<sup>55</sup> Marilyn Dunn, *The Emergence of Monasticism*, 76

one is without sin due to inhibitions of 'the flesh,' which can greatly affect the will to be virtuous. A person who claims to be without sin is, therefore, blind to their own faults.<sup>56</sup>

Even though he attempted to keep his views as close as possible to those of Augustine and Jerome, Cassian was at odds with the two theologians on some issues. Cassian differed from Augustine in that he was less cynical about the concept of Original Sin, and he differed from Jerome in that he supported Evagrian thought. Evagrius of Pontos was a renowned theologian from the fourth century, but he was also an Origenist, which showed through into his theology. Jerome was very critical of Origen's theology, so Cassian avoided any mention of Evagrius in his writings.<sup>57</sup>

The aspect of monastic life that Cassian insisted upon was "self-support through manual labor."<sup>58</sup> He was a critic of Gallic monasticism and its tendency to avoid physical labor, but this did not deter his writings from being very influential at the most renowned monastery in Gaul, Lérins. He even dedicated part of his *Conferences* to Eucherius and Honoratus, two of Lérins' founders,<sup>59</sup> so he obviously found some favor with the working of Lérins if not Gallic monasticism in general. In the second decade of the fifth century, Gaul was in the midst of a political upheaval, and many upper-class noblemen probably entered the monastery of Lérins as a means of putting the outside world behind them. It was not long before many of these aristocratic men were consecrated bishop.<sup>60</sup> Lérins attracted and housed a number of aristocratic men who were used to a luxurious life rather

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 82.

than one that consisted of physical labor. It is, therefore, not hard to see why it was originally dependent upon family money rather than its monks striving to be self-sufficient.

The monastic discipline that developed at Lérins, however, became ascetic in nature and was extremely strict.<sup>61</sup> It was “designed to break forever, in young men of noble family, the springs of worldly pride.”<sup>62</sup> Lérins had a widespread influence that stretched as far north as Britain and Ireland. The writings of Cassian were very popular with the monks of Lérins, so Cassian’s influence became more widespread as well. One of the reasons the monks were so accepting of Cassian’s writing was that “they grasped Cassian’s identification of contemplation with scriptural study as an encouragement to transfer the skills they had learned as part of their secular education to the writing of sermons and the study of theology and scripture.”<sup>63</sup>

Another theologian whose writings had a significant impact upon Lérins and western monasticism was Basil of Caesarea. Around 357, Basil made the decision to pursue an ascetic life, so he journeyed to places like Palestine and Egypt in search of spiritual direction. He later joined a group of ascetics near Annesi in the northern part of Asia Minor. After a few years of solitude, he decided that a coenobitic life was better, so he established a community at Caesarea.<sup>64</sup> Basil also wrote to influence the creation of other ascetic communities. There were plenty of monastic communities already developed, but Basil had his own ideals about how monastic communities should conduct themselves. He was a strong supporter of only having monastic communities that separated men and

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<sup>61</sup> Peter Hunter Blair, *The World of Bede* (New York: St. Martin’s Press), 121.

<sup>62</sup> Peter Brown, *Rise of Western Christendom*, 112.

<sup>63</sup> Marilynn Dunn, *Emergence of Monasticism*, 83.

<sup>64</sup> C.H. Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism: Forms of religious life in Western Europe in the Middle Ages* (London and New York: Longman Group Limited, 1984), 8.

women. He also thought that monastic communities should be charitable organizations.<sup>65</sup> For Basil, “the renunciation of wealth for charitable purposes was fundamental to his vision of monasticism.”<sup>66</sup> The giving of alms for the forgiveness of sins was, therefore, important to Basil as well. He supported this belief from within the Scriptures when he quoted Christ,

Sell all your goods and give to the poor and you will have treasure  
in heaven.<sup>67</sup>

In those early years at Lérins, Honoratus, its founding father, shared Basil’s opinion that leaders of monasteries should hold authority over their community but serve it as well.

Honoratus reportedly had two main qualities that he expected of all his monks, obedience and humility, which are evidenced in the writings of both Cassian and Basil.<sup>68</sup>

All the varying theologies and concepts for a proper monastic and ascetic life, eventually led to the development of rules. The first rules were written in the fifth century or the early sixth, and they reveal a growing change in monastic communities. Monasteries were becoming more institutionalized, and the need for written rules was becoming more practical. The first five western rules written after Augustine are known collectively as the *Rules of the Fathers*.<sup>69</sup> The *Rules* reveal monasticism shifting towards a coenobitic lifestyle.

The anonymous *Rule of the Master*, written in the early decades of the sixth century,<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Marilynn Dunn, *Emergence of Monasticism*, 36.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>70</sup> Daniel Caner follows the traditional argument that says the *Rule of Master* was written around 500-530 and the *Benedictine Rule* was written around 530-560 and offered a shorter more condensed monastic rule than its predecessor. Marilynn Dunn, however, proposed a very thorough argument in her book, *The Emergence of Monasticism*, which states that the *Benedictine Rule* preceded the *Rule of the Master* due to evidence of Irish influence associated with the arrival of Columbanian monasticism in the seventh century found in the *Rule of the Master*. See chapter six in her book on “The *Rule* of Saint Benedict and its Italian Setting.” However, despite this new theory, for the purposes of this research project I’ve decided to keep with the traditional argument.

identified four kinds of monks, or *genera monachorum*; the *coenobites*, *anchorites*, *sarabaites*, and *gyrovagi*.<sup>71</sup> The two respected *genera monachorum* were the *coenobites* and *anchorites*. “*Coenobites* lived together and regulated their prayer, fasting, and manual labor in obedience to superiors in their communities. *Anchorites* were those who had withdrawn far from society and lived alone in deserted regions after training in *coenobia*.”<sup>72</sup> Jerome and Cassian both identified the *coenobites* and *anchorites* within their work, but it was Cassian who first referred to the wandering monks as *sarabaites*.<sup>73</sup> The *sarabaites* lacked the proper discipline of the *coenobitic* life, wandered around at their own will, and worked only for their own gain. In his *Conferences*, Cassian said there was another type of monk, but he never went so far as to identify this fourth category.<sup>74</sup> The name *gyrovagi* first appeared in the *Rule of the Master*, which considered these to be the worst kind of monks.<sup>75</sup>

Benedict of Nursia later used this same categorization in his *Rule*. These four *genera monachorum* identified within the *Rule of the Master* and the *Benedictine Rule* also created stereotypical opinions of each that persisted throughout the medieval period. The *sarabaites* were seen as the negative monastic life in comparison to the *coenobitic*, while the *gyrovagi* were the negative lifestyle in comparison to the *anchoretic*.<sup>76</sup> Even though the *coenobitic* life was the most encouraged; it was the *anchoritic* life that held the most respect. The example of the ascetic hermit that was put forth by Antony in the fourth century was a pinnacle few could achieve.

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<sup>71</sup> Daniel Caner, *Wandering, Begging Monks: Spiritual Authority and the Promotion of Monasticism in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2002), 9.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 8-9.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 9-10.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.



Monasticism had grown since the Council of Chalcedon in 451 which declared that all monasteries were “subject to the authority of the bishop of the diocese in which they were situated and his permission was required for any new foundation.”<sup>77</sup> This council also said that clerical monks were to remain under episcopal authority, which put them under the direct authority of the bishop instead of the abbot in whose monastery they were residing. Soon tensions emerged between abbots and bishops over who held more authority within the monastery. It was the Council of Arles in 455 that brought about a resolution. The council decreed that while a bishop had authority over clerical monks, “he could not introduce strangers or exercise his ministry in the monastery without the abbot’s permission and all lay monks – the majority of the community – were the responsibility of the abbot alone.”<sup>78</sup> This did not reduce the power a bishop, since the abbot was still subject to him, but the clear authority of the abbot was being established. From this point on, the abbot exhibited control over the spiritual and communal lives of monks living inside monasteries.

Another problem developed when monasteries first started building their own churches. Once again abbots and bishops were competing for authority. Ordained monks were responsible for saying Mass in these monastic churches, but since bishops remained in control of these clerics, they were under his jurisdiction, which could weaken the authority of the abbot. The solution came in the mid-sixth century when it was declared that ordinary monasteries, which were monasteries that mainly consisted of lay brethren, were to “ordain a single monk to serve Mass – other clerics could only reside in monasteries as

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<sup>77</sup> Marilynn Dunn, *Emergence of Monasticism*, 96.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

visitors or as penitents.”<sup>79</sup> This was the beginning of the formation of monastic life as it was in the seventh century.

By the sixth century, monasticism had become a more “institutionalized phenomenon” than it ever was in the beginning with Antony, Athanasius, and Augustine. Monastic rules provided practical instructions on the proper way to live an austere life within the walls of a monastery, and the coenobitic life had become common place. Monks were living under the authority of an abbot whose power would only continue to grow as the century progressed. Monastic rules began putting emphasis on the role of the abbot as well as instituting an official hierarchy within the monastery that assigned specific duties. In the mid-sixth century, the *Benedictine Rule* brought “a solution to the problems of monastic instability and disobedience, reinforcing the bonds of community life by a strengthening of the powers of the abbot, an insistence on absolute obedience and a severing, as far as possible, of contacts with the secular world.”<sup>80</sup>

Benedict’s *Rule* was considerably shorter than its predecessor, *The Rule of the Master*, but it was no less comprehensive. Around 670, Wilfrid of York brought the rule of St. Benedict to Britain and started the first two Benedictine monasteries in Northumbria, Ripon and Hexham.<sup>81</sup> The *Benedictine Rule*, however, did not spread throughout the whole of Britain until the tenth century, and by then it was most popular monastic rule in Western Europe. In the seventh century, however, Wilfrid was the only monastic founder to establish a Benedictine monastery in Britain. Other monastic founders, like Benedict Biscop

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 127-128.

<sup>81</sup> C.H. Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism*, 53.

when he established Wearmouth and Jarrow, “referred to [the *Rule*] for guidance on practice matters such as the procedure for electing an abbot.”<sup>82</sup>

Bishops in the meantime controlled when and where monasteries could be built within their diocese, therefore, despite the control an abbot had within a monastery itself, it was legally under the bishop’s supervision.<sup>83</sup> Bishops were also in charge of appointing abbots to these newly established monasteries.<sup>84</sup> This stipulation in control allowed the bishop to possess more authority over the abbot within a monastery, since he had the final say in who could be appointed abbot. Also, through Lérins’ influence, Gallic monasteries and their bishops were often considered “promoters of monasticism rather than its opponents.”<sup>85</sup> In Anglo-Saxon England, this is evidenced through the works and teachings of Benedict Biscop who attended Lérins early on in his monastic career. Monasticism also still turned to older monastic works by writers like Augustine, Jerome, Basil, and Cassian for direction. At this time, the writings of Cassian had particular influence, since monastics could relate to his reasoning that contemplation was aided by spiritual reading and study.<sup>86</sup>

## **Monasticism in Roman and Celtic Britain**

An interesting aspect of monasticism in Britain was that it developed on two fronts. In the southern region, missionaries from Rome sent by Pope Gregory the Great began their efforts in the kingdom of Kent, and from there the Roman tradition of Christianity spread into the other English kingdoms. In the northern region, it was the Celtic missionaries from

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>83</sup> Marilynn Dunn, *Emergence of Monasticism*, 98.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 97.

Iona who appeared first.<sup>87</sup> This meant that two different missionary groups were spreading two distinctly different monastic traditions around Britain.

The main differences between the Celtic and Roman traditions stem from the fact that the Roman Empire never reached Ireland, which makes it nearly impossible to determine how or when organized monasticism reached the smaller island. A number of possibilities have been debated, but it is not known whether monasticism in Ireland originated from Britain, Gaul, or even the eastern Mediterranean.<sup>88</sup> There is evidence of the influence that all three had upon Ireland. It is known that missionaries from Britain and Gaul worked to evangelize Ireland.<sup>89</sup> St. Patrick, a native of Britain, is probably the best known missionary to Ireland. Also, ascetics, whose influence primarily came from Egypt, were constantly moving between Ireland and continental Europe.<sup>90</sup> It remains a mystery, however, as to how the inspiration of the Desert Fathers of Egypt and Syria reached Ireland, but the evidence of their influence is unmistakable.<sup>91</sup> On the other hand, the traditions and influence of the Roman Empire were better documented, which makes it much easier to discern when and how the Roman tradition of monasticism developed.

Since Celtic monks learned a form of Latin that was unrecognizable to their “Roman” brothers and sisters, the Celtic Mass as well as its monastic office was unintelligible to other Christians when it was first introduced. The Celtic reliance on older texts had a lot to do with the development of this incomprehensible Latin, but another point to make is that Irish monks and clergy were teaching themselves a language that they

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<sup>87</sup> C.H. Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism*, 50.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 38-39.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

had no prior experience in using.<sup>92</sup> In Britain, among the ecclesiastic students who were unfamiliar or struggling in Latin, there were those who traveled to Ireland to study the language in the Celtic method.<sup>93</sup> Bede himself wrote of “English nobles [who] traveled to Ireland to pursue religious studies or lead a life of stricter discipline.”<sup>94</sup> Also, in the anonymous *Life of Ceolfrith*, there is the story of St. Ceolfrith’s brother, Cynefrith, who left to study Scripture in Ireland.<sup>95</sup>

Situated in the center of this “spiritual empire which stretched from Ireland along the northwest coast of Scotland as far as the Hebrides, Loch Ness, and to the north of the Great Glen of Scotland,”<sup>96</sup> was Iona, an island located on the seaways between the northern region of Ireland and Scotland. In 565, Columba arrived in Iona as a self-imposed exile.<sup>97</sup> Within fifty years of his death, the influence of the monastery of Iona had grown. Iona then had an “unusually extensive spiritual empire” which “stretched from western Scotland deep to the southwest into the heart of Ireland and, to the southeast, it reached down throughout northern Britain, through the influence of its sister monastery Lindisfarne.”<sup>98</sup>

It was in 635 that a group of monks from Iona, one of which was Aidan, traveled to Northumbria at the request of King Oswald. Oswald granted Aidan land to set up a monastery at Lindisfarne, and it adhered to the rule of life that was set by Columba seventy years earlier at Iona.<sup>99</sup> Aidan and his fellow monks managed to convert the principal Saxon

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<sup>92</sup> Marilynn Dunn, *Emergence of Monasticism*, 152.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

<sup>95</sup> Anonymous, “Life of Ceolfrith,” in *Anglo-Saxon Saints and Heroes*, ed. Clinton Albertson, S.J. (Fordham: Fordham University Press, 1967), 248.

<sup>96</sup> Peter Brown, *Rise of Western Christendom*, 328.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 327.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 328.

<sup>99</sup> C.H. Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism*, 51.

warlords of northern Britain probably at the behest of Oswald himself.<sup>100</sup> Other monasteries in northern Britain that were established as a result of Aidan's mission were Melrose, Gateshead, Hartlepool, Ripon, and Lastingham.<sup>101</sup> The Ionian missionaries all had similar strategies: "they addressed themselves initially to the court aristocracy, and monastic foundation went forward with the active collaboration of the Northumbrian kings, who provided the landed endowment."<sup>102</sup>

Another interesting facet in English monasticism was the double monastery. These double monasteries were the result of "links between English courts and the women's abbeys in northern Gaul."<sup>103</sup> In seventh-century England, double monasteries were nunneries that were attached to a monastic community of men and under the authority of an abbess. English double monasteries were modeled after the Columban double monasteries in Gaul, and more than likely followed a rule that was a mixture of the Columban and Benedictine rules.<sup>104</sup> The Columban Rule was developed by a Celtic monk named Columbanus. Columbanus, like Columba, left Ireland to become a self imposed exile.<sup>105</sup> He settled in northern Gaul and proposed his own *Monastic Instructions*.<sup>106</sup> The most prominent of these double monasteries before the generation of Bede was Whitby, which was governed by Abbess Hilda. Hilda was also the abbess of Hartlepool, and she was taught under the monastic direction of Aidan. Whitby was, therefore, a double monastery founded under the Celtic tradition. Whitby's importance to Christianity in

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<sup>100</sup> Peter Brown, *Rise of Western Christendom*, 328.

<sup>101</sup> C.H. Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism*, 51.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>105</sup> Peter Brown, *Rise of Western Christendom*, 247.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 249.

Anglo-Saxon England is apparent in the fact that King Oswy chose it as the place to hold the very decisive synod of 664.<sup>107</sup>

One of the main issues that lead to the synod at Whitby was the debate over celebrating Easter. The Irish put a lot emphasis on the skill of *computus*, which was the “compiling of ecclesiastical calendars,”<sup>108</sup> and the most significant aspect of *computus* was the calculation of Easter.<sup>109</sup> The difference between the Roman and Celtic calculations of Easter was such that the followers of the two traditions would, in some years, celebrate Easter as much as a month apart from one another.<sup>110</sup> In a region like Northumbria where the two traditions clashed, doubt in regard to the correct date of Easter led to uncertainties in other facets of monastic and secular life. For instance, the date of Easter “affected the timing of mass baptisms of the newly converted and upset the rhythms of the royal court, where a warrior-king was expected to show his most exuberantly Christian face at the Easter feast.”<sup>111</sup>

Seventh-century England was a place when external gestures and matters were just as important as spoken loyalties for both clerical and lay people alike. In addition to the correct date of Easter, the other main issue that revolved around the Celtic and Roman debate was the tonsure. Under each monastic tradition, one of the steps by which monks were initiated into their order was receiving the tonsure. At this time, a person’s style of hair cut was a distinct part of their identity. It distinguished “laity from clergy, warrior

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<sup>107</sup> C.H. Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism*, 52-53.

<sup>108</sup> Marilyn Dunn, *Emergence of Monasticism*, 153.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>110</sup> Peter Brown, *Rise of Western Christendom*, 361.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 361.

from farmer, 'Roman' from barbarian."<sup>112</sup> The Roman tonsure was fashioned to look like the crown of thorns Jesus wore at his crucifixion. The Celtic tonsure, on the other hand, was fashioned to signify a monk's departure from his warrior status.<sup>113</sup> Instead of cutting the hair at the top of the head to form a crown, Irish monks "shaved the front half [of their head] from ear to ear."<sup>114</sup> The reason for both of these issues was that "the precise nature of visible gestures and the precise timing of festivals spoke volumes. Conflicts over fully visible practices counted for more than any conflict of ideas."<sup>115</sup>

The Council of Whitby was, therefore, more than a declaration over which tradition was representative of the 'true faith.' It was a dispute concerning customs in a region that was divided by two dominating loyalties, St. Columba and St. Peter. The decision made at Whitby not only changed the face of monasticism in Anglo-Saxon England, but monasticism as a whole. When the Roman tradition became the 'true faith,' measures were taken to cement the influence of Rome and to erase as much of the Celtic influence as possible. The larger presence and influence of Rome in northern Britain after 664 is undeniable, but the extent of that power is another subject of debate altogether, especially since change was gradual and often times met with opposition by those loyal to St. Columba. The Irish in Northumbria for the most part strove to conform to the Roman tradition after Whitby, but it was not until much later that those in Iona would agree to conform as well.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 361.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 360.

<sup>114</sup> Clinton Albertson, *Anglo-Saxon Saints and Heroes*, 42.

<sup>115</sup> Peter Brown, *Rise of Western Christendom*, 360-361.

<sup>116</sup> Marilynn Dunn, *Emergence of Monasticism*, 154.



The hagiography written in the late-seventh and early-eighth centuries came from this region in northern Britain and offers a glimpse into the struggles and decisions that the monastic community faced. Two of the leading monastic figures during this change were Benedict Biscop and Wilfrid of York. Both had their own agendas and methods for obtaining the goal of a universal conversion to the Roman tradition, Biscop tended to be more lenient while Wilfrid tended to be more aggressive. Where Biscop was willing to find ways of making the Roman tradition more acceptable to those loyal to St. Columba, Wilfrid took a stance against Celtic monastic ideals. Two different approaches for the same objective, but both, along with the other *Lives*, reveal some of the progress made during this transition period of monastic life in Northumbria.

## CHAPTER 2: A LOOK AT MONASTICISM THROUGH HAGIOGRAPHY

Anglo-Saxon hagiography written in the late-seventh and early-eighth centuries predominately came from Northumbria, and these lives recount those who were influenced by as well as those who helped influence monasticism in Britain after the Roman tradition became recognized as the one 'true faith.' At this time, northern Britain was experiencing a change that held both religious and cultural significance, and each of the *Lives* selected for this paper deal with people who helped establish Roman authority. With the exception of Wilfrid, there seems to have been a conscious effort to make the Roman tradition more acceptable to those still loyal to St. Columba and Celtic monasticism. An interesting aspect of Anglo-Saxon hagiography is that it outlines the discord and the eventual union between the two traditions.<sup>117</sup>

In addition to the hagiography there is another important source, the Venerable Bede. Educated and raised within the walls of the monastery of Jarrow,<sup>118</sup> Bede was taught and inspired by some of the most prominent religious figures of his day. The one who inspired Bede the most was probably Ceolfrith. Biscop was more often than not traveling to Rome and various other places, while Ceolfrith for the most part remained behind within the walls of Jarrow where Bede lived and wrote. Bede, considered to be one of the more respected scholars of his time, wrote a number of works that remain invaluable for our knowledge of English history. His most famous work was *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, but Bede also wrote hagiography. His *Lives of Abbots of Wearmouth-Jarrow* is a very important reference in that it was written by a monk who was a living witness to some

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<sup>117</sup> D. H. Farmer, *Age of Bede*, 15.

<sup>118</sup> Bede, "Lives of Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow," in *Anglo-Saxon Saints and Heroes*, ed. Clinton Albertson, S.J. (Fordham: Fordham University Press,) 223.

of the events that happened in the lives of Biscop and Ceolfrith. Bede also wrote one of the two lives of Cuthbert, and it his *Life of Cuthbert* that will be analyzed later on.

A recurring theme within Anglo-Saxon hagiography that emphasizes the Roman tradition of Christianity is a devotion to the apostles, especially to St. Peter. This concept goes back to St. Peter being the first pope of the Roman Catholic Church, which also makes St. Peter a 'Roman' saint. The importance of St. Peter within the Roman Church also relates to Christ calling Peter the rock from which His church would be built. This is evidenced in the *Life of Wilfrid* by Eddius Stephanus, a monk of Ripon, when King Oswy at the Council of Whitby asked all assembled the one question that would change the course of not only monasticism, but Christianity as well: Who was greater, St. Columba or St. Peter?

The Lord decided this when he said, 'Thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And to thee I will give the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt bind upon earth shall be bound also in heaven and whatsoever thou shalt loose upon earth shall be loosed also in heaven.' (Mt. 16:18-19).<sup>119</sup>

This emphasis placed upon the apostles and 'Roman' saints made other biblical figures like the Blessed Virgin Mary, for instance, less influential. Mary, though important in her role as the Mother of God, seems to have been an afterthought to early monasticism or, at the very least, early monasticism did not place as great an import upon her role as it did upon that of the apostles. This observation is most obvious in the *Life of Wilfrid*, when the archangel Michael appeared to Wilfrid in a dream. Wilfrid was bed ridden from a serious illness when the angel came to him and said,

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<sup>119</sup> Eddius Stephanus, "Life of Wilfrid," in *Anglo-Saxon Saints and Heroes*, ed. Clinton Albertson, S.J. (Fordham: Fordham University Press), 105.

I am Michael the herald of the Most High God, who has sent me to tell you that years have been added to your life because holy Mary, God's Mother ever virgin, has interceded for you, and the tearful prayers of your subjects have reached the ears of the Lord. This will be a sign for you that from this hour your health will grow better day by day and you will reach your homeland. And all those things that were most dear to you shall be yours again, and you shall finish your life in peace. But you must also be ready, for after the space of four years I shall visit you again. And now call to mind how you have erected churches in honor of the Apostles St. Peter and St. Andrew, but for holy Mary ever virgin who is interceding for you [,] you have built nothing. You must put this right and dedicate a church in her honor.<sup>120</sup>

Benedict Biscop built a church inside the monastery of Wearmouth that he dedicated to the Virgin Mary.<sup>121</sup> He even brought back from one of his many trips to Rome a painting that was in the likeness of the Blessed Mother of God, which he placed inside the church he dedicated to St. Peter.<sup>122</sup> There was, however, no mention within the *Life* of him dedicating anything more to Mary.

In *Medieval Hagiography*, Thomas Head says that "literary expression of the legend about the Virgin's life and her miraculous powers tended to be restricted, in the West at least, to the liturgy until the twelfth century."<sup>123</sup> This assessment is apparent in regards to seventh-century hagiography. The cult of the Virgin "was one of the oldest in Christendom," the Ave Maria "was one of the best known Latin prayers among the laity," and feast days dedicated to Mary "were an important part of the calendar,"<sup>124</sup> but at this time, monasticism more often than not turned to the Roman saints for guidance. All of this

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 151-152.

<sup>121</sup> Bede, "Lives of Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow," 235.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 231.

<sup>123</sup> Thomas Head, *Medieval Hagiography*, xxi.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., xxi.

goes along with highlighting the 'Roman' aspects of Christianity after 664. Monastic leaders who displayed a commitment toward a particular 'Roman' saint over a more local one was doing more than declaring love and devotion towards their favorite saint. They were also, whether it was a conscious decision or not, stressing the importance of the authority of Rome and the papacy over any other possible influence, particularly the Celtic.

### ***Lives of Abbots of Wearmouth-Jarrow by Bede***

Bede's *Lives of Abbots of Wearmouth-Jarrow* follows the lives of Benedict Biscop and Ceolfrith, the founding fathers of these two monasteries, who were two of the most influential abbots during this period. The majority of *Lives of Abbots* deals with the life of Biscop, since he was the principal founding father. It is only in the last few chapters that sole attention is given to Ceolfrith, so for the purposes of this paper this section on the *Lives* will mainly concentrate on Biscop. The next section will deal more with Ceolfrith's life when *The Anonymous Life of Ceolfrith* is analyzed, therefore, the last few chapters of Bede's *Lives of Abbots* will be disregarded in favor this other *Life* written on Ceolfrith.

Bede called Biscop a "devout servant of Christ."<sup>125</sup> At the age of twenty-five, he left England and traveled to Rome where he fulfilled his life-long desire to "see with his bodily eyes the shrines of the bodies of the blessed apostles and pray in their presence. Then from the moment he returned home he never passed up an occasion of speaking enthusiastically, to all who would listen, about the various forms of religious life which he had seen and which he so loved and revered."<sup>126</sup> In 665, after returning from Rome for a second time, Biscop went to the monastery of Lérins in Gaul. By this time, Lérins had become a leader in

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<sup>125</sup> Bede, "Lives of Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow," 225.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 226.

monastic education. At Lérins, Biscop “joined the community of monks, received the tonsure, took the distinguished vow of a monk, and followed the regular discipline with all due earnestness. After two years of instruction in the proper principles of monastic life, he was overcome once again by his love for Peter, Prince of the Apostles.”<sup>127</sup> Within these words of the *Life*, there are some significant points that specifically emphasize the Roman tradition. The most visual example would be Biscop receiving the tonsure before taking his vows as a monk. As previously stated, the correct style of the clerical tonsure was a major item of contention between Celtic and Roman Christians, and the numerous references to the Roman tonsure within Anglo-Saxon hagiography is illustrative of this tension. Here Biscop was physically announcing his acceptance of the Roman tradition as the proper religious instruction to follow. Another example would be Bede explicitly stating that Biscop was devoted to St. Peter, the first pope of the Roman Church.

By 668, Benedict Biscop had been consecrated bishop. Shortly thereafter, the pope asked him to return to Northumbria. The pope “bade him in the interest of a greater good give up the pilgrimage for Christ that he had undertaken and return to his country so that he could bring with him the master of truth whom he had been so diligently seeking, and for whom he could serve as both interpreter and guide not only on the journey to Britain but after he had settled down there and begun to teach.”<sup>128</sup> Biscop was looked upon as “a man of wisdom, industry, piety, and nobility of soul.”<sup>129</sup> He spent years studying Roman Christian values. He was educated at Lérins, and he had made several pilgrimages to Rome and various holy shrines around the continent. In addition to being encouraged by

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 227.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 228.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 228.

Biscop's mission to culturally and ecclesiastically enrich England,<sup>130</sup> the pope also probably recognized Biscop's influence in Northumbria as a nobleman of that region. For these reasons it is not surprising that he would consider Biscop to be the best candidate for the job of helping unite a region divided by Christian loyalties.

In addition to the Pope asking Biscop to be a teacher to his brethren, other important figures also favored his counsel. After ruling a monastery for two years, Biscop once again set out on a pilgrimage. On one of his return trips from Rome, he met and befriended King Ecgrith of Northumbria. The king became intrigued by the stories Biscop told of his travels. As Biscop spoke "he could not conceal the religious zeal which consumed him; he disclosed all that he had learned about ecclesiastical and monastic usage in Rome and elsewhere; he displayed how many sacred volumes, how many relics of the blessed apostles and martyrs of Christ he had brought back."<sup>131</sup> Ecgrith was so impressed with Biscop that he gave the bishop seventy hides of land to build a monastery and dedicate it to St. Peter the Apostle. The monastery was built on the mouth of the River Wear in the year 674.<sup>132</sup> Then around 681, Ecgrith granted Biscop forty more hides of land. With this latest gift, the monastery dedicated to St. Paul the Apostle at Jarrow was built.<sup>133</sup> Ecgrith made only one stipulation to this second grant, which was that there "always be preserved between the two monasteries a common peace and harmony, a common family spirit and

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<sup>130</sup> D. H. Farmer, *Age of Bede*, 29.

<sup>131</sup> Bede, "Lives of Abbots," 229.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 229.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 232.

love.”<sup>134</sup> The purpose of this was for Wearmouth<sup>135</sup> and Jarrow to remain “united in the fraternal companionship of the first two apostles.”<sup>136</sup>

Bede was no less avidly devoted to Roman saints, especially St. Peter, than Biscop was himself, which is demonstrated in the way he wrote in *Lives* about Biscop’s love for the apostle. For instance, when Bede addressed the construction of Wearmouth in the fifth chapter, he said it was Biscop’s enthusiasm and devotion to the saint that allowed the monastery to be built so quickly. It was “out of love for St. Peter in whose honor he was building he showed so much enthusiasm in the work of construction that, within the space of one year from the time the foundations were laid, the roof was put on and you might have witnessed the solemn rites of Mass being celebrated inside.”<sup>137</sup> Since Bede lived at Jarrow while Biscop was still alive, he was more than likely taught by Biscop, and it is logical that Biscop’s enthusiasm would show through into Bede’s writing. Also, Ecgrith granting Biscop land for monasteries dedicated specifically to St. Peter and St. Paul over any of the local Anglo-Saxon saints reveals a push toward Roman monasticism over any local influences.

Ceolfrith was appointed abbot of Jarrow, while Biscop’s cousin, Eastorwine, was chosen to partner with Biscop as abbot of Wearmouth.<sup>138</sup> In the *Lives of Abbots*, Bede said that it was not necessary for a monastery to have two abbots, but that it was beneficial in the case of Wearmouth. Having an additional abbot allowed Biscop to “bear more easily the burden which he had not been able to sustain alone. Nor should anyone think it out of

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 232.

<sup>135</sup> Today Wearmouth is known as Monkwearmouth. For the purposes of this paper, I have decided to use its original name since that is how it is referred to in the hagiography.

<sup>136</sup> Bede, “Lives of Abbots,” 232.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 230.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 232-233.



place for one monastery to have had two abbots at the same time. It was demanded by Benedict's frequent absence on the business of the monastery, his constant setting out across the sea and the uncertainty of his return."<sup>139</sup>

It was while Biscop was away on one of his ventures that disaster struck in the form of a plague.<sup>140</sup> Eastorwine died and a deacon by the name of Sigefrith was appointed abbot of Wearmouth by his brethren in Biscop's absence. Upon his return, Biscop accepted Sigefrith's position as his partner in authority because "he was a man well-trained in the knowledge of Scripture, graced with the finest qualities of character and possessed of a wonderful power of self-control."<sup>141</sup> It was not long though before Sigefrith and Biscop fell ill. Both men suffered for years before death finally claimed them, but their illness did not stop them from instructing and guiding the brethren.

Before his death, Biscop made sure his fellow monks understood how to conduct themselves as monks of Wearmouth and Jarrow. He had taught them the best of what he had learned from every monastery he had ever visited, and left them specific instructions on how to appoint future abbots. Biscop said, "You must not think that this institute which I drew up for you was simply the impulsive voice of my heart, without any study having gone into it. What I have passed on to you, to be observed to your own benefit, is nothing but a compilation of all the practices I learned from the seventeen monasteries, that, in the course of my frequent travel abroad, I found out were the best."<sup>142</sup> These words by Biscop are significant because they are suggesting that he developed his own monastic rule for the

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 233.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 236.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 236-237.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 237.

monks of Wearmouth and Jarrow. If there was a monastic rule written by Biscop, it did not survive, but his words and Bede's record of them hint at the possibility that there may have been one. This statement by Biscop also shows his willingness to teach and accept something other than a strict Roman monastic discipline. If he was putting together and teaching the best of what he learned from his travels, then he was teaching something that differed from what he learned at Lérins. Biscop was educated in and supportive of the Roman tradition of Christianity, but he also seems to have been a unique individual who recognized the need to make the transition from Celtic to Roman monasticism more acceptable. He, therefore, acquainted himself with the organization and management of other monasteries and found out what was working at these other monasteries and what was not. He took the best practices from each monastery and incorporated them into what he knew about Roman monasticism. Bede's *Lives of Abbots* suggests that the monks of Wearmouth and Jarrow were highly responsive to Biscop's instruction.

In the business of appointing future abbots, Biscop's instructions were to elect someone from within the two monasteries. The monks of Wearmouth and Jarrow were told to appoint an abbot according to what they had learned and according to the rule of St. Benedict. By following the Benedictine Rule, the possibility of the succession becoming a hereditary matter was eliminated. Biscop was obviously very adamant about this one instruction because he worked to prevent his own brother from succeeding him as abbot.

And I tell you truly, in comparing two evils, if God should decide that all this property on which I have built this monastery should be turned back into a wilderness forever, I would find it much easier to bear than if my brother of the flesh, who we know walks not in the way of the truth, should succeed me as abbot and rule this monastery. Therefore always be very careful, my brothers, never to seek a father for

yourselves on the principle of who his family is, and never seek an outsider. But according to the prescriptions of the rule of that great Abbot Benedict of former days, and according to the prescriptions of our own privilege, look for whoever shall be approved by common consent at a meeting of your community as the most capable and worthy by his virtuous life and wise teaching to fill such an office, and for whomever all shall unanimously and knowingly have selected as the best in an election conducted in all charity. Then you will summon the bishop and ask that this man be confirmed as your abbot by the usual blessing.<sup>143</sup>

Biscop's legacy to his brethren was that he was able to help them accept monastic life under the Roman discipline a little bit easier than most. Other monastic leaders were not as lucky. Cuthbert, for instance, met opposition at Lindisfarne, and Ceolfrith had trouble in those first few years at Wearmouth. Biscop's travels were valuable to monastic life, especially since he was the one traveling and learning more about the Roman tradition and finding the best ways of formulating it into the culture of Northumbria while his brethren were staying in their monastery and living proper coenobitic lives. Biscop being encouraged to travel was special because wandering monks were still frowned upon. Also, traveling to Rome or any of the holy shrines that housed sacred relics, may have been part of a pious Christian's devotion, but few could have embarked on such a journey much less completed it as many times as Biscop did. The need for a second abbot at Wearmouth is excellent proof that both Biscop's brethren and his superiors accepted the need for him to travel. In the sixteen years that he was alive after founding Wearmouth, Biscop not only traveled to seventeen monasteries, but he was often called to the court of King Ecgrith who sought his council.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 238-239.

<sup>144</sup> Anonymous, "Life of Ceolfrith," 254.

Another reason for Biscop's popularity with his brethren might have had a little to do with the fact that he was the principal founding father for both Wearmouth and Jarrow, which relates to the *comitatus* relationship that was common around Anglo-Saxon England and the other Germanic kingdoms of the era. But, instead of warrior men swearing loyalty to a king, monks within a monastery were "answering to the personality of their founders."<sup>145</sup> But, whatever the reasons for his widespread recognition as a devout servant of God, or his ability to instill loyalty in his brethren, the fact is that Benedict Biscop was one of the more successful advocates of spreading the monastic tradition of St. Peter to an area that was still in some ways holding on to its Celtic traditions in those years after Whitby. By writing Biscop's story, Bede attained the defining characteristic of Anglo-Saxon hagiography from this period. He wrote to "advance his own salvation," but he also managed "to educate his audience in the proper practice of Christianity."<sup>146</sup>

### ***The Anonymous Life of St. Ceolfrith, Abbot of Jarrow***

Upon his and Sigefrith's death in 689,<sup>147</sup> Biscop left Ceolfrith in charge of both monasteries. The last few chapters of Bede's *Lives of Abbots* are devoted to Ceolfrith, but as mentioned in the last section this paper will deal with the *Anonymous Life of Ceolfrith, Abbot of Jarrow* instead of examining the rest of the *Lives of Abbots*. The author of the *Life of Ceolfrith* said he was "the kind of man whose life of devotion to God should fitly be followed, not only in its ending but also in its beginning and its whole intervening course, and whose unfeigned faith should be copied for its constancy."<sup>148</sup> Right before this

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<sup>145</sup> Clinton Albertson S.J., *Anglo-Saxon Saints and Heroes*, 238.

<sup>146</sup> Thomas Head, *Medieval Hagiography*, xxi.

<sup>147</sup> D.H. Farmer and J.F. Webb, *Age of Bede*, 32.

<sup>148</sup> Anonymous, "Life of Ceolfrith," 247.

statement, the author addressed his “dearest brethren,” which means one of his purposes in writing the *Life* was to specifically instruct his fellow monks in the Roman practice of Christianity.

Like Biscop, Ceolfrith was from a noble family. It is also important to note that Ceolfrith’s father was a part of the comitatus of King Oswy just like Biscop originally was. The difference between Biscop and Ceolfrith was that the latter always knew he wanted to lead a virtuous life devoted to God even as a young boy, so he never became a part of the king’s comitatus.<sup>149</sup> Ceolfrith entered the monastery of Gilling, which was ruled by his biological brother, Cynefrith. The author said Cynefrith was “a devout man dear to God,” but he was “lured away to Ireland,”<sup>150</sup> which essentially means that he was drawn to the Celtic method of studying Scripture and Latin. Cynefrith and a few others left Gilling to attend school in Ireland. The author said it was because of “his strong attraction to the study of Scripture and partly by his desire to serve the Lord in a freer manner with more opportunity for prayer and affectionate devotion.”<sup>151</sup> The only other mention of Cynefrith was in the very next chapter when the author speaks of his untimely death. It cannot be determined if the author was using Cynefrith’s death as ploy or scare tactic against others succumbing to the Celtic teachings as well, but it can be deduced that he wanted to discourage others from leaving. The scenario the author introduced was that Ceolfrith stayed behind to devoutly pursue monastic life, “giving himself with enthusiasm to the reading and the working and the regular discipline in all things,” but his brother and “others of the Anglican nobility who had gone to Ireland to study the Scripture departed

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 247.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 248.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 248.

for eternal life by the brief passageway of death.”<sup>152</sup> While this is not an outright scare tactic, it does not exactly convey a trip to Ireland as being a pilgrimage that would be beneficial to a person’s health.

Ceolfrith moved to the monastery of Ripon after he accepted an invitation from its newly-appointed abbot and bishop, Wilfrid. At Ripon, Ceolfrith “settled into the regular life of the rule, and after the proper time had passed was chosen for the priesthood.”<sup>153</sup> Shortly after 669, at the age of twenty-seven, he traveled to Kent to “satisfy his desire for the fullest possible understanding of the rules of monastic life and of the priesthood which he had undertaken.”<sup>154</sup> He also traveled to East Anglia to learn what he could from Abbot Botulf, a man who reputed to have an “exceptional life and teaching and a man filled with the grace of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>155</sup> Upon his return to Ripon, Ceolfrith was regarded as the most educated man in both the ecclesiastical and monastic rule.<sup>156</sup> The author also said that Ceolfrith “could not be enticed away from his humble attitude of mind either by consideration of his state of life, or of his learning, or of his noble name. On the contrary, he endeavored to subject himself in everything to the observance of the rule.”<sup>157</sup> Humility, knowledge, nobility, and obedience are all good characteristics of a man looking forward to leading others in their monastic lives. It was not long before Benedict Biscop himself had “become well aware of Ceolfrith’s gifts of learning, piety, and devoted application to

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 248.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 248-249.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 249.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 249.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 249.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 249.

work.”<sup>158</sup> He then asked Bishop Wilfrid to allow Ceolfrith to leave Ripon and help in the founding of his first monastery, Wearmouth.

At this point, the author makes it clear that even though Biscop was seeking Ceolfrith’s assistance, Ceolfrith was in no way more knowledgeable than “the great Abbot Benedict”<sup>159</sup> in matters that concerned monastic discipline. The author uses Moses and Aaron as a good example. Even though he was trained and chosen by God to lead His people out of Israel, Moses had his brother Aaron there to assist him. In this way Moses “could accomplish a task whose enormous weight of responsibility he might well have feared to bear alone.”<sup>160</sup> Biscop, like Moses, needed the help because “even though he was most learned in all matters of monastic discipline, yet in establishing his monastery he sought the help of Ceolfrith who could strengthen the observance of the monastic life by a devotion to the study of religious teaching equal to Benedict’s own, and could help with the service of the altar since he was in priestly orders.”<sup>161</sup>

In the second year of Wearmouth, Biscop left Ceolfrith in charge while he made a trip to Gaul to visit his friend, Abbot Torhthelm, who could help him get in touch with builders to construct a stone church. In Biscop’s absence, Ceolfrith met opposition from his brethren. They obviously did not agree with his method of instruction, and “the office of prior was becoming a burden for Ceolfrith, and the freedom of the quiet monastic life began to appeal to him far more than the responsibility of ruling others.”<sup>162</sup> Earlier it was mentioned that Ceolfrith “endeavored to subject himself in everything to the observance of

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 250.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 251.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 251.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 251.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 251.

the rule,"<sup>163</sup> and as a student of Wilfrid the main monastic rule he would have been subject to was the rule of St. Benedict. Wilfrid was Ceolfrith's first teacher after his brother's departure to Ireland, and Wilfrid, as his *Life* indicates, was a man of strict Roman principals with little allowance for anything Celtic within the Christian faith. Ceolfrith, therefore, at this time was also strictly Roman, and since he was coming from Wilfrid's Benedictine monastery at Ripon, Ceolfrith was among the first Benedictines in Northumbria.

Ceolfrith went from Ripon, a Roman monastery, to a monastery that housed formerly Celtic monks who were resentful of being forced to convert to Roman monasticism. The decision that went in favor of the Roman tradition at Whitby was twelve years earlier, and the monastery of Wearmouth at this point was only two years old. It is highly likely that some of the monks had come from monasteries that followed the Celtic tradition. Biscop may have been taught in the Roman tradition and tolerant of the Celtic, but he could not have foreseen Ceolfrith having enough trouble in disciplining the monks of Wearmouth in the 'proper instruction' that he would be forced to return to Ripon. Biscop's advantage was that he constantly traveled between Britain and the Continent as well as to the many monasteries around Britain. He was, therefore, able to compile all that he had learned and experienced.<sup>164</sup> Ceolfrith did not have this same advantage. He was a learned man, but two of his main instructors on monastic life were Bishop Wilfrid at Ripon and Abbot Botulf in East Anglia. Also, Ceolfrith may have helped Biscop get the monastery up and running, but Biscop seems to be the founding father that the brethren owed the most loyalty to. Ceolfrith eventually gained his brothers' love and respect, as they all

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 249.

<sup>164</sup> Bede, "Lives of Abbots," 237.



deeply mourned his leaving years later,<sup>165</sup> but at this point he may not have gained the same respect as Biscop with the monks at Wearmouth. In the beginning, it may have been difficult for Ceolfrith to get used to a group of monks who were still in some ways loyal to St. Columba, and his return to Ripon while Biscop was away demonstrates this difficulty.<sup>166</sup>

The significance of this part of Ceolfrith's life story is that it offers an example of the difficult transition the kingdom of Northumbria faced when it tried to universally convert all monastic life to a Roman model. It is apparent that Ceolfrith's education severely contrasted to that of the monks at Wearmouth, and even though the author of the *Life* does not specifically say which discipline these monks originally belonged to, it is reasonable to ascertain that it was the Celtic tradition since the author speaks very eloquently against it in a previous chapter. It is also important to note the author's anger towards the monks who gave Ceolfrith such a hard time. His words are very expressive of how high tensions could rise during this transition period; "For he and most spiteful persecution by certain nobles who became subjected to the bitterest were unable to bear his regular discipline."<sup>167</sup>

It took the urging of Biscop to convince Ceolfrith to return to Wearmouth. The author said that, "when Benedict followed and pleaded with him to come back, Ceolfrith gave in to his loving entreaties and returned to carry out sedulously the duties which he had undertaken with Benedict, of establishing the monastery and putting it in order."<sup>168</sup> Ceolfrith did not desire the power or recognition that the position of abbot granted him, but he accepted it out of duty. He preferred a quiet life of reflection and prayer. In this

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<sup>165</sup> Anonymous, "Life of Ceolfrith," 260.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 251-252.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 252.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 252.

respect, Ceolfrith was very much like Pope Gregory the Great. Formerly a monk, Gregory would have preferred to continue living inside a monastery rather than becoming the Apostolic Father.<sup>169</sup> He was an “intellectual who had accepted authority reluctantly as a duty and strove, as best he could, to maintain the joys of the contemplative life while fulfilling the obligations of his office.”<sup>170</sup> In this regard, Ceolfrith was a lot like Gregory, and it is not that much of a stretch to see where the author might want to draw a correlation between the two men.

It was not long before the ‘church’ was finished and dedicated to Peter the Apostle. The author referred to it as a church, but he was more than likely referring to the monastery of Wearmouth and not a church within the monastery itself. This is another example of a Christian building or monument being dedicated to a Roman saint. It is also interesting to point out that Anglo-Saxon churches during this period were more often dedicated “to ‘Roman’ St. Peter than to any other saint.”<sup>171</sup>

After its completion, Biscop made plans for another journey to Rome. This time, however, Ceolfrith joined him on his travels, which meant that they had to leave the monastery in the hands of another. The main purpose for this journey was that Biscop wanted to get “instructors in the liturgical usage of the Roman rite who could teach the proper methods of chanting and of conducting services in the church he just founded.”<sup>172</sup> Biscop specifically wanting to get ‘instructors in the Roman rite’ is important because it not only shows that he wanted to make sure that his monastery was teaching the proper

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<sup>169</sup> Marilyn Dunn, *Emergence of Monasticism*, 133-134.

<sup>170</sup> Richard Abels, *Alfred The Great: War, Kingship And Culture In Anglo-Saxon England* (London and New York: Longman, 1998), 237.

<sup>171</sup> Clinton Albertson, *Anglo-Saxon Saints and Heroes*, 159.

<sup>172</sup> Anonymous, “Life of Ceolfrith,” 252.

discipline, but that he also wanted every member of the monastery to embrace the same tradition. Since the author never specified where the monks of Wearmouth were previously from, it is safe to say that they varied in age and experience and not all of them could have been new to monastic life. The matter that was the most important to Biscop and Ceolfrith was that all the monks at Wearmouth needed to be schooled in the Roman instruction whether they had recently received the tonsure of St. Peter or not.

Joint Anglo-Celtic monasteries like the one founded by Bishop Colman failed in the past and Biscop would not have wanted to repeat an already unsuccessful endeavor. Maintaining a monastery that housed both Celtic and Roman disciplined monks apparently only led to disharmony between the two. In his *Ecclesiastical History*, Bede reported that one of the main reasons for discord among the monks at Colman's joint monastery at Inishbofin was that the Celtic monks "insisted on heading for far places in the summertime while their outraged Anglo-Saxon brethren were left to harvest the crops, which the Irish insisted on sharing when they returned in the winter."<sup>173</sup> With these kinds of situations happening, tensions were bound to arise between the two traditions. The Roman and Celtic traditions greatly differed from one another, and this is only one example of just how much. In the eyes of Biscop and Ceolfrith, it was better to have a monastery that embraced only one tradition, specifically the Roman one.

When Ceolfrith accompanied Biscop to Rome, Eastorwine was left in charge of Wearmouth. On this particular trip, "things turned out as they [Biscop and Ceolfrith] had planned"<sup>174</sup> because the two of them "learned much in Rome about the discipline of the

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<sup>173</sup> Clinton Albertson S.J., *Anglo-Saxon Saints and Heroes*, 252; and Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 179.

<sup>174</sup> Anonymous, "Life of Ceolfrith," 253.

Church, and they brought back with them to Britain the archchanter of the Roman Church, John, abbot of the monastery of the blessed Martin, who instructed us fully, both orally and by his writings, in the method of chanting according to the proper rite.”<sup>175</sup> There are a few points to emphasize in this section of the *Life*. The first is that they were able to bring Abbot John back with them to the monastery of Wearmouth. He was able to instruct them in the Gregorian method of chanting. This was another instance where the Celtic and Roman traditions differed, since the Gregorian chant varied from the Celtic style.<sup>176</sup> Also, Biscop not only found someone who could teach his monks ‘fully’ under the Roman manner, but he brought back an abbot from the monastery of St. Martin as well. In the fourth century, the *Life of Saint Martin of Tours* “helped to popularize monasticism in Rome’s western provinces.”<sup>177</sup> It seems only fitting that an abbot from the monastery dedicated to him would be used to help popularize the Roman tradition as the proper instruction on monastic life.

Around 681, King Ecgrith granted more land to Biscop and the monastery of Jarrow was built. Ceolfrith was put in charge of Jarrow while Eastorwine continued to share authority with Biscop at Wearmouth. Once the main buildings were constructed, Ceolfrith moved in to Jarrow with twenty-two brothers, “ten tonsured and twelve still awaiting the grace of the tonsure,”<sup>178</sup> which means some of the monks were still waiting to be formally accepted into monastic life. The tonsure was more than an expression of faith. Receiving the tonsure was mandatory, and it “was prescribed by canon law in the very early Christian

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<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>176</sup> Clinton Albertson, *Anglo-Saxon Saints and Heroes*, 253.

<sup>177</sup> F.R. Hoare, *Soldiers of Christ*, 3.

<sup>178</sup> Anonymous, “Life of Ceolfrith,” 253.

times: it was imperative for all clerics to be tonsured, and this was very solemnly done before ordination by a bishop in the case of clergy, an abbot performing the same ceremony for a monk entering a monastery.”<sup>179</sup>

This time around, Ceolfrith had an easier time getting the monks to accept the discipline he presented to them. There could be a number of reasons as to why the brothers of Jarrow were able to accept Ceolfrith’s teachings better than the monks at Wearmouth were able to less than a decade earlier. The fact that more than half of them were still waiting for the tonsure could offer one possible explanation. It could mean that they did not come from another monastery and were, therefore, unfamiliar with any other discipline on monastic life. The Celtic tradition would have been unknown to them, especially if the only training they received was from Ceolfrith. Also, in the years since his problems at Wearmouth, Ceolfrith had been to Rome, and he had that time to watch Biscop’s teaching methods as well. Another important factor is that Abbot John had also been introduced to help smooth and speed along the transition. The one explanation that has the most merit as to why Ceolfrith would have better luck the second time around is his change in attitude towards teaching his brethren, and this change gained Ceolfrith the respect and love of his fellow monks.

There he undertook to observe the very same discipline of the regular rule, and all the same canonical procedures of chanting and reading which they followed in the first monastery, even though at the moment not all of those by any means who had come with him knew how to sing psalms, or much less how to read in the church, or how to say either the antiphons or the responsories. But they were aided by their love of the religious life and by the example and wise persistency of their earnest

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<sup>179</sup> Herbert Norris, *Church Vestments: Their Origin and Development* (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co. Inc., 1950), 180.

superior. For while he was in the process of planting in the deep root of monastic observance he made it a practice to visit the church while the brothers were there, often during all the canonical hours, and to take his meals and his rest with them, so that if there was anything that needed correction, or if anything had to be taught to the novices, he could do it personally.<sup>180</sup>

Ceolfrith's decision to live in commune with his brethren seems to have been an important part of his instructing others on the Roman tradition, and the author seems to be offering Ceolfrith's example to other abbots and Church authorities as a means to help them make the transition towards the Roman tradition easier.

At Biscop's deathbed, he named Ceolfrith abbot of both Wearmouth and Jarrow. Here the author also states Biscop's reason for appointing Ceolfrith over both monasteries as a way of preventing his own biological brother from succeeding him, but this author goes a step further than Bede's version and says that it was a way of bringing the monasteries closer together.

And he decreed that there should be but one monastery in all things, even though situated in two places, and that it be governed always by one abbot, and guarded by the protection of the same privilege which he had received from Pope Agatho and by the rule of our holy father Benedict [of Nursia], an abbot was never to be sought for this monastery on the grounds of family descent but on the grounds of his manner of life and his devotedness to teaching.<sup>181</sup>

This version of Biscop's last request is similar to Bede's version in *Lives of Abbots*,<sup>182</sup> since both say it was in accordance with the Benedictine Rule that an abbot should be selected. The author of the *Life of Ceolfrith*, however, also states that all future abbots should get final

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<sup>180</sup> Anonymous, "Life of Ceolfrith," 253-254.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 256.

<sup>182</sup> Bede, "Lives of Abbots," 238-239.

approval from the pope, so that the monastery would be assured the papacy's protection. This signifies that Biscop and Ceolfrith were successful in establishing two Roman monasteries in Northumbria in the twenty-five years after Whitby.

Ceolfrith led both monasteries as one for another twenty-seven years before he decided to retire. He longed to spend the rest of his days in a more contemplative life by "living as a pilgrim in the home of the Apostles."<sup>183</sup> In parting for his final journey to Rome, Ceolfrith told his brethren "to keep the rule he had taught them."<sup>184</sup> He also told them that it was important for them "to remember that both [Wearmouth and Jarrow] are one monastery and must always be ruled by the same abbot lest the inner bond of brotherhood should be sundered."<sup>185</sup> Ceolfrith, like Biscop, in his final message wanted the monks to realize the importance of the monastic rule they had been taught. Biscop may have made a few adjustments to make the transition a little smoother,<sup>186</sup> but both Bede in his *Lives of Abbots* and the anonymous author of the *Life of Ceolfrith* were quick to say that the monastic life the monks of Wearmouth and Jarrow was at least partially based upon the rule of St. Benedict.<sup>187</sup>

### ***Life of Wilfrid* by Eddius Stephanus**

The *Life of Wilfrid* is unique in that Eddius Stephanus wrote it in defense of the Roman tradition as well as in defense of Wilfrid to his enemies. It is likely that Eddius studied under Wilfrid while he was a monk at Ripon.<sup>188</sup> This could explain why Eddius was so adamant about Wilfrid's innocence. In the seventh century, Wilfrid of York had

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<sup>183</sup> Anonymous, "Life of Ceolfrith," 259.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 260.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 262.

<sup>186</sup> Bede, "Lives of Abbots," 237.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., 256, 261.

<sup>188</sup> Clinton Albertson, *Anglo-Saxon Saints and Heroes*, 87.

accumulated a vast array of land holdings and wealth for the Church and in these areas Wilfrid possessed a tremendous amount of authority. As Wilfrid's power and influence grew, so did the number of enemies who resented Wilfrid for this prominence. For Eddius, Wilfrid was a man innocent of any wrongdoing, and the *Life of Wilfrid* is the story of a virtuous man who saw to the conversion of pagans as well as to the transition of all Christians to the Roman tradition.

Within the *Life*, Eddius also made an effort to place Wilfrid in the same ranking as some of the more influential Roman saints, like Sts. Peter, Paul, James and Andrew, by using quotes from these saints to describe Wilfrid's life and character. For example, as a boy Wilfrid was said to be "obedient to his parents, beloved by all, handsome, well-proportioned, gentle, modest, and controlled, with none of the silly fads common to boys, but, as St. James the apostle says, 'swift to hear but slow to speak.'" <sup>189</sup> Also, when Wilfrid was considered worthy of holding episcopal office, it was said that he fit St. Paul's description of a proper bishop. According to Eddius, it was the 'councillors of the realm,' who said,

We know him to be such as the apostle Paul describes to Titus:  
"For a bishop must be without crime, as the steward of God:  
not proud, not subject to anger, not given to wine, no striker,  
not greedy of filthy lucre; but given to hospitality, gentle, sober,  
just, holy, continent, embracing that faithful word which is  
according to doctrine, that he may be able to exhort in sound  
doctrine and to convince the gainsayers." He has every quality  
Paul thinks necessary. <sup>190</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> Eddius Stephanus, "Life of Wilfrid," in *The Age of Bede*, trans. J.F. Webb (London: Penguin Group, 1965), 107.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., 116-117.



This style of writing is clearly another way of cementing Wilfrid's praiseworthiness, but it was also used to encourage the Roman tradition. If Wilfrid could live by the laws and words of the apostles, it stood to reason that others could follow his example, and this example placed precedence on the Roman tradition. It was not uncommon for the Anglo-Saxon hagiographers to utilize this method, but Eddius continually made such references throughout the *Life*.

In addition to quoting the noteworthy 'Roman' saints, Eddius liberally compared Wilfrid and his life to biblical figures and events. For instance, the anonymous author of the *Life of Ceolfrith* compared Biscop's need for a co-abbot, Ceolfrith, to Moses needing the help of Aaron.<sup>191</sup> Eddius, however, used biblical references as more than a helpful comparison. His continual use of the words "just as" and "like" when referring to biblical text could suggest that Wilfrid lived his life parallel to the Holy Scripture. The first example of this occurs in Chapter One;

A sign from God proved that he was sanctified while still in the womb of his most pious mother, just as clearly as when the voice announced to Jeremiah: 'Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee: and before thou camest out of the womb I sanctified thee and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations.'<sup>192</sup>

Another example is after Wilfrid witnessed the death of his mentor the archbishop of Lyons. Wilfrid was prepared to sacrifice his life to follow his mentor as a martyr, but he was spared a similar fate. In this chapter, Eddius compares Wilfrid to St. John.

So Wilfrid in his youth was already worthy to be counted a confessor like St. John the Evangelist, who sat unscathed in a cauldron of boiling oil and drank deadly poison without taking

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<sup>191</sup> Anonymous, "Life of St. Ceolfrith," 251.

<sup>192</sup> Eddius Stephanus, "Life of Wilfrid," 106.

hurt. Of him and his brother James the Apostle, Jesus said:  
'Can you drink the cup that I am about to drink?'<sup>193</sup>

It might seem strange that Eddius would try to portray Wilfrid as being on equal ground to these more renowned and respected Roman saints. In a small degree, it relates to what D.H. Farmer says in *The Age of Bede* in regards to the miracles written in Bede's *Life of Cuthbert*. In a non-scientific world, religious writers, including hagiographers, were expected to show Christianity's superiority to paganism. In order to do that they were compelled to write about miraculous events and authenticate divine power.<sup>194</sup> The difference is that while Eddius did write miraculous stories to show Christianity's divinity over paganism, he did not write very many. One of the few miracles found within the *Life of Wilfrid* is the story of Wilfrid saving the life of a young stone mason who had fallen from the topmost part of the church at Hexham that was in the process of being constructed.<sup>195</sup>

Eddius, unlike Bede, for instance, did not tell of one miraculous event after another, he seemed more concerned with Wilfrid's superiority over any of the local saints and heroes as well as the Roman tradition's superiority over the Celtic. By comparing Wilfrid to the Roman saints, Eddius was not only saying that Wilfrid deserved the same respect and authority, but, by doing so, he was also stating that Wilfrid and his teachings were superior to anything that had to do with the Celtic teachings.

Eddius, like Wilfrid, had little or no tolerance for the Celtic tradition, which is evidenced throughout the *Life*. At one point, Eddius blatantly called the supporters the

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<sup>193</sup> Ibid., 111-112.

<sup>194</sup> D. H. Farmer, *Age of Bede*, 18.

<sup>195</sup> Eddius Stephanus, "Life of Wilfrid," 129.

Celtic tradition “schismatics” and said they were “ignorant” of the correct rule of Easter.<sup>196</sup>

Another good example of this intolerance is in Wilfrid’s acceptance speech for episcopal office.

Your royal majesties, it behooves us to take careful thought as to how, with God’s help but without criticism from Catholics, we, your candidate, might be raised to episcopal dignity. Many English bishops are as much Quartodecimans<sup>197</sup> as the Celts themselves. Of course it is not for me to point the finger at them, but I know I am right. The Holy See does not consider the men they ordain as being in communion with her – any more than she does those who consort with schismatics. In all humility, therefore, let me beg you to send me, under your protection, across the sea to Gaul, where there are many bishops of recognized orthodoxy. There, though unworthy, I can be consecrated without the Holy See raising any objection.<sup>198</sup>

It has been debated among scholars on whether or not Wilfrid calling some English bishops ‘Quartodecimans’ was really Eddius putting words into Wilfrid’s mouth.<sup>199</sup> The importance of this quote in this case, however, is that it was a direct affront against the Celtic tradition and whether these were Wilfrid’s exact words or Eddius speaking his opinion through Wilfrid is not the main point. What is important is that there was no room for the Celtic tradition within the *Life of Wilfrid*. Unlike the other saint’s lives that illustrate a willingness to make the new monastic life more acceptable to those who still wanted to hold on to their Celtic faith and practices, the *Life of Wilfrid* shows that not everyone was willing to compromise.

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<sup>196</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>197</sup> “Quartodecimans were those who celebrated Easter on the fourteenth day of Nisan, irrespective of whether or not that day was a Sunday.” (D.H. Farmer and J.F. Webb, *Age of Bede*, 118).

<sup>198</sup> Eddius Stephanus, “Life of Wilfrid,” 118.

<sup>199</sup> D.H. Farmer and J.F. Webb, *Age of Bede*, 118; Clinton Albertson, *Anglo-Saxon Saints and Heroes*, 106.

An important aspect of the *Life of Wilfrid* is that, like Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, it gives a detailed account of the synod at Whitby. Another is that it reveals one man's resolve to cement the Roman teachings within his native land. There are more than likely a number of reasons that Wilfrid was unwilling to accept the Celtic tradition, but part of these reasons probably had a lot to do with those who had an impact upon him early in his life, especially his mentors and teachers. Others who seemed to have both a positive and negative influence upon Wilfrid were, surprisingly, women.

The women that Wilfrid encountered in his early years offer a good example as to how women played such an important role throughout his life. The first was his stepmother, for she and Wilfrid did not share a positive relationship: she is recorded as being rather cruel towards her young stepson. It was this cruelty on the part of his stepmother that convinced Wilfrid to leave home and pursue ecclesiastic life. Wilfrid's father gave him leave, and sent him to the court of King Oswy to be presented to his queen, Eanfled. The queen then put him under the supervision of Cudda, a nobleman who had recently devoted himself to monastic life at Lindisfarne.<sup>200</sup> At the monastery of Lindisfarne,

He [Wilfrid] strove humbly and obediently to carry out the rule with sincere devotion [and] made his master and the older monks love him as a son, and his equals to regard him as a brother. He learnt the whole psalter and several other books by heart. His head was not yet tonsured but he served God in purity and true circumcision of heart, deserving a share in the blessing which Samuel received as Eli's servant.<sup>201</sup>

At this point in the *Life*, it is important to note certain aspects that would have made him inflexible towards Celtic teachings, especially since he was sent to Lindisfarne, a

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<sup>200</sup> Eddius Stephanus, "Life of Wilfrid," 107.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid., 107-108.

monastery founded by Aidan. Eddius does not specifically say which rule it is that Wilfrid so sincerely devoted himself to, which makes it difficult to discern which one it was among the number of monastic rules that were available. The only monastic rule to survive in an English monastery from the seventh and eighth centuries was the Benedictine Rule.<sup>202</sup> A person, therefore, could be led to believe that it was the rule of St. Benedict, but since Wilfrid is the one credited with bringing the Benedictine Rule to Anglo-Saxon England,<sup>203</sup> it could not have been the rule he was learning at this time. Wilfrid was more than likely introduced to the Benedictine Rule during his time spent with either Archdeacon Boniface in Rome or the Archbishop of Lyons. Since no conclusions can be drawn as which rule it was that Eddius was specifically referring to, there has to be another way to explain how Wilfrid developed an early opinion against the Celtic tradition.

A possible solution would be to compare the monastery of Lindisfarne to the court of King Oswy. In Northumbria, there was a division within the household of King Oswy in regard to the two traditions. On one side there was Oswy, who spent a large period of his youth in exile among the Celts with his brothers.<sup>204</sup> After taking the throne in 641, Oswy, like his brother St. Oswald before him, followed the Celtic tradition. On the other side was Eanfled, Oswy's queen and second wife. Eanfled was raised in Kent,<sup>205</sup> which was the first kingdom to convert to Christianity after Pope Gregory the Great sent Augustine and the other Roman missionaries in the sixth century. Queen Eanfled was, therefore, decidedly Roman. The situation extended itself beyond the royal family to encompass the entire court,

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<sup>202</sup> Peter Hunter Blair, *The World of Bede*, 147.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid., 140; Eddius Stephanus, "Life of Wilfrid," 156.

<sup>204</sup> Clinton Albertson, *Anglo-Saxon Saints and Heroes*, 9.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., 54.

which would have also included their priests who undoubtedly had conflicting views among themselves. But, more notably it was affecting some of the king's most significant functions like the all-important Easter Festival where he was supposed to "show his most exuberantly Christian face."<sup>206</sup>

When Bede wrote about Inishbofin in his *Ecclesiastical History*, he showed how a similar state of affairs could not succeed within a monastery. In Book IV, he wrote about Bishop Colman's unsuccessful attempt at a joint Anglo-Celtic monastery.<sup>207</sup> But, for this instance, the interesting aspect of Inishbofin was not that it failed, but that it shared a connection to the monastery of Lindisfarne through Colman. Bishop Colman founded Inishbofin after he left Lindisfarne in 664. He chose to step down from his position of abbot as well as his episcopal office rather than follow the decree handed down at Whitby. Accepting the Roman tonsure and Easter was not an option for him.<sup>208</sup>

All of this leads to a pertinent question; why would a queen, who was very clearly a follower of the Roman faith, send a ward of hers to a Celtic monastery? At this time, Lindisfarne and the abbot who led it were unmistakably Celtic. It was established as a sister monastery to Iona by Aidan, and it was being led by Colman, a Celtic abbot and bishop.<sup>209</sup> So, why would Queen Eanfled send young Wilfrid to Lindisfarne and place him into the care of Cudda? Eddius said Cudda was "one of the king's most loving and faithful companions," who "had also resolved, on account of his paralysis, to give up worldly

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<sup>206</sup> Peter Brown, *Rise of Western Christendom*, 361.

<sup>207</sup> Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 179.

<sup>208</sup> Eddius Stephanus, "Life of Wilfrid," 116.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

ambition and dedicate himself to monastic life at Lindisfarne.”<sup>210</sup> Since Eddius made his discontent towards Celtic monasticism known on several occasions within the *Life of Wilfrid*, it is hard to imagine him showing a lot of respect towards someone he would have considered a “schismatic.”<sup>211</sup> Another fact to consider is that Eanfled did not send young Wilfrid to Bishop Colman, who was the head of the monastery, she sent him specifically to Cudda, who was merely a nobleman who turned to the life of a monk. This leads to the conclusion that there had to be one shining difference between Colman and Cudda, other than their obvious level of authority within Lindisfarne.

Cudda could have been a follower the Roman tradition, which opens the possibility that Lindisfarne could have become a type of joint Anglo-Celtic monastery sometime between its original founding in 635 and the year 664. If this could be proved, it would further explain Wilfrid’s disenchantment with Celtic monasticism. Disillusionment between the two traditions within the same household was well documented, and it was documented by Bede how the two failed to co-exist within the same monastery as well. The suggestion that Lindisfarne could have been an Anglo-Celtic monastery is not an unlikely conclusion, particularly since it is documented that Colman did make an attempt at a joint monastery. The main issue, however, cannot be whether or not Lindisfarne was a joint monastery, especially since the sources do not present concrete evidence to prove it as such. What is important is that Lindisfarne allowed Wilfrid to form an early opinion in regards to the Celtic monastic tradition. Cudda was Wilfrid’s first mentor of monastic life, and Wilfrid

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<sup>210</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid., 110.

probably spent his early years at Lindisfarne witnessing the differences between the Celtic and Roman traditions.

Before he reached the rank of priest, Wilfrid had two other mentors who significantly influenced him in his unwavering attitude towards the Roman tradition. One was the archdeacon Boniface. After only spending two years at Lindisfarne, Wilfrid announced his desire to journey to Rome to visit the See of St. Peter. A few years later after finally making his long-awaited journey, Wilfrid met Boniface at the shrine dedicated to St. Andrew in Rome.

In the oratory dedicated to St. Andrew he humbly knelt before the altar over which the four gospels are placed, and adjured the apostle, by the name of God for whom he had suffered, to obtain for him keenness of mind to learn and teach the nations the message of the Gospel. His prayer was granted, as many will testify. He passed many months in daily visits to the shrines of the saints, at one of which he found a teacher, sent by God and the apostle to be his faithful friend, Boniface the archdeacon, one of the wisest of counsellors.<sup>212</sup>

Thus began a more entrenched education in the Roman tradition that would set into motion Wilfrid's views on the Christian faith that he would whole-heartedly express at Whitby only a few short years later.

Boniface made him word-perfect in the four gospels, taught him the rule of Easter, of which the British and Irish schismatics were ignorant, and many other rules of Church law, teaching him as diligently as though he were his own son.<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>212</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid., 110.



The other influential person in Wilfrid's young life was the archbishop of Lyons.<sup>214</sup> Wilfrid met the archbishop on his first visit to Lyons where he stayed for an extended period of time before he was able to travel the rest of the way to Rome. After leaving Rome and Boniface, Wilfrid returned to Lyons and stayed there for three years before finally returning to Northumbria.<sup>215</sup> It was probably around this time that Wilfrid was introduced to the Benedictine Rule. It could have been during his stay with Boniface who taught him 'many other rules of Church law,' or it could have been during his time with the Archbishop of Lyons. For the years he stayed with the archbishop, Eddius says that Wilfrid "made sound progress under his learned tutors,"<sup>216</sup> which does not specify the exact rule or rules that Wilfrid learned from these tutors of the Roman tradition. The most convincing evidence that suggests Wilfrid learned the Benedictine Rule from either Archdeacon Boniface or the Archbishop of Lyons is that he returned to Northumbria with the knowledge of the Benedictine Rule only after this journey and having met and learned from these two men.

In 658, while Wilfrid was still staying with the archbishop, he received the tonsure of St. Peter. Receiving the tonsure was Wilfrid's first visual display of his acceptance of the Roman tradition over any other and his willingness to follow the authority of the Roman Church.<sup>217</sup> It was not long after receiving the tonsure that his mentor was martyred when Queen Baldhild persecuted the Church "like Jezebel who killed the prophets of old."<sup>218</sup> The Archbishop of Lyons was killed with eight other bishops. Wilfrid wanted to follow his

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<sup>214</sup> Eddius recorded Dalfinus as the archbishop of Lyons "in reality Annemundus was archbishop; his brother Dalfinus was Lyons' secular ruler." (D.H. Farmer and J.F. Webb, *Age of Bede*, 111).

<sup>215</sup> Eddius Stephanus, "Life of Wilfrid," 111-112.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid., 111.

mentor in death, but the dukes who were carrying out the queen's orders spared him since he was a foreigner to their country.<sup>219</sup>

Upon Wilfrid's return to his native land of Northumbria, word reached Alhfrith, the sub-king of Deira alongside his father Oswy that Wilfrid was a man "adherent to the true Easter and an expert in the discipline of the Church of St. Peter,"<sup>220</sup> so Alhfrith ordered Wilfrid to appear before him. At their first meeting, Alhfrith recognized Wilfrid as "God's chosen servant" and the two became fast friends.<sup>221</sup> In 660, Alhfrith went so far as to grant Wilfrid ten hides of land that was later increased by another thirty and the monastery at Ripon. Eddius called Ripon a "great opportunity for worldly aggrandizement – given by the Lord through the prayers of St. Peter – Wilfrid used as a means of almsgiving."<sup>222</sup>

Ripon was the first monastery given to Wilfrid, and knowing this helps further explain the situation previously mentioned in this chapter about the difficulty Ceolfrith experienced at Wearmouth early on in his career as abbot. Ripon could probably be considered one of the first completely Roman monasteries in Northumbria. The monks at Ripon lived under Wilfrid's guidance. They celebrated the Roman Easter and received the Roman tonsure, and Ceolfrith lived his early life among this brethren. Benedict Biscop recognized Ceolfrith for being the wise and holy man that he was, but the transition from Ripon to Wearmouth had to have been huge.

In 663, three years after Alhfrith gave Ripon to Wilfrid, he told the bishop of Wessex that Wilfrid was "humble, peaceable, given to prayer and fasting, kind temperate, discreet,

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<sup>219</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid., 113.

compassionate, full of the power and grace of God, modest, prudent, no wine-bibber, pure and open of speech, willing to learn and a good teacher,"<sup>223</sup> and he asked Agilberht to appoint Wilfrid into the rank of priesthood. Agilberht agreed and ordained Wilfrid as the priest at Ripon.<sup>224</sup>

The next year was when Oswy called the famous synod. Among those present with Oswy and Alhfrith were "abbots, priests, and clerics of every rank gathered at Whitby Abbey in the presence of the most holy Abbess Hilda, the two kings and Bishops Colman and Agilberht, to discuss the proper time for celebrating Easter."<sup>225</sup> An important aspect of the synod is that Bishop Agilberht was not the person who spoke for the Roman side of the argument. Agilberht instead chose to let Wilfrid, a newly ordained priest, speak in his place. Eddius said Wilfrid was the more eloquent speaker, but another determining factor could have been that Wilfrid was the native of Northumbria not Agilberht. Agilberht was from Gaul, and he was only bishop of Wessex from 648-660.<sup>226</sup>

The chapters on Whitby in the *Life of Wilfrid* can be considered the high point within the *Life*. Eddius actually wrote a condensed version of what was written by Bede in his *Ecclesiastical History*, but he got the point across as to the main focus of the synod, and the reasons that the Roman tradition won out in the end. At the synod, Bishop Colman, arguing for the Celtic tradition, spoke first.

Our fathers and theirs before them, clearly inspired by the Holy Spirit, as was Columba, stipulated that Easter Sunday should be celebrated on the fourteenth day of the moon if that day were a Sunday, following the example of St. John the

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<sup>223</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>226</sup> D. H. Farmer and J.F. Webb, *Age of Bede*, 114.

Evangelist “who leaned on the Lord’s breast at supper”, the disciple whom Jesus loved. He celebrated Easter on the fourteenth day of the moon as did his disciples, and Polycarp and his disciples, and as we do on their authority. Out of respect to our fathers we dare not change, nor do we have the least desire to do so.<sup>227</sup>

Next, Wilfrid took his stand and spoke for the Roman side.

This question has already been admirably treated by a gathering of our most holy and learned fathers, three hundred and eighteen strong, at Nicaea, a city in Bithynia. Among other things they decided upon a lunar cycle recurring every nineteen years. This cycle gives no room for celebrating Easter on the fourteenth day of the moon. This is the rule followed by the Apostolic See and by nearly the whole world. At the end of the decrees of the fathers of Nicaea come these words: “Let him who condemns any one of these decrees be anathema.”<sup>228</sup>

Colman and Wilfrid’s words bring into light the main reasons for the differences between the two traditions with startling clarity. In the previous chapter, it was mentioned that Ireland was never conquered by the former empire, and was, therefore, never under Roman control or influence. The clerics in Ireland who learned to read Latin taught themselves by studying the sacred texts that were available to them. As a result, they developed a large amount of respect for Saints Columba and John the Evangelist and followed their teachings, while the rest of the world that had been influenced by Rome progressed in a different manner. The Council of Nicaea, which Wilfrid mentioned in his speech, played an important role in that division. Ireland, situated in its own corner of the world outside the former empire, missed some of the changes that occurred after Nicaea. The differences between the Celtic and Roman traditions, and the Celtic ignorance, as Eddius called it, of the laws passed by the Church since St. John seems to one of Wilfrid’s main arguments

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<sup>227</sup> Eddius Stephanus, “Life of Wilfrid,” 115.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid., 115.

against the Celtic tradition. They did not follow the 'rule' passed down by the Apostolic See, which Wilfrid more than likely viewed as being something not only disrespectful to the Church but towards St. Peter as well.

After the synod ruled in the favor of the Roman tradition, Wilfrid's words gained him the deep respect of his peers and superiors. He was elected to the episcopacy of York that same year.<sup>229</sup> An interesting aspect of Wilfrid's consecration was that he did not want to be consecrated in Britain. He instead chose to be sent to Gaul; this request comes from the end of his acceptance speech, which was previously quoted in its entirety.

In all humility, therefore, let me beg you to send me, under your protection, across the sea to Gaul, where there are many bishops of recognized orthodoxy. There, though unworthy, I can be consecrated without the Holy See raising any objection.<sup>230</sup>

This portion of Wilfrid's speech brings up two significant points. The first would be that Wilfrid found Britain's orthodoxy too chaotic to want to be consecrated there. The second is that, though he claimed to be unworthy, Wilfrid wanted to make sure Rome would accept his consecration, which would be another reason he wanted to be consecrated in a place where there was no confusion, or even a fusion, between the two traditions. He was more than likely referring to southern Gaul around Lyons where he had received the tonsure of St. Peter. It was also an area of Gaul that was largely Roman and uninfluenced by Columbanus' Celtic teachings, which was more widespread around northern Gaul.

While the first portion of the *Life* offers a large amount of evidence that is in favor of the Roman tradition over the Celtic, the remaining portion is for the most part Eddius'

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<sup>229</sup> Ibid., 115-117.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid., 118.

defense of Wilfrid against his enemies as well as a detailed account of Wilfrid's struggles once his fame grew. Wilfrid's troubles began not long after he became bishop of York. In 666, while Wilfrid was returning from Gaul, King Oswy let Chad, a Celt, be placed over Wilfrid's see, and it was another three years before he got it back.<sup>231</sup> It was not, however, the end of his problems. Through the years, Wilfrid gained a vast number of monasteries in addition to Ripon, a number of buildings including a church at Hexham, and an array of followers who were "armed like a king's retinue."<sup>232</sup> These followers were abbots and abbesses who gave him their possessions and noblemen of high position who sent their sons to Wilfrid to be tutored "so that they might have the choice either of giving themselves to God or else of returning as grown men with Wilfrid's recommendation to enter the king's service as warriors."<sup>233</sup> Wilfrid's popularity and influence was so widespread throughout Northumbria that resentment towards his wealth and power made him the enemy of his peers as well as kings. His two greatest antagonizers were King Ecgfrith of Northumbria, Oswy's son and successor, and the Archbishop Theodore of Canterbury.

The remainder of Wilfrid's *Life* does not concern itself so much with Wilfrid's teachings or the Roman and Celtic traditions, but with Wilfrid's efforts to win back his see, which took up a considerable portion of his time for the rest of his life. It is, therefore, necessary to move on to the next hagiographical work for the purposes of this paper.

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<sup>231</sup> Ibid., 120-121.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid., 128.

## ***Life of Cuthbert by Bede***

There are actually two surviving lives of St. Cuthbert. The first was written about 700 by an anonymous monk at Lindisfarne,<sup>234</sup> and it is considered the “‘earliest surviving piece of written literature’ produced in England by the English.”<sup>235</sup> Bede’s version was written sixteen years later, and he used the original work as a source when he wrote his *Life of Cuthbert*.<sup>236</sup> His purpose, like that of all hagiographers, was the veneration of this holy man and saint. The *Life of Cuthbert* is a recollection of all his miracles and teachings as well as the story of his life. This is the opposite of the way Eddius Stephanus wrote the *Life of Wilfrid*.

Eddius, as previously stated, was mainly interested in defending and proving Wilfrid to be a virtuous man. In this respect, there was nothing Bede had to prove in the case of St. Cuthbert. The crowning difference between Wilfrid and Cuthbert was their choice of lifestyle, which was also the main reason Wilfrid had as many enemies as Cuthbert had friends. While Wilfrid was willing to accept authority over a number of monasteries throughout Northumbria, Cuthbert preferred a more secluded life. The point in Cuthbert’s life where he was the happiest was when he was living as a hermit on the Island of Farne.<sup>237</sup> He actually dreaded the day Abbot Boisil’s prophecy of him becoming a bishop would come true.<sup>238</sup> Cuthbert would have preferred to remain a hermit forever because he feared the power that came with the position of bishop.<sup>239</sup> Wilfrid, on the other

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<sup>234</sup> D.H. Farmer, *Age of Bede*, 16.

<sup>235</sup> Clinton Albertson, *Anglo-Saxon Saints and Heroes*, 31.

<sup>236</sup> D.H. Farmer, *Age of Bede*, 16.

<sup>237</sup> Bede, “Life of Cuthbert,” 66.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

hand, was the exact opposite of Cuthbert. While Wilfrid chose to fight for and hold on to his bishopric, which forced him to petition Rome on several occasions to seek aid in his cause,<sup>240</sup> it took some heavy convincing on the part of the synod that appointed Cuthbert to convince him to accept the bishopric of Lindisfarne.<sup>241</sup>

Bede's respect and admiration for the saint is obvious even though Cuthbert was originally taught in the Celtic tradition of Christianity. The only problem with Bede's *Life of Cuthbert* is that he wrote it in such a way that anyone reading it that is unfamiliar with the history could easily assume that Cuthbert had always been a supporter of the Roman tradition. Cuthbert, however, was an adult when he started living according to Roman monastic principles, probably some time after the death of his mentor, Boisil.

In order to better understand when and how Cuthbert was able to so readily accept Roman monasticism over Celtic, it is best to look at his *Life* from the beginning. As a boy Cuthbert had already exhibited holy qualities, especially when he devoted himself to God at a fairly young age, but he did not immediately enter monastic life.<sup>242</sup> It was not until the death of Aidan that Cuthbert decided to go into a monastery. On the night of Aidan's death, Cuthbert was out tending to a flock of sheep when he witnessed the saint's ascension into Heaven. It was this occurrence that convinced Cuthbert to enter a monastery.<sup>243</sup> An interesting aspect about this incident is the symbolic meaning behind it: with Aidan's death Cuthbert's new monastic life began.

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<sup>240</sup> Eddius Stephanus, "Life of Wilfrid," 136-137, 159-160.

<sup>241</sup> Bede, "Life of Cuthbert," 75.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid., 48.



Cuthbert then decided against entering Lindisfarne in favor of studying under the priest at Melrose, named Boisil. Both Lindisfarne and Melrose started out as Celtic monasteries, but Bede does not show any antagonism towards them or any of their brethren. Bede said Lindisfarne was “well adorned with holy monks, under whose example and teaching he [Cuthbert] might make good progress, but the reputation for sublime virtue enjoyed by Boisil, priest of Melrose, led him to enter there.”<sup>244</sup>

At Melrose, Cuthbert received the tonsure from Eata, who was abbot and bishop of the monastery. It is significant to note that Bede does not mention the type of tonsure that Cuthbert received from Eata, but it is logical to deduce that the tonsure was not fashioned in the shape of a crown. Since Eata was a supporter of Celtic monasticism, who showed his unwillingness to accept Roman Christian practices,<sup>245</sup> the likelihood that he bestowed Cuthbert with the Roman tonsure is slim. Bede also would not have wanted to openly state that the man he was venerating had at one time received the Celtic tonsure. Where it was specifically stated in other *Lives* that Wilfrid, Benedict Biscop, and Ceolfrith received the ‘Roman tonsure of St. Peter,’ the *Life of Cuthbert* by Bede only said that Cuthbert “gained permission for him to receive the tonsure and become one of the community.”<sup>246</sup>

Not long after Cuthbert had become a monk at Melrose, King Alhfrith, the sub-king of Diera, granted Bishop Eata land to establish a monastery at Ripon. When the monastery was completed, Eata sent some of the monks from Melrose to Ripon, and Cuthbert was among them. These monks had only been living at Ripon for a few years when Alhfrith

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<sup>244</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>245</sup> D.H. Farmer and J.F. Webb, *Age of Bede*, 51.

<sup>246</sup> Bede, “Life of Cuthbert,” 50.

took the monastery away from Eata, around 661.<sup>247</sup> Eata along with Cuthbert and the rest of their brethren were thrown out of the monastery they had built because Eata refused to adopt Roman practices. King Alhfrith, a Roman Christian and the one who funded the building project for the safety of his immortal soul, wanted a monastery established in the Roman tradition.<sup>248</sup> Eata was not the man that Alhfrith needed, so Ripon was passed on to someone more than willing to teach Roman monasticism to the monks residing there. Wilfrid, a newly appointed priest and an austere Roman Christian himself, was well suited for the task.<sup>249</sup>

Being forced to leave Ripon clearly had an impact upon Cuthbert, for it becomes apparent within the next few chapters of the *Life* that he was preaching the Roman faith, not the Celtic, to his fellow monks as well as to the surrounding villages.<sup>250</sup> In Cuthbert's *Life*, Bede does not give a clear indication as to when Cuthbert made the conversion nor did he specifically mention Whitby or why Cuthbert willingly made such a momentous decision. The Ripon incident and Boisil's death, however, seem to have been the triggers that helped convince him to accept monastic life under the authority of the Roman Church either before or immediately after the synod of 664. The best evidence in the *Life* that suggests Cuthbert was embracing the Roman tradition for the first time is in the ninth chapter when he becomes prior of Melrose.

On Boisil's death Cuthbert became prior, an office which he carried out for many years with holy zeal. Inside the monastery he counselled the monks on the religious life and set a high example of it himself, and outside, in the world, he

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<sup>247</sup> Eddius Stephanus, "Life of Wilfrid," 101.

<sup>248</sup> Bede, "Life of Cuthbert," 51.

<sup>249</sup> Eddius Stephanus, "Life of Wilfrid," 113.

<sup>250</sup> Bede, "Life of Cuthbert," 54.

strove to convert people for miles around from their foolish ways to a delight in the promised joys of Heaven.<sup>251</sup>

In seventh century England, it was not uncommon for priests or other clerics to travel around the countryside to bring not only pagan worshipers but also schismatics back into the fold. A priest would go into a village and everyone there would listen to him preach as they gathered around him, and Cuthbert was always eager to preach to these people.<sup>252</sup> Preaching to the masses was something Cuthbert considered to be a “labor of love,”<sup>253</sup> despite his preference to meditate in isolation. It was important to Cuthbert because he was preaching to those who,

...had forgotten the mystery conferred on them in baptism and had fled to idols, as though incantations or amulets or any other diabolical rubbish could possibly avail against a punishment sent by God the Creator. To bring back both kinds of sinners he often did the rounds of the villages, sometimes on horseback, more often on foot, preaching the way of truth to those who had gone astray.<sup>254</sup>

It is significant that Bede points out two specific types of sinners in the above passage, the ones he said had ‘gone astray.’ There were those people who had ‘fled to idols,’ or fled to paganism, but there were also those who followed ‘other diabolical rubbish,’ or more specifically those who followed something other than the Roman Christian ideals, like the Celtic Christians. A relevant question at this point would be to ask why Bede would classify both pagans and Celtic Christians as sinners. A reliable answer would be to consider the incompatible relationship between the two traditions. At a time when there could only be one main authority over all of Christianity, there would be instances when

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<sup>251</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid., 54-55.

anything that contradicted it would be considered inferior and heretical. In this instance, Bede was giving Celtic monasticism both of these negative connotations just as he was giving them to paganism.

After leaving Ripon, Cuthbert spent the next several years at Melrose until Eata sent him to Lindisfarne.<sup>255</sup> Cuthbert arrived not long after Colman departed with thirty of his brethren.<sup>256</sup> In addition to being the abbot of Melrose, Eata was made abbot of Lindisfarne, and either unwilling or unable to teach the Roman faith to the monks still living at Lindisfarne, he sent Cuthbert in his absence as prior “to teach the true rule of monastic life in his capacity as prior and to illustrate it by his own perfect example.”<sup>257</sup> Also, the see of York had recently been put under the authority of its new bishop, Wilfrid. Under Wilfrid and his temporary replacement, Chad, York became the main ecclesiastical center in Northumbria, which left Lindisfarne without a bishop from 664 to 678.<sup>258</sup>

As prior, Cuthbert was given the task of instructing the monks of Lindisfarne, but most of them preferred to continue living the monastic life they had learned from Aidan. They were not interested in conforming to the new rule they were expected to follow.<sup>259</sup> An important aspect of this section in the *Life* is the information it provides on how Cuthbert was able to work with his brethren and convince them to convert to a monastic life in the Roman tradition. Like Biscop, Cuthbert realized that it was not going to be an easy transition and it would take a little ingenuity. While Biscop chose to incorporate all he had learned into the education of his brethren, Cuthbert chose to lead by example. As the

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<sup>255</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>256</sup> D.H. Farmer, *Age of Bede*, 19.

<sup>257</sup> Bede, “Life of Cuthbert,” 63.

<sup>258</sup> D.H. Farmer, *Age of Bede*, 19.

<sup>259</sup> Bede, “Life of Cuthbert,” 63-64.

following passage shows, it took Cuthbert years to gain the obedience of the Lindisfarne monks.

Some of the monks preferred their old way to life of the rule. He overcame these by patience and forbearance, bringing them round little by little through daily example to a better frame of mind. At chapter meetings he was often worn down by bitter insults, but would put an end to the arguments simply by rising and walking out, calm and unruffled. Next day he would give the same person exactly the same admonitions, as though there had been no unpleasantness the previous day. In this way he gradually won their obedience.<sup>260</sup>

This is an excellent example to show why this transition period had to take place. The Roman Easter may have won at Whitby, but it was much harder to force conformity in other areas of their Celtic culture and religious practices.

Bede did not specifically mention which monastic rule that Cuthbert was trying to encourage the Lindisfarne monks to accept, but it was quite possibly the Benedictine Rule. A few factors lead to this idea. The first suggestion comes from Bede himself when he said Pope Gregory the Great was once “a great devotee” to the life the monks were living.<sup>261</sup> There were many monastic rules circulating around Rome in Pope Gregory’s time, but what stuck out in the Benedictine Rule for Gregory was “Benedict’s unfailing sense of measure and his spiritual insight.”<sup>262</sup> Benedict was an abbot who was able to “lead his tiny flock of monks through every spiritual and material emergency. And he had done this by exacting absolute obedience.”<sup>263</sup> Cuthbert too, as pointed out in the above quote, managed

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<sup>260</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>262</sup> Peter Brown, *Rise of Western Christendom*, 210.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid., 210.

to eventually earn the obedience of those monks who were placed under his spiritual guidance.

The other factor, and probably a bigger indicator, which suggests that the Benedictine Rule was the new monastic life for Lindisfarne, is Wilfrid. In the year 666, King Oswy went against canon law and appointed Chad over Wilfrid's see. During these three years that Chad was stationed in York, Wilfrid was traveling around Northumbria. His main accomplishment during these travels was his introduction of the Benedictine Rule.<sup>264</sup> While Wilfrid was traveling around Northumbria, Cuthbert was in Lindisfarne. It may not be documented that Wilfrid specifically visited Lindisfarne at the time, but it stands to reason that Lindisfarne would have been one of the main monasteries to convert not only to Roman monasticism but to the Benedictine Rule as well. When Colman lost at Whitby, he was both abbot and bishop of Lindisfarne. Lindisfarne was also the sister monastery of Iona, which was the monastery that was proving to be one of the most difficult to convert.

Cuthbert lived at Lindisfarne until about 676, when he decided to become a hermit.<sup>265</sup> By this time, he had gained the admiration and respect of his fellow monks, and though he enjoyed teaching them, he longed for the quiet and contemplative life in his old age. "He was delighted that after a long and spotless active life he should be worthy to ascend to the stillness of divine contemplation."<sup>266</sup> He retired to a secluded place on the island of Farne that was located "in the outer precincts of the monastery."<sup>267</sup> Once he was

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<sup>264</sup> Eddius Stephanus, "Life of Wilfrid," 120.

<sup>265</sup> D.H. Farmer, *Age of Bede*, 19.

<sup>266</sup> Bede, "Life of Cuthbert," 65.

<sup>267</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

completely settled in, Cuthbert chose to close himself off from the outside world, only opening a widow to give blessings or address other important needs.<sup>268</sup>

During his years as a hermit, his reputation for miracles managed to attract people from all across Britain to him. His fellow monks from Lindisfarne were also frequent visitors to Farne. They continued to seek his counsel, even though he chose to live separately from them. The main piece of advice he gave his brethren during this time was for them to marvel of their own monastic life and not his own.

It is the monastic life you ought to stand in awe of. In that life everything is subject to the abbot; the times of prayer, fasting, vigils, and work governed by his will. I have known many abbots who for purity of mind and depth of prophetic power have far surpassed my poor self – Boisil, for example, a man to be named with all honor and veneration.<sup>269</sup>

Cuthbert's words are a direct suggestion that the cenobitic life under the rule of a single abbot was the best monastic life for the majority. This was the type of monastic life that the Benedictine Rule supported and it was gaining gradual support in Britain, if Wilfrid's efforts are any indication. Another main point here is that very few men had the discipline and the ability to handle the life of a hermit. This was a main reason that people looked upon the hermit with such respect, but as far as the hagiography was concerned one of its purposes was to encourage monks to embrace monastic life by the laws of Roman Church. If some of them started thinking a hermit's life was in their best interest, then these monks would have placed themselves outside the Church's immediate control. As Cuthbert pointed out in the above passage, every aspect of a monk's life inside a monastery was subject to the abbot. The abbot was more than a father figure to these monks. He was also

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<sup>268</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid., 73.

their spiritual and material advisor in every matter. Hermits, however, were subject to themselves. The Roman Church, and Cuthbert himself, would not have wanted to encourage just anyone into pursuing this independent lifestyle. It was safer to keep the majority under the authority of a man who had been appointed by a bishop of the Church.

Cuthbert's years as a hermit did not last as long as he would have wanted it to. In 685, a synod led by Archbishop Theodore of Canterbury and King Ecgfrith of Northumbria elected Cuthbert to become the new bishop of Lindisfarne.<sup>270</sup> The purpose of the synod was another attempt at decreasing Wilfrid's power and wealth as well as fragmenting his expansive bishopric into smaller ones.<sup>271</sup> Cuthbert, who was at first reluctant to give up his life at Farne, eventually agreed to becoming bishop because "the decree of the Supreme Ruler cannot be escaped, no matter where one might flee to."<sup>272</sup> He was consecrated in the winter of that same year.

As a bishop, Cuthbert reestablished his former regimen of teaching. He taught by "example first and precept later."<sup>273</sup> Cuthbert, however, was only a bishop for two years before he knew his life of coming to an end and yearned to return to Farne. "Once free from material worries he might be able to give himself undividedly to his prayers and psalms, to prepare himself for death or, rather, eternal life."<sup>274</sup> His request was granted, and, in 687, Cuthbert returned to his secluded place at Farne.<sup>275</sup> He was visited by his

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<sup>270</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>271</sup> D.H. Farmer, *Age of Bede*, 20.

<sup>272</sup> Bede, "Life of Cuthbert," 75.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>275</sup> D.H. Farmer, *Age of Bede*, 20.



brethren, who frequently went to check on him, but Cuthbert only lived a few more months before he died of a fatal disease.<sup>276</sup>

It was in these last few weeks of life that Cuthbert gave his most eloquent words in instructing his brethren on how to uphold the monastic life that he had spend years teaching them. He warns them against schisms and tells them to always maintain the Roman tradition.

Preserve amongst yourselves unfailing divine charity, and when you have to hold council about your common affairs let your principal be to reach a unanimous decision. Live in mutual concord with all other servants of Christ; do not despise those of the household of the faith who come to you seeking hospitality. Receive them, put them up, and set them on their way with kindness, treating them as one of yourselves. Do not think yourselves any better than the rest of your companions who share the same faith and follow the monastic life. With those who have wandered from the unity of the Catholic faith, either through not celebrating Easter at the proper time or through evil living, you are to have no dealings. Never forget that if you should ever be forced to make the choice of two evils I would much rather you left the island, taking my bones with you, than that you should be party to wickedness on any pretext whatsoever, bending your necks to the yoke of schism. Strive most diligently to learn the catholic statutes of the fathers and put them into practice. Make it your special care to carry out those rules of the monastic life which God in His divine mercy has seen fit to give your through my ministry. I know that, though some might think my life despicable, none the less after my death you will see that my teachings are not to be easily dismissed.<sup>277</sup>

A significant aspect of this quote is that Cuthbert was making an actual distinction between the two traditions by telling his brethren how each should be treated. He considered the Roman Christians to be ‘servants of Christ,’ and they were to give their

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<sup>276</sup> Bede, “Life of Cuthbert,” 89.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid., 93.

brothers mutual respect. On the other hand, their reasons for going against the teachings of Rome and St. Peter did not matter, since Celtic Christians were to be considered outcasts. The monks were not to have any sort of 'dealings' with them. These are very strong words coming from a man who was reportedly patient and non-confrontational when teaching others about the 'joys of Heaven.' For this chapter in the *Life*, Bede said his source of information was Herefrith, who was the abbot and priest of Lindisfarne when Bede was composing this work. Even though these words are more than likely a slight exaggeration on the part of Herefrith or Bede rather than the actual words of Cuthbert himself, it is imperative to note what is actually being said. These words that supposedly came from Cuthbert clearly outline the central concern of Anglo-Saxon hagiography that is stated in the introduction of this paper. Here is Cuthbert speaking to his brethren, telling them what they need to do in order to ensure the salvation of their souls once he has passed on, while still managing to place ultimate emphasis upon the Roman tradition and its practices, distinguishing it above all other orthodoxies.

## CONCLUSION

The hagiography reveals how Northumbria, a kingdom divided both culturally and ecclesiastically over its Christian ideals, was eventually brought under the authority of the Roman Church. The Synod of Whitby passed the rule that said Easter was to be celebrated universally according to what was decreed at Nicaea, but the synod itself could not bring about any of the changes needed to ensure stability. The transition took years, if not decades, and it did not start until the saints, whose *Lives* were analyzed in the previous chapter, and others like them began preaching in favor of the Roman tradition. Each *Life* offers a glimpse of how these saints dealt with the problem of convincing others to follow 'Roman' monastic principles. They had to find ways of combating the Celtic beliefs and loyalties.

The facet of the period that cannot be shown in the hagiography is how much of the Celtic tradition remained in Northumbria during the transition or after its completion. As Peter Brown points out, there were aspects of Celtic Christianity that remained in Britain, and the religious art of the period is a good indicator.<sup>278</sup> The hagiography, however, was not written to show how much Celtic Christianity still affected Britain. It was written to contest it.

The writers of Anglo-Saxon hagiography may have written for the good of their immortal souls as well as for the souls of their audience, but this being a period of change gave them a second purpose to write. Since there could only be one authority over all of western Christianity, there could only be one representative of the 'true faith.' The Roman

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<sup>278</sup> Peter Brown, *Rise of Western Christendom*, 372.

tradition may have won the battle at Whitby, but the war to convince all western ecclesiastics to adhere to the decision was far from over.

Despite the fact that the Roman tradition had more widespread influence, the Celtic faith possessed remarkable qualities that were firmly entrenched. For instance, a few of the Celtic saints, like Patrick, Columba, Columbanus, and Aidan, were well respected by both traditions. The Roman tradition, however, claimed to follow the teachings of St. Peter and the other Apostles, who held a much higher standing within western Christendom than any other saint. The difficulties with the transition that the Church had to contend with was more than getting everyone to accept the authority of Rome and the papacy as the one representative of the 'true faith.' Its main problem was getting those who were completely loyal to Celtic monastic principles and to the memory of these Celtic saints to switch loyalties. The synod could not contend with these loyalties. The transition could not begin until men like Benedict Biscop and Wilfrid, who had received part of their education from places like Gaul and Rome, were chosen to preach all they learned to the monks housed inside these prominent monasteries situated at the heart of the controversies. The hagiography is an excellent resource on how these monasteries founded on the basis of Celtic monasticism were transformed into the leading Roman monasteries of later generations.

Another significant aspect of the hagiography is that each of these saints and their varying backgrounds reveal how the transition affected Northumbria on a number of levels. Benedict Biscop was raised in the Roman monastic tradition, but he was able to sympathize with those who wanted to remain loyal to their Celtic monastic roots. His personality mixed with his education and experiences made him a unique individual. Out

of all of them, Biscop was the only one who experienced a smooth transition when teaching his brethren. Biscop had the ability to persuade others to accept the authority of monastic life under the Roman Church. The pope obviously recognized this ability within Biscop as well, since he told Biscop to return home to Northumbria.<sup>279</sup>

Ceolfrith, unlike Biscop, did not enjoy unconditional acceptance from his brethren in the very beginning. He was educated in the Roman tradition, but he also spent a good portion of that education living at Ripon, which was a monastery led by Wilfrid and backed by King Alhfrith who were both strict followers of Roman Christianity. Ceolfrith's first attempt to instruct the monks of Wearmouth in the same manner he was taught did not go over very well, especially if they were used to Biscop's sympathetic and more understanding attitude towards their difficult transition. This episode in the *Life* is important because it shows the complex nature of the conversion. The outcry of the monks at the end of the *Life of Ceolfrith* is also important because it shows the progression of this transition. It reveals how the monks of Wearmouth and Jarrow, and maybe other monasteries in the same situation, had become more agreeable to the Roman tradition over the years. Ceolfrith's brethren had not only grown to accept him but his teachings as well.

The most significant parts of the *Life of Wilfrid* in regard to this transition to Roman monasticism were the role he played at Whitby and the recognition he earned as being the one who brought the Benedictine Rule to Britain. Through his words, Wilfrid changed the face of monasticism, and it was his actions that helped develop that change. Wilfrid may have acquired a number of enemies in his time, but he profited from a large number of friends as well. Noblemen sent their sons to him to be educated, his ecclesiastic brothers

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<sup>279</sup> Bede, "Lives of Abbots," 228.

and sisters donated their possessions to him when they entered the community, and he had the support of three popes who favored his petitions for the return of his episcopal see. Wilfrid was in essence the spokesman for the Roman tradition in Britain by his words as well as those of Eddius Stephanus.

The special aspect of Cuthbert that makes him stand out against the other three is that he was the one among them originally educated in the Celtic tradition. Wilfrid spent time at Lindisfarne as a boy, but he was only there for a couple of years before he left on his first pilgrimage to Rome. Cuthbert, on the other hand, was an adult when he converted to the Roman tradition. Bede did not mention Cuthbert's own conversion, which implies his willingness to accept Roman monasticism from the beginning. Cuthbert, like Ceolfrith, however, did not have an easy time convincing others to convert.

As Bede indicates, it took years before the monks at Lindisfarne began to accept the new rule that Cuthbert attempted to impose upon them. In this respect, the monks at Lindisfarne were like the monks of Wearmouth in those first years. The difference between the two monasteries was that Lindisfarne was founded on Celtic monastic principles by Aidan, which meant the loyalties at Lindisfarne more than likely went a lot deeper than the ones at Wearmouth, a newly established monastery. The situation at both monasteries, however, had to be a reoccurring theme all around Northumbria as well as other parts of Britain.

The monks of Lindisfarne finally approving of Cuthbert and his new way of monastic life must have been essential to encouraging the acceptance of Roman monasticism throughout Northumbria, as well as the whole of Britain. Lindisfarne was one of the more prominent monasteries in Northumbria, and it was founded by missionaries

from Iona, the monastery that helped bring Celtic monasticism to Anglo-Saxon England. If the sister monastery to Iona could accept Roman monasticism, other monasteries should be able to as well. Cuthbert's ability to earn the obedience of his brethren was crucial. So crucial, in fact that it was recorded onto the pages of history not once but twice.

Each work of hagiography selected for this research project stands alone as a significant record. Their importance to this period in Britain is apparent within these works as well. Written after the famous synod of 664, each *Life* provides a chronicle of what happened in those succeeding years. The synod could decide what changes needed to be made within the Church, but it could not initiate the change itself. It is also important to realize that the emphasis placed upon the Roman tradition of monasticism within each *Life* reveals the extent to which these saints, their writers, and the Church authorities were trying to push this transition. It was an endeavor to gain universal acceptance that the Roman faith was the truest representation of Christianity.

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## VITA

Carrie Couvillon developed an interest in history from her fifth grade teacher Mrs. Galliano, whose apparent enthusiasm on the subject was encouraging. From then on, the subject of history remained one of her favorites in school, American History or Western Civilization it did not matter. In high school, she even earned the 'Woodsman of the World' Award. When she entered college, she quickly learned that the classes were more challenging but no less interesting, especially when the professor would wear a yellow toga and brown leather sandals that laced up to his knees every day that he lectured on Ancient Rome.

Her first upper level history class in college was on the Later Middle Ages at Southeastern Louisiana University, which increased her interest on the medieval period of Europe. She graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in History in May of 2000 and went to work at Magnolia Mound Plantation in Baton Rouge a few months later in the hopes of one day becoming a museum curator. There are many interesting facets to museum work, but the one position she really wanted had the minimum requirement of Master's degree to ensure promotional opportunities at any of the larger museums. A trip to New York to visit a friend who was then working at the Metropolitan Museum of Art convinced her that continuing her education would be worth the effort, if she could become the curator at a similar museum in the future. So, Carrie applied for graduate school at Louisiana State University and began studying for a Master of Arts in History in January of 2002. Three years and almost fifty credit hours later, Carrie will finally graduate in August of 2005 and then hopefully find the job she has been working for all along.