PART THREE:

The Formation of Western Christendom
THE WESTERN CHURCH
AND THE CONVERSION OF
THE BARBARIANS

The fall of the Western Empire in the fifth century did not
result in the immediate formation of an independent cultural
unity in Western Europe. In the sixth century Western
Christendom was still dependent on the Eastern Empire, and
Western culture was a chaotic mixture of barbarian and Ro-
man elements which as yet possessed no spiritual unity and
no internal principle of social order. The temporary revival
of civilisation in the sixth century was followed by a second
period of decline and barbarian invasion which reduced Eu-
ropean culture to a far lower level than it had reached in
the fifth century. Once again it was on the Danube that the
crisis developed. The second half of the reign of Justinian
had seen a progressive weakening of the frontier defences
and the Balkan provinces were exposed to a series of destruc-
tive invasions. The Gepids, an East German people allied to
the Goths, had taken the place of the Ostrogoths in Pannonia,
while the Kötigur Huns held the lower Danube and carried
their raids to the very gates of Constantinople. In their wake
came the Slavs, who now for the first time emerge from the
prehistoric obscurity that envelops their origins. Faced by so
many dangers, the imperial government found itself unabl
to defend its frontiers by military means and fell back upon
diplomacy. It egged on the Uītigurs of the Kuban steppe to
attack the Kötigurs, the Herules and the Lombards against
the Gepids, and the Avars against the Gepids and the Slavs. Thus in 567, after the death of Justinian, the Avars united with the Lombards to destroy the Gepid kingdom, and the government of Justin II, hoping to recover Sirmium for the Empire, left the Gepids to their fate. But here the Byzantines overreached themselves, for Bayan, the great Khan of the Avars, was no petty chieftain to be made the cat’s paw of imperial diplomacy, but a ruthless Asiatic conqueror of the type of Attila and Genghis Khan. In place of a relatively stable Germanic state, the Empire now had to deal with a people of warlike nomads whose empire extended from the Adriatic to the Baltic. Under its pressure the Danube frontier finally gave way, and the Illyrian provinces, which had been for nearly four hundred years the foundation of the military strength of the Empire and the cradle of its soldiers and rulers, were occupied by Slavonic peoples who were dependent on the Avars.

But the Empire was not the only power to suffer. All Central Europe fell a prey to the Asiatic conquerors. Their raids extended as far as the frontiers of the Frankish kingdom. The Northern Sueves were forced to evacuate the lands between the Elbe and the Oder, and Eastern Germany was colonised by the Slavonic subjects of the Avars. Thus of the East German peoples who had formerly ruled Eastern Europe from the Baltic to the Black Sea, there remained only the Lombards, and they were too wise to try conclusions with their Asiatic allies. Immediately after the fall of the Gepid kingdom they evacuated their lands on the Danube and marched on Italy. Here again the Empire was powerless to protect its subjects. Lombardy and the whole of the interior of the peninsula was occupied by the invaders, and the Byzantines only preserved their hold upon the coastal districts—the Venetian Islands, Ravenna and the Pentapolis, the Duchy of Rome, and Genoa, Amalfi and Naples.

This was the last blow to the declining civilisation of Italy, and we cannot wonder that to the men of that age the end of all things seemed at hand. The writings of St. Gregory the Great reflect the appalling sufferings and the profound pessimism of the age. He even welcomes the pestilence that was devastating the West as a refuge from the horrors that surrounded him. "When we consider the way in which other men have died we find a solace in reflecting on the form of death that threatens us. What mutilations, what cruelties
have we seen inflicted upon men, for which death is the only
cure and in the midst of which life was a torture!" ¹ He sees
Ezekiel's prophecy of the scathing pot fulfilled in the fate of
Rome: "Of this city it is well said 'The meat is boiled
away and the bones in the midst thereof.' . . . For where is
the Senate? Where is the People? The bones are all
dissolved, the flesh is consumed, all the pomp of the digni-
ties of this world is gone. The whole mass is boiled away."

"Yet even we who remain, few as we are, still are daily
smitten with the sword, still are daily crushed by innumerable
afflictions. Therefore let it be said, 'Set the pot also empty
upon the coals.' For the Senate is no more, and the People
has perished, yet sorrow and sighing are multiplied daily
among the few that are left. Rome is, as it were, already
empty and burning. But what need is there to speak of men
when, as the work of ruin spreads, we see the very buildings
perishing. Wherefore it is fitly added concerning the city
already empty, 'Let the brass thereof be hot and melt.' Al-
ready the pot itself is being consumed in which were first
consumed the flesh and the bones. . . ." ²

But the worst had not yet come. In the seventh century the
Arabs conquered Byzantine Africa, the most civilised prov-
ince of the West, and the great African Church, the glory of
Latin Christianity, disappears from history. Early in the eighth
century the tide of Moslem invasion swept over Christian
Spain and threatened Gaul itself. Christendom had become
an island isolated between the Moslem south and the Barbar-
ian north.

Yet it was in this age of universal ruin and destruction
that the foundations of the new Europe were being laid by
men like St. Gregory, who had no idea of building up a new
social order but who laboured for the salvation of men in a
dying world because the time was short. And it was just this
indifference to temporal results which gave the Papacy the
time to become a rallying-point for the forces of life in the
general decadence of European civilisation. In the words of
the inscription which Pope John III set up in the Church
of the Most Holy Apostles: "In a straitened age, the Pope
showed himself more generous and disdainful to be cast down
though the world failed." ³

At the very moment of the fall of the Empire in the West,
St. Augustine, in his great book Of the City of God, had set
forth the programme which was to inspire the ideals of the
new age. He viewed all history as the evolution of two opposite principles embodied in two hostile societies, the heavenly and the earthly cities, Sion and Babylon, the Church and the World. The one had no final realisation on earth, it was “in via;” its patria was heavenly and eternal; the other found its realisation in earthly prosperity, in the wisdom and glory of man; it was its own end and its own justification. The State, it is true, was not condemned as such. In so far as it was Christian, it subserved the ends of the heavenly city. But it was a subordinate society, the servant and not the master: it was the spiritual society that was supreme. The moment that the state came into conflict with the higher power, the moment that it set itself up as an end in itself, it became identified with the earthly city and lost all claims to a higher sanction than the law of force and self-interest. Without justice, what is a great kingdom but a great robbery—magnum latrocinium? Conquering or being conquered does no one either good or harm. It is pure waste of energy, the game of fools for an empty prize. The terrestrial world is unsubstantial and transitory, the only reality worth striving for is that which is eternal—the heavenly Jerusalem—‘the vision of peace.’

This ideal of the supremacy and independence of the spiritual power found its organ of expression above all in the Papacy. Already before the fall of the Empire the Roman bishop possessed a unique position as the successor and representative of St. Peter. Rome was the “Apostolic See” par excellences, and in virtue of this authority it had intervened decisively against both Constantinople and Alexandria in the doctrinal struggles of the fourth and fifth centuries. The decline of the Empire in the West naturally enhanced its prestige, for the process by which the bishop became the representative of the Roman tradition in the conquered provinces was far more accentuated in the case of the ancient capital. The old imperial tradition was carried over into the sphere of religion. In the fifth century St. Leo the Great, addressing his people on the Feast of SS. Peter and Paul, could say, “These are they, who have brought thee to such glory as a holy nation, a chosen people, a royal and priestly city that thou mightest be made the head of the world by the Holy See of St. Peter, and mightest bear rule more widely by divine religion than by earthly dominion.”

The Pope was still a loyal subject of the Emperor and regarded the cause of the Empire as inseparable from that of
the Christian religion. The Liturgy couples together "the foes
of the Roman name and the enemies of the Catholic Faith," and
the Roman Missal still contains a prayer for the Roman
Empire "that God may subdue the Emperor all the bar-
barous nations, to our perpetual peace." But after the Lom-
bard invasion and the age of St. Gregory, the actual author-
ity of the imperial government in Italy was reduced to a
shadow, and it was on the Pope that the responsibility fell
for the safety of Rome and the feeding of its inhabitants.
Rome became, like Venice or Cherson, a kind of semi-
independent member of the Byzantine state. It remained an
open door between the civilised East and the barbarised
West; it was a common meeting-ground to both, without
exactly belonging to either.

This anomalous position was very favourable to the exer-
cise of papal influence in the barbaric kingdoms of the West,
since the Papacy enjoyed the prestige of its connection with
the Eastern Empire without any danger of being considered
an instrument of imperial policy, and thus the Frankish kings
raised no objection to the Bishop of Arles receiving the office
of Apostolic Vicar for the Church in Gaul. Nevertheless, the
power of the Papacy, and with it that of the Universal
Church, was greatly limited by the inherent weakness of the
local churches. The Church of the Frankish kingdom, espe-
cially, suffered from the same process of barbarisation and
cultural decadence that affected the whole society.

The bishop became a territorial magnate, like the count,
and the greater was his wealth and power, the greater was the
danger of the secularisation of the office. The monarchy had
no direct intention of interfering with the prerogatives of the
Church, but it naturally claimed the right of appointing to
an office which took such an important share in the admin-
istration of the kingdom, and its candidates were often of very
dubious character, like the "robber bishops," Salmonius and
Sagittarius, whose exploits are described by Gregory of Tours
(Lib. IV, cap. 43; V, cap. 20). Moreover, the transformation
of the state into an agrarian society and the progressive de-
cline of the city had a most deleterious effect on the Church,
since the influence of the barbarous and half pagan coun-
tryside came to predominate over that of the cities. For while in
the East Christianity had penetrated the countryside from
the first, and the peasantry was, if anything, more Christian
than the townspeople, in Western Europe the Church had
grown up in the towns and so had failed to make a deep impression on the peasants and countryfolk. They were pagans, the "pagans," who clung after the manner of peasants to their immemorial customs and beliefs, to the rites of sowing time and harvest, and to the venerations of their sacred trees and springs.

Yet the fundamental ethos of the new religion was in no way alien to the peasant life. Its first beginning had been amongst the fishermen and peasants of Galilee, and the Gospel teaching is full of the imagery of the field and the fold and the vineyard. Christianity only needed a new organ besides the city episcopate in order to permeate the countryside. Now at the very moment when the conversion of the Empire was binding the Church closer to the urban polity, a new movement was drawing men away from the city. The heroes of the second age of Christianity, the successors of the martyrs, were the ascetics—the men who deliberately cut themselves off from the whole inheritance of city culture in order to live a life of labour and prayer under the simplest possible conditions.

In the fourth century the deserts of Egypt and Syria were peopled with colonies of monks and hermits which became schools of the religious life for all the provinces of the Empire, and the neighbouring peoples of the East. But in the West, though its fundamental ideals were the same, the difference of social conditions forced the monasteries to take up a different attitude towards the society that surrounded them.

In the rural districts of the West the monastery was the only centre of Christian life and teaching, and it was upon the monks rather than upon the bishops and their clergy that the task of converting the heathen or semi-heathen peasant population ultimately fell. This is evident even as early as the fourth century in the life of the founder of Gallic monasticism, the great Martin of Tours, but its great development was due to the work of John Cassian, who brought Gaul into direct contact with the tradition of the monks of the Egyptian desert, and to St. Honoratus, the founder of Lerins, which became the greatest monastic centre of Western Europe in the fifth century and the source of a far-reaching influence.

But it was in the newly-converted Celtic lands of the far West that the influence of monasticism became all-important. The beginnings of the monastic movement in this re-
gion dates from the fifth century, and probably owes its origins to the influence of Lerins, where St. Patrick had studied in the years before his apostolate and where in 433 a British monk, Faustus, had held the position of abbot. But though St. Patrick had introduced the monastic life into Ireland, his organisation of the Church followed the traditional lines of episcopal organisation, as did that of the British Church in Wales. Since, however, the Roman bishop was always the bishop of a city, the normal system of ecclesiastical organisation possessed no natural social basis in the Celtic lands, where the social unit was not the city but the tribe. Consequently, the great extension of monastic influence and culture in the sixth century led to the monastery's taking the place of the bishopric as the centre of ecclesiastical life and organisation. The movement started in South Wales, where the monastery of St. Illtyd on Caldey Island became a great school of the monastic life after the model of Lerins early in the sixth century. From this centre the monastic revival was diffused throughout western Britain and Brittany by the work of St. Samson, St. Cadoc of Llancarvan, St. Gildas and St. David. Moreover, the great development of Irish monasticism that took place in the sixth century under the “Saints of the Second Order” was closely related to this movement. St. Finnian of Clonard (d. 549), the chief inaugurator of the new type of monasticism, was in close relations with St. Cadoc of Llancarvan and with St. Gildas, and it was through him and his disciples, above all St. Ciaran of Clonmacnoise (d. 549), St. Brendan of Clonfert, and St. Columba of Derry and Iona, that the monastic tradition of St. Illtyd and his school was diffused in Ireland. The importance of this movement was literary as well as ascetic, for the school of St. Illtyd and St. Cadoc cultivated the traditions of the old schools of rhetoric, as well as those of purely ecclesiastical learning, and encouraged the study of classical literature.

This is the origin of the movement of culture which produced the great monastic schools of Clonard and Clonmacnoise and Bangor, and made Ireland the leader of Western culture from the close of the sixth century. It is, however, probable that its development also owes something to native traditions, for the Irish, unlike the other barbaric peoples, possessed a native tradition of learning, represented by the schools of the poets or Fidid, which enjoyed considerable wealth and social prestige. The new monastic schools en-
tered in a sense into the inheritance of this native tradition, and were able to replace the old druidic and bardic schools as the intellectual organs of Irish society. By degrees the imported classical culture of the Christian monasteries was blended with the native literary tradition, and there arose a new vernacular literature inspired in part by Christian influence but founded in part on native pagan traditions. Although this literature has come down to us mainly through Middle Irish versions of mediaeval date, there can be no doubt that its original creation goes back to the seventh and eighth centuries—the Golden Age of Irish Christian culture—and that the literary tradition of mediaeval Ireland has its roots deep in the prehistoric past. The most striking example of this is the great prose epic or saga—the Tain Bo Cualgne—which takes us back behind the Middle Age and behind the classical tradition to the heroic age of Celtic culture, and preserves the memory of a stage of society resembling that of the Homeric world. Thus there was no sudden break between the old barbaric tradition and that of the Church, such as occurred elsewhere, and a unique fusion took place between the Church and the Celtic tribal society entirely unlike anything else in Western Europe. The hierarchical episcopal organisation of the Church, which was common to the rest of Christendom, was here completely subordinated to the monastic system. Bishops of course continued to exist and to confer orders, but they were no longer the rulers of the Church. The monasteries were not only the great centres of religious and intellectual life; they were also centres of ecclesiastical jurisdiction. The abbot was the ruler of a diocese or haroecchie, and usually kept one or more bishops in his community to perform the necessary episcopal functions, except in those cases in which he was a bishop himself. Still more extraordinary is the fact that this kind of quasi-episcopal jurisdiction was sometimes exercised by women, for the see of Kildare was a dependency of St. Bridget's great monastery and was ruled jointly by bishop and abbess, so that it was in the phrase of her biographer "a see at once episcopal and virginal." The monasteries were closely connected with the tribal society, for it was the prevailing if not the universal custom for the abbot to be chosen from the clan to which the founder belonged. Thus the Book of Armagh records in the ninth century that the Church of Trim had been ruled for
nine generations by the descendants of the chieftain who endowed the see in the days of St. Patrick. In the same way the early abbots of Iona belonged to the family of St. Columba, the royal race of the northern Uí Néill.

In organisation and way of life the Irish monks closely resembled their Egyptian prototypes. They rivalled the monks of the desert in the rigour of their discipline and the asceticism of their life. Their monasteries were not great buildings like the later Benedictine abbeys, but consisted of groups of huts and small oratories, like the Egyptian laura, and were surrounded by a *roth* or earthenwork. Moreover, they preserved the oriental idea of the cenobitical life as the culmination and goal of the monastic state. In Ireland, however, this ideal assumed a peculiar form that is not found elsewhere. It was common for monks to devote themselves to a life of voluntary exile and pilgrimage. The case recorded in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (s.a. 812) of the three monks “who stole away from Ireland in a boat without any oars because they would live in a state of pilgrimage for the love of God, they recked not where,” is typical of this development. It led to a movement of travel and exploration which is reflected in a legendary form in the adventures of St. Brendan the Navigator. When the Vikings first discovered Iceland they found that the Irish “papas” had been there before them, and every island of the northern seas had its colony of ascetics. The informants of Dicuil, the Carolingian geographer, had even sailed beyond Iceland and reached the frozen Arctic seas.

But the real importance of this movement lies in the impulse that it gave to missionary activity, and it was as missionaries that the Celtic monks made their most important contribution to European culture. The monastic colonies of St. Columba at Iona, and of his namesake Columbanus at Luxeuil, were the starting points of a great expansion of Christianity. To the one was due the conversion of Scotland and of the Northumbrian kingdom, to the other the revival of monasticism and the conversion of the remaining pagan elements in the Frankish kingdom. Luxeuil, with its six hundred monks, became the monastic metropolis of Western Europe, and the centre of a great colonising and missionary activity. Very many of the great medieval monasteries not only of France, but of Flanders and Germany, owe their foundation to its work—for example, Jumièges, St. Vandrille, Solignac and Corbie in France, Stavelot and Malmedy in Belgium, St.
Gall and Dissentis in Switzerland, and Bobbio, the last foundation of Columbanus himself, in Italy. All through Central Europe the wandering Irish monks have left their traces, and the German Church still honours the names of St. Kilian, St. Gall, St. Fridolin and St. Corbinian among its founders.

It is easy to understand what an influence this movement must have exercised on the peasants. It was essentially rural, avoiding the towns, and seeking the wildest regions of forest and mountain. Far more than the preaching of bishop and priest from the distant city, the presence of these colonies of black-robed ascetics must have impressed the peasant mind with the sense of a new power that was stronger than the nature spirits of the old peasant religion. Moreover, the Irish monks were themselves countrymen with a deep feeling for nature and for the wild things. The biographer of Columban relates how, as he went through the forest, the squirrels and the birds would come to be caressed by him, and "would frisk about and gambol in great delight, like puppies fawning on their master." Indeed, the legends of the monastic saints are full of an almost Franciscan feeling for nature. It is true that the Celtic monastic ideal was that of the desert; they loved the forest or, better still, uninhabited and inaccessible islands, like Skellig Michael, one of the most impressive of monastic sites, just as the Eastern monks to-day still choose Mount Athos or the Meteora. Nevertheless, the monastic settlements were forced by necessity to take up the peasants' task, to clear the forest and to till the ground. The lives of the monastic saints of the Merovingian period, whether Gallic or Celtic, are full of references to their agricultural labours—their work of clearing the forest and of bringing back to cultivation the lands that had been abandoned during the period of the invasions. Many of them, like St. Walaric, the founder of St. Valery-sur-Somme, were themselves of peasant origin. Others, though noble by birth, spent their whole lives working as peasants, like St. Theodulph, the abbot of St. Thierry near Rheims, who would never cease from labour and whose plough was hung up in the church as a relic by the peasants.

These were the men to whom the conversion of the peasants was really due, for they stood so near to the peasant culture that they were able to infuse it with the spirit of the new religion. It was through them that the cultus that had been paid to the spirits of nature was transferred to the
Saints. The sacred wells, the sacred trees and the sacred stones retained the devotion of the people, but they were consecrated to new powers, and acquired new associations. The peasants near Rheims paid honour to a holy tree, which was said to have sprung miraculously from the ox-goad which that same St. Theodulf thrust into the earth. In the West the stone crosses of the saints replaced the menhirs of the heathen cult, just as the great tumulus of Carnac has been crowned by a chapel of St. Michael, and a dolmen at Ploucret has been turned into a chapel of the Seven Saints. It was only with difficulty that the Church succeeded in putting down the old pagan customs, and it was usually done by providing a Christian ceremony to take the place of the heathen one. The statement in the Liber Pontificalis that St. Leo instituted the ceremonies of Candlemas in order to put an end to the Lupercalia is perhaps erroneous, but the Great Litanies and processions of April 29th seem to have taken the place of the Robigalia, and the feast of the Collection or Oblatio that of the opening of the Ludi Apollinares. Still more remarkable is the correspondence between the Ember Days and the seasonal pagan Feriae of the harvest, the vintage and the seedtime. The liturgy for the Advent Ember Days, especially, is full of references to the seedtime, which it associates with the mystery of the Divine Birth. "The Divine seed descends, and whereas the fruits of the field support our earthly life, this seed from on high gives our soul the Food of Immortality. The earth has yielded its corn, wine and oil, and now the ineffable Birth approaches of Him who though His mercy bestows the Bread of Life upon the Sons of God."

But this liturgical transfiguration of the spirit of the Vegetation Religion was too spiritual to reach the mind of the peasant. In spite of all the efforts of the Church the old pagan rites still survived and all through Europe the peasants continued to light the midsummer fires on St. John's Eve and to practise the magic ritual of fertility in spring. Even to-day, as Maurice Barrès has shown in La Colline Inspirée, the sinister powers of the old nature religion are still latent in the European countryside and are apt to reassert themselves whenever the control of the new order is relaxed. Nevertheless it is remarkable that it is just in those regions where the external survivals of pagan customs are most noticeable, as in Brittany and the Tirol, that the Christian
ethos has affected the life of the peasant most deeply. For Christianity did succeed in remoulding the peasant culture. The old gods disappeared and their holy places were reconsecrated to the saints of the new religion. It is true that the cult of the local sanctuaries and their pilgrimages gave occasion to all kinds of strange survivals, as we see in the Breton Pardons to this day. But it was this very continuity of culture—this association of the old with the new—which opened the peasant mind to Christian influences that it could not receive in any other way. And the disappearance of the old peasant customs in later times has often been accompanied by a relapse into paganism of a far deeper kind than the paganism of archaeological survivals.

But the evangelisation of rural Europe during the Merovingian period is only one among the services which monasticism rendered to European civilisation. It was also destined to be the chief agent of the Papacy in its task of ecclesiastical reform and to exert a vital influence on the political and cultural restoration of European society. The same period that saw the rise of Celtic monasticism in Ireland was also marked by a new development of monasticism in Italy which was to have an even greater historical importance. This was due to the work of St. Benedict “the Patriarch of the Monks of the West,” who founded the monastery of Monte Cassino about the year 520. It was he who first applied the Latin genius for order and law to the monastic institution and who completed that socialisation of the monastic life which had been begun by St. Pachomius and St. Basil. The ideal of the monks of the desert was that of individual asceticism and their monasteries were communities of hermits. That of St. Benedict was essentially co-operative and social; its aim was not to produce heroic feats of asceticism, but the cultivation of the common life, “the school of the service of the Lord.” In comparison with the rules of Pachomius and St. Columban, that of St. Benedict appears moderate and easy, but it involved a much higher degree of organisation and stability. The Benedictine monastery was a state in miniature with a settled hierarchy and constitution and an organised economic life. From the first it was a landowning corporation which possessed villas and serfs and vineyards, and the monastic economy occupies a larger place in the rule of St. Benedict than in any of the earlier rules. Hence the importance of co-operative labour which filled so large a part
of the life of the Benedictine monk, for St. Benedict was inspired by the ideals which St. Augustine had set forth in his treatise *De opere monachorum* and had an equal detestation of the idle and "gyrovagous" monks who had done so much to bring monasticism into disrepute in the West.

But the primary duty of the monk was not manual labour, but prayer, above all the common recitation of the Divine Office, which St. Benedict terms "the work of God." Nor was study neglected. It was the monasteries which kept alive the classical tradition after the fall of the Empire. In fact the last representative in the West of the learned tradition of the Roman civil service—Cassiodorus—was also a founder of monasteries and the author of the first programme of monastic studies. It is true that the ostentatious literary culture of the old rhetorician at Vivarium was alien from the stern simplicity and spirituality which inspired the Benedictine rule, but Western monasticism was to inherit both traditions. Under the influence of the Papacy the rule of St. Benedict became the Roman standard of the monastic life and finally the universal type of Western monasticism. After the Celtic expansion came the Latin organisation.

The beginning of this Benedictine world mission was due to the action of St. Gregory, himself a Benedictine monk. It was from the Benedictine monastery on the Caetian that St. Augustine and his monks set out on their mission for the conversion of England, and the Benedictine monastery at Canterbury, probably the earliest Benedictine foundation outside Italy, became the starting point of a movement of religious organisation and unification which created a new centre of Christian civilisation in the West.

The appearance of the new Anglo-Saxon culture of the seventh century is perhaps the most important event between the age of Justinian and that of Charlemagne, for it reacted with profound effect on the whole continental development. In its origins it was equally indebted to the two forces that we have described—the Celtic monastic movement and the Roman Benedictine mission. Northern England was common ground to them both, and it was here that the new Christian culture arose in the years between 650 and 690 owing to the interaction and fusion of the two different elements. Christianity had been introduced into Northumbria by the Roman Paulinus who baptised King Edwin in 627 and
established the metropolitan see at the old Roman city of York, but the defeat of Edwin by the heathen Penda and the Welsh Cadwallon led to the temporary ruin of the Anglian Church. It was re-established by King Oswald in 634 with the help of St. Aidan and the Celtic missionaries whom he brought from Iona to Lindisfarne, and throughout his reign Celtic influence reigned supreme. It was not until the synod of Whitby in 664 that the Roman party finally triumphed, owing to the intervention of St. Wilfrid, who dedicated his long and stormy life to the service of the Roman unity. It is to him and to his friend and fellow-worker, St. Benedict Biscop, that the establishment of Benedictine monasticism in Northern England is due. Nor was their activity solely of ecclesiastical importance; for they were the missionaries of culture as well as of religion, and they were responsible for the rise of the new Anglian art. They brought back from their many journeys to Rome and Gaul skilled craftsmen and architects, as well as books, pictures, vestments and musicians, and their abbeys of Ripon and Hexham, Wearmouth and Jarrow, were the great centres of the new culture. At the same time in the South, a similar work was being carried out by the Greek-Syrian archbishop, Theodore, and the African abbot, Hadrian, who were sent from Rome in 668.

In them we can trace the appearance of a new wave of higher culture from the East, which does much to explain the rise of Anglo-Saxon scholarship and the superiority of the Latin of Bede and Alcuin to the barbarous style of Gregory of Tours or the Celtic author of the Historia Farnina. The higher culture had survived far more in the Byzantine provinces of Africa and the East, and the storm of Arab invasion had brought an influx of refugees to the West, who played somewhat the same part in the seventh century as the Greek refugees from Constantinople in the fifteenth. From 685 to 752 the Roman see was occupied by a succession of Greeks and Syrians, many of them men of considerable character, and the oriental influence was at its height, not only at Rome but throughout the West. In the Anglian art of this period, the oriental influence is especially well marked. From about the year 670—probably as a result of the activity of Benedict Biscop—we find in place of the old Germanic art, a new school of sculpture and decoration, purely oriental in inspiration, and based on the Syrian motive of a vine-scroll inter-
woven with the figures of birds or beasts, as we see it in the
great series of Anglian crosses, especially the famous ones at
Ruthwell and Bewcastle, which probably date from the begin-
nning of the eighth century. That an Irish school of art also
existed in Northumbria is proved by the magnificent Lind-
seanore Book of Gospels, but there is no trace of its in-
fluence on architecture or sculpture. On the other hand
the art of Saxon England is much more composite and shows
the influence not only of the oriental style both in its North-
umbrian and its Frankish Merovingian forms, but also that
of Irish art.

Nevertheless, behind all these foreign influences there lies
a foundation of native culture. The same age and district
that produced the Anglian crosses also saw the rise of Anglo-
Saxon literature. It was the age in which the old pagan story
of Beowulf received its literary form, and even more char-
acteristic of the time were the Christian poets, Caedmon,
the shepherd of Whitby Abbey, whose romantic story is pre-
served by Bede, and Cynewulf, the author of several surviving
poems, including Andreas, Elene, Juliana and, perhaps, also
of the noble Dream of the Rood, a quotation from which is
sculptured on the Ruthwell cross.

The rise of this vernacular literature no doubt owes some-
thing to the influence of Ireland where, as we have seen, a
remarkable development of vernacular Christian culture was
taking place at this time. But Anglo-Saxon literature has a
very distinctive character which is neither Celtic nor Teutonic
but all its own. It is marked by a characteristic melan-
choly which has nothing in common with the "Celtic mel-
ancholy" of literary tradition. It is the melancholy of a people
living among the ruins of a dead civilisation whose thoughts
dwell on the glories of the past and the vanity of human
achievement.

But this native tradition is not necessarily Anglo-Saxon: it
may go back further than that. Mr. Collingwood has ex-
plained the sudden flowering of Anglian art as due to a re-
naissance of the genius of the conquered people, and this
seems even more probable in the case of the leaders of reli-
gion and culture. The almost entire absence of any remains
of heathen Anglian settlements north of the Tees in Bernicia,
the centre of Northumbrian power in the days of St. Oswald,
is specially noteworthy. It suggests the probability of the
survival of native elements in the very region that played so large a part in the history of the Anglian culture, i.e., Tyneside and the east end of the Roman wall.  

And the same holds good to a lesser degree of Wessex, both Aldhelm and Boniface being natives of regions not occupied by the Saxons in early times. The enthusiasm of the newly converted Anglo-Saxons for the Latin culture and the Roman order cannot have been merely fortuitous. A man like Bede, who represents the highest level of culture in the West between the fall of the Empire and the ninth century, cannot have been an artificial product of an Italian mission to Germanic barbarians; the appearance of such a type in Denmark, for example, even after its conversion, is inconceivable. The conversion of the Anglo-Saxons produced such a vital change in England because it meant the reassertion of the old cultural tradition after the temporary victory of barbarism. It was the return of Britain to Europe and to her past.

This was the reason why the Christian and monastic culture attained in England an independence and autonomy such as it did not possess on the continent except for a time in Spain. In the Frankish dominions the kingdom still kept some of the prestige of the ancient state, and exercised, as we have seen, considerable control over the Church. In England, the Church embodied the whole inheritance of Roman culture as compared with the weak and barbarous tribal states. It was the Church rather than the state that led the way to national unity through its common organisation, its annual synods and its tradition of administration. In the political sphere the Anglo-Saxon culture was singularly barren of achievement. The Northumbrian state fell into weakness and anarchy long before the fall of the Anglian art and culture. The popular conception of the Anglo-Saxon as a kind of mediaeval John Bull is singularly at variance with history. On the material side Anglo-Saxon civilisation was a failure; its chief industry seems to have been the manufacture and export of saints, and even Bede was moved to protest against the excessive multiplication of monastic foundations which seriously weakened the military resources of the state.  

But, on the other hand, there has never been an age in which England had a greater influence on continental culture. In art and religion, in scholarship and literature, the Anglo-Saxons of the eighth century were the leaders of their age. At
the time when continental civilisation was at its lowest ebb, the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons marked the turn of the tide. The Saxon pilgrims flocked to Rome as the centre of the Christian world and the Papacy found its most devoted allies and servants in the Anglo-Saxon monks and missionaries. The foundations of the new age were laid by the greatest of them all, St. Boniface of Crediton, "the Apostle of Germany," a man who had a deeper influence on the history of Europe than any Englishman who has ever lived. Unlike his Celtic predecessors, he was not an individual missionary, but a statesman and organiser, who was, above all, a servant of the Roman order. To him is due the foundation of the mediaeval German Church and the final conversion of Hesse and Thuringia, the heart of the German land. With the help of his Anglo-Saxon monks and nuns he destroyed the last strongholds of Germanic heathenism and planted monasteries and bishoprics on the site of the old Folkingungs and heathen sanctuaries, such as Buraburg, Amonburg and Fulda. On his return from Rome in 739 he used his authority as Papal Vicar in Germany to reorganise the Bavarian Church and to establish the new dioceses which had so great an importance in German history. For Germany beyond the Rhine was still a land without cities, and the foundation of the new bishoprics meant the creation of new centres of cultural life. It was through the work of St. Boniface that Germany first became a living member of the European society.

This Anglo-Saxon influence is responsible for the first beginnings of vernacular culture in Germany. It is not merely that the Anglo-Saxon missionaries brought with them their custom of providing Latin texts with vernacular glosses, nor even that the earliest monuments of German literature —the old Saxon *Genesis* and the religious epic *Heiland*— seem to derive from the Anglo-Saxon literary tradition. It is that the very idea of a vernacular culture was alien to the traditions of the continental Church and was the characteristic product of the new Christian cultures of Ireland and England, whence it was transmitted to the continent by the missionary movement of the eighth century.

But in addition to this, Boniface was the reformer of the whole Frankish church. The decadent Merovingian dynasty had already given up the substance of its power to the mayors of the palace, but in spite of their military prowess, which saved France from conquest by the Arabs in 735, they had
done nothing for culture and had only furthered the degradation of the Frankish Church. Charles Martel had used the abbeyes and bishoprics to reward his lay partisans, and had carried out a wholesale secularisation of Church property. As Boniface wrote to the Pope, "Religion is trodden under foot. Benefices are given to greedy laymen or unchaste and publican clerics. All their crimes do not prevent their attaining the priesthood; at last rising in rank as they increase in sin they become bishops, and those of them who can boast that they are not adulterers or fornicators, are drunkards, given up to the chase, and soldiers, who do not shrink from shedding Christian blood." Nevertheless, the successors of Charles Martel, Pepin and Carloman, were favourable to Boniface's reforms. Armed with his special powers as Legate of the Holy See and personal representative of the Pope, he undertook the desecularisation of the Frankish Church.

In a series of great councils held between 742 and 747, he restored the discipline of the Frankish Church and brought it into close relations with the Roman see. It is true that Boniface failed to realise his full programme for the establishment of a regular system of appeals from the local authorities to Rome and for the recognition of the rights of the Papacy in the investiture of the bishops. But, though Pepin was unwilling to surrender his control over the Frankish Church, he assisted St. Boniface in the reform of the Church and accepted his ideal of co-operation and harmony between the Frankish state and the Papacy. Henceforward the Carolingian dynasty was to be the patron of the movement of ecclesiastical reform, and found in the Church and the monastic culture the force that it needed for its work of political reorganisation. For it was the Anglo-Saxon monks and, above all, St. Boniface who first realised that union of Teutonic initiative and Latin order which is the source of the whole medieval development of culture.