

Companion Guide
to accompany the program

Memorable Leaders in Christian History

AIDAN

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Memorable Leaders in Christian History

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ABOUT THE SERIES

The film series explores the 7th century world of Celtic spirituality and the impact of the Roman church's traditions upon it and the great men and women who shaped the future of the church in northern England. Beautiful photographic images and the comments of clerics and scholars tell the story through the lives of the leaders of their time.

A Background to the Series

Christianity came to England in the 2nd or 3rd centuries. A tale in the *History of the Britons* by Nennius tells of a British king, Lucius, who accepted baptism from missionaries sent by the pope in 167. Origen and Hippolytus, both writing in the 3rd century, mention Christians in Britain. The Acts of the Council (Synod) of Arles, held in 314, state that five persons from Britain attended including Eborius, bishop of York, and Restitutus, bishop of London. St. Athanasius (c. 296-373) lists the British among those who accepted the decrees of the Council of Nicaea in 325. Traces of what are believed to have been Christian churches built around 360 have been found in Silchester, England.

Because England was a country of kingdoms, to convert a king meant to convert his people. St. Augustine (not Augustine of Hippo), the future archbishop of Canterbury, landed in Kent in 597 as papal envoy. Within six months of his arrival he converted Ethelbert, King of Kent. By July of 598, Pope Gregory could write to the Patriarch of Alexandria that on Christmas Day of that year 10,000 Britons were baptized.

Two Traditions

The Celtic Church refers to those churches which used the Celtic languages and existed before Augustine arrived from Rome on his official mission from Pope Gregory. The original center of Celtic Christianity was the Island of Iona in the Inner Hebrides off the coast of Scotland. It was the headquarters of St. Columba who arrived there from Ireland c. 565 on his way to convert Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Any doctrinal distinctions between the Celtic churches and those on the continent are speculative. Perhaps the differences could best be described as those of emphasis and tradition. Celtic monks were more in tune with the asceticism of the East. They used their own language in the liturgy and their own calendar. They were used to working within a tribal rather than a diocesan context, and they retained their affinity to the natural world.

The Scene

The stronghold of Celtic spirituality was the kingdom of Northumbria (now Northumberland County), which bordered partly on Scotland and also had a coastal plain on the North Sea. The Romans had been there and left a reminder of their presence in the remains of Hadrian's wall, which once spanned the entire kingdom. The borders have changed many times over the years. The center of Celtic spirituality in Northumbria was the monastery of Lindisfarne, while Hexham was the first Saxon bishopric and followed the Roman Calendar.

ABOUT THIS PROGRAM

St. Aidan (d. 651) St. Paulinus (d. 644), bishop of York, was sent to England by Pope Gregory to continue the work of St. Augustine of Canterbury. He traveled to Kent with Ethelburga when she married Edwin, king of Northumbria, and was successful in converting King Edwin and his chieftains. He was consecrated bishop of York in 625.

Following the death of Edwin (633), St. Oswald (c. 605-642), the new king of Northumbria, erected a wooden cross on the battlefield, urging his men to pray for victory against the British king Caedwallon, near Hexham. He was successful in battle, and now that peace was established, he wanted to continue the missionary work begun by Paulinus. So he asked the monks of the Holy Isle of Iona to send him missionaries. He himself had been converted by the monks of St. Columba at Iona. The monks sent to him **Aidan**, who was consecrated bishop of Lindisfarne in 635.

First of all, Aidan established a monastic headquarters on the island of Lindisfarne. He also established a seminary on the island for the education of twelve young boys, who would be future leaders of the Celtic Church. Among them was St. Chad.

Aidan traveled back and forth across the causeways that at low tide connect the island to the mainland to visit the people and their churches. Aidan brought a new approach to missionary work as he walked among the people. To a preacher who was unsuccessful in reaching the people, Aidan said "I think, brother, that you have been more rigorous than reason would have with unlearned hearers, and that you have not, according to the apostle's instruction, first given them the milk of a milder doctrine, until... nourished by the word of God, they were able to receive the more perfect things and fulfill the higher commandments of God." (Bede, Bk. III, Chap. 5)

Bishop Aidan was ascetic, prayerful and gentle, and a true friend to King Oswald, who did not hesitate to serve as his interpreter. Bede (see separate video in this series) tells us that Aidan's life "was so far removed from the slackness of our times that all who walked with him ... must needs study; that is, bestow their time either in reading Scripture or in learning the Psalter (the Psalms)." (Bk. III, Chap. 5)

When Oswald died in 642, St. Oswin became his successor, and he, too, was the kind friend of the gentle **Aidan**. Both Oswin and **Aidan** died in 651.

Presenters

Robert Duncan <i>Story Teller</i>	Professor David Rollason “ <i>Durham University</i>
Rev. Elizabeth Culling <i>Community of Aidan and Hild</i>	Canon Kate Tristram <i>Warden, Marygate House</i>
Canon David Adam <i>Vicar of Holy Island</i>	Dr. Eric Cambridge <i>Hon. Research Fellow</i>
Andy Raine <i>Northumbria Community</i>	Canon Arthur Duncan <i>Author</i>

Questions for Discussion

1. Why did King Oswald want missionaries for his land?
2. Why do you think that Aidan was more successful than earlier missionaries?
3. How did the king show his support of Aidan’s work?
4. What was the importance of Aidan’s establishment on Lindisfarne.
5. What value did Aidan place on Scripture?
6. Does Aidan have good advise for us on evangelizing others?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR THE SERIES

Bainton, Roland H. *Christianity*, Houghton Mifflin, Boston

Bede (*Ecclesiastical History*) *Historical Works*, 2 vols., Loeb Classical Library, Harvard, 1979

____ Martin & Hurst, Trans. , *Homilies on the Gospels*, 2 vols., Nos. 110-111

____ Martin & Hurst, Trans. , *Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, No. 117

____ Hurst, Dom David, OSB, *Commentaries on the Seven Catholic Epistles*, No. 82

(All three from Cistercian Studies Series)

Bruce-Mitford, Rupert. *Aspects of Anglo-Saxon Archaeology*, Harper's Magazine Press, 1974

Cross, F. L. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, Oxford, 1997

Edwards, David L. *Christian England: Its Story to the Reformation*, Oxford, 1980

May-Harting, Henry. *The Coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England*, London, 1972

Phillips, Rev. Andrew. *The Hallowing of England*, Anglo-Saxon Press, England

Trevor-Roper, Hugh. *Northumberland* from *The Illustrated Counties of England*, Facts on File, 1985

Wilson, David M. *The Archaeology of Anglo-Saxon England*, Cambridge, 1976

Check your library and your local bookstore for the availability of these books, some of which may be out of print and available only through inter-library loan.

Related Websites

The Celtic World

<http://www.harpanddragon.com/whoare.htm>

http://www.ealaghol.demon.co.uk/celtenc/celt_ind.htm (Ency. of the Celts)

<http://www.clannada.org/docs/theline.htm> (Celtic Timeline)

(Note: A number of "Celtic" sites are New-Age oriented.)

Anglo-Saxon Northumbria:

<http://www.users.zetnet.co.uk/bamburghproject/northland.html>

Celtic Saints

<http://freespace.virgin.net/david.ford2/saints.html>

<http://www.knight.org/advent/> (click on letter for saint's name) Catholic Encyclopedia.

Bede:

<http://cedar.evansville.edu/~ecoleweb/glossary/bede.html> (Ecole Glossary)

<http://www.bedesworld.co.uk/index.htm>

(The Museum of Early Medieval Northumbria at Jarrow)

Lindisfarne

<http://www.knight.org/advent/> (click on L) Catholic Encyclopedia.

<http://www.lindisfarne.org.uk/links/index.htm> (tourists and retreat information)

<http://www.bl.uk/diglib/treasures/lindisfarne.html> (Gospels)