

TRUTH TRIUMPHANT: CHAPTER 11

Dinooth and the Church in Wales

The abbot of the most distinguished British monastery, at Bangor, Neynoch 1 by name, whose opinion in ecclesiastical affairs had the most weight with his countrymen, when urged by Augustin to submit in all things to the ordinances of the Roman Church, gave him the following remarkable answer: 1 "We are all ready to listen to the church of God, to the pope at Rome, and to every pious Christian, that so we may show to each, according to his station, perfect love, and uphold him by word and deed. We know not, that any other obedience can be required of us towards him whom you call the pope or the father of fathers." 2

THE heroic figure of Dinooth (c. A.D. 530-610) sheds glory upon the history of Christianity in Wales. He stamped his personality upon the life of the Welsh nation, and he gave direction to the first desperate encounter between an able leader of the Celtic Church and the agents of the Papacy. He became director of Celtic Christianity in England and Wales about the time the 1260-year period was beginning in 538. He led the Celtic Church in its critical encounter with Augustine, the founder of the papal church in England.

The Welsh still consider the sixth century as the most brilliant period of their history. 3 Columba was finishing his work in Scotland when Dinooth was at the height of his career. Since these two were leaders of the same faith during victorious years of Celtic Church advance in the British Isles, Dinooth learned from Columba, and followed his program of evangelization.

Add to the names of these pioneers that of Aidan, a famous leader of Celtic Christianity in England in the generation following Dinooth, and one can see the unity, as well as the abundant evangelism, that this church displayed. To obtain a close-up view of the environment in which Dinooth carried on his great work, it is necessary to examine the history of the British Isles as they experienced three inundating waves of penetration.

Wales was the first of the nations of Great Britain to feel weapons of aggression directed against the Celtic Church after the arrival of the Papacy. Welsh believers exemplified the bravery of others who laid down their lives for their faith. The Celtic people were renowned for their courage, and they almost exhausted the conquering forces of the Roman Empire when army after army melted away before the native tribes of the Welsh mountains. 4

The Welsh, a part of the great Celtic branch of the human family, 5 were originally pagan in their religion. Some practiced polytheism, while others followed druidism. The schools of the druids are famous in history for their scholarship and literary training.

The Arrival of Christianity

Christianity early entered the British Isles. Even in the days of the apostles the message may have reached them, for Mosheim writes, "Whether any apostle, or any companion of an apostle, ever visited Britain, cannot be determined; yet the balance of probability rather inclines toward the affirmative." 6

Origen about A.D. 225 spoke concerning Britain as follows: "When did Britain previous to the coming of the Christ agree to the worship of one God? When the Moors? when the whole world? Now, however, through the church all men call upon the God of Israel." 7

During the four hundred years that Britain was under the Roman Empire, the followers of the gospel there knew nothing of the ecclesiastical domination and pompous ritual of Rome. The truth was practiced in apostolic simplicity. The British were first evangelized, not by Rome, but by their brethren in Asia Minor who had continued in primitive Christianity. 8 Columbanus, who was of the same faith as Dinooth, declared that his church had received nought but the doctrines of the Lord and the apostles. 9 Therefore, as shall later be seen in his conflict with papal leaders, we must conclude that early British Christianity was apostolic and not papal.

The invasions of the Goths and the sack of Rome brought a crisis to the Celtic Church in England and Wales. The defense policy of the empire was forced to a radical change. The order was given at once for the imperial legions to abandon Britain, as they were needed on the Continent nearer home. The frontier of the empire contracted, leaving the British to their fate. At once the fierce Picts from Scotland and the Saxons from Scandinavia swept down upon the island. And, when about 449 the surge of invasion of the Anglo-Saxons began, the hatred of the foreigners against the Britons spent its fury on the British Church. Ultimately, paganism was dominant from the English Channel to the border of Scotland - Wales alone being able to stand its ground.

Step by step the Anglo-Saxons conquered and settled England. It took them almost two hundred years to do what the Romans did in a few years. Never was there more noble, sacrificing, and persistent resistance to despoilers. The overrunning of Italy and Spain was a migrating movement, but England was won only inch by inch and foot by foot. The defenders were farmers and herdsmen as well as fighters, but the pagan invaders took their lands. Christian churches were demolished or replaced by heathen temples. During these conflicts in England, however, Celtic Christianity was expanding and growing stronger in Ireland, Scotland, and Wales.

While the pagan Anglo-Saxons were pressing the Celtic Church back to Wales, a revolution had taken place in France which would ultimately affect Christianity throughout Great Britain. The pagan Franks, coveting the rich lands in southern France possessed by the Christian Visigoths, underwent a political conversion to Rome, strongly supported by the bishop of Rome and the Roman emperor. The Franks conquered the Visigoths in 508. This made their new faith dominant in France, and foreshadowed a similar advance into England. Before the revolution in Gaul was fully consummated, the conquering Anglo-Saxons in England had coalesced into a number of strong confederacies. Finally, there emerged a number of kingdoms, usually under the number of seven, spoken of as the Heptarchy. Of these, the kingdom of Kent was the first to engage attention because of its early strong lead and of its relationship with the church at Rome.

The king of Kent at this time (A.D. 560-616) was Ethelbert, who had married Bertha, the daughter of the Roman Catholic king of the Franks. Immediately a powerful advantage was given to the Papacy, since this zealous princess had the support not only of the strong nations of Gaul and Italy, but also of the Eastern Empire, whose emperor was in alliance with the Papacy. Bertha consented to this marriage only on condition that she should be accompanied to England by her chaplain.

Augustine in Great Britain

When Augustine and his monks landed on the island (A.D. 597), political conditions favored his coming. The Papacy had sought for more than two hundred years to pierce the apostolic Christianity which prevailed throughout Great Britain. By misrepresentation and by the sword it had persecuted the evangelical dissenters in northern Italy. It also hated the similar organization in Great Britain. Now, at last, it had found an ally. The previous stubborn resistance of the Celtic Britons to the Germanic Anglo-Saxon invaders had permeated the latter with rage toward their victims. The religious hatred embosomed in the Papacy was now joined to the racial hatred of the Anglo-Saxons.

On landing, Augustine went to Canterbury, the metropolis of Kent. He and his companions drew near, "furnished with divine, not with magic virtue, bearing a silver cross for their banner, and the image of our Lord and Savior painted on a board; and singing the litany." 10 It was a severe affliction upon the Christianity introduced among the Anglo-Saxons to make them believe that the ineffable Eternal could be represented by an image on a board, and to teach them license with God's commandment against images while proclaiming obedience to Christ, for had not the prophet declared of God: "To whom then will ye liken Me?" (Isaiah 40:25.)

These newcomers were given permission to teach openly, to repair and to reopen the churches which the pagan Anglo-Saxons had destroyed. How political and therefore how superficial Augustine's wholesale baptism, often thousand Kentish subjects was, became apparent when shortly after the death of the king the kingdom lapsed into paganism, 11 Due probably to the influence of Augustine, a revision of the old laws had been made in which an ordinary penalty was prescribed for offenses against ordinary citizens, a ninefold penalty for an offense against the king, but an elevenfold penalty for an offense against the bishop and a twelvefold penalty for an offense against a church building.

Then followed more strategic marriages. Probably the greatest line of success achieved by Augustine was the marriage of the Roman Catholic princess Aethelberg, daughter of Ethelbert, to the pagan king, Edwin, ruler of Northumbria, and later the marriage of the Roman Catholic princess Eanfled, granddaughter of King Ethelbert to the Northumbrian king, Oswy, grandson of Edwin, who had embraced the British faith under the influence of his saintly father, King Oswald, a student of Columba's celebrated training school at Iona. These three, Bertha, Aethelberg, and Eanfled, represented Rome's policy of marrying Catholic princesses to the ruler of the country whose faith was to be overthrown. Of these three, Eanfled had the most influence, as is related later, when she turned away the heart of her husband, King Oswy of Northumbria, from following the Celtic Church after he, for ten years as king, had walked in the footsteps of his noble father.

King Arthur and Early Welsh Heroes

One name around which romance has built a voluminous literature is that of King Arthur, the Welsh hero. This George Washington of his country must have fought many fierce battles to throw back the Anglo-Saxons. Evidently Arthur was the sword of the Lord in defense of the British Church. He is credited with building or repairing many churches, as well as with successful battling. The historian Gibbon says:

But every British name is effaced by the illustrious name of ARTHUR, the hereditary prince of the Silures, in South Wales, and the elective king or general of the nation. According to the most rational account, he defeated, in twelve successive battles, the Angles of the north and the Saxons of the west; but the declining age of the hero was embittered by popular ingratitude and domestic misfortunes. 12

The splendid growth of the Celtic Church during the period which elapsed between the time of King Arthur and the landing of Augustine, brought serious misgivings to the papal church. Dr. A. Ebrard says of Pope Gregory I: "A Rome-free British Irish church and mission in the British Islands already existed. He invested Augustine with jurisdiction over all the bishops of the British Church." 13 The fact that Pope Gregory commissioned Augustine to be archbishop over British bishops as well as over the Roman Catholics proves that the pontiff planned the extinction of the Celtic Church.

Augustine influenced King Ethelbert of Kent to summon the Celtic teachers from the nearest provinces of the Britons to Augustine's Oak, a place probably located on the banks of the Severn. The summons was sent to the famous Celtic training school at Bangor in Wales. Bede relates that the large enrollment of ministerial students at this college necessitated its being separated into seven divisions with a dean over each. None of the different parts contained less than three hundred men, all of whom lived by the labor of their hands. 14

Dinooth, as president of his college, would, according to the organization of the Celtic Church in that period, be supreme director also of the churches in Wales. If Dinooth would attend the proposed conference, Augustine would have opportunity to encounter a learned representative of early British Christianity.

To Augustine's Oak, therefore, came delegations of the doctors or teachers from Bangor, Wales, which college might be looked upon as the ecclesiastical center of the Britons. 15 The Roman Catholics began by accusing the Celtic pastors of doing many things against the unity of the church. Augustine requested them to abandon their method of keeping Easter, to preserve Catholic unity, and to undertake in common the preaching of the gospel to the pagans. A long disputation followed. It was clearly evident to those pastors, whose church had an origin independent of the Papacy and had never had any connection with Rome, that the unity demanded of them meant the loss of their identity. They refused to be swayed by the exhortations and rebukes of Augustine and his companions. They gave answer that it was their preference to follow their own Christian practices. The Britons promptly declared, "that they could not part from their ancient customs without the consent and leave of their people." 16 Therefore a second conference was arranged. Second Conference on Church Doctrines

To this second meeting came seven bishops, as Bede calls them, and many learned men of the Britons. Before these delegates left for this conference they visited one of their ancient men noted for his sanctity and wisdom to ask his advice. He counseled them to let Augustine and his party arrive at the place of meeting first. If, when the Britons arrived, Augustine arose and received them with the meekness and humility of Christ, they were to look upon him as heaven's messenger. If, however, he displayed haughtiness and arrogance, it was a sign that they were to refuse to fellowship with him or accept his authority.

When they did arrive at the place of meeting, Augustine was already there and, retaining his seat, did not deign to rise. Whereupon, the Britons charged him with pride, answering all his arguments. Augustine commanded them to keep Easter according to the Church of Rome, to give up their evangelical unity, and to become Romanists. The Britons fully and determinedly rejected Augustine's claims to the superior authority of his church and the supremacy of the pope who sent him. They declared that "they would do none of these things, nor receive him as their archbishop." 17 Consequently, Augustine predicted their ruin, saying that "if you will not join with us in unity, you shall from your enemies suffer the vengeance of death." 18

James Ussher writes of this interview: "The Welsh Chroniclers further relate that Dinooth the abbot of Bangor produced divers arguments at that time to show that they owed him no subjection." From the same authority we further learn that the Welsh made answer to Rome's monks that they adhered to what their holy fathers held before them, who were the friends of God and the followers of the apostles, and therefore they ought not to substitute for them any new dogmatists. 19

Soon after this contest between Dinooth and Augustine, the Welsh clergy lived to see the terrible slaughter of their young ministerial candidates in the war waged upon the Britons and the British Church in Wales. Aethelfrith, king of Northumbria, raised a great army to war against them. As he prepared to attack, he noticed a special company of about twelve hundred young men engaged in prayer. These were from the famous training college of Bangor, Wales. Though these young men were opposed to bearing arms, they were wont to pray for the soldiers of their own nation who were fighting for national existence. Upon learning who these twelve hundred were, Aethelfrith shouted that their prayers showed on what side they stood, even if they did not bear arms, and that he would slay them first. By his wicked command practically all of them were exterminated. So great was the slaughter that the papal historian Bede thinks he sees in this a fulfillment of Augustine's malediction.

Ussher has recorded some of the poems of the leading Welsh bard, Taliessin, poet laureate we may say, who wrote:

Woe unto him who doth not keep
From Romish wolves his holy sheep.

All must admire the spirit of the Welsh church leaders. Their lot was hard enough with the fierce Anglo-Saxon armies constantly harassing them. Added to that were the demands of the papal emissaries and of the organization backed by the king of France and the Roman emperor. The gulf between the two types of believers was deep and wide. This same Pope Gregory who sent Augustine to Britain had issued a bull declaring that the decrees of the first four general councils of the church were of equal inspiration with the gospels. This was an unacceptable man-made enlargement of the Scriptures. The Celtic Church rejected it and clung to the Bible and the Bible only.

In the second place the Welsh would not accept what Augustine did in Kent. On the advice of Gregory, he proceeded to sanctify, not abolish, the idolatrous festivals he found there. It was the practice of the apostles and their immediate successors wherever possible to abolish pagan sacrifices which, they declared, were sacrificed to devils. 20 Images of no kind were permitted in the churches of primitive Christianity during the first three hundred years.

Then, the pressure to accept the supremacy of a foreign Italian bishop as ordained of God to be a universal head of the church by virtue of apostolic succession, was offensive to the Welsh Church which had received its faith in direct descent from the apostles.

A fourth point was the new conception of the office of the bishop. The Celtic Church retained the original understanding of the New Testament that a bishop was a pastor over a church, a presbyter, and not a spiritual overlord who held his authority from a superior in the Roman Catholic hierarchy.

A fifth reason for the difference between the Welsh Church and the Papacy was the increasing demand by Rome for celibacy of the clergy. The Church in the Wilderness always maintained the original God-given freedom of its officers to marry. At times when dangers, exposure, and travel were the lot of the

missionaries, they often chose the single life. These cases were the exception and certainly were never made the *sine qua non* of entrance into the ministry. The Papacy, even in the days of its greatest power, was never able to force celibacy onto the Welsh clergy, though she made many attempts to accomplish it. 21

Then came the controversy over the Sabbath. The historian A. C. Flick says that the Celtic Church observed the seventh day as the Sabbath. 22 The believers resented the effort to stigmatize them as Judaizers because they conscientiously believed the seventh day of the fourth commandment to be still binding. Moreover, this same Pope Gregory had issued an official pronouncement against a section of the city of Rome itself because the Christian believers there rested and worshiped on the Sabbath. 23 When the facts reveal that at this time, the seventh century, there were still more Christian churches throughout the world sanctifying the seventh day, the day which God sanctified in the fourth commandment of the Decalogue, rather than Sunday, we can fully understand the apostolic churches that refused to worship on another day.

There is much evidence that the Sabbath prevailed in Wales universally until A.D. 1115, when the first Roman bishop was seated at St. David's.

The old Welsh Sabbath-keeping churches did not even then altogether bow the knee to Rome, but fled to their hiding places where the ordinances of the gospel to this day have been administered in their primitive mode without being adulterated by the corrupt Church of Rome. 24

The Welsh and the papists led by Augustine disagreed. The Welsh Church continued independent. Nothing would ever now satisfy Rome but the obliteration of the Celtic Church.

The change came when William the Conqueror landed in England with his Norman warriors and overthrew the Anglo-Saxon power. Here is a truly interesting parallel. When the Franks, still pagans, crossed the Rhine, to overthrow Gaul, the Papacy cooperated with the new pagan tribes, relying upon her great alliance with the Eastern emperor to so influence the invaders that, in ruining Gaul, they would also ruin the Celtic Church. And such came to pass as we present later in studying the widespread work in Europe of the Celtic missionaries from Ireland and Scotland. Likewise, William the Conqueror had the full assurance and the help of the pope, and the understanding that he would have this continued support, on condition that the Celtic Church must go. 25

It is sad to follow step by step the policy pursued to displace the Celtic Church in Wales. One is thrilled by the spirit of independence and fidelity to apostolic truths which was shown by its members in the following centuries. Dinooth is a type of the splendid leadership given the native church. Had the entire conflict come immediately after William the Conqueror landed, instead of the prolonged wearing away, undoubtedly the early Celtic Church would still be there. Little by little, however, by intrigue, by flatteries, by threats, supported at every turn by England's armed power and seconded by the strong papal influences in Italy and France, the papal clergy succeeded after seven centuries in obtaining the mastery.

Steps in Subjection

In analyzing the different steps in securing this subjection, we might present them as follows: First, some of the Celtic clergy were persuaded to seek ordination from the papal primate of England, the archbishop of Canterbury. Secondly, the bishop of England assumed the power to nominate the clergy

of Wales. Thirdly, England, by right of conquest succeeding certain wars, claimed definite pieces of territory within the Welsh realm in which she would build a Catholic monastery and set over the community a Catholic bishop. Fourthly, whenever a Norman bishop was placed in Wales, he astutely followed the policy of claiming the lands belonging to any near-by landed noble who owed unpaid revenues. Fifthly, continued efforts were made by the papal clergy in England to drive a wedge between the Celtic clergy in Wales and the Welsh princes. Sixthly, as this went on, they had persuaded the Welsh princes that it was to their advantage to divorce their interests from those of the native church. Seventhly, when a sufficient number of papal clergy had gained a foothold in Wales, they began to hold regional synods or conventions. Eighthly, another step in advance was made when the native clergy submitted to a tour of visitation by a Catholic bishop.

A new turn of affairs came with the victories of King Edward I. This aggressive warrior who overthrew Sir William Wallace of Scotland as well as Prince Llewellyn of Wales, asserted his claim to be the head of the Welsh Church, and also to be the sovereign lord over Wales. By statutory legislation he decreed that English law should be the code of procedure wherever the crown had visited the states in Wales. In other territories he was willing that the old Celtic ecclesiastical measures should prevail in the church while English civil law ruled in secular matters. Thus from 1272 until King Henry VIII, Wales was no longer under Welsh law both civilly and religiously, but was under three different codes.

Under Henry VIII all this was swept aside. This monarch, who had brought into existence the Church of England, ordered that the civil and religious laws of England should be supreme throughout Wales. This had an immense effect in tearing down Welsh customs and in overthrowing the influence of the Celtic Church. It placed the Welsh clergy in the difficult position of either surrendering their convictions and practices of centuries, or being found in rebellion against the supreme law of the land. This situation has continued from then until now. It had the tendency to embitter a people who had never been too fond of their neighboring Anglo-Saxon kingdom. These changes were forced upon them and were never heartily accepted, so that when the Methodist revival in the eighteenth century swept Wales, it found a nation always resentful of ritualism, ready to return to evangelism.

The Celtic Church of Wales, not the papal, is the connecting link in that land between apostolic Christianity and latter-day Protestantism. Although centuries have passed, the old religious characteristics of the people still remain. Ecclesiasticism which was forced upon them is no deeper than a thin veneer. The deadly struggle between these Celtic and Roman churches may be summed up in the words of J. W. Willis Bund:

The issue was at once shifted from a fight between Christianity and paganism to a fight, a deadly fight, between the Latin and the Celtic Churches. In the north of England the Latin Church was victorious. She forced the Celtic missionaries to retire to Scotland or Ireland, and nominally brought England under the rule of Rome. But in Wales the result was different. Here the Latin Church was repulsed, if not defeated; here Celtic Christianity long maintained its position with its peculiar ideas and exceptional beliefs. 26