

God's Mysterious Blessing Upon England

Without doubt God has richly blessed the nation of England (by this term I include all of Great Britain, an old convention of historians). This is easily proved by just a few historic facts such as: the repulsion of the Great Armada, the influence of the early Celtic church, the widespread acceptance of the Westminster Confession, the profusion of great Christians leaders and teachers, the separation from Rome and so on. That God has blessed many nations is without doubt; but the long line of divine testimony in English history is without precedent. No other nation has manifested such an adherence to Biblical truth and a proclamation to the Gospel for so long. Even the testimony of the Netherlands is not as ancient as that of England.

Now I am not in favour of Erastianism, nor am I advocating a theory of Christendom; there is no such thing as a spiritual nation and the only theocracy existed in ancient Israel. Neither do I believe that England warrants praise for its testimony today since its government is ungodly, passing wicked laws; its national church is utterly apostate and the situation amongst most evangelicals is shocking. The truth is only being held by a very small minority. Furthermore, I do not claim that England's spiritual and secular leaders were without fault. Even during periods when God clearly directed the nation in an unusual way (such as during the separation from Rome) the actions of authorities were often motivated by self-interest or error.

What I am interested in is tracing the blessing of God from the time of the early church to today, revealing that in his sovereignty God has chosen to use the English church to promote his glory and has blessed her with an abundance of godly men. The corollary is that areas, which once stood as a pillar of the truth due to the prominence of great leaders often collapsed within a generation.

This is all of grace. There is no merit in England, just as there is no merit in any other country; but in his grace, God chose to use England more than any other nation. This is worth historical consideration.

The Celtic Church

Britain's ancient Christian testimony

Early British inhabitants

There is an idea in the popular imagination that Britain was a primitive nation of head-hunting savages running around in woad until the Romans appeared. This is far from the truth. The Celtic people (a tribe originally from Galatia which diversified across Europe) overtook the indigenous British inhabitants at some point and these formed a highly sophisticated society. The original Britons were established by Brutus (Bryttys in Welsh, hence 'British'), a descendant of Aeneas, the famous hero of Virgil's *Aeneid* who set sail from Greece. This settling of Britain was in about 1104 BC after the Ice Age had receded subsequent to the Flood (there are records of the Ice Age at the time of Partholan's coming to Ireland in the 15th century BC¹). Far from being uncivilised, the Celts invented soap long

1 Mageoghagan, C, *The Annals of Clonmacnoise*, (1627); Univ. of Dublin Press (1896), p13.

before the Romans ever used it but no less civilised were the original Briton inhabitants of 'Albion', descendants of the wealthy and civilised city of Troy (or Ilium²).

Trade between Britain and the Near East had been long established by the Phoenicians. This was important because Britain was one of the best places to find the tin necessary for making bronze (copper plus tin) instruments of war. Scripture shows us that Solomon had a navy that worked with the Phoenicians around 1000 years BC (1 Kg 10:22) bringing items from long distances (such as ivory or apes). A harbour used in the Phoenician trade route was Tarshish (1 Kg 10:22; Ezek 27:12) which was on the Atlantic coast of Spain, now Cadiz; this was well on the way to Britain from the eastern Mediterranean. Trade and commerce between the south coast of England and the Near East was well established before the time of Christ.

The importing of tin from the far west (in fact from the Scilly Isles off Cornwall) is mentioned by Herodotus in 'The Persian Wars' (c. 445 BC). Greek explorers also visited Britain, such as Pytheas of Massalia in about 300 BC. The Greek historians Polybius and Strabo describe this, in a somewhat derisory fashion, in some fragments of manuscripts but Pytheas' reports are credible. The Greek Diodorus Siculus, writing during the 1st century BC, even stated that the Cornish merchants were more civilised and courteous than most.³ There is also good evidence that Jews had settled in Britain long before the time of Christ. Many place names, especially in Cornwall, are of Jewish origin or character (e.g. Marazion or Menheniot).⁴ These probably came with Phoenician traders from ancient times.

The Molmutine Laws of King Dyvnal Moelmud (Dunvallo Molmutius) have survived from 5th-4th centuries BC and reveal a well ordered society. It describes laws regarding farming, land rights, human rights, bankruptcy, and so forth. Iron mines were common property but the ore extracted was private. It describes shepherding, hunting, public duties and the teaching of itinerant bards and shows that the bonds holding society together were very strong and well regulated under a restrained monarch. There was no despotism. In 500 years Britain had established a prosperous and stable civilisation after the original settling of the land by Brutus.

The power of the Britons is revealed by their sacking of Rome under Bran and Beli (Belinus and Brennius, sons of Dunvallo). This is the invasion mentioned by Livy as the sack of Rome by Gallic Celts in 390 BC.⁵ Livy mentions that the leader of the attack was Brennius (Bran) in alliance with related Continental Celts from Bourges.⁶

It is tempting to discuss further the origins of the British people, from Trojan refugees fleeing Greece, to Celtic invaders, to later Saxon and Teutonic incursions but we must

² Troy (Turkish Truva; Latin Ilium) was believed to be merely a Homeric legend, until a stronghold called by the Turks Hissarlik, in Asiatic Turkey near the Dardanelles, was identified as the site by the German archaeologist H. Schliemann, in 1870. Excavations of the mound proved to be composed of 46 strata, dating from the early Bronze Age to the Roman era. The stratum known as Troy VII, believed to be that of the Homeric city, was sacked c.1210 BC. Again destroyed c.1100 BC, the site was resettled by the Greeks c.700 BC and finally abandoned in the Roman period. Like the early and other records of Ancient Britain, Troy was considered a fable until archaeological proof was discovered; much like the Biblical Hittite Empire was ridiculed until discovered as ruins. There is nothing fabulous about escapees from Troy settling elsewhere and their descendants reaching Britain. Aeneas founded Carthage and later the Roman state.

³ Dio, 'Bibliotheca Historica', *Universal History*, Book V.

⁴ See: Susser, B; *The Jews of South-West England*.

⁵ Titus Livius, *History of Rome*, Book V, p378-395.

⁶ Livy confirms the accounts, long neglected by modern historians, of Geoffrey of Monmouth and *the Tysilio Chronicle* (from the Welsh Chronicles) in the Bodleian Library (*Jesus College MS LXI*).

resist this. [Further information can be found in: Mike Gascoigne, *‘Forgotten History of the Western People*, and Bill Cooper, *‘After the Flood’*.] The point is that long before the Roman occupation the Britons were a civilised and well-ordered society having considerable power. They flourished in a land full of natural resources, which was considered a great prize for Claudius. Indeed, his invasion and occupation established his position in Rome, completing something even Julius Caesar had failed to do. It was in this land, now Romanised, that Christianity took root amongst Celtic leaders and then throughout the nation, overruling the pagan Druidism, by about 55 AD.

The first Christianised nation was Britain.

The early British church

There has always been a strong contention that the English church is not only of ancient origin but that it was initiated by Biblical characters, particularly Joseph of Arimathea, Paul and his disciples. Despite the dismissal by modernist academics that these are mere legends, it pays to examine the actual evidence.

What is certain is that Christianity came to Britain at least as early as 55 AD, that is only 25 years after the crucifixion. Rome had occupied Britain for some years after Claudius’ invasion in 43 AD.⁷ It was a good prize, being a large country of good farmland, harbours and natural resources, particularly tin in Cornwall, which Phoenician traders had exported for many years. Some local chieftains had resisted the Roman occupation, most noteworthy being Caratacus (popularly Caractacus better Caradoc or Caradog), the Celtic Pendragon leader, chief of the Silures Celts of southern Wales.⁸ Eventually he was betrayed to the Romans and taken to Rome, where in God’s providence he was pardoned and respected after his speech of defiance before the Senate.⁹ His family joined him there, where he had a state pension and apartments in the Imperial Palace (the *Pallatium Britannicum* or ‘British Palace’), and they all became Christians. Later, in 58 AD Caractacus was sent back to Britain as a puppet king but most of his family remained in Rome as surety. Caractacus’ daughter, Claudia, married a Roman senator called Rufus Pudens, and both became Christians. Her brother Linus became a Christian upon travelling to Rome and he later succeeded Peter as Bishop of Rome. All three are mentioned by Paul in 2 Tim 4:21 and the whole family (Linus, Rufus and Claudia’s four children) suffered martyrdom under Nero except Claudia, who died a natural death.

After seven years in Rome, where he became a Christian, Caractacus’ father, Bran, returned to Britain in, or slightly before, 58 AD and helped to convert the nation from the leaders to ordinary citizens.¹⁰ By 130 AD lands and freemen status were given to Christians by Lleirwig, great-grandson of Caradoc and Llandav was established as the first archbishopric.¹¹ Britain thus became the very first nation to publicly adopt Christianity

⁷ Britain had been invaded by Julius Caesar in 55 BC during his Gallic campaigns. In 54 BC he penetrated to the Thames with 5 legions; but it was only under Claudius that the Romans made as serious attempt to conquer Britain. Within three to four years their rule reached to the Humber in the north and the Severn in the west.

⁸ This was the chieftain Caradoc (Caradog), named Caractacus (Caradocus) by the Romans; some believe him to be the cousin of Arviragus, chief of western England. He was a Celtic warrior who was defeated in 50 AD at Caer Caradoc, Shropshire. Fleeing north he took refuge with Queen Cartimandua, who betrayed him to curry favour with the Romans, whereupon he was taken captive to Rome to meet Claudius, who granted him his freedom. Some of his family had been captured with him, notably his daughter Claudia. The other famous rebel was Boudicca, queen of the Iceni who led a revolt in 61 AD. Pendragon is an ancient Welsh (Celtic) term for a prince claiming supreme power.

⁹ See Tacitus, *Annals*, XII.37.

¹⁰ See the *Welsh Triads*.

¹¹ Flinders Petrie, *Neglected British History*, Vol VIII, p1-28 quoted in Bill Cooper, *After the Flood*, p248.

instead of paganism. Furthermore, it became the first nation to have a Christian king in Lucius (or Lucian or Llew), great grandson of Arviragus. In 180 Lucius sent to Rome for teachers and Christianity was established as the national religion.¹² Bede affirms that British King Lucian proclaimed Christianity as the national religion in 156 while Jerome quotes Sabellius as saying, ‘*the first nation that ... called itself Christian ... was Britain*’.¹³

Early church councils acknowledged all this and gave Britons the precedence in their meetings:

The churches in France and Spain must yield in points of antiquity and precedence to that of Britain as the latter church was founded by Joseph of Arimathea immediately after the passion of Christ. [*Disputatio super Dignitatem Angliae et Galliae in Concilio Constantiano*, Theodore Martin, Lovan, 1517.]

There is good testimony regarding the early conversion of Britain. The church father Tertullian (155-222) stated that Britain had already received and accepted the Gospel by his lifetime,

... all the limits of the Spains, and the diverse nations of the Gauls, and the haunts of the Britons – inaccessible to the Romans, but subjugated to Christ. [*Adversus Judaeos*, p189 (1664)]

Eusebius, (260-340) the Bishop of Caesarea and esteemed Christian historian, wrote of Christ's disciples in *Demonstratio Evangelica*, saying that ‘*some have crossed the Ocean and reached the Isles of Britain*’.¹⁴ Hilary of Poitiers (300-376) testified that the Apostles had built churches in Britain¹⁵ while the historian Hippolytus (170-236) named Aristobulus (cf. Rm 16:10) claiming that he became a British church leader.¹⁶ Finally, the first ‘Christian’ Roman Emperor, Constantine, came to power in Britain (at the Battle of Milvian Bridge), was from York and was the grandson of the British king Coel.

Joseph of Arimathea

It is true that most of the records of Joseph in connection with Britain are comparatively late. He appears in the 9th century *Life of Mary Magdalene* by Rabanus Maurus (766-856), Archbishop of Mainz, who avers that Joseph of Arimathea was sent to Britain, claiming that he was accompanied by Mary, Martha and Lazarus and several others including Mary Magdalene for part of the journey. They followed the directions of the Phoenician trade route through France.¹⁷ After landing at Falmouth they sailed to Glastonbury via the Bristol Channel and marshland (that has since been drained).¹⁸ Though of late date, this was based upon the much earlier Vatican manuscript of Baronius, upon which many more fabled medieval tales rest.¹⁹ These medieval records have many accretions but are too late to hold much credence, though historical cynic Polydore Vergil

¹² See *Liber Pontificalis*, referenced by Bill Cooper, *Chronicle of the Early Britons*, footnote 284. Also Peter Roberts, Tysilio's *Chronicle of the Kings of Britain*, (1811) p90. See also Gascoigne, p179ff.

¹³ Jerome *Ep.* 46.10.

¹⁴ *Demonstratio Evangelica*, Book 3.

¹⁵ *Tract XIV*, Psalm 8.

¹⁶ Wace, *Hippolytus*.

¹⁷ There were two routes from the Near East to Britain. The sea route went round Spain, but after the Romans established law and order in France, the safer route was up the Loire valley in France to St Nazaire then across the channel.

¹⁸ Bodleian Library. ‘Manuscripts’.

<http://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/dept/scwmss/wmss/medieval/mss/laud.htm>. *MS. Laud 108* of the Bodleian.

¹⁹ Baronius, *Ecclesiastic Annals*, ad annum 35.

in 1534 affirmed the story. The truth is that we cannot know for certain exactly what Joseph's role in Glastonbury was.

However, there is a very strong and oft repeated tradition that Joseph founded the very first Christian church at Glastonbury in 36 AD which requires consideration. The historian Gildas wrote during the 6th century that this occurred in the reign of Tiberius Caesar (i.e. before 16 March 37 AD). What is astounding in this is that a specific public building was established for church use (even though made of wattle and daub), which was endorsed by the local chief (later king Arviragus, then Duke of Cornwall) who had given the Christians about 2 square miles of land, at a time when everywhere else in the Roman Empire Christians were being hounded and persecuted and forced to meet in secret. This alone sets Britain out as unusual.

That Joseph did found this church at Glastonbury is attested by very many sources and accepted by many good men, including Archbishop Ussher. Even Augustine (of Hippo) is supposed to speak of a church founded in Western Britain in 'Glastonia'.²⁰ However, other sources say the church was founded by different disciples. Maelgwyn of Llandaff (St. David's uncle) in about 450 states that Joseph was buried at Glastonbury in 76 AD. It seems fairly certain that Joseph, along with other disciples (some known others unknown), came to England to preach the Gospel and came to Glastonbury where they probably settled.

Others

It is claimed that the disciple/apostle Simon Zelotes (Matt 10:4; Mk 3:18; Lk 6:15) arrived in Britain subsequent to Joseph. This is mentioned by Dorotheus, Bishop of Tyre in 300 AD who says that he was martyred in Britain by crucifixion. The theologian Nicephorus confirms this writing in the 8th-9th centuries. Baronius also records the death of Simon which occurred in 44 AD, suggesting that he may have travelled with Joseph. After Simon, Aristobulus (Rm 16:10) arrived and, according to Dorotheus, was made a bishop. As well as being a colleague of the apostle Paul, Aristobulus was claimed to have been one of the 70 disciples sent out by Jesus (Lk 10:1-17). The Greek Martyrologies states that he was martyred in Britain after a successful period of evangelisation. The Bishop of Augusta, Haleca, confirms this.²¹ Morgan states that the district of Arwystli in Powys, Wales is named after him.

The apostle Paul

References to the Lord Jesus travelling to Britain can be dismissed as romanticism, especially as celebrated by the mystic painter/poet William Blake in his hymn '*And did those feet in ancient times*'. However, claims that Paul came as a missionary to these shores are less easily dismissed.

That Paul intended to preach to the farthest extremes of the Roman Empire is attested by Scripture; in Rm 15:24 he mentions that he proposed to go to Spain. This was well on the way to Britain following the Phoenician sea route. However, Paul's imprisonment put a temporary stop to his missionary journeys for two years, where the Biblical historical record ends (Acts 28:30). But Paul was eventually released from this imprisonment in 62 AD and had a few more years of service before being martyred by Nero in 66-67 AD. It is believed that Paul visited Laodicea, Nicopolis (Greece), and Crete but more than that is uncertain. However, there is plenty of time for him to have visited Spain and even England.

²⁰ Lomax, F; *The Antiquities of Glastonbury by William of Malmesbury*, (c.1135), Talbot, London, (1908) p5 and Morgan, RW; *St Paul in Britain*, 'Epistolae ad Gregorium Papam', James Parker & Co, (1880), p143.

²¹ See Morgan, p153.

Theodoret, Bishop of Cyropolis, wrote in 435 AD,

Paul, liberated from his first captivity at Rome, preached the Gospel to the Britons and others in the West. Our fishermen and publicans not only persuaded the Romans and their tributaries to acknowledge the Crucified and His laws, but the Britons and also the Cimbri (Cymry i.e. Welsh). [Theodoret, *De Civ. Graec. Off*, lib. IX; ref. in Morgan, p188.]

Theodoret also affirms that Paul went to Spain and from there travelled to Britain and other islands.²² Clement, Paul's friend and early Christian writer, says that Paul travelled to '*the furthest limits of the west*', a term which was understood to include Britain. There is no reason to deny that Paul visited Britain.

Summary

- Britain was established as a well-organised civilisation from antiquity, with rulers descended from ancient Troy via Aeneas. At the time of the early church it was an established Celtic kingdom.
- Britain was evangelised very early. This is traditionally thought to have been by Joseph of Arimathea after the resurrection and almost certainly by Paul and his disciples later (hundreds of years before Augustine of Canterbury).
- The first Christian royal family was that of Caradoc (who was not called a king but 'Pendragon').
- The first church ever built with the permission of the local king was at Glastonbury.
- The first Christianised nation was Britain, as established by Bran the Blessed.
- The first Christian king was the Briton Lucius.
- The first Christian Roman Emperor was Constantine, from the British royal family.
- Church fathers and early church councils attest the antiquity and authority of the British church.
- No other nation can match this series of achievements.

The See Apostolic from when I come hath a special respect to this realm above all others, and not without cause, seeing that God Himself, as it were, by providence hath given to this realm prerogative of nobility above all others, which to make it plain unto you, it is to be considered that this island first of all islands received the light of Christ's religion. [Archbishop of Canterbury, Cardinal Pole, addressing Parliament; quoted in Gascoigne, p168.]

The Celtic Church

Many people consider that Christianity arose in Britain after the missionary efforts of the Roman priest Augustine (first Archbishop of Canterbury). This is utterly false. What Augustine did was to ensure the ruin and devastation of the indigenous Celtic church and traditions in order to establish Romanism and subjection to the pope. By the time of the Synod of Whitby (664) this was completed, but long before Augustine the Celtic church was thriving and well established.

It was not until 597 AD that formal Roman Catholicism was brought to England by Augustine, with a mission to bring the Celts' version of Christianity into line with Rome. Pope Gregory provided all that Augustine required, drove him on when he was depressed and encouraged syncretism with heathen practices in order to win over the 'barbarians'²³.

²² *Comm. on 2 Tim 4:16*; Morgan, p188.

²³ E.g. warrior's helmets combined the cross with Odin's symbol of the tusked boar.

The purpose was to destroy Celtic Christianity which, by holding to apostolic principles, had developed on a different path to the practices of Rome. Even so, despite 'converting' certain princes (with political motives), the mission did not fare well for many years, so strong was the hold of indigenous Christianity.

At this time the Western Roman Empire was succumbing to threats from outside. The withdrawal of the Roman legions from Britain (early 5th c.) initiated a revival of Celtic life, focused on withstanding the invasion of Jutes and Saxons. The legendary Celtic King Arthur is based upon a real character, whose 12 battles stemmed the tide of Saxon advance for a century (c. 500), and who went into battle with the cross as his insignia on his shoulders, but the damage could not be stopped.²⁴

By the 7th century, the Celtic church was rapidly losing ground. It had no unified territorial system and missionaries became a law unto themselves and were isolated. Christianity in Britain started to become superficial, legalistic and some sank into native Celtic cults of sun-worship, holy wells and evil spirits. Some priests became shamans and extreme asceticism was practised. By 613 the long process of invasion by Angles, Saxons and Jutes (Teutonic, i.e. German Tribes) resulted in a final conquest of British Celtic culture, in the south at least. This has been described as a revolution:

The replacement of Celt by Teuton, Christian by heathen, a western culture by one mainly northern, and an old scheme of agriculture by a new.²⁵

Thus, by the time of Augustine although all of England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland had been evangelised, the Celtic Britons in southern England had been driven into Wales to escape from the Saxon invasions. The pagan Saxon population thus needed evangelisation. Augustine's mission was twofold: convert the pagan Saxon settlers, now dominant in Sussex (South Saxons), Essex (East Saxons) and Wessex (West Saxons) and convert the Celtic church (still strong in the north and west) to Roman ways. Roman orthodoxy that was to be imposed on the Celtic church included: praying to saints, acceptance of Purgatory, priestly abstinence from marriage, universal authority of the pope, images in churches, sacramentalism, Roman tonsure for monks, and the Roman date for Easter.

Augustine had some success converting the Saxons and was made Archbishop of Canterbury, but he could not prevail over the Britons. During meetings Augustine was arrogant, demanding and cold. The Britons that had opposed him were slaughtered in the attack by two Saxon kings upon the monastery at Bangor-is-y-Coed near Wrexham; 1200 monks were killed. Some say that Augustine instigated this before his death. When Augustine is credited with bringing Christianity to the English, by this is meant the Saxons (plus Angles and Jutes), not the Celtic Britons. An example of the difference in the two religions in the north and south is seen in the example of king Oswy of Northumbria who was observing Easter while his queen (who was taught in the south) was still fasting.

A conference was needed to find a way forward regarding these traditions. Wilfrid, from Lindisfarne, felt the need for reformation after visiting Rome and Lyons and determined to bring Britain under the sway of the Papacy. As Abbot of Ripon, he precipitated a crisis which led to the council of Whitby in 664 to decide which tradition would rule. King Oswy, with bishops Colman and Chad represented the Celtic tradition while Alchfrid, son of Oswy, with bishops Wilfrid and Agilbert represented the Roman tradition. Rome won when King Oswy gave in and Northumbria became Catholic. The rest of the nation

²⁴ According to the Welsh Annals

²⁵ Sir Keith Feiling, *A History of England*, BCA, p26

gradually accepted the Papal rule; however, the Celtic church did not totally perish just because the chiefs accepted the rule of the Pope; it clung on, especially in the west.

So in the 7th century the relatively pure Christianity of the Celts, planted by Paul and others, had been ruined by a combination of Romanist religious activity, ruling compromises, political changes and military invasion.

Britain's ancient and powerful missionary movement

The Celtic British church was so well established that it sent many missionaries throughout Europe, preaching the Gospel as far as Italy. In times when many European churches met underground, the Celts were sending out missionaries from well organised Church centres in England.

In the mid 5th century incursions of pagan Jutes, Saxons and Angles (the origin of the word 'English') began leading to the slaughter and destruction of Christians and churches in the south. People were even too afraid to bury murdered priests and many fled west. Pure religion was confined to the areas the Celts escaped to and monastic communities developed in the north of England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, and Cornwall. These spawned a powerful missionary movement which established monastic centres of learning in Western Europe featuring their ecclesiastical differences from Roman practices. The influence of these missionaries preserved Celtic Christianity until the decline in the 7th century.

Some of the greatest ancient saints were British

Patrick

Patrick (b. 389) was a Briton who was raised as a Christian in a family of Roman citizens in the Welsh marches. When he was 16 he was kidnapped by pirates led by Niall and sold as a slave in Ireland. After six years of slavery he redeemed himself with a piece of gold that he had found, and went to Auxerre, Tours and Lerins in France where he studied for decades. He sought the permission of Pope Celestine to evangelise Ireland and went to Wicklow with some disciples in 432. King Laigerius allowed him to preach freely for 30 years, founding churches and monasteries. He then spent another 30 years in Armagh, dying at the age of 122. Whether his age is correct or not, the massive work of Patrick is without doubt. He wasn't the first missionary, Palladius and others had done work there before him and there were already churches; but Patrick's work was immense, converting thousands (including royal families) and establishing organised Christian centres.

The work of Patrick, supported by Rome, was at a later stage than the evangelisation of Britain and was conducted when the Roman Church was more apostate and authoritarian. This led to fundamental differences between English and Irish Christianity. King Lucius had requested help from Rome at an earlier stage in the 2nd century and the work of the two teachers sent (Faganus and Damianus, who may have actually been British) did not detract from the indigenous Celtic church. The differences between Celtic and Roman orthodoxy led to the later work of Augustine and the eradication of the Celtic distinctives in the 7th century by force.

Columba

Columba was born of the royal family in about 520; he was a prince, a poet, a ruler and a missionary. After working in Ireland, and being banished, he established the church at Iona in 563, and then converted the Picts in Scotland and sent missionaries to the Orkneys. Indeed, the establishment of orthodox Christianity in Scotland is based on Columba's work, though Palladius and Ninian had already done some work there and there had been

traces of Pelagianism.²⁶ Missionaries from Iona secured Christianity in Scotland, two-thirds of England and even Iceland. Leaders from Iona include Aidan, Hilda and Cuthbert. By 660, only the princedoms of Sussex and the Isle of Wight remained heathen.

Aidan

In 635 Aidan left Iona to evangelise Northumbria. He met with much success and established a new Iona on the Isle of Lindisfarne. It has been said that Aidan deserves to be called the 'apostle of the English' rather than Augustine.²⁷ Ultimately in the south only Wessex, East Anglia and Kent followed the Roman tradition. The north and Midlands were under the influence of Iona. Lindisfarne became justly famous as a centre for scholarly activity and Irish culture. As well as spiritual matters and exegesis of scripture, people were taught grammar, maths, physics, and the classics. Finan succeeded Aidan and promoted the missionary movement in the Midlands after Chad.

Columbanus (i.e. Columba the Younger, 543-615)

Columbanus set out from the monastery in Bangor (Ireland) with 12 monastic companions, settling in Burgundy, Switzerland, and Italy establishing monasteries.

Important British Christian centres

We have noted that the monastery at Iona, off the coast of Scotland, was founded by Columba in about 563 while Lindisfarne was founded by Aidan around 635 near Berwick-on-Tweed. The importance of these two centres cannot be overstated. It was from these centres that a stream of deeply committed, self-denying, godly, ministers went forth to evangelise and establish churches, some going as far as Europe. The work at Iona continued until repeated attacks by Vikings curtailed it. As well as being centres for teaching, local education, ministerial preparation, local evangelisation and missionary activity, these communities also produced large numbers of highly skilled literary works, Bibles and commentaries, including some that have survived (e.g. the decorated '*Lindisfarne Gospels*').

Conclusion

The idea that the British church blossomed only after about 600 AD with Augustine is utterly false. It was established very early indeed, within two to three decades after the cross. Britain had a long pedigree of being a well-ordered civilisation which traded tin with the Phoenicians from ancient times. The trade routes were well known and used by merchants, and were continued by the Romans who made them more secure.

When the Gospel came to Britain it was inhabited by various tribes and princedoms of Celts, who had established law, order and a well-run society. These willingly accepted the message of Christ and were converted in large numbers from the time of Caractacus onwards. There is also evidence that Biblical characters were involved in the evangelisation of England. Gradually kings became converts and the nation was the first to proclaim that it was entirely Christian. Britain was represented at ecumenical councils and was accepted by the east as being of great prominence. The achievements of the British church are many, including providing the first sovereignly permitted public church, the first Christian king and the first Christian emperor. Some of the greatest saints and missionaries prior to the

²⁶ Pelagianism affirms free will and the ability of man to save himself by following the law of God. It began with a British monk called Morgan who renamed himself as Pelagius when he went to Italy in 380. To deal with this heresy Britons asked for help from the Continent and a delegation led by Germanus arrived to combat the false teaching in 429. Germanus strengthened the churches and founded Welsh monasticism.

²⁷ JB Lightfoot, '*Not Augustine, but Aidan, is the true apostle of England*'. J Douglas (ed.), *Dict. of the Christian Church*, article 'Aidan'.

Dark Ages were British, as were some of the greatest Christian centres of learning and training.

The blessings heaped upon England are unparalleled and without explanation, other than God's sovereign providence. If England had no other blessing, this would be enough to secure its historical importance. But more was to come.

The Dark Ages

The Dark Ages, which followed the fall of the Roman Empire in the west, were so called because the spiritual light of the Gospel was covered up by all sorts of errors, namely: widespread superstitions, plus the authoritarianism, legalism, heresy and sacramentalism of the Roman Church. Worse than these was the lack of vernacular Bibles. Very few people would have had access to a Bible in Latin, and even if they had only monks could read it. The average person was truly in darkness.

In this period only a very few brave souls tried to bring some sort of reform to the Roman Church. Savonarola in Italy, Gottschalk in France, Jerome of Prague and Jan Hus in Bohemia, all suffered the ultimate sacrifice for their pains. But perhaps the most important proto-reformer was British.

One of the first and most important proto-reformers and Bible translators – Wycliffe.

The importance of John (de) Wycliffe (1329-1384) cannot be overstated; in fact Wycliffe is often described as the 'Morning Star of the Reformation' because of his importance as a proto-Reformer.

Wycliffe was a brilliant scholar and a lecturer at Oxford University, but also a rector of various churches. His brilliance led him to court via John of Gaunt who virtually ruled England until Richard II became an adult. Wycliffe's radical reforming ideas led to condemnation by the pope and an archbishop's court commanded he stop teaching his views. But Wycliffe had many powerful friends who supported his attacks on the immorality and the encroaching civil power of the church. However, these were less supportive when he began to attack key areas of Catholic theology, such as transubstantiation. The Peasant's Revolt of 1381 also made the aristocracy very wary of change.

Wycliffe's followers (called Lollards) were ousted from Oxford and he himself went to Lutterworth in 1382 where he died of a stroke two years later. His body was later exhumed and burned as a heretic. The Lollards continued, becoming an organised sect by 1395 with considerable influence amongst the middle and artisan classes, with supporters in Parliament. Lollard theology is summarised in '*The Twelve Conclusions*' presented to Parliament in 1395, which pre-empted much later Reformation theology. By 1414 the movement was forced underground by targeted persecution. In many ways the Lollards paved the way for English nonconformity.

Wycliffe's enemies were amazed at his prolific writing, most notable being his *Summa Theologica*, as well as other books and many pamphlets. Perhaps more important was his instigation of a translation of the Vulgate (Latin Bible) into English which was completed by Nicholas of Hereford ('The Lollard Bible'). Wycliffe stirred many by his sermons and lectures at Oxford. He is a proto-Reformer due to his insistence that the Bible is the only source of authority for the Christian and the guide of faith and knowledge. Amongst his other Reforming policies are: a denial of transubstantiation, attacks on the institution of

the papacy, denial of religious orders and the denial of indulgences (the later initial cause of the Reformation by Martin Luther). Wycliffe's students took his ideas abroad where they were taken up, especially in Bohemia where they affected Jan Hus.

On the Continent the key early foundation for the later Lutheran Reformation was the work of Jerome of Prague and particularly Jan Hus in Bohemia²⁸; but it will be noticed that this work was dependent upon the Lollard movement, which in turn was spawned by Wycliffe. Truly Wycliffe was the Morning Star of the Reformation and thus England was the land where the ideas of Reformation were planted.

The English Reformation

England was not the first nation to respond to the Protestant faith but was one of the first. Though parts of Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands and Central Europe responded to the radical message initially proclaimed by Luther before England, various difficulties prevented whole nations following the break with Rome. These included political intrigue, wars, counter activity from Catholic princes, splits amongst the Reformers, problems from heretical sects and so on. So, most of Germany, principally the Palatinate, became Lutheran early on. At least two cantons of Switzerland were Reformed but were prevented from an early alliance due to the varying nature of Reformed faith between Calvinism and Zwinglianism, and the confusing influence of Anabaptists. The Netherlands were largely Reformed but political problems and wars prevented this from settling for some time. Scandinavia adopted Protestantism somewhat later.

The difference in England was that a king of the whole country (rather than a prince of a province) sided with the Reformers and carried the nation in a radical change.

The first Protestant kingdom.

This kingdom was that of Henry VIII (1491-1547), who made a clean break with Romanism in a political sense, separating the nation from domination by the pope and initiating a new national church. Now Henry, deep in his heart, remained pretty loyal to Catholic dogma and many of his policies were superficial and prompted by political expediency; but that does not alter the fact that under God's sovereignty the change occurred. Though most of Germany submitted to Lutheranism, all of England (and Wales & Ireland) became formally Anglican under royal protection. A case could be made that it was the first Protestant nation; it was also Reformed (Calvinistic) and not Lutheran. It was certainly the first Protestant, Reformed kingdom.

The Reformation in England was more securely established by Henry's son, Edward VI (1537-1553). A pious Protestant, Edward, though young and sickly, made sweeping changes to ensure sound public worship was formalised. His uncle, the Duke of Somerset, alongside Archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Cranmer, made certain that the Reformed faith was firmly secured in England. Measures against holding the Protestant faith were repealed, priests were allowed to marry, images in churches removed and services were conducted in English. Cranmer prepared the Book of Common Prayer and forty-two articles of faith were drawn up, later reduced to the 'Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion'. The population

²⁸ It was said that Hus was the goose who laid the egg that Luther hatched (Hus means 'goose', derived from the town of his birth – Husinec, 'Goosetown'). Luther is supposed to have said, "St. John Huss prophesied of me, writing out of prison to Bohemia: 'Now shall they roast a goose' (for Huss means a goose),' but an hundred years hence shall they hear a swan sing, (a swan was Luther's symbol) that they shall be forced to endure.' So must it be, God willing."

largely supported the changes, though isolated Catholic uprisings did occur, especially in the West Country.

When Edward died aged 16 there was confusion. He had been persuaded to make a will naming Lady Jane Grey, an ardent Protestant, to the throne; but this was against the will of Henry VIII who had named his daughter Mary as queen if Edward died without an heir, and Elizabeth if Mary died. Poor, innocent 18-year-old Lady Jane Grey was beheaded, as was the Duke of Northumberland who had organised the plot. Mary (1516-1558) was proclaimed queen. This led to a terrible time of oppression for Protestants under the reign of 'Bloody Mary' who instigated outright persecution; Cranmer was amongst the nearly 300 victims burned at the stake. Driven by failing health, Mary strove to finish off Protestantism but her early death put a stop to this and ensured that Elizabeth (1533-1603) came to the throne aged 25 in 1558.

Elizabeth guaranteed that England was not only Protestant, but developed to be a significant world power. Though more wily than godly, Elizabeth sought to find compromises between Protestants and Catholics to secure peace in the nation. She renounced the title of 'Head of the Church' taken by Henry, which had so offended Catholics, in the Act of Supremacy (1559); though she actually kept the position in reality. The Act of Uniformity (1559) restored the compulsory use of the Prayer Book but the Forty-Two Articles were not insisted on. It was also in the Elizabethan age that culture blossomed to a great degree, providing many skilful artists, writers, poets and musicians. But the key feature was that Protestantism was now firmly and securely established as British.

For the Puritans there were many more reforms necessary to the state church, but it was Elizabeth that ensured England was a peaceful, settled, victorious state where the Reformed faith could develop. Though probably not a genuine believer, Elizabeth was an avowed Protestant who was thoroughly committed to the safety, protection and peace of her Protestant realm. This is proved by her final rejection of the love of her life, the French Duke d'Anjou, because it would have caused serious unsettlement to her subjects who did not want another Catholic ruler and were deeply suspicious of the French. In Elizabeth God provide a ruler who was prepared to make personal sacrifices in order to maintain peace for her people. In return her people were extremely loyal.

Through the turmoil of events between Henry VIII up to Elizabeth's reign in the providence of God the Reformed faith was firmly established and protected by the monarchy. This would continue, despite some hiccups,²⁹ until the present day.

One of the first and most important Bible translators.

Britain produced many men who laboured faithfully to translate the Biblical texts and produce vernacular Bibles for Englishmen; but the greatest of these was William Tyndale. The influence of Tyndale cannot be overstated. Not only was he a great and very tenacious man, but his poetic work of translation still comprises most of the King James Bible.

²⁹ For instance during the reign of the Stuarts after James I. The fact that Protestantism was so firmly entrenched in England by law and precedent made certain that the romanising actions of Charles I, Charles II and James II could not succeed and led to the Glorious Revolution when the Dutchman William III (1650-1702) was invited to share the throne with his wife Mary (daughter of James II). It was in this time that Parliament asserted itself as supreme by passing a Bill of Rights, granting it control over the army, raising taxes and free elections, preventing the king from altering the law. No longer was the concept of the divine right of kings valid in England and the Act of Settlement (1701) provided for continued Protestant succession.

A product of both Oxford and Cambridge he became convinced early in the Reformation that the only way to convince men of the truth about God was by producing a good translation of the Bible in English. He had to leave England forever to accomplish this and began working on the project in 1525 at Cologne and then, after disruption, at Worms. He was based at Antwerp, supported by British merchants. In addition to Bible translation he penned many reforming, theological and expositional works and attacked the erroneous tracts of people like Archbishop Thomas More, being mainly influenced by Luther early on and then by the Swiss reformers.

His tenacious nature was vital to his continued work as he was betrayed by friends, had works stolen, suffered shipwreck, lost manuscripts, was chased by secret agents and suffered from police raids. Despite these problems his translation work was sharp, lucid and easy to understand. For his pains he was arrested near Brussels and in 1536 was strangled and burned at the stake.

Tyndale is a good example of the type of man provided by God in his providence to come through the British educational system to serve Englishmen. In the early part of the Reformation two translation works stand out; the first was Luther's Bible in colloquial German and then there was Tyndale's NT and part of the OT (completed by others). However, Tyndale's work continues to be read widely today as it appears in the King James Version.

Some of the greatest Reformers and Reformed theologians.

England was blessed with many reformers who were not only godly but were also incredibly scholarly and learned. They combined genuine piety with a deep intellectualism and an ability to organise and educate. Some of them had unfortunate idiosyncrasies, as do most of us, but their greatness is undeniable.

One of the most important reformers after Calvin is John Knox; who after being nurtured at Calvin's Geneva then established a powerful reforming work in Scotland that still has effects to this day. Almost single-handedly he changed Scotland from being a nation that was despised as backward and barbaric by Europeans to being a centre of strong Reformation principles with an established national Reformed church.

The Church of England was home to very many great men who pioneered the Reformation in England and produced many fine theological works that are still used today. We could name Thomas Cranmer, who composed the Prayer Book, supported an English Bible version and helped to compose the church's early theological articles of faith. William Perkins was one of the greatest British theologians whose works are of immense value. Other great Reformers include Hugh Latimer, Nicholas Ridley, John Bradford, Matthew Parker, John Whitgift, John Hooper, and John Jewel.

Without doubt England was not behind the Continental reformers in producing many fine men who ensured the strong foundation of Protestantism in England.

Home for Continental reformers.

When Protestantism was established in England it enabled men who were persecuted or threatened abroad to become refugees or employed as educationalists in British centres of learning. Some of the greatest Continental reformers came to England, best known being Martin Bucer, the man who greatly influenced Calvin. Bucer's work in Strasbourg was of immense importance and helped many, like Calvin, to understand church principles and even crucial aspects of theology (e.g. predestination and the Lord's Supper). After his exile by the Emperor, Bucer sought refuge with Cranmer and was appointed as a professor at

Cambridge. Here he was able to influence some of the developments of reforming policy in England.

Universities.

The university system in Britain was the best in the world at the time of the Reformation, and continued to be a source of excellence for centuries. Very few educational centres outside Britain could compare. Universities had been around since the time of the ancient Greeks and were also established in the Moslem Empire. In the Middle Ages universities at Bologna and Paris were famous during the 11th century; Oxford was founded slightly later in the 12th century and Cambridge in 1209.

Streams of great Christian leaders emerged from Oxford and Cambridge over the years ensuring that Britain had a source of leadership that combined disciplined scholarship with godliness, and in time more and more university centres and associated schools, were established, particularly in the reign of Edward VI.

Post Reformation

Divine deliverances

Protection from overwhelming military odds (the great Armada).

The fledgling monarchy of Elizabeth was immediately under threat from Catholic countries loyal to the pope seeking retribution for her father's disruption of the church. Though much fuss was made that this was the reason behind threats of war, the real reason was that Britain was a great prize and Catholic countries thought a Protestant queen would be easy picking.

Though there was considerable political intrigue and encouragement from the pope for Britons to rebel, the biggest danger facing the country in 1588 was the threat of a huge Armada of Spanish warships heading for the south coast. In previous history large numbers of ships carrying infantry, and even cavalry, did unseat a British monarch; most famously the defeat of the Saxon Harold by the Norman Duke William the Bastard (later King William the Conqueror). The Armada was no small hazard; it consisted of 130 ships, carrying 8,000 sailors and 19,000 infantrymen, under the command of the inexperienced Duke of Medina, Sidonia.

Though much is made, justly, of the inventiveness of Sir Francis Drake using fire ships and smaller, faster vessels in a nine-day running fight up the channel, the greatest damage to the Armada was done by terrible storms. A strong wind drove the remaining vessels into the North Sea and they were forced to make their way back to Spain round Scotland so that scarcely half the original fleet returned home. This defeat of King Philip of Spain was rightly seen as a divine providence to support the fledgling work of Reformation in England.

Protection from the intensity of religious persecution

Europe was overwhelmed with all sorts of religious persecution after 1517. There was the necessary military force against certain Anabaptist and Lutheran enthusiast extremists who sought to overwhelm society to impose a millennial, prophetic, theocratic, communal utopia, such as occurred at Munster. This anarchy could not be allowed to continue; thus at Munster, Catholic princes led an army to recover the town and deal with the inspirational heretics. Behind events such as this, and the Peasants War in Germany, religion was attached to politics to serve as a front for the real problem, which was the suffering of the poor under the feudal system.

Then there were outright wars resulting from religious differences, chiefly between Catholics and Protestants, the most noteworthy being the Thirty Years War that devastated Central Europe. Again political struggles became enmeshed in this conflict, which caused the prolonged suffering. Then there were the many local cases of persecution where bodies, such as the Jesuits or the Spanish/Portuguese Inquisition, saw fit to inflict kidnapping, torture, imprisonment and death at will. On occasion the sheer scale of numbers greatly afflicted a whole nation, such as the auto de fé ('act of faith') in Spain where many thousands were needlessly killed and maimed. [The auto de fé continued in Mexico until 1850.]

Then there was the major uprising of politically sanctioned persecution where many thousands were killed all of a sudden. Perhaps the worst example of this was the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre in 1572 in Paris and 12 other towns, where thousands of Huguenot Protestants died.

Now, apart from the short reign of Bloody Mary (and perhaps the killing times in Scotland under the later Stuarts), Britain largely escaped such horrors. There were isolated cases of religious persecution, but not the prolonged periods of suffering, nor the devastating intensity that was witnessed on the Continent. Indeed, Britain became a haven for refugees of persecution, such as the large influx of French Huguenots. This occurred when persecution of Protestants was legalised when Louis XIV revoked the Edict of Nantes in 1685. With Calvinism now illegal, hundreds of thousands of Huguenots left France, many bringing their talents and Calvinistic work ethic to England, where they usually prospered.

It was only by the mercy of God in his providence that Britain was spared the intensity of prolonged persecution and religious wars that engulfed much of Europe.

Protection from rising 18th century European anarchy

The rising working class discontent in Europe developed into anarchy after the Enlightenment. The emphasis upon human reason and rationality in thinking reduced the acceptance of the divine right of kings and focused daily suffering into anger against the ruling classes that oppressed them. Most noteworthy was the situation in France, which boiled over into full-scale rebellion in 1789, followed by ritual slaughter of the aristocracy and royal family at the guillotine.

It has been frequently observed that Britain was spared this ordeal, despite the conditions of the poor being almost as bad as that in France. The fundamental reason for this was a special move of God across the nation whereby many poor people were converted and many churches were formed. This revival changed the social situation in Britain in many ways. Indolent people became workers, fathers addicted to drink stopped drinking and got their lives back on course, women took better care of their children, some charitable works cared for orphans, the poor, the needy and provided some education for children. More than this, the idea of rebellion was quashed by the recognition (in the Gospel) that submission to governing authorities was a Christian duty.

Great credit is usually given to John Wesley in this, who tirelessly travelled all over Britain preaching an Arminian gospel and setting up small meetings. He did this in contravention of his vows to his Anglican Church and in fact he did a great deal of damage in teaching his various heresies. What people tend to ignore is that a number of men were raised up by God to preach the Gospel effectively. Most noteworthy of these being George Whitefield, who had far more success numerically than Wesley, though he did not organise them into local groups, trusting that they would be raised properly in their local church. Other men

transformed whole areas by their faithful Gospel preaching and hard work, such as William Grimshaw in Haworth, Yorkshire.

It was the work of these faithful men in preaching and teaching that ensured England was spared a bloody revolution. God raised these men up in Britain in his sovereign providence whereas France had historically expelled godly men.

1940: Dunkirk & The Battle of Britain and national calls to prayer

The story of how the British navy evacuated 338,000 soldiers stranded in front of advancing German troops on a French beach is well known. The first call to prayer was on 27 March, 1940, just before the relief of Dunkirk. The commander of the British Forces, Lt General Sir Frederick Morgan, said that only a miracle could save the entrapped soldiers. The miracle occurred when the channel was remarkably calm enabling thousands of small boats to assist the Royal Navy in transporting the stranded army. After the first day of prayer called by George VI hundreds of small boats gathered to rescue the stranded British army alongside the 22 naval units. Prayer was answered by a calm sea enabling even the most modest of boats, such as Thames barges, to cross the channel. Some amateur yachting enthusiasts even sailed from as far as Southampton on their own initiative.

Another miracle was that Hitler did not follow up his victory swiftly enough. With a mobilisation big enough to smash the British Expeditionary Force with no difficulty he paused, with no explanation, giving the troops the time they needed.

When the armed forces had been mostly rescued from Dunkirk (12,000 did not survive), Britain was a sitting duck and within weeks the fate of England was in the balance. The situation was so dire that King George VI (on the instigation of Churchill) called the nation to prayer again. In fact there were two within five months. In days when secularism was less advanced, the whole nation took to praying for deliverance and another miracle was needed. The German army had overrun the Netherlands, Belgium and France within a matter of weeks and Operation Sealion (the invasion of Britain) was ready. There was little left to defend England. The army was almost wiped out and demoralised after Dunkirk, having lost all their armaments and a massive German mobilisation was gathering on the Continent. All that was required was for Germany to knock out Britain's air defence. When Churchill coined the title 'The Battle of Britain' for the coming air war, in the summer of 1940 after being in power for one month, he was not overstating the situation.

In early July 1940 the Luftwaffe had 2,600 bombers and fighters while the RAF had just 640 fighters. Wave after wave of fighters and bombers was sent to destroy Britain's shipping and air defences. The RAF patched up damaged aircraft and encouraged weary pilots to shoot enemy planes down one more time. By August Hermann Goring was certain that the total destruction of the RAF was only days away and the 13 August was designated as 'Adlertag' ('Eagle Day') when the knock-out blow would be administered. But hundreds of Spitfires and Hurricanes continued to fly piloted by men almost too tired to walk and in October the Luftwaffe turned its attention to bombing cities at night (The Blitzkrieg). Invasion was now only a postponed dream. The RAF had saved Britain from immediate danger.

We can examine the features of this period and mention the rapid production of Spitfires and Hurricanes, which kept the numbers of fighters roughly equal on each side. By 3 August the RAF had 1,032 fighters to the Luftwaffe's 1,011; Britain's factories out-produced Germany's. We could mention the short range of the Messerschmitt Bf 109, giving it only 30 minutes of fighting time over Britain. We could refer to the superior flying capability of the Spitfire and the ease of repairing the Hurricane. We could even consider the mistake of

Goring to stop bombing airfields, giving time for recovery. But these would all be the human end of the spectrum; the overarching reality is the sovereignty of God in enabling these things to happen.

Even if we ignore apocryphal stories of dead men continuing to fly and attacking German fighters, or the appearances of angels, (though there are many references to these) the fact is that God ensured that Goliath was struck down by David when no one was betting on David. This was a crucial turning point in the war. The courage of the pilots galvanised the country, which was close to capitulation. Only half of these pilots survived the war; 20% died in the Battle of Britain alone.

It is noteworthy that events described in World War II as miraculous always followed a national call to prayer. Seven times the king, supported by Parliament, did this and each time a mighty deliverance followed. It is also curious to remember that Hitler was a supporter of astrology and other occult disciplines. In the days of prayer the population crowded into churches so that they overflowed. In fact, it was in gratitude to God for these deliverances that Parliament made Christian teaching in schools compulsory after the war. Modern evolutionary atheists, like Richard Dawkins, who hate the teaching of Christianity in schools, have no explanation for the huge beneficial effect that prayer had in the war and should bear in mind that only 70 years ago both king and Parliament saw the action of God vital in our defence.

Production of the most mature Reformed confession.

There are many valuable Christian standards, and several excellent Reformed ones, notably the Heidelberg Catechism, the Second Helvetic Confession, The Belgic Confession and the Canons of the Synod of Dort. However, the most universal and widely loved confession is that of the Westminster Assembly, composed under the jurisdiction of the British Long Parliament and sanctioned by the king. Since it was composed later than most of the Continental standards, Reformed theology had time to mature and develop so that the production of the Westminster Confession and Catechisms were blessed with great solidity and thoroughness.

The standards were also the process of many great men from varying church backgrounds and this further enabled the theological statements to be fitting to various Christian viewpoints, rather than the thoughts of one extreme position. Its usefulness developed beyond the range of the Reformed theologians and Reformed church it was intended for. Congregationalists, like John Owen, saw its value and their Savoy Declaration is a restatement of Westminster with minor changes regarding church order. Even the Baptists could find no better source for their theological foundation and re-worked the Westminster Confession into the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith, with amendments regarding baptism.

It was the signally British circumstances of the time that led to this great usefulness. Without doubt, Britain provided one of the best confessions of all time.

The first Christian republican commonwealth.

Whatever you think about Oliver Cromwell, there is no doubt that he was a signally great political leader and general who was absolutely motivated by his deeply held Christian principles. That he made mistakes is without doubt, but that his achievements were great is also certain.

Whatever one thinks about the commonwealth he initiated and led, and there is no space here to discuss the details of this, there is no uncertainty that he made England a great

world power, feared and respected throughout Europe. Britain changed from being dominated by despotic kings with little ability, to being led by a single-minded man devoted to protecting his subjects and glorifying God.

While there had previously been cities, such as Geneva or Strasbourg that had been governed by a council more or less determined to establish Christian rule, only in Britain was there ever a republic led by a Christian and dominated by Biblical ethics to a large degree. Despite the great prejudice these days against Cromwell (even by supposed believers) it is unquestionable that his rule was more beneficial, prosperous and wise than any of the Stuarts before or after him. In fact the country fell to pieces when the monarchy was restored, requiring the eventual Glorious Revolution under a Christian king and queen.

Though America sought to be a Christian republic, and in the early days nearly became one when provinces were led by Reformed governors, it succumbed to secularism, greed, commercialism and socialism (mixed with a great deal of Freemasonry) and never became the Christian utopia it set out to be. Though Cromwell's commonwealth was no utopia, it remains the only genuine Christian, democratic, republican experiment so far. Despite its flaws, it established the fundamental basis of our current parliamentary democracy.

Springboard for American Protestantism.

Without Britain there would be no America in its current state (whether good or bad). The intention of the founding fathers, who were Puritans by and large, was to create a place of personal liberty, religious freedom, free speech and ethical government based on fairness for all. The spark for this was the religious intolerance that existed in England at the time under the Stuarts. Though it did not become the Christian utopia the fathers sought, the principles they strived for in those early days were sound and true. They even generally maintained peaceful relations with the indigenous Indian tribes where possible and at the beginning the Indians saved the Pilgrim Fathers from starvation by providing corn.

The point is that it was not a foreign country that led to the development of America as a Christian republic, but Britain. The provision of good men to start the colony was from England and the ethical principles were British and Reformed.

Seedbed for scientific discoveries

It was Christianity that directly led to scientific experimentation in England. Paganism accepted that the gods were fickle and changed the laws of nature and the way matter behaved at their whim. Roman Catholics kept a stranglehold on scientific discovery since it threatened the authority of the pope and papal councils, the source of their acceptable knowledge. Nations dominated by these religions saw little point in investigating natural events, apart from a few persecuted souls such as Galileo. But in England, the Reformation led scientists to search out the laws of nature in order to understand the ways of God better, *'thinking God's thoughts after him'*. It was believers who established the Royal Society in 1660, the very first scientific institution, with 48 of the original 68 signatories being Puritans. [Later, beginning in the 1720s, the Christian base of this society would be overcome by a secular conspiracy led by the *X Club* founded principally by Martin Folkes. Folkes became president after 80 years and within 118 years it had become fully secularised.]

One after another English scientists travailed night and day to discover the laws of physics and seek to tame them. Modern evolutionary atheists deliberately ignore the fact that most of the early scientific achievements were by Christians, or at least God-fearing men. Even

Albert Einstein said, '*I want to know how God created this world. ... I want to know His thoughts, the rest are details*'.³⁰

We can only give a few examples here. The following were great British scientists who publicly acknowledged God.

- William Henry Bragg (1862–1942) who was awarded the 1915 Nobel Prize in physics for his contribution to the analysis of crystal structures by means of X-rays.
- Sir Nevill Mott (1905-1996) who received the 1977 Nobel Prize in physics for his research on the magnetic and electrical properties of non-crystalline semiconductors.
- Sir Isaac Newton (1642-1727), the founder of classical physics and infinitesimal calculus.
- Sir Francis Bacon (1561-1626), the founder of the scientific inductive method.
- Sir Michael Faraday (1791-1867), the founder of electronics and electro-magnetics.
- Sir James Clerk Maxwell (1831-1879), the founder of statistical thermodynamics.
- Lord Kelvin (1824-1907), the founder of thermodynamics and energetics.
- Sir Robert Boyle (1627-1691), the founder of modern chemistry.
- Sir William Harvey (1578-1657), the founder of modern medicine.
- Sir Joseph J. Thomson (1856-1940), a Nobel Laureate in Physics, discoverer of the electron, founder of atomic physics.

This list could be easily extended. It was British Protestantism which enabled men to consider seeking out the way the universe worked combined with relative stability and peace plus excellence of the British educational system which encouraged scientists to great discoveries. In more than a thousand years of domination, Romanism only sought to squash scientific discovery, with many good men being severely persecuted for their curiosity.

The Modern Age

Many great Christian leaders.

There are some countries which produced a stream of great theologians, pastors and teachers after the Reformation. We could consider the Netherlands and men like Wilhelmus à Brakel or Herman Bavinck. We could mention many greats of America, Dabney, Warfield and the Hodges amongst the Presbyterians or Dagg and Boyce amongst the Baptists. But for sheer numbers of some of the best men the church ever produced one has to look at England.

There were dozens of men from the Puritan party that were awesome in their greatness; men like John Owen, William Ames, Richard Sibbes, Thomas Goodwin, Thomas Watson, Thomas Brooks and John Flavel. There were the independents of huge standing, such as John Bunyan, whom John Owen loved to hear preaching, or more recently AW Pink. There were great theologian/pastors from Scotland such as Samuel Rutherford, John Brown of Haddington or George Gillespie; scholars like William Cunningham and stalwart itinerant preachers like Alexander Peden. Ireland too was home to eminent scholars, such as Archbishop Ussher. The Church of England, now thoroughly apostate, produced wonderful pastors and theologians for centuries; including Augustus Toplady, Matthew Henry, William Parks, John Newton, JC Ryle, Henry Law, William Grimshaw and many more.

Some of the greatest evangelists in history have been English, such as George Whitefield, who for over thirty years held audiences spellbound and saw thousands of converts, and

³⁰ Ronald Clark, *Einstein: The Life and Times*, Hodder and Stoughton, London (1973), p33.

Scottish, such as Murray M'Cheyne. The Baptists also produced many fine men, such as the learned John Gill or the great evangelist/preacher CH Spurgeon. The Brethren, though confused in some particulars, also produced men of great standing in preaching, charitable works, pastoring and Bible translation; we could name CH Mackintosh, AN Groves, George Muller, GH Lang, S Tregelles and Benjamin Newton.

We could literally continue in this vein for page after page. Only America comes close to producing as many fine men, but Britain, having a big head start, has almost certainly produced the most.

Most important missionary movements

In the same way Britain started the modern missionary movement and produced some of the greatest missionaries the world has ever seen.

The first modern missionary was the Baptist William Carey who worked so tirelessly in India at Serampore; the effect of his work lives on. After him a stream of missionaries set sail from Britain; some of the best known are: WC Burns, Hudson Taylor, CT Studd, Robert Morrison, George Grenfell, Wilfred Grenfell, and John Paton. Many women also left for foreign fields, such as: Amy Carmichael, Mary Slessor and Gladys Aylward.

There was a time when exciting biographies of pioneer missionaries would be given to young believers and children, who filled shelf after shelf with their stories. Scores of books on missionaries were the staple relaxing reading diet of disciples on top of more studious books. Sadly these days are now gone and most young Christians have no knowledge about the self-sacrifice and sufferings of these great men and women.

Many great charitable works

While some served abroad many served at home, but not in a pastoral capacity. Some founded orphanages or established free schools and Sunday schools; others evangelised prisoners or set up aid for the poor and needy; yet others sought to make beneficial changes to society, such as by making slavery illegal. Again Britain excelled in producing such people. We could mention: Elizabeth Fry, William Wilberforce, Robert Raikes, Thomas Barnado, George Muller and many more.

Comparison - Great Foreign Christian centres which collapsed

The fact of Britain's continuing Christian testimony for 2,000 years is even more noteworthy when we consider that many of the great early centres of Christian authority vanished from history or were overrun by secularism or other religions.

Great early Christian centres

Virtually all the key ancient centres vanished within a few hundred years. These were either absorbed into Islam, Eastern Orthodoxy or the nations were conquered and the testimony snuffed out. [Cappadocia, Antioch, Alexandria, Ephesus, Greece, Albania, Romania, Bulgaria, the Goths etc.]

Apostasy of Roman Catholicism

Many other important church centres capitulated to Romanism: Spain, France, Italy, Central Europe, and the Hapsburg Empire.

Collapse of Protestant piety

Belgium, the Netherlands and Switzerland are areas where the Reformed faith was once strong but have now almost completely apostatised. The evangelical testimony in Switzerland has long since evaporated; several years ago the Dalai Lama preached in John Calvin's pulpit. The Netherlands has a name for being Reformed but in practice most of the church has long been liberal, and most of the remaining Reformed churches have capitulated to Amyraldism or worse. Belgium is largely Roman Catholic.

Abandonment to humanism

There was once a strong Reformed work in Scandinavia, and even a Calvinistic King in Gustavus Adolphus. However, long ago this capitulated to liberalism, modernism and finally humanism. France too is a humanistic state in general, mixed with a firmly entrenched superstitious Catholicism. Germany was never Reformed but Lutheran and its orthodoxy declined after the death of Martin Luther, following universalism, compromise and baptismal regeneration. Today it is a pretty secular state where most churches are liberal. However there are a few churches that are sound.

It is incredible that centres which were so important to Christians in the ancient world should have their testimony snuffed out long ago while Britain continued to be blessed for centuries. Cities that were closely associated with an apostle, such as Ephesus or Antioch, and the areas travelled by Paul were especially favoured in the early church but before long were absorbed into the compromised and unorthodox religion of the Byzantine Empire. In time this was overcome by the Seljuk Turks³¹ and then various Moslem states.

Conclusion

Britain's Spiritual Heritage

I do not believe that there is any such thing as a spiritual nation or a Christian country; the very concept is unbiblical. There was only ever one theocracy and that was Israel under the Law; this situation ended with the New Covenant brought in by the exaltation of Christ and the outpouring of the Spirit. God's people are now part of a heavenly kingdom and they are crucified to the world, and the world to them. We are pilgrims and sojourners in this world and have no roots here. Neither do we expect the church to grow so influential that it will rule the nations; those that do misinterpret prophetic texts which speak of the glorious reign of Christ in the new earth after the Day of Judgment. The church on Earth in this age is always a persecuted minority and this persecution will increase as the age continues (2 Thess 2; Matt 24). So, there is no validity in the concept of a Christian nation.

However, we do have to recognise history and national rulers need to ensure that they truly represent the people they govern and recognise the history that put them there. For instance, modern America was born from the pioneering struggles of Christians who sought to have a better life escaping from the persecution they found in Europe at the time. The Native American Indians, also immigrants from Asia in primeval history, share the historical roots of the USA with Christian immigrants. The last 400 years saw the difficult development of America from those two roots. This cannot be denied or usurped by modern influences, though accommodation must always be made to tolerate social developments as they arise; but history cannot be ignored or re-written to suit modern politics.

³¹ A Turkish dynasty that ruled Asia Minor in the 11th–13th centuries, which overtook the Byzantine Empire and subsequently fought against the Crusaders.

This is even more applicable to England whose history reaches back millennia, not a few centuries. For some divine reason, God in his grace decreed that England should be at the forefront of the Gospel's development from the earliest days. The nations and people groups that were involved in the birth and early life of the church either vanished or fell away over time. For instance some of the key initial developments in the church took place in Alexandria, Ephesus, Cappadocia, Byzantium and Antioch. None of the places have any significance in evangelical Christian theology today. For some divine reason the Gospel came early to Britain and was allowed to develop for 20 centuries.

Now modern social and political developments in Britain need to take this into full consideration. Though it is admitted that the UK is far more multi-cultural today, and this needs to be taken into account and individuals tolerated, the historical backbone of this country is Christian and to deny this is folly. It would be to work against God's providence in history and against the cultural foundation of this country to ignore this heritage. While we must work politics out in a multi-faith society, and while there must be freedom of religious thought (a very British concept held long before other modern nations), the marrow of Britain is founded upon its Christian heritage; all its key institutions arise from Biblical principles. To destroy these will be an act of great folly and social suicide. Yet this is what is happening every day under European Union legislation and treacherous modern governments ignoring English Common Law.

A quick summary

Even for those with little knowledge of British social history, it can be easily proved that England is steeped in Christian traditions that are upheld to this very day. In a time when the very concept of what is British is being hotly debated (and denied), the very core of 'Britishness' is Christianity.

- Take the National Anthem. The very first word is 'God', and the reason her subjects pray for the Queen is due to her position as a nominal Christian sovereign. Indeed she is head of the state church (not something I approve of but a fact nevertheless). Since Henry VIII Britain's monarchs have united the British state with the nominal Christian church.
- This is also represented in the British flag, which is comprised of the united symbols of three Christian saints, themselves founded upon the Christian symbol of the cross. Then English flag is a red cross symbolising the atonement of Christ and was the standard of the Christian St George.
- What forms the basis of the English legal system? The essential principles of God's law found in the Bible. This has long been accepted; indeed the oath sworn in judicial courts has always been on the Bible (though now other scriptures are also used for other faiths).
- What was the basis of English universities, hospitals, schools and orphanages? The Christian religion. All these were originally founded by Christian benefactors as part of the desire to establish Christian ethics in society.
- What is the historic definition of a city? It was primarily that it had a cathedral.
- What comprised the centre of village life for centuries? Two things; the local pub during the week and the local church at the weekend. Indeed, the local church minister performed a number of key social tasks that united the local community and was probably the most respected single man.
- Under what aegis was British social life conducted? The church; people were recorded on the church roll at their birth, christened in one, were married in one and had their funerals in one. Though things have changed in the last 60 years with the secularisation

of society, it remains true that for hundreds of years the Anglican Church was the centre of British social life.

These central blocks of British life form part of what makes Britain Britain. That they are, without doubt, of Christian origin is indisputable.

The beginning of Britain

Details regarding the ancient roots of the land of Albion are shrouded in mystery but the basic facts of a descent from Aeneas and Brutus are established. We know little about the builders of Stonehenge but we are aware that the inhabitants traded with foreign nations, even the Phoenicians for tin, and had certain relationships with the inhabitants of Western Europe and contact with the Near East.

During the wave of Celtic expansion, which spread over all Europe from Galatia, Britain became settled by various Celtic tribes. After the Roman invasion many tribes migrated westwards and dominated Wales, Cornwall and Ireland. Others in the south, after initial wars, eventually settled down to an uneasy alliance with the Roman invaders.

Within a very few years after the crucifixion, Celtic Christians were worshipping in southern England and soon a thriving Celtic church was established. Stories about Joseph of Arimathea living in the Vale of Glastonbury abound, and may have some essential truth, but nevertheless a Christian testimony grew from the earliest Christian times. This church became strong and influential through the selfless missionary endeavours of many great saints. Only the famous are now remembered, like Columba and Aidan but there were large numbers who spread the Gospel across central Europe. Strong Christian centres were established at Iona, Lindisfarne and other places, and there was close communication with Christian centres in France. Indeed ministry was shared. The traditions that built up in England were so strong and influential that the pope sought to change these diversities by sending Augustine to bring the tribes in line with Roman Catholics on the date of Easter and the tonsure of monks. At the Synod of Whitby in 663/4, English Christianity formally capitulated to the Roman system when King Oswy of Northumbria made a political decision to submit to the pope.

What is important to establish here is that a thriving Christian community was at the centre of English social life from the earliest days, even under the Roman occupation. The essence of the Celtic defence at Whitby was that British Christianity was traced back through to Polycarp and thus to the apostle John. Christianity was not a focal point of English life merely from the time of the Reformation, but long before that. The events after the Reformation solidified the Christian testimony of Britain and ensured a stream of godly theologians, preachers and teachers right up to the 20th century.

Christianity has been a key part of Britishness since the first century AD.

A warning

Having established that, without doubt, Britain has been greatly favoured by God for many hundreds of years, we, as a nation, should now be full of shame that this heritage has been generally thrown away.

After many churches succumbed to the early onslaught of liberalism, modernism and evolutionary theories in the early 20th century, the nation became more and more secularised, as the churches became more and more apostate or superficial. The social revolution of the sixties onwards altered the nation's ethics, habits and attitudes, leading to greater and greater permissiveness; at the same time the churches fell under the sway of

Charismaticism, becoming more and more unbiblical and mystical. The situation we now find ourselves in is that people do not know their right hand from their left; they are social and religious infants, stimulated by hedonism, fed only dumbed-down trivia and focused upon escapism. In the secular world this is evidenced in the pre-occupation with the media, video games, celebrity status, sound bites and selfishness, while in the church it is seen in superficial (if any) teaching, ignorance of Scripture, mystical emotionalism in worship and a focus upon miracles.

In this conclusion I make a call to Christians to repent of this appalling superficial attitude to religion and to consider the sacrifices and hard work of their forbears, who in God's grace achieved great things. We can again go great things if we have the same faith of those who went before us, seeking to honour God alone, trust absolutely in his word and give ourselves unreservedly in his service.

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