

CHAPTER 9

“I would like to start our class today with a quote from the book *Education* p. 57,” began Mr. Dell. “I highly recommend that you memorize this paragraph – it is one you will want to remember all your life. 'The greatest want of the world is the want of men,--men who will not be bought or sold; men who in their inmost souls are true and honest; men who do not fear to call sin by its right name; men whose conscience is as true to duty as the needle to the pole; men who will stand for the right though the heavens fall.' Isn't that beautifully written?”

“All through history God has used men and women who were not afraid to call sin by its right name. *Heroes of the Cross* is full of stories about God's heroes who stood for right amidst fierce trials and temptations. Today we will be introduced to more selfless missionaries who worked for the conversion of the English people.”

Passing out a map, their teacher directed, “In our story today you will hear about a training school built on Lindisfarne. Please mark the island with a black dot and write in its name.



<http://www.jncc.gov.uk/images/SPArevSitemaps/UK9006011.gif>

“If we could have the lights dimmed I would like to show you a few pictures from areas we will read about today.

“Our first shot is from the island of Lindisfarne, also known as 'Holy Island'. This is an excellent areal shot of the ruins of this famous English college. These are not the original ruins - they were destroyed by Vikings in AD 793. According to the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, we are told that 'on the 8th of June, the harrying of the heathen miserably destroyed God's church on Lindisfarne by rapine and slaughter.'



http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/upload/img_400/holyisland_lindisfarne_340x.jpg

“These are the present-day remains of the Norman buildings built after the devastating Norwegian Viking raid:



<http://www.bownet.org/jvulgamore/vikings/Viking%20Pictures/lindisfarne/LINDISFARNE%20PRIORY.JPG>

“This next picture shows a statue depicting Hilda. We are going to be learning today about this remarkable woman and the famous college she started. As you can tell from the way she is cradling that building, Christian education was very dear to the heart of this trail-blazing hero. As we will learn, her school at Whitby laid claim to a couple of important “firsts” for the Celtic Church.”



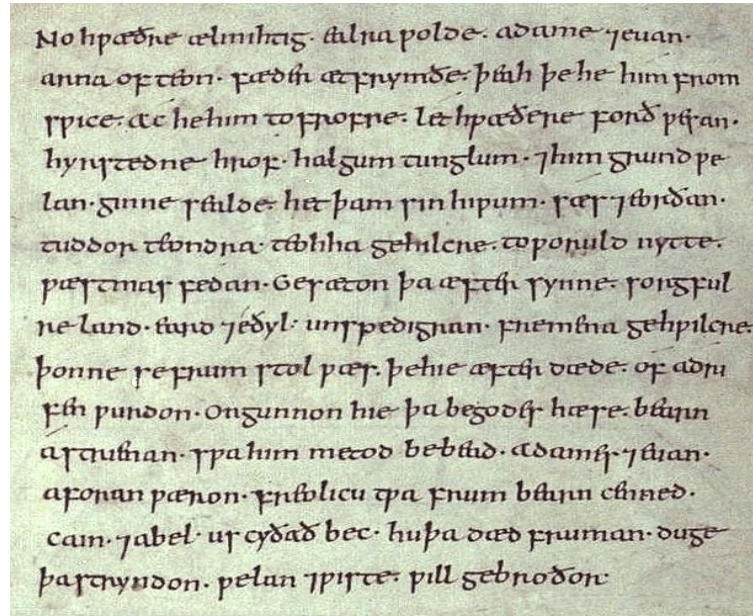
<http://www.whitbyguesthouses.co.uk/images/whitby-tourist-info-st.hilda.jpg>

Mr. Dell projected a new picture. “Here is a picture of the famous Abbey at Whitby. Whitby's history dates back to AD 675 when Hilda founded her unique school which trained not only men but women. This present structure is from 1078 and is now under the protective care of English Heritage.



<http://people.brunel.ac.uk/~hsstnns/pictures/Yorkshire/Whitby0.jpg>

“Today you will learn about Caedmon. He was English's first poet and one of the most famous student at the Whitby school. Here we have a copy of the Cædmon manuscript,” Mr. Dell said, as he paused to see if anyone could decipher the words on the screen. When they admitted defeat, he promised them that he would read part of Caedmon's poem later in the class.



<http://www.bible-researcher.com/codex-junius.jpg>

Mr. Dell flicked on the lights, turned off his projector and picked up his book.

OTHER GREAT ENGLISH MISSIONARIES

Roman Catholic history would have you believe that Augustine was responsible for converting the English people to Christianity. But the truth is that history records he ordained only two bishops in England. The true evangelists of the British Isles were from the Celtic church. Faithful men brought the uncorrupted Word of God to people darkened by pagan superstitions. Come with me as we learn the stories of several fascinating heroes for God.

One of England's greatest missionaries was Aidan. We are not sure of his date of birth, but we do know he was born in Ireland and trained at Iona. Aidan, like all the students who attended Columba's school, had consecrated teachers who gave him a thorough education. At Iona he often had opportunity to speak with visitors traveling through Scotland to neighboring countries. Through their conversations Aidan developed a good understanding of England, the land where God called him to labor.

After completing his scholastic studies Aidan was chosen to answer an unusual royal call. King Oswald of Northumbria had sent an urgent request to Iona for an evangelist to teach his people. Perhaps the story behind the invitation will interest you. Many years before Aiden's time, a priest named Paulinus came from Kent (where Augustine had his headquarters) and converted King Oswald's father to Christianity. Oswald's father followed the superficial worship

of the Roman Church and many of his subjects went back to paganism and idolatry when their king was killed in battle. During the political turmoil caused by his father's death, Oswald fled to Iona for safety. There he learned the beauty of the gospel from the dedicated Celtic teachers and pastors. Years later, when he regained his father's throne, Oswald chose to bring a spiritual leader from Iona, rather than Kent, to instruct his people in Biblical truth. As you may have already guessed, Aidan was the missionary who was selected.

King Oswald was so happy to have an evangelist for his people that he performed the humble task of translating Aidan's sermons until the missionary was fluent in the native language. Aidan quickly won the respect of the people in Northumbria. He was not haughty or proud and he did not seek for riches and power. Soon many people in Northumbria joined the Celtic church.

The secret of Aidan's success was simple – his life reflected what he taught. If he received gifts or money from the wealthy and powerful, he would immediately distribute them to the poor. Seldom would you see Aidan on horseback; he usually walked throughout the towns and countryside. While traveling he would begin conversations with rich or poor alike, and if they were not believers he would invite them to give their lives to God. When he met fellow Christians, he would strengthen their faith and his life of honesty and good works challenged them to greater Christian service.

Aidan was a man of prayer and industry. Early in his labors for Northumbria, King Oswald gave Aidan the island of Lindisfarne to develop into an educational center. Using Iona as his model, Aidan constructed a school surrounded by fields. Its lush gardens and orchards supplied both food and labor for the students and teachers. The enrollment at his school was purposely limited because Aidan believed that there should be many small-scale schools built throughout the countryside. Those scattered beacons of light continued to shed truth for many years after Aidan laid down his selfless missionary work.

However, there was one large, notable school to tell you about. If you had traveled through England's verdant, rolling hills around AD 660, you might have chanced upon one of the country's most famous training centers, Whitby. That large school boasted 7000 students who were trained by dedicated and God-fearing teachers. Unlike other schools of that day, a pious woman named Hilda founded this school. Known for her deep love and devotion to God, she chose service for her Lord over the pleasures of royal life. When paganism swept through Northumbria after the superficial work done by Augustine, she left her country and spent time at two Christian training centers. Hilda returned to her homeland when King Oswald returned from Iona to claim the throne.

As soon as she was settled she began the construction of Whitby. Her vision was to build a Bible training center that educated not only young men, but women also. Hilda saw the importance of education for women – after all, they would train England's future leaders. Not only did the women need a solid scholastic training, Hilda knew they must be able to understand the Bible and develop godly characters in their children.

The instructors at Whitby made sure the curriculum gave practical experience in domestic jobs such as weaving, knitting, gardening, food preparation and caring for children. Such training would make the young women not only a blessing to others but allow them to make comfortable and happy homes for their husbands and children. Known for her practical wisdom and useful service, Hilda influenced not only her pupils, but also kings and princes. Often the ruling men of her country sought out Hilda for her sound advice on vexing problems.

Many famous students graduated from Whitby, including England's first poet. Often in the

evening students gathered together to entertain each other with their favorite poems and songs. Caedmon, a shy and uneducated man, felt embarrassed around his more talented peers. When invited to join their impromptu concerts, Caedmon refused to play the harp or sing.

One night however, as he slept in the stable where he was in charge of the cattle, he was given a dream. A brilliant celestial visitor appeared and asked Caedmon to sing for him. Caedmon replied that he couldn't sing and expressed his sorrow that he was not talented like his fellow students. The visitor urged him to sing. When Caedmon asked what he should sing the man replied, "The beginning of created things." Immediately Caedmon began to sing and compose a poem of praise to God. We no longer have the whole poem that we call "Caedmon's Hymn" but one early historian gave us the following lines which he copied from the original text:

Now we should praise the Guardian of the Heavenly Kingdom
The Ruler's power and His understanding,
The work of the Father of Glory, how He, eternal Lord
Established the beginning of every wondrous thing.
He first created Heaven as a roof
For the children of mankind, the holy Creator;
Then the Guardian of mankind,
The eternal Lord, afterward adorned the earth –
The Lord Almighty adorned the world for men.

Hilda soon heard of Caedmon's amazing heavenly gift and asked him to retell his dream to her. Delighted with what she heard, Hilda encouraged him to always use his talent for the glory of God. As word spread about Caedmon's special gift, people brought him Bible texts which he turned into beautiful verses set to harmonious music. It could be argued that Caedmon's gift was even more important to the building up of God's church in those days before printing presses, than it would be today.

With such dedicated instructors and converted students, Christianity spread rapidly throughout England. However, storm clouds were gathering over the British Isles. While praising God for the triumphs in Ireland, Scotland and England, the Culdee leaders watched with growing concern the religious changes taking place across the English Channel. They saw a destructive pattern as the Roman Church united with one monarch after another throughout Europe. As the papacy increased in power, she enforced her religion through political means. Celtic pastors saw individual freedom of conscience undermined; the Roman Church forced everyone to obey her teachings.

That same controlling spirit made its way into England when King Oswy married a Roman Catholic queen. King Oswy had succeeded King Oswald on the throne. Although he knew the beliefs of the Culdee Church, Oswy did not have a deep love for Christ. His new queen and her chaplain, Wilfrid, recognizing the king's lack of spiritual commitment and determined to halt the influence of the Celtic Church.

Once again the Roman Church agitated the debate over when Easter should be observed. There was a veiled threat to this debate since, in Europe, some opponents to Rome's Easter had already been put to death. Such harsh measures couldn't yet be used in England, however. The queen had to find a different way to deal with the widespread and much-loved Celtic Church. The queen and her chaplain proposed a debate and the king quickly agreed. He ordered that the meeting take place at Whitby. On one side of the issue stood Colman (the leader of the Culdee Church), Hilda, Bishop Cedd and other staunch Celtic supporters. On the

other side stood the king, queen, Prince Alchfrid, Wilfrid and two of his priests.

Colman clearly defended the Celtic Church's position with convincing arguments, but Wilfrid brought the debate around to the idea of authority. The Roman Church taught that when Jesus said, "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church, ... and to thee I will give the keys of the kingdom of heaven," He really meant that the Roman Catholic Church had His permission to make any rule they wanted. That, of course, would include when Easter should be celebrated. Wilfrid argued that anyone going against the universal church Roman Catholic Church was, in fact, fighting against God. Wilfrid's reasoning convinced the king, who was not a strong Bible student.

When the Celtic delegation saw that clear Biblical proof had no effect on the assembly they immediately departed for Iona. They knew that opposing the king would cause bloodshed, so instead they chose to retreat. When the people saw their king place his royal influence on the side of Wilfrid and the Roman Church, many of them followed his example and embraced the papacy.

For the next four hundred years truth in England was buried under the rubbish of false papal doctrine, ceremony and relic worship. However, the seeds of truth did not die. Instead they waited patiently to be watered by the Reformers many years later.

"Perhaps it would be good for us to look at that verse in Matthew 16:18 since it is the text Rome uses to prove her power to lead Jesus' church on earth," Mr. Dell suggested as he took his Bible and *Strong's Concordance* from the bookshelf. "To properly understand this verse we have to look at the Greek words that are used.

"When Jesus said, 'And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter,' the Greek word 'Peter' is *Petros* which means a small pebble; a rolling stone – something tiny and wobbly. You wouldn't want to build upon *Petros* because it is movable.

"Then Jesus said, 'And upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.' Now the Greek word translated 'rock' is *Petra* which means an enormous rock," explained the teacher.

"Oh, you mean *Petra* is like El Capitan," Emily exclaimed. "We visited Yosemite National Park last summer and El Capitan is gigantic."

"That's a good example," Mr. Dell agreed. "It is solid granite and stands over 4,000 feet in the air - and that's the part we can see! We don't even know how deeply it is embedded in the earth. Christ said that He will build His church upon a mighty Rock (Himself) not Peter, the rolling pebble."

"Makes sense to me," Aaron said as he made some notes in his Bible. "I'm glad we have a church that is founded on Jesus."

"Yes," agreed their teacher. "Let's always make sure our faith is built on God and His Word."

B.G. Wilkinson, *Truth Triumphant: The Church in the Wilderness* (Teach Services, Brushton, New York, 1994) Chapter 12

Helen Godfrey Pyke, *A Sword Unsheathed* (Southern Publishing Assoc., Nashville, TN, 1970)

Elder Lawrence Nelson: <http://www.ktfministry.org/sermons/156/the-awesome-keys-of-the-kingdom>