

# COLUMNISTS

## Feast shows potential of ecumenical spirit

England has just celebrated the 1,400th anniversary of St. Augustine of Canterbury's arrival there to bring the Gospel to the Anglo-Saxons.

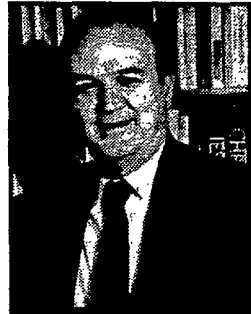
Christianity was probably first brought to England nearly four centuries earlier by soldiers or traders. In fact, the country's first martyr was a Roman soldier, St. Alban (d. ca. 203), who refused to renounce his Christian faith. The church was later established in Wales, Cornwall, Brittany, Ireland and Scotland, and in 431 Pope St. Celestine I sent Ireland its first bishop.

In the mid-fifth century, following the departure of the Romans, three Teutonic tribes — the Angles, the Saxons and the Jutes — settled in England, driving the Christianized Britons to the west.

During the next century, however, Celtic missionaries re-evangelized the country from the north. Notable among them was St. Columba, who ministered on the island of Iona, off the coast of Scotland.

In the spring of 597, St. Augustine landed with about 44 other monks on the coast of Kent, at the southeastern tip of England.

St. Augustine had been prior of the monastery of St. Andrew's in Rome when Pope St. Gregory the Great dispatched him to re-found the church in England. Because St. Augustine's companions wanted to turn back after reaching southern Gaul (modern-day France), Pope St. Gregory strengthened St. Augustine's hand by appointing him as their abbot and encouraged him to press



essays in theology

BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

forward.

St. Augustine established his mission with a monastic community at Canterbury. After a few months Christianity was formally adopted by Ethelbert, king of Kent, whose Frankish wife Bertha had already been a Christian before their marriage. The king gave St. Augustine some surviving Roman churches in which to worship.

As St. Augustine's efforts continued to bear fruit, there were differences to be resolved between the older Celtic and the newer Roman missions. The former, rooted in monasticism, was generally indifferent to matters of organization, while the latter reflected the highly ordered temperament of the country's former colonizers. The two churches also differed on the dating of Easter. The Celts had their own method of determining the feast, while the new missionaries followed the Roman practice of celebrating Easter on the Sunday following Passover.

The disparity in practices continued

long after St. Augustine's death (ca. 605). As late as 651 the Kentish Queen Eanfleda and her son Alhfrith, both of whom followed the Roman practice, were observing Palm Sunday on the same day that her husband and his father, Oswiu, king of Northumbria, was celebrating Easter. The problem was resolved finally in 664 at the Synod of Whitby, which Oswiu himself convened.

At the synod it was a matter of saint against saint. St. Colman, bishop of Lindisfarne, argued in favor of the retention of the Celtic customs, and appealed to the authority of St. Columba, the great missionary abbot. St. Wilfrid, abbot of Ripon (and later bishop of York), argued even more persuasively for the Roman approach.

When the king decided in favor of Rome, those clergy who could not accept the verdict withdrew to Iona and later to Ireland. St. Colman was displaced as bishop of Lindisfarne and spent the remainder of his life in an Irish monastery.

The great English historian, St. Bede (d. 735), regarded the Synod of Whitby as the turning point in the ecclesiastical history of England because the synod brought unity to the church for the first time.

But the unity would not last forever. English Christianity was torn in two during the late Middle Ages when the Reformation divided Europe between Catholics and Protestants.

It is all the more remarkable, therefore, that the recent celebration of the 1,400th anniversary of St. Augustine of

Canterbury's arrival in England should have had such an extraordinarily ecumenical dimension.

On Monday, May 26, English Christians from all churches joined together for a national celebration at Canterbury Cathedral, with Prince Charles representing the queen. George Carey, the archbishop of Canterbury and spiritual head of the worldwide Anglican Communion, presided, while Basil Hume, the cardinal-archbishop of Westminster, sat to his immediate left in the sanctuary.

Archbishop Carey referred in his sermon to the ecumenical encyclical of Pope John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint*, and called upon all Christians — Anglicans and Roman Catholics in particular — to work for the healing of division. "If in Augustine's mission we savor our origins," he said, "can we in his mission find our unity?"

The following day, the feast of St. Augustine of Canterbury, all the Benedictine communities gathered in the tightly packed cathedral for monastic vespers. Cardinal Hume, himself a Benedictine, preached on this occasion, calling for unity based on the spirituality of St. Augustine and the Gospels.

Cheers rang out through the cathedral as both archbishops gave their final blessing in unison and then walked side by side through the congregation.

The spirit of Whitby lives on.

Father McBrien is a professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame.

## Catechism, canons clear about annulments

**Q.** Two local politicians are attempting to obtain annulments. Both of these characters are divorced and remarried out of the church, and apparently are trying to legalize their actions.

I have reviewed the Catechism of the Catholic Church and the Code of Canon Law and can find nothing about annulments. Yet we know annulments exist.

Is this each bishop's prerogative? Or do they still come from the Vatican? (Texas)

**A.** Both of these individuals seem to have had tragically messed up lives. I assume you are happy and grateful that, at whatever late date, they are trying to heal what can be healed and somehow return to the practice of their faith.

However, your reading of the catechism and canon law, I must say, leaves a



question corner

BY FATHER JOHN DIETZEN

great deal to be desired. If you're as knowledgeable as you say you are, you know that a declaration of nullity by any diocesan tribunal (normally not the Vatican) means that something essential for a valid marriage was missing from the beginning of that marriage.

The catechism spells out very careful-

ly what those essentials are: They include intentions for a permanent life commitment to their partner, willingness to have children, total fidelity to one's spouse in sexual and other areas of their life together, freedom from any force or fear that could make a free and voluntary marriage impossible, and so on.

In addition, marriage consent must be a "human act." This means an act that is conscious and emotionally mature, a genuine human commitment to a "partnership of the whole of life," as canon law and the catechism speak of marriage.

When any of these essentials are lacking, says the catechism, the church can declare a marriage null. No true, valid marriage, as we understand marriage to be, ever existed.

Procedures for all this are spelled out

in canon law.

As you see, the catechism not only speaks of what makes a marriage null and void, but addresses directly the church's process for granting annulments. (see especially Nos. 1625-1654)

Dear Readers: I receive inquiries often about disposal of rosaries, pictures and other religious articles. The Franciscan Monastery in Washington has an outlet for these items and welcomes whatever you may send. The address is: Brother Joseph, OFM, Franciscan Monastery, 1400 Quincy St. N.E., Washington, D.C. 20017.

Father Dietzen is pastor of Holy Trinity Church, 704 N. Main St., Bloomington, Ill. 61701. Questions for this column should be sent to him at the same address.

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