

We live in an age of anxiety, slowly emerging into a 'foreign' land; a land we know not yet how to develop and in which to, once again, find security. Great hopes are being voiced as to this being an age of opportunity; a time to turn away from relentless growth to a more caring society; a time to find a new story by which to live. The signs are not propitious for this: too much power invested in the wrong people, and we could easily be dissuaded from giving it a try. St Augustine's initial failure to continue his mission to the English comes to mind. At some point in his journey through Gaul, his fellow monks persuaded him to return to Rome and plead for an end to 'so dangerous, arduous and uncertain a journey.' What exactly they were they afraid of is not known but we can surmise from a hint in Pope Gregory's response that it was partly 'what men say': rumours, fake news, false reports, perhaps, of the awfulness of the Anglo-Saxons from beyond the Alps: barbarians in contrast to the civilised people of the Mediterranean. Such xenophobia can only be overcome by love, which is exactly the message Augustine is being asked to convey and the message which will sustain us, too, on our journey into a foreign land. It's a risk embodied in the life, death and resurrection of Christ. It's what Christians are for.

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