

This is really just a thought for the day on the theme of cultural difference. I've put it like that, with Pope Gregory's famous advice to Augustine in mind, to go easy on the pagans in England when it came to the treatment of their religious rites and customs. By all means destroy the pagan idols, but do re-use their temples *if in serviceable condition* sprinkling them with holy water *to purge them of all corrupt associations*. It was a way of leading the people gently towards Christian faith, allowing them the familiarity of their own buildings. Even the slaughtering of oxen could continue, but to be eaten, rather than offered to pagan gods. In this way, said Gregory, the people would *more readily come to desire the joys of the spirit. For it is certainly impossible to eradicate all errors from obstinate minds at one stroke, and whoever wishes to climb a mountain top climbs gradually step by step, and not in one leap.*

On the whole, it seems that Augustine followed this wise advice and was successful in his mission of converting the Anglo-Saxons. He was less successful, however, when it came to converting the already Christian Britons of the west to a Roman form of Christianity and it was a lack of the simplest of gestures that did it. At a second conference to seek agreement, *'Augustine failed to rise from his seat when the (seven) British bishops approached, a sign, they thought, of a lack of Christian courtesy and meekness'*.

(p.48 *The Early Church in Eastern England* by Margaret Gallyer)

You see how easy it is to win people or to turn them away. This calls for great love: the willingness, that is, to surrender one's will to another, and to allow other people room to be themselves.

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