

When Pope Gregory sends Augustine with thirty or so monks, to convert the Anglo-Saxons to Christianity, they may have been the first outreach of the Roman Church to people outside the then boundaries of the Roman Empire. He seemed unaware of the private initiative of Patrick to Ireland or, at least, makes no reference to it, which will cause all sorts of problems later, but not immediately for Augustine.

His focus is firstly on Kent *the most sophisticated of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms* whose king, Ethelbert, was already married to a Christian, Bertha, the daughter of the king of Paris. It was nonetheless a daunting task to reach out to this land *at the edge of the world* and Augustine and his monks at first hesitated, not daring to leave France and needing encouragement from Gregory to continue. They came with all the customs and practices of the Roman Church but Gregory was relaxed about how these were to be used in agreement with any already existing customs and practices. It was a mission in which *example rather than argument was the key*. Gregory had, indeed, told his friend, Leander of Seville, with regard to baptism, that *where there is one faith, a diversity of usage does no harm to the Church* and when Augustine asked whether he should use Gallican or Roman customs in the Mass he was told:

*My brother, you know the customs of the Roman Church in which, of course, you were brought up. But things are not to be loved for the sake of a place, but places are to be loved for the sake of their good things.*

(Quoted in Eamonn Duffy *Saints and Sinners* p57)

Such adaptations have been the bread and butter of liturgists ever since but one has a sense that liturgy is to be enjoyed rather than imposed. We have that tension again between the ossification of custom, the encodement of past experience, of law taken literally, and law interpreted by love. Law that is arrived at through lived experience and, in this sense, always on the move. Law that is indulged, enjoyed, and enlivened by the Spirit.

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