



Edinburgh

Lothian

Lindisfarne

Tweed

Bernica

Northumbria

Durham

Tees

Deira

York

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GANZ NOTES - TNS 18, 2  
ST. BEDE THE VENERABLE  
17 FEBRUARY 2026

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**Version:** 9, 21, 27, 30 January 2026; 10, 15, 17 February 2026



## MY DESCRIPTION OF TNS 18, 2

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Our Guest has been understood to have been the most learned of the Anglo-Saxon Christians. The particular Form of love that we will notice in him is his love expressed in **his devotion to learning** of God and of the world that God has given us.

The age of the Anglo-Saxons extends from the time when the Romans lost control of Britain around 410 CE up to 1066 CE when the Normans invaded Britain. The Anglo-Saxons (the Angles, the Saxons, and the Jutes - invaders from modern day Germany, Denmark, and the Netherlands) were the original “English” peoples (vs. the Britons who were far older, Celtic, inhabitants of Britain), and the type of English that they spoke and wrote was what we call “Old English”.

Bede was only 7-years old when he entered a monastery (Benedictine), spending the rest of his life there. Mostly teaching himself by his voracious reading, he had what was clearly a divine desire (what we call a “charism”) **to love God through learning**. And because God is lord of all, so Bede became through extraordinary effort a polymath; i.e., he became an accomplished student of many disciplines, not just the Bible and all the ways of reading it, not just of Theology, but also, and most famously, of History, and more specifically, his writing of the history of how the Anglo-Saxons came to become Christians. His *Ecclesiastical History of the English* [i.e., Anglo-Saxon] *People* is a founding document of the whole discipline of History.

Last month at The Night School, our Guest was the author of the biblical book, Song of Songs. This month, we will appreciate how Bede’s love for learning gave him the insights he had into Song of Songs. We will explore sections of his Commentary on Song of Songs.

Welcome to the Night School.

## QUOTES

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**St. Bede the Venerable** - “I have spent all my life in this monastery, applying myself entirely to the study of the scriptures; and, amid the observance of the discipline of the Rule and the daily task of singing in the church, it has always been my delight to learn or to teach or to write.... From the time I became a priest until the fifty-ninth year of my life I have made it my business, for my own benefit and that of my brothers, to make

brief extracts from the works of the venerable fathers on the holy scriptures, or to add notes of my own to clarify their sense and interpretation.”<sup>2</sup>

**C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*** – “Reality, in fact, is usually something you could not have guessed. That is one of the reasons I believe Christianity. It is a religion you could not have guessed. If it offered us just the kind of universe we had always expected, I should feel we were making it up. But, in fact, it is not the sort of thing anyone would have made up. It has just that queer twist about it that real things have.”<sup>1</sup>

**St. Bede the Venerable Episcopal Church, Santa Fe, New Mexico**<sup>2</sup> - Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History* covered a vast sweep of history – from Julius Caesar’s raids of Britain ca. 55 B.C. to the arrival of Saint Augustine of Canterbury in 597 A.D., the first missionary to arrive from Rome. Bede was a master of classical languages, including Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, and had a passion for the work of the Church fathers. **He was the first to use the system of reckoning years from the time of Jesus (A.D. and B.C).** Bede cited as his sources for the *Ecclesiastical History* ancient letters to which he had access, traditions which had been passed down, and his own personal knowledge. He was born in the year 672 or 673, in Jarrow (now Durham) in England. **His name comes from the old English word *bede* which means prayer.** [The idea, I think, is the association of prayer with beads.] It seems likely that Bede came from a noble family, fairly well-to-do. At the age of seven he was sent to a monastery for his education. **He spent most of his life inside monastery walls, working tirelessly as a scholar.**

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## KINGDOM OF NORTHUMBRIA (604-954 CE)

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<sup>2</sup> *Ecclesiastical History* 5.24, trans. in *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History*, ed. Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969; reprinted with corrections, 1991), 567.

<sup>1</sup> Lewis, C. S. *A Year with C. S. Lewis: Daily Readings from His Classic Works*. Edited by Patricia S. Klein, 1st ed., HarperOne, 2003, p. 27.

<sup>2</sup> See: <https://stbedessantafe.org/the-venerable-bede/>.



*World History Encyclopedia*, “**Kingdom of Northumbria**” by Joshua J. Mark – The Kingdom of Northumbria (c. 604-954 CE) was a political entity in the north of modern-day Britain with Mercia directly to the south, the Kingdoms of the Welsh to the west, and the land of the Picts to the north; the eastern line of the kingdom was bordered by the sea. The region was originally divided between the two kingdoms of Bernicia (in the north) and Deira (south) but the people were referred to as Northumbrians, (meaning “those north of the Humber River”). These two kingdoms often fought against each other until they were united under the reign of Aethelfrith (r. 593-616 CE) but their rivalry would continually destabilize the region throughout its history. **There were frequent conflicts between Northumbria and the Kingdom of Mercia over the years with one or the other maintaining supremacy at one time or another.**

Microsoft CoPilot –

In Bede’s world – early 8th-century Northumbria – the word “Britons” had a very specific meaning. It did not refer to all inhabitants of Britain, **nor to the English (the Anglo-Saxons)**. Instead, it referred to a distinct people with their own language, culture, and political identity.

Who the “Britons” Were in Bede’s Time

### 1. The Britons were the descendants of the island’s pre-Anglo-Saxon Celtic population

These were the peoples who lived in Britain before the arrival of the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes in the 5th–6th centuries.

Bede saw them as the native inhabitants of the island.

### 2. They spoke a Brittonic Celtic language

This language was the ancestor of:

- Welsh
- Cornish
- Breton (brought to Brittany by emigrants fleeing Anglo-Saxon expansion)

Bede calls their language “Brittish” (*lingua Brittonum*).

*World History Encyclopedia* at “**Celts**” – The Insular Celtic group of languages are two: British or Brittonic (Breton, Cornish, and Welsh) and Goidelic (Irish and its medieval derivatives, Scots Gaelic, and Manx). **Brittonic** was spoken in all of Britain in the Roman period. From it evolved **Cumbrian** (extinct since medieval times), **Cornish** (no longer spoken after the 18th century CE but recently revived), **Breton** (likely introduced by 5th-century CE British settlers and not connected directly to Gaulish), and **Welsh**, which is still spoken today. The earliest evidence of Goidelic-Irish dates to the 5th century CE, and it later evolved into **Middle Irish (c. 950-1200 CE)** and, thereafter, morphed again into Modern Irish, which is still spoken today.

### 3. Their political centers were in the west and north

By Bede’s lifetime (c. 673–735), Anglo-Saxon kingdoms dominated most of eastern and southern Britain. The Britons survived mainly in:

- Wales (Gwynedd, Powys, Dyfed, etc.)
- Cornwall (Dumnonia)
- Strathclyde (the “Cumbrians” around modern Glasgow)
- Parts of northern England (the kingdom of Rheged had recently disappeared)

To Bede, these were still culturally and linguistically Brittonic peoples.

4. They were Christians – but not always in the Roman way

**Bede often contrasts the Britons with the Anglo-Saxons in religious matters.**

He criticizes the Britons for:

- Following Celtic rather than Roman Easter calculations
- Maintaining distinct monastic traditions
- Not evangelizing the Anglo-Saxons (a point where Bede is polemical)

**So “Briton” in Bede’s writing carries both ethnic and ecclesiastical meaning.**

## JEAN LECLERQ, OSB - THE LOVE OF LEARNING AND THE DESIRE FOR GOD

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*The Love of Learning and The Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture*

Jean Leclercq O.S.B.

Pages: 296

*The Love of Learning and the Desire for God* is composed of a series of lectures given to young monks at the Institute of Monastic Studies at Sant' Anselmo in Rome during the winter of 1955-56.

THE PRINCIPAL LITERARY SOURCES of monastic culture may be reduced to three: **Holy Scripture, the patristic tradition, and classical literature.** The liturgy, which will be treated later, is the medium through which the Bible and the patristic tradition are received, and it is the liturgy that gives unity to all the manifestations of monastic culture. In the first place, then, we must attempt to supply an introduction to the study of monastic exegesis. “Attempt” and “introduction”: these two terms are justified by the fact that this domain has been, till now, but very little studied. What has been studied most are the classical sources, probably because these problems of medieval culture have been approached more often by medievalists than by theologians and patrologists.

However, it is now perceived that the monastic Middle Ages in general and St. Bernard in particular must be understood from the point of view of what preceded them – *the patristic tradition whose principal task was to transmit and explain the Bible*. A general study of the medieval monastic commentators is still lacking. The groundwork for this study will have to be prepared for by editions of individual works, a task which still remains to be done. If, therefore, solutions cannot be proposed, at least attention may be drawn to some of the problems which are encountered. **To begin with, one fact is certain: there really is a monastic literature on Scripture, and it is abundant, more abundant than the few studies dedicated to it would lead us to believe.** [Leclercq, Jean. *The Love of Learning and The Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture* (p. 71). Kindle Edition.]

GRAMMAR – **The premise held by all who work with Holy Scripture is that grammar is a necessary introduction to it. Since Scripture is a book, one must know how to read it and learn how to read it just as one learns how to read any other book.** In the first place, a verbal analysis must be made, using the same philological methods Smaragdus used in connection with the *Rule* of St. Benedict. That grammar is considered as the “introduction to Sacred Scripture” is clearly stated in the life of St. Hugh of Cluny, for example, and this application of grammatical analysis to Scripture resulted in a certain attachment to the written word itself, and great importance being given to the texts and to the words. (p. 72)

LECTIO DIVINA / SACRA PAGINA - **Originally, *lectio divina* and *sacra pagina* are equivalent expressions.** For St. Jerome as for St. Benedict, the *lectio divina* is **the text itself** which is being read, a selected passage or a “lesson” taken from Scripture. During the Middle Ages, this expression was to be reserved more and more for *the act of reading*, “the reading of Holy Scripture.” In the schools it refers most often to the page itself, the text, which is under study, taken objectively. Scripture is studied for its own sake. **In the cloister, however, it is rather the reader and the benefit that he derives from Holy Scripture which are given consideration.** In both instances an activity is meant which is “holy,” *sacra, divina*; but in the two milieux, the accent is put on two different aspects of the same activity. The orientation differs, and, consequently, so does the procedure. The scholastic *lectio* takes the direction of the *quaestio* and the *disputatio*. The reader puts questions to the text and then questions himself on the subject matter: *quaeri solet*. **The monastic *lectio* is oriented toward the *meditatio* and the *oratio*. The objective of the first is science and knowledge; of the second, wisdom and appreciation.** In the monastery, the *lectio divina*, which begins with grammar, terminates in **compunction**, in desire of heaven. (p. 72)

## COMPUNCTION -

The term *compunction* (Latin *compunctio*, from *cum-pungere*, “to puncture with”) is found in the works of the Fathers of the Church in a number of different patterns, e.g., compunction of fear, compunction of desire and compunction of the heart. In its original profane use, the word is a medical term, indicating attacks of physical pain. **The first ecclesiastical usage, toward the end of the second century, transposes the meaning to signify pain of the spirit, a suffering due to the actual existence of sin and human concupiscence, and as a result of our desire for God.** The theological connotation is closely parallel to the biblical idea of *metanoia*, rendered in English as “penitence.”

In the Scriptures the idea of compunction corresponds to the biblical notion of *katanyxeis*, from the two Hebrew words *tar’élâ* (Ps 60:5) and *tardémâ* (Isa 29:10), indicating **a lethargic inebriation resulting in spiritual blindness.** In the NT the Pentecost speech of Peter (Acts 2:37) employs the notion to express the supernatural shock that leads to conversion, translated in the Vulgate as *compuncti sunt corde*. To this extent, the most common use associates the idea of compunction with *a change of heart*.<sup>3</sup>

**For the Desert Fathers, compunction is a sign of valid repentance, the fruit of this conversion being tranquility (*hesychia*), a purity of heart.**

**Origen (d. 253)** associates the theme with another scriptural theme, *penthos*, indicating public or private mourning. **St. John Chrysostom (d. 407)** authored two books on compunction (*De compunctione*, PG 47:391–422), while **St. Gregory of Nyssa (d. ca. 394)**, in his *Third Homily on the Beatitudes* (PG 44:1219–1232) distinguishes between the sadness (*penthos*) according to God and the sadness according to the world. **One notes the foundations for the later medieval distinction between *contrition* (sadness for sin because it offends God) and *attrition* (remorse for sin out of fear of punishment).**

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NT New Testament

<sup>3</sup> Downey, Michael. [The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality](#), Electronic ed., Liturgical Press, 2000, p. 193.

PG *Patrologia Graeca*, J.P. Migne, ed., 1857–1865

PG *Patrologia Graeca*, J.P. Migne, ed., 1857–1865

**John Cassian (d. ca. 435) and St. Gregory the Great (d. 604)** were two of the great doctors of compunction in the Latin West, giving the monastic formulation of compunction as *an element of affective prayer*. In this case compunction is a kind of grace inflamed by the Holy Spirit, producing strong feelings often accompanied by tears. One finds this idea developed in the *Rule of Benedict*, where he speaks of *compunctio lacrimarum* (chap. 20) and *compunctio cordis* (chap. 49). **Tears of love always accompany those of penitence. Initially the penitent experiences tears of remorse, but in time these tears are dominated by tears of joy.**<sup>4</sup>

RUMINATION - It has already been mentioned that in the Middle Ages the reader usually pronounced the words with his lips, at least in a low tone, and consequently he hears the sentence seen by the eyes – **just as today, in order to learn a language or a text, we pronounce the words. This results in more than a visual memory of the written words.** What results is a muscular memory of the words pronounced, and an aural memory of the words heard. The *meditatio* consists in **applying oneself with attention to this exercise in total memorization**; it is, therefore, inseparable from the *lectio*. **It is what inscribes, so to speak, the sacred text in the body and in the soul.** This repeated mastication of the divine words is sometimes described by use of the theme of spiritual nutrition. In this case the vocabulary is borrowed from eating, from digestion, and from the particular form of digestion belonging to ruminants. For this reason, reading and meditation are sometimes described by the very expressive word *ruminatio*. (pages 72-73)

The *Oxford English Dictionary* at “**to ruminare**” – **1.a. – 1533 – transitive.** To revolve, turn over repeatedly in the mind; to meditate deeply upon.

REMINISCENCE - This way of uniting reading, meditation, and prayer, this “meditative prayer” as William of St. Thierry calls it, had great influence on religious psychology. **It occupies and engages the whole person in whom the Scripture takes root, later on to bear fruit.** It is this deep impregnation with the words of Scripture that explains the extremely important phenomenon of *reminiscence* whereby the verbal echoes so excite the memory that a mere allusion will spontaneously evoke whole quotations and, in turn, a scriptural phrase will suggest quite naturally allusions elsewhere in the sacred books. **Each word is like a hook, so to speak; it catches hold of one or several others which become linked together and make up the fabric of the exposé.** This accounts for

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<sup>4</sup> Downey, Michael. [The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality](#), Electronic ed., Liturgical Press, 2000, p. 194.

the difficulty of what we call research into sources: are the monks quoting older versions of Scripture or are they modifying them? **Most frequently, it would seem, they are quoting from memory; quotations by means of the “hook-words” group themselves together in their minds and under their pen, like variations on the same theme.** It happens that the same context is found several times in the same author and in others. Not that the one is necessarily referring to what he has already said or is citing another author who is using the same series of texts. Quite simply, the same words evoke similar quotations. (pages 73-74) ...

As it had for the Fathers, *reminiscence* on the part of the monastic authors of the Middle Ages had a profound effect on their literary composition. **The mere fact of hearing certain words, which happen to be similar in sound to certain other words, sets up a kind of chain reaction of associations which will bring together words that have no more than a chance connection, purely external, with one another.** But since the verse or passage which contains this word comes to mind, why not comment on it here? In such a case an author may turn away from his original subject which he had started to treat and apparently lose the thread of his discourse. (p. 74)

The *Oxford English Dictionary* at “**reminiscence**” – **1.a. – 1589** – The action, process, or fact of remembering or recollecting; *spec.* the action of recovering knowledge or fondly recalling memories by mental application; recollection.

VIGOROUS IMAGINATION – Another important factor explained by rumination and reminiscence is the power of **imagination** of the medieval man. Exuberant as this faculty is, it nevertheless possesses a vigor and a preciseness which we find difficult to understand. We are used to seeing, almost without looking at them unless with a distracted eye, printed or moving pictures. We are fond of abstract ideas. **Our imagination, having become lazy, seldom allows us to do anything but dream. But in the men of the Middle Ages, it was vigorous and active. It permitted them to picture, to “make present,” to see beings with all the details provided by the texts: the colors and dimensions of things, the clothing, bearing, and actions of the people, the complex environment in which they move. They liked to describe them and, so to speak, re-create them, giving very sharp relief to images and feelings.** The words of the sacred text never failed to produce a strong impression on the mind. The biblical words did not become trite; people never got used to them. (p. 75)

The spiritual men of those days counsel **the renunciation of carnal images**; but this is in order to substitute for them **a holy imagination**. *The sanctification of*

*the imagination results in their attachment to the slightest particulars of the text, and not merely to the ideas it contains.* This strength of imagination had great consequences in the field of iconography, and in literary expression as well. **The memory, fashioned wholly by the Bible and nurtured entirely by biblical words and the images they evoke, causes them to express themselves spontaneously in a biblical vocabulary.** Reminiscences are not quotations; elements of phrases borrowed from another. **They are the words of the person using them; they belong to him.** Perhaps he is not even conscious of owing them to a source. Moreover, this biblical vocabulary is twofold in character. In the first place, it is often poetic in essence. **Sometimes it has greater value because of its power of suggestion than because of its clarity or precision; it hints at much more than it says.** (p. 75)

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## THE DATE OF EASTER

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The *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, “**Bede**” by J. Campbell – “The Easter question has central significance in Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica*. His writings (and a letter attributed to Abbot Ceolfrith, but which may really be Bede's) explain why it meant so much. **Easter had to come just after the equinox, for lengthening days represent Christ's triumph over the powers of darkness. It had to be in the first month of the lunar year, for this was that in which the world had been created and should be newly created. It had to be as the moon was about to wane, for then the moon moves from facing the earth to facing the sun, just as we should turn from earthly to heavenly things.** Bede's treatment of Easter brings together the study (one might almost say, the scientific study) of computation with analogical theology, historical learning, and the homiletic use of history. This well illustrates the integrated nature of his superficially diverse works.

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## POPE BENEDICT XVI

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Benedict XVI, Pope. *Church Fathers and Teachers: From Leo the Great to Peter Lombard* (pp. 73-78). Kindle Edition.

Saint Bede, the Venerable WEDNESDAY, 18 FEBRUARY 2009 Saint Peter's Square

NOTES BY RICHARD GANZ

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Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The Saint we are approaching today is called Bede and was **born in the northeast of England, to be exact, Northumbria, in the year 672 or 673**. He himself recounts that when he was seven years old his parents entrusted him to the Abbot of the neighboring Benedictine monastery to be educated: “spending all the remaining time of my life a dweller in that monastery”. He recalls, “I wholly applied myself to the study of Scripture; and amidst the observance of the monastic Rule and the daily charge of singing in church, I always took delight in learning, or teaching, or writing” (*Historia eccl. Anglorum*, V, 24). In fact, Bede became one of the most outstanding erudite figures of the early Middle Ages since he was able to avail himself of many precious manuscripts which his Abbots would bring him on their return from frequent journeys to the Continent and to Rome.

**His teaching and the fame of his writings occasioned his friendships with many of the most important figures of his time, who encouraged him to persevere in his work from which so many were to benefit.** When Bede fell ill, he did not stop working, always preserving an inner joy that he expressed in prayer and song. He ended his most important work, the *Historia Ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, with this invocation: “I beseech you, O good Jesus, that to the one to whom you have graciously granted sweetly to drink in the words of your knowledge, you will also vouchsafe in your loving kindness that he may one day come to you, the Fountain of all wisdom, and appear for ever before your face”. **Death took him on 26 May 737: it was the Ascension.**

INTERPRETING SCRIPTURE IN TWO WAYS - Sacred Scripture was the constant source of Bede’s theological reflection. After a critical study of the text (a copy of the monumental *Codex Amiatinus* of the Vulgate on which Bede worked has come down to us), he comments on the Bible, interpreting it in a Christological key, that is, **combining two things: on the one hand, he listens to exactly what the text says, he really seeks to hear and understand the text itself; on the other, he is convinced that the key to understanding Sacred Scripture as the one Word of God is Christ, and with Christ, in his light, one understands the Old and New Testaments as “one” Sacred Scripture. The events of the Old and New Testaments go together; they are the way to Christ, although expressed in different signs and institutions (this is what he calls the *concordia sacramentorum*).**

CHRISTIANS AND JEWS AND FROM “NEW PEOPLES” ARE THE GIFT - For example, the tent of the covenant that Moses pitched in the desert and the first and second temple of Jerusalem are images of the Church, the new temple built on Christ and on the Apostles with living stones, held together by the love of the Spirit. **And just as pagan peoples also contributed to building the ancient temple by making**

available valuable materials and the technical experience of their master builders, so too contributing to the construction of the Church there were apostles and teachers, not only from ancient Jewish, Greek, and Latin lineage, but also from the new peoples, among whom Bede was pleased to list the Irish Celts and Anglo-Saxons.

**Saint Bede saw the growth of the universal dimension of the Church, which is not restricted to one specific culture but is comprised of all the cultures of the world that must be open to Christ and find in him their goal.**

**Another of Bede's favorite topics is the history of the Church.** After studying the period described in the Acts of the Apostles, he reviews the history of the Fathers and the Councils, convinced that *the work of the Holy Spirit continues in history*.

THE PROTESTANT MISTAKE (see Louis Bouyer, *The Spirit and Forms of Protestantism* (1956) – I learned from Bouyer how in its rejection of history, Protestantism, was seeking to return to the pure and simple Christianity of Christ with his disciples. Though this was expressing a laudable and understandable critique of the Medieval Church in all its human embellishments and corruptions, it finally was a failure to understand that and how the Holy Spirit works in history.

In the *Chronica Maiora*, Bede outlines a chronology that was to become the basis of the universal Calendar *ab incarnatione Domini*. *In his day, time was calculated from the foundation of the City of Rome.* **Realizing that the true reference point, the center of history, is the Birth of Christ, Bede gave us this calendar that interprets history starting from the Incarnation of the Lord.**

HIS "SCHOLASTIC" INSTINCT - Bede records the first six Ecumenical Councils and their developments faithfully presenting Christian doctrine, both Mariological and soteriological, and denouncing the Monophysite and Monothelite, Iconoclastic and Neo-Pelagian heresies. Lastly, he compiled with documentary rigor and literary expertise the *Ecclesiastical History of the English Peoples* mentioned above, which earned him recognition as "the father of English historiography".

SCHOLASTICISM in the *Oxford English Dictionary* - 1. - 1693 -

The predominant theological and philosophical teaching of medieval academic institutions or the 'school', **based upon the authority of the Bible and Christian Fathers and the logic and philosophy of Aristotle and his commentators;** the methods of learning used in medieval academic institutions, characterized by dialectical reasoning, subtle argument, and disputation; the doctrines and teaching methods of the schoolmen.

Scholasticism attempted to use dialectic and reasoned argument to find rational proof of Christian doctrine, to systematize Christian theology by bringing conflicting doctrinal sources into harmony, and to reconcile Christian theology with ancient classical philosophy (esp. the works of Aristotle). Scholasticism dominated European philosophy from the 11th to the 15th cent., reaching its height during the 13th and early 14th cent., when the leading scholastic philosophers included Thomas Aquinas, Duns Scotus, and William of Ockham. By the 15th cent., humanists and reformers had begun to criticize the teaching of the medieval philosophers and the terms *scholastic* and *scholastical* were used with depreciative connotations by Renaissance humanists, who ridiculed the doctrines and methods of the medieval 'schools' for a perceived dependence upon quibbling argument and needless distinctions.

The characteristic features of the Church that Bede sought to emphasize are: a) **catholicity**, seen as faithfulness to tradition while remaining open to historical developments and as the quest for unity in multiplicity, in historical and cultural diversity according to the directives Pope Gregory the Great had given to Augustine of Canterbury, the Apostle of England; b) **apostolicity and Roman traditions**: in this regard he deemed it of prime importance to convince all the Irish, Celtic, and Pict Churches to have one celebration for Easter in accordance with the Roman calendar. **The *computus* which he worked out scientifically to establish the exact date of the Easter celebration, hence the entire cycle of the liturgical year, became the reference text for the whole Catholic Church.**

**Bede was also an eminent teacher of liturgical theology.** In his homilies on the Gospels for Sundays and feast days, he achieves a true *mystagogy*, **teaching the faithful to celebrate the mysteries of the faith joyfully and to reproduce them coherently in life**, while awaiting their full manifestation with the return of Christ, when, with our glorified bodies, we shall be admitted to the offertory procession in the eternal liturgy of God in Heaven. Following the "**realism**" of the catecheses of Cyril, Ambrose, and Augustine, Bede teaches that the sacraments of Christian initiation make every faithful person "not only a Christian but Christ". **Indeed, every time that a faithful soul lovingly accepts and preserves the Word of God, in imitation of Mary, he conceives and generates Christ anew.** And every time that a group of neophytes receives the Easter sacraments, the Church "reproduces herself" or, to use a more daring term, the Church becomes "Mother of God", participating in the generation of her children through the action of the Holy Spirit.

HOLY LEARNING AT THE SERVICE OF THE CHURCH - By **his way of creating theology, interweaving the Bible, liturgy, and history**, Bede has a timely message for the different "states of life": a) for **scholars** (*doctores ac doctrices*) he recalls two essential

tasks: to examine the marvels of the Word of God in order to present them in an attractive form to the faithful; to explain the dogmatic truths, avoiding heretical complications and keeping to “Catholic simplicity”, with the attitude of the lowly and humble to whom God is pleased to reveal the mysteries of the Kingdom; b) **pastors**, for their part, must give priority to preaching, not only through verbal or hagiographic language, but also by giving importance to icons, processions, and pilgrimages. **Bede recommends that they use the vernacular** as he himself does, explaining the “Our Father” and the “Creed” in Northumbrian and continuing, until the last day of his life, his commentary on the Gospel of John in the vernacular; c) Bede recommends to **consecrated people** who devote themselves to the Divine Office, living in the joy of fraternal communion and progressing in the spiritual life by means of *ascesis* and contemplation, that they attend to the apostolate – no one possesses the Gospel for himself alone but must perceive it as a gift for others, too – both by collaborating with Bishops in pastoral activities of various kinds for the young Christian communities **and by offering themselves for the evangelizing mission among the pagans, outside their own country, as *peregrini pro amore Dei***.

Making this viewpoint his own, in his commentary on the **Song of Songs**, Bede presents the Synagogue and the Church as collaborators in the dissemination of God’s Word. **Christ the Bridegroom wants a hard-working Church**, “weathered by the efforts of evangelization” – there is a clear reference to the word in the Song of Songs (1:5), where the bride says *Nigra sum sed formosa* (“I am very dark, but comely”) – intent on tilling other fields or vineyards and in establishing among the new peoples “not a temporary hut but a permanent dwelling place”, **in other words, intent on integrating the Gospel into their social fabric and cultural institutions**.

In this perspective the holy Doctor urges lay faithful to be diligent in religious instruction, imitating those “insatiable crowds of the Gospel who did not even allow the Apostles time to take a mouthful”. He teaches them how to pray ceaselessly, “reproducing in life what they celebrate in the liturgy”, offering all their actions as a spiritual sacrifice in union with Christ.

**THE FAMILY AS CHURCH - He explains to parents that in their small domestic circle**, too, they can exercise “the priestly office as pastors and guides”, giving their children a Christian upbringing. He also affirms that he knows many of the faithful (men and women, married and single) “capable of irreproachable conduct who, if appropriately guided, will be able every day to receive Eucharistic communion” (*Epist. ad Ecgbertum*, ed. Plummer, p. 419).

The *Oxford English Dictionary* at the verb “**to venerate**” – **1. – 1623 – transitive**. To regard with feelings of respect and reverence; to look upon as something exalted, hallowed, or sacred; to reverence or revere.

THE TITLE “VENERABLE” - The fame of holiness and wisdom that Bede already enjoyed in his lifetime earned him the title of “Venerable”. Pope Sergius I called him this when he wrote to his Abbot in 701 asking him to allow him to come to Rome temporarily to give advice on matters of universal interest.

McBrien, Richard P. *The Pocket Guide to the Popes: The Pontiffs from St. Peter to John Paul* (pp. 90-91). Kindle Edition.

**84 - SERGIUS I, ST. Syrian, December 15, 687–September 8, 701** - A strong pope, Sergius I asserted the authority of the Bishop of Rome in the West and resisted the efforts of the emperor Justinian II in the East to make the pope bow to his will. Thus, he consecrated Damian as the new archbishop of Ravenna in Rome (the first such papal consecration since 666, when Ravenna was declared autonomous), baptized Caedwalla, the young king of the West Saxons, and received the see of Aquileia back into communion with Rome, ending a schism begun in 553. And when the emperor demanded that the pope approve the acts of a council he called in 692, ostensibly to complete the work of the Second and Third Councils of Constantinople (553 and 680–81, respectively), Sergius I refused. The council (known as the Trullan Council because it met in the domed room [*trullus*] of the imperial palace) had not included any Western bishops, ignored Western canon law, banned certain practices observed in the West (such as clerical celibacy and the Saturday fast in Lent), and expressly renewed the twenty-eighth canon of the Council of Chalcedon (451), granting Constantinople equivalent status to Rome. When the emperor learned of the pope’s response, he sent the commander of the imperial bodyguard to force the pope to sign or to arrest him and bring him to Constantinople. But the imperial troops in Ravenna and elsewhere rallied to the pope’s support, forced their way into Rome, and hunted down the imperial commander. Only the pope’s pleas saved the man’s life. The humiliated emperor was overthrown and exiled in 695. **An accomplished singer, Sergius I introduced the singing of the Agnus Dei (“Lamb of God”) at Mass and processions on the four principal feasts of the Blessed Virgin Mary. He was buried in St. Peter’s, and there is some indication that a cult developed soon after his death.** Feast day: September 8.

After his death, Bede’s writings were widely disseminated in his homeland and on the European Continent. **Bishop Saint Boniface, the great missionary of Germany (d. 754), asked the Archbishop of York and the Abbot of Wearmouth several times to have some of his works transcribed and sent to him so that he and his companions might also enjoy the spiritual light that shone from them.**

THE LIGHT IN THE WEST - A century later, Notker Balbulus, Abbot of Sankt Gallen (d. 912), noting *the extraordinary influence of Bede*, compared him to **a new sun that**

**God had caused to rise, not in the East but in the West, to illuminate the world.** Apart from the rhetorical emphasis, it is a fact that with his works Bede made an effective contribution to building a Christian Europe in which the various peoples and cultures amalgamated with one another, thereby giving them a single physiognomy, inspired by the Christian faith.

Let us pray that today, too, there may be figures of Bede's stature to keep the whole Continent united; let us pray that we may all be willing to rediscover our common roots in order to be builders of a profoundly human and authentically Christian Europe.

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## OXFORD DICTIONARY OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH, 4<sup>TH</sup> ED

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Foot, Sarah. "[Bede, St.](#)" *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, edited by Andrew Louth, Fourth Edition, vol. 1, Oxford University Press, 2022, pp. 205–06.

**Bede, St** (c.673–735) 'The Venerable', pedagogue, computist, biblical exegete, hagiographer, and historian, **the foremost and most influential Latin scholar from Anglo-Saxon England.**

**Perplexity AI at World History Encyclopedia – "Anglo-Saxon"** [whom Bede calls "the English" in contrast to "the Britons"] denotes the **Germanic** peoples (Angles, Saxons, Jutes, and related groups) who settled in Britain from the 5th century CE and their descendants, as well as the culture and kingdoms of England **between the end of Roman rule (c. 410 CE) and the Norman Conquest (1066), characterized by Old English language**, distinctive legal and social institutions, and a fusion of Germanic, Christian, and Roman traditions.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* at "**computist**" – **1.a. - a1398** – A person skilled in the *computus* or medieval calendar, or in chronological or calendrical reckoning. Now *historical*.

The course of his uneventful life is known from the brief notice which he himself gave in the last chapter of his *Historia Ecclesiastica*: at the age of 7 he was given as an oblate to the newly founded monastery of Wearmouth under the care of Benedict Biscop and subsequently, on the foundation of Jarrow in 682, was transferred to that abbey and to its abbot, Ceolfrith. **Except for brief excursions to Lindisfarne and York, Bede spent**

**the remainder of his life at Jarrow, devoting himself to reading, teaching, and the explication of scripture.** He was ordained deacon at the age of 19 and priested when he was 30; he died at Jarrow aged over 60.

Bede's pedagogical writings include treatises *De Orthographia*, an alphabetically arranged glossary of Latin words which are capable of confusion or misunderstanding by beginners; *De Arte Metrica*, a lucid account of the principles underlying quantitative verse, based on Late Latin grammatical treatises but including many quotations from Christian Latin poets; and *De Natura Rerum*, a cursory exposition of natural phenomena such as the motion of the planets, eclipses, tides, etc., based mainly on Isidore and Pliny. Each of these pedagogical treatises survives in large numbers of manuscripts, indicating that they constituted an essential ingredient of the medieval curriculum.

His computistical writings were equally influential. They include an early work, the *De Temporibus*, written to explain to his students the principles for the calculation of Easter acc. to the Roman usage adopted by the Synod of Whitby (664). This work was so highly compressed, however, that Bede later produced a longer and more discursive account of Paschal reckoning in his *De Temporum Ratione* (written in 725), and this work, which survives in some 250 manuscripts, proved to be the most widely studied computistical manual of the Middle Ages. **Bede's pedagogical instincts were, however, best applied to the explication of scripture.** For his biblical exegesis he used both the Vulgate and the Old Latin texts as well as (for Acts) the Greek text. His commentaries were largely based on the writings of Augustine, Jerome, Ambrose, and Gregory the Great, but they also embodied original comment: **they were motivated above all by concern with clarity of exposition**, and it was this concern which commended them to his contemporaries and successors. His commentaries include works on Gen. 1–20, Exod. 24: 12–30: 21, Sam., Kgs, Tobit, Song of Songs, Ez. and Neh., Mk, Lk., Acts, the Catholic Epistles, and Rev. Bede's interest in hagiography is reflected in the extensive revision which he made of the *Hieronymian Martyrology* (his revision does not survive in its pristine form) as well as in the prose *Vita S. Felicis*, a recasting of various poems by Paulinus of Nola on Felix. But it was his two *Lives of Cuthbert* – one in verse and a later one in prose (c.721) – which secured Bede's reputation as a hagiographer and the establishment of the cult of Cuthbert throughout Europe.

Whereas during the Middle Ages Bede was widely known for all facets of his scholarly work, **he is best known today as a historian**; indeed, he has been called the 'Father of English History'. His early interest in *computus* led him naturally to the study of chronology: to each of his major computistical treatises he appended a set of annals

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acc. according

Rev. revised

recording the history of the world from creation to his own day. The study of chronology culminated in the *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* (completed in 731), one of the great works of medieval historiography and the single most important source for our understanding of early England and the conversion of the English.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* at “**to compute**” – **1.a. – 1579** – *transitive*. To determine by arithmetical or mathematical reckoning; to calculate, reckon, count. In later use chiefly: to ascertain by a relatively complex calculation or procedure, typically using a computer or calculating machine.

To the end of his life Bede was occupied in teaching and expounding scripture, as we learn from an eyewitness account of his last days by a devoted student (the *Epistula Cuthberti de Obitu Bedae*). In a letter written towards the end of his life and addressed to Ecgberht (abp of York, 732–66) he emphasized the importance of episcopal visitation, confirmation, and frequent communion as the remedy for the ills of the time. **Less than a century after his death he was honoured with the title of Venerable, and in the 11th cent. his bones were translated to Durham; a conspicuous tomb in the cathedral still commemorates him. In 1899 Leo XIII declared him a ‘Doctor of the Church’.** Feast day, 25 (formerly 27) May.<sup>5</sup>

#### **Durham Cathedral<sup>6</sup> –**

After Bede was moved from Jarrow, at first, he shared a coffin – and a shrine – with Cuthbert. The bag containing Bede’s bones was rediscovered in 1104, when Cuthbert’s coffin was moved into the newly built Norman Cathedral. The bones were enshrined near to Cuthbert in the Feretory and, a few years later, Bishop Hugh de Puiset placed them in their own gold and silver relic box. Bede remained next to Cuthbert until 1370, when Richard of Barnard Castle, who was Archdeacon of Northumberland and worked for Thomas Hatfield, Bishop of Durham, persuaded the bishop to move Bede’s relics from Cuthbert’s Feretory into his own shrine in the Galilee Chapel. When Richard died, he was buried next to Bede’s tomb, his grave marked by a black stone in the floor which can still be seen today.

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abp archbishop

cent. century

<sup>5</sup> Foot, Sarah. “[Bede, St.](#)” *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, edited by Andrew Louth, Fourth Edition, vol. 1, Oxford University Press, 2022, pp. 205–06.

<sup>6</sup> See: <https://www.durhamcathedral.co.uk/explore/treasures-collections/bedes-tomb>.