

CELTIC SAINTS & CELTIC SPIRITUALITY



A Program of
The Pilgrimage

3 SESSIONS

- 10/18 Introduction - the Celtic Tradition: history and geography.
- 10/25 Celtic Saints: a survey of the lives Celtic Saints
- 11/8 Edinburgh, Holy island, and Iona

WHAT BRINGS YOU HERE?

- Share with one another the following:
 - What question or interest brings you to this class?
 - Have you done any reading in preparation? If so — which book?
- Welcome to ALL! We are glad you are present.
 - Some of you are taking this in preparation for the **Pilgrimage to England & Scotland** in September - October 2026.
 - If you are not yet a “pilgrim” feel free to talk to Paul or others about completing The Way Of The Pilgrim.

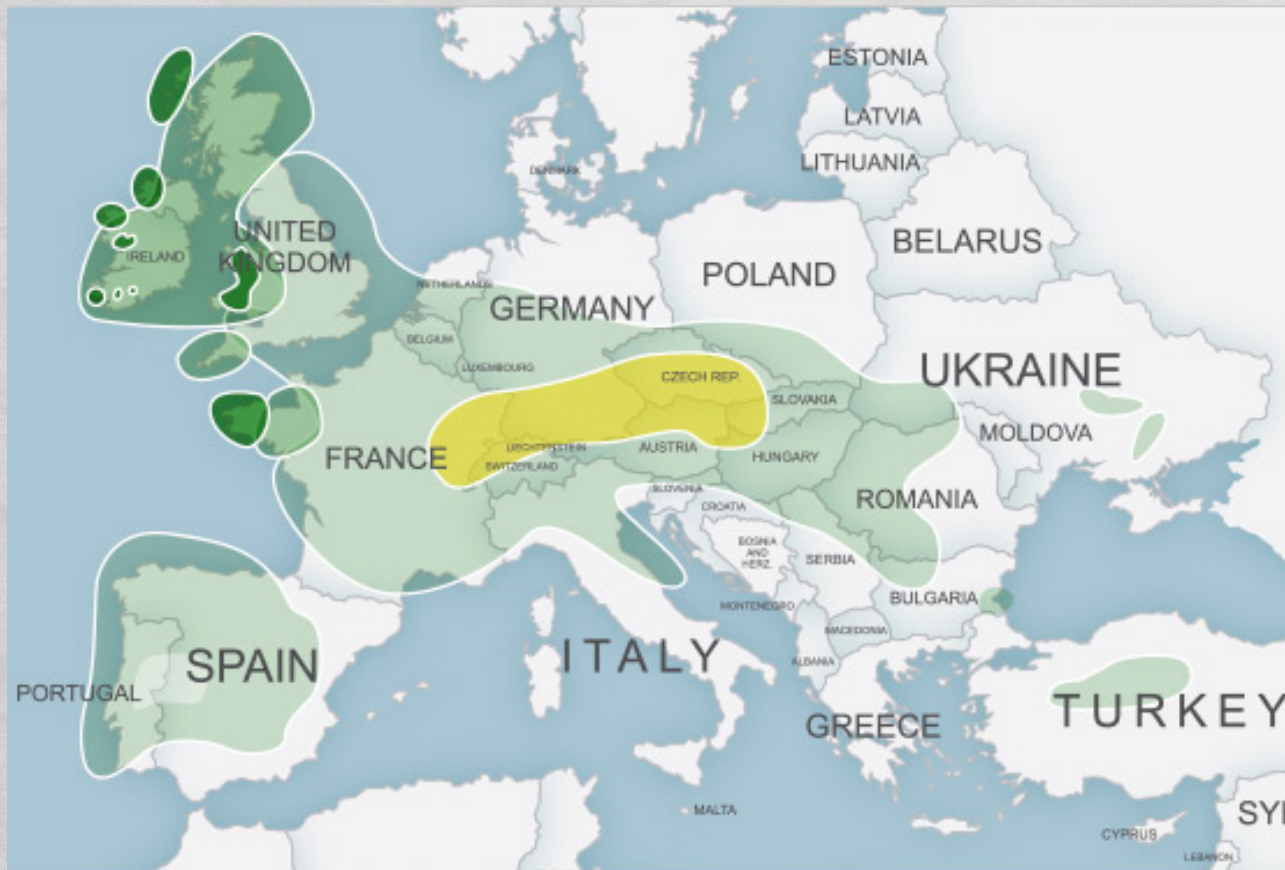
Introduction to the Celtic Tradition

- A quick look at the history of the Celts.
- Considering the Roman Empire of the 4th and 5th centuries CE.
- A quick review of the History of Christianity in the 3rd to 5th centuries CE.
- Christianity West & East (Rome versus Jerusalem / Constantinople).
 - Augustine of Hippo b. 354 in North Africa.
 - Pelagius b. 354 in Wales/Scotland but migrates as young adult to Rome and then on to Jerusalem.

A QUICK HISTORY OF THE CELTS/BRITISH ISLES

- 600-300 BCE — The Celts arrive in Britain. Celts originally from central Europe. 500 BCE Ireland.
- 43-84 CE — Arrival of first Roman invasions.
- 90-145 CE — Age of Expansion of the Roman empire.
- 122 CE — Construction of Hadrian's wall begun.
- 160 CE — Peak of Roman Empire's ascendancy.
- 354 CE — St. Augustine of Hippo & Pelagius born.
- 387 CE — Battle of Allia. First invasion of the Gauls (Celts). Defeat of Roman army by river Allia opens the way to eventual sack of Rome.
- 409 CE — Rome losing control of Britain. Britons told to defend themselves.

How CELTS Got to Britain 2500 BCE TO 275 CE



Celtic and Germanic tribes

Although “Celtic” is often associated with the people of Ireland and Scotland, the Celts emerged as a unique culture in central Europe more than 2,500 years ago. From an epicenter in what is now Austria, they spread and settled in the areas of today’s western Germany and eastern France, generally near the Rhine and Danube Rivers. By 450 B.C., their influence and Celtic languages had spread across most of western Europe, including the areas that are now France, the Iberian Peninsula and the British Isles. The Celts either conquered or assimilated the previous inhabitants of the area, and almost all languages and cultural and religious customs were replaced.

In the early 4th century B.C., Celtic tribes in northern Italy invaded and sacked Rome, setting the stage for centuries of conflict.

Map and blurb are borrowed from [ANCESTRY.COM](https://www.ancestry.com) (PHL’s DNA info page)

How Christianity Got to Britain

The Roman Empire



The Roman Empire at AD 54
at the death of Claudius

How Christianity Got to Britain



British Christianity is Abandoned

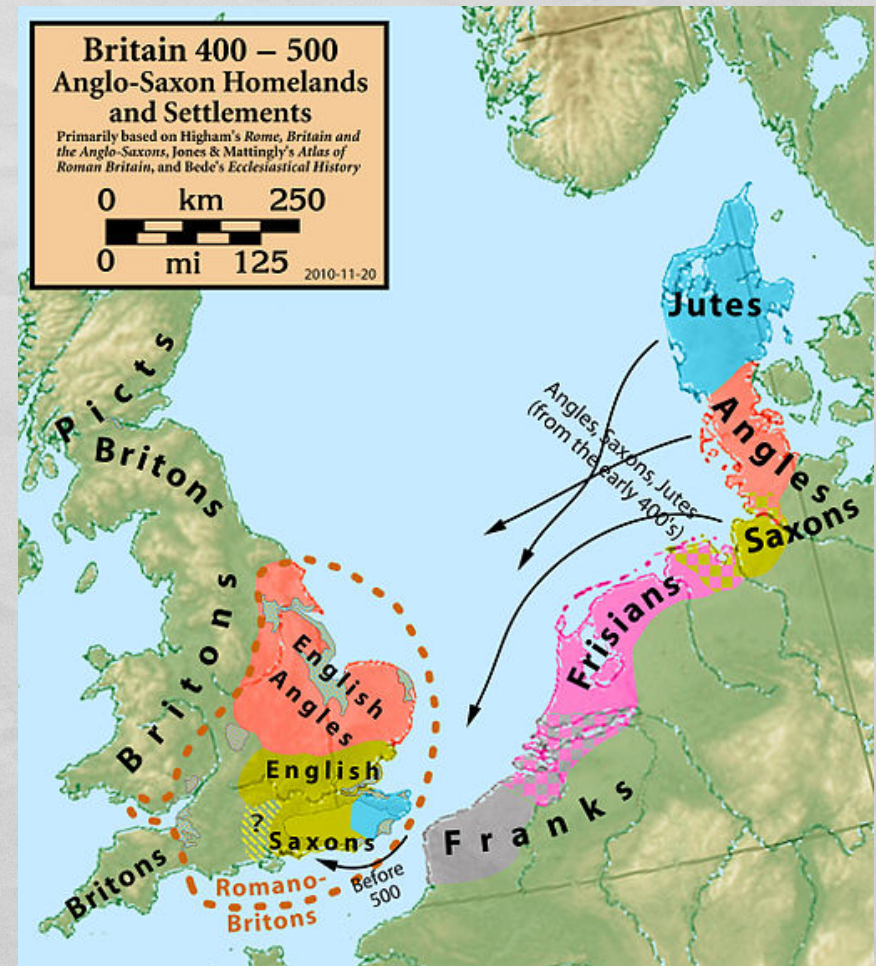


By 500 CE/AD The Roman Empire has collapsed and all that remains of that empire (and the faith it promoted) shifts to Constantinople.



Meanwhile, in British Isles those Christians who were left behind are being pushed West and North to Scotland, Ireland, and Briton by the invasion of the pagan Jutes (Sweden), Angles (Denmark), and Saxons (Germany).

What Christianity remains is left isolated from the continental (and Augustine-dominated theology) of the Western Church. It has an independent growth process which brings it into conflict with the dominant theology of the West. This is foreshadowed by the Pelagian Controversy.



CHRISTIANITY FROM THE THIRD TO FIFTH CENTURIES CE

- 250 CE — There are several thousand Christians in Rome. Enough to attract attention/persecution.
- 250's to 260 CE — Persecutions which grow from Christians refusing to offer sacrifice to the emperor (starts with Decius).
- 303-311 CE — Another wave of persecutions.
- 312-313 CE — Constantine and the Battle of the Milvian Bridge 312. 313 Edict of Milan establishes Christianity as a religion favored in the empire (gives many privileges + *wealth*).

CHRISTIANITY FROM THE THIRD TO FIFTH CENTURIES CE

- 313 CE — Even in remote Britain there are enough Christians for them to send three bishops to a council of the church in Europe (From London, York, and Lincoln).
- 325 — The Council of Nicaea.
- 380 — Christianity becomes the official state-religion under Theodosius.
- 313- early 5th Century CE — the Christian Church struggles to come to grips with its new power and wealth — particularly in the West.

CHRISTIANITY FROM THE THIRD TO FIFTH CENTURIES CE

- In many ways the church proves that it is not ready for power and wealth.
 - Persecution of others.
 - Endless internal arguments about theology.
 - Political intrigue and all the other entanglements of being the church of the state.
- The desert mothers and fathers who flee into the deserts of North Africa.
- A state-religion needs to produce “certitudes” which correlate with the empire’s ability to engage with force. The state wants good civilians (compliant) and church wants good communicants (those who are willing to cede authority to the church in matters of God).
- Ascetical movements like the desert mothers & fathers and like Pelagius are very threatening to both the political *and church* powers in Rome.

AUGUSTINE OF

Born 354 CE - Died 430 CE

- † Born just as the serious decline of Roman Empire begins.
- † Stunned by defeat of Roman Army by pagans at Allia 387.
- † Receives refugees from the sacking of Rome in 410.
- † Augustine struggles to make sense and ends up with a dark, sin & shame-based theology which has dominated Western theology ever since.
- † We are sinful from birth (original sin). He bases this almost solely on his peculiar reading of Romans 5:12.
- † We are Totally Depraved (apart from God we can do nothing good.)
- † We are not free to choose what is good because we are predestined either to salvation or to damnation.
- † Someone must pay for our sin — Jesus pays.

This *is* biblical. But it *is not* the *only* biblical option!

ROMANS 5:12

Rom. 5:12 Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man [Adam], and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned —

PELAGIUS OF

Born 354 CE - Died 430 CE

† He sees empire collapse too — but at a distance. Be begins in Britain ends in Palestine (possibly returns to Britain).

† He reads his bible and sees something very different from Augustine.

† Following teachings which are still prevalent today in some parts of Christendom (The Eastern Orthodox, and [oddly] within *some* branches of American Protestantism.)

† Pelagius taught that we *can* freely choose the good.

† He denied Augustine's "original sin" in favor of a system in which we are all invited by God to "choose life."

† Pelagius gets caught up in the theological debates of Rome and in the end is named a heretic. He correctly argues that he is named heretical for issues not in the creeds.

† "Recent analysis of his thinking suggests that it was, in fact, highly orthodox, following in the tradition established by the early fathers and in keeping with the teaching of the church in both the East and the West. ... From what we are able to piece together from the few sources available... it seems that the Celtic monk held to an orthodox view of the prevenience of God's grace, and did not assert that individuals could achieve salvation purely by their own efforts..." *The Celtic Way* by Bradley Ian p.62

DEUTERONOMY 30:19

Deut. 30:19 I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live.

PELAGIUS IN HIS OWN WORDS . . .

“Look at the animals roaming the forest: God's Spirit dwells within them. Look at the birds flying across the sky: God's Spirit dwells within them. Look at the tiny insects crawling in the grass: God's Spirit dwells within them. Look at the fish in the river and the sea god's Spirit dwells within them. There is no creature on earth in whom God is absent... When God pronounced that his creation was good, it was not only that his hand had fashioned every creature; it was that his breath had brought every creature to life. Look too at the great trees of the forest; look at the wildflowers and the grass in the fields; look even at your crops. God is present within all plants as well. The presence of God's Spirit in all living things is what makes them beautiful and if we look with God's eyes, nothing on earth is ugly.”

PELAGIUS AND YOUR *ANAM CHARA*...

Pelagius instructed that having an *anam chara* (a ‘soul-friend’) was more important than having institutional instruction within the church. Here you see the high value placed on relational aspects of faith and theology.

If Roman theology was advanced by arguments and learned-discourse, then Celtic theology was advanced by an authentic, personal-transformation, guided by someone who was wise and faithful. This looks a lot like the hesychastic tradition of the 4th-6th centuries in the deserts of Africa.

PELAGIUS IN HIS OWN WORDS . . .

“You will realize that doctrines are inventions of the human mind, as it tries to penetrate the mystery of God. You will realize that Scripture itself is the work of human minds, recording the example and teaching of Jesus. Thus it is not what you believe that it matters; it is how you respond with your heart and your actions. It is not believing in Christ that matters; is becoming like him.”

TRADITIONAL CELTIC PRAYER

I weave a silence onto my lips;
I weave a silence into my mind;
I weave a silence within my heart;
I close my ears to distractions;
I close my eyes to attractions;

I close my heart to temptations.
Calm me, O Lord, as you stilled
the storm.
Let the tumult within me cease.
Enfold me, Lord, in your peace.