

## Lesson 5: Anglo-Saxon England

Source: Daniel Hannan, *Inventing Freedom: How the English Peoples Made the Modern World* (2013).

### Introduction

The Anglo-Saxons—an interesting world, a fascinating people, a *wyrd* language!

*Who are these people? What leads into them? What comes from them to us?*

**Claim:** Surprisingly Nordic—just think of *Beowulf*—yet with Latin influences from the beginning:

One island – Britannia

One church – Roman Catholic

One enemy – the Vikings – pillaged, invaded, dominated – with *two* influences on the English language!

*In Pluralism, we will learn of the four causes of a nation—language, location, politics, and religion.*

### Britannia – the island of Britain

Anglo-Saxon Immigration (5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> centuries)

cf. Deuteronomy – the land is “given” to a people, and once given, the people have God-enforced rights

*What happened to the original inhabitants?*

1. Older Theory: Displacement and Annihilation

Pf. Language – Welsh in the west, no loanwords in English

Welsh monk Gildas, *On the Ruin and Conquest of Britain* – the sea or our throat slit!

2. Common Sense: Displacement and Assimilation

Pf. Gildas has an agenda (cf. Augustine’s threat of judgment on the British church).

Peru – assimilated people with pure Spanish

Genetics – the Y-chromosome (male) has Germanic traits (men married British women?)

**Sum:** The English people were never wholly Germanic, but had a Latin element through British lineage.

### English Church – Roman Catholic

#### *Three Streams of Christianity in Britain*

*British* – no evangelization of the Anglo-Saxons

*Celtic* – very evangelistic in the northern Britain, then on the European continent

Patrick → Columba (Iona) → Scotland monasteries (cf. Ninian – the White House)

*Roman* – Gregory sends Augustine (not of Hippo!) to Britain (*angli sunt, angeli fiant*)

King Ethelbert of Kent – welcomed Augustine to Canterbury

Augustine’s Oak – the meeting with British bishops and monks from Bangor

Augustine healed the blind man, but is he humble? Rejected, he calls them, “Heretics!”

**Showdown: *Synod of Whitby*** (AD 663-64) – the date of Easter and the manner of tonsure (crown)

Oswald, king of Northumbria, had called on Christ in battle – helped from Iona (Aidan at Lindisfarne)

Son Oswin with queen from Kent – he might be celebrating Easter, when she was still in Lent—crisis!

Irish bishop *Colman* vs. Roman bishop *Wilfrid*

“Jewish” (Passover) reckoning learned from John vs. “Christian” reckoning learned from Peter

Authority: Who are you against the whole world? Who is Columba compared to Peter?

*This is the same arrogance Luther will encounter, but there is not yet resolve to fight it.*

King Oswin: “Since he is the doorkeeper, I will not contradict him” (Bede 159).

**Sum:** Ironically, the Celtic church then was independent of Rome, but the English church submitted to Rome.

### Viking Influence – separated Nordic peoples who were still pagan

First Invasion: Monastery at Lindisfarne sacked (AD 793) → Northumbria falls, half Mercia gone

Mercia joins East Anglia under King Alfred the Great of Wessex—England’s only “the Great”

Result: United people, birth of the nation-state (AD 876) with king and parliament (the Witan)

Danish Invasions: King Aethelred the Unready and “Dane-geld” (tribute), then the Danish king Cnut!

Norman Invasion: Vikings (“Norsemen”) who settled in northern France and speak French.

**Sum:** Ironically, the conquering Vikings from the south bring with them Latin-based words!

### Legacy – *What do we get from these original English people?*

*Language* – the uninflected “pidgin” English

*Law* – the freedoms of common law, representative government, and the coronation oath (Daniel Hannan)

*Latin Christianity* – but why would these freedom-loving people submit to Rome?