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Review of Lambert's "Christians and Pagans: The Conversion of Britain from Alban to Bede"

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Malcolm Lambert, *Christians and Pagans: The Conversion of Britain from Alban to Bede*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2010. Pp. xx + 329. \$50.00.

Reviewed by Caitlin Corning, George Fox University

In the introduction, Lambert writes that one of his main goals is to provide a summary of recent research on “how Christianity came to the island of Britain, how it spread and developed until the death of Bede in 735” (xv). In addition, due to the amount of new archaeological and place-name data published in the last few decades, he believes it is now possible to present a continuous narrative of Christianity from Roman Britain through early Anglo-Saxon England, one that can reveal something of religious experience of not just the powerful, but the “common people” as well (xviii-xix).

Lambert’s work is divided into eight chapters. The first three examine the Romano-British church, the connections between the British and Continental churches in the early Anglo-Saxon period and the influence of the Anglo-Saxon invasions upon the British church. In each of these areas, Lambert is careful to examine the surviving written sources, archaeological remains, and place-evidence to document the spread and/or survival of Christianity. He clearly outlines both the reasons for the decline of Christianity in Post-Roman Britain and the continued existence of the British Church in the sixth century. Chapter four shifts focus to the Irish church, especially the early missions of Palladius, Patrick, and Columba. Lambert clearly presents the differences in the role that kings played in the expansion of Christianity in Ireland compared to that in the Anglo-Saxon and British kingdoms. He also provides a good overview of the founding of Iona and its relationship with Dál Riata. Chapters five through seven are concerned with the Augustinian Mission, Northumbria through the reign of Oswiu, and the roles of Wilfrid and Theodore, respectively. He examines the challenges of converting the Anglo-Saxons and the controversies over the alternative Irish and British practices. The final chapter examines the situation of the Church in Britain in the early-eighth century.

Overall, Lambert has written a good summary of Christianity in Britain from its earliest days to the eighth century. There are, however, some problems with the text given its intended audience. First, in the later chapters, as an increasing number of people are mentioned, few helps are provided to the reader unfamiliar with the period. He does include one family tree for the Northumbrian royal house; however, this chart contains no dates, and it is not immediately clear how some members of the family are related. In the narrative itself, additional dates and titles would have been helpful especially when a person is reintroduced into the narrative sequence. For instance, Lambert mentions Eorpwald, king of East Anglia on pages 192 and 196 and then reintroduces him to the narrative twenty pages later without a footnote back to the earlier passages or a note on earlier events. The narrative sequence in these later chapters also moves back and forth with few dates to assist the reader in following chronological developments.

A second possibly confusing aspect to the reader unfamiliar to the topic would be the discussion of the Easter Controversy. Lambert refers alternatively to the "Irish Easter" and "Columban Easter" (224) without clarifying that this is the same thing. He also refers to "Columban's monasteries" and "Iona and its associated monasteries in northern Ireland" (225) as different entities but does not explain what he means by this. The narrative of the developing Easter controversy skips from a discussion of the adoption of the Victorian Easter table by the Frankish Church to the post-Augustinian mission, Columbanus, the fate of his monasteries after his death, to the Synod of Whitby with no dates except that of 541.

His discussion of the organization of the Irish Church implies a level of monastic organization that has been questioned by recent historians. [See Thomas Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, (2000) and Colmán Etchingham *Church Organisation in Ireland AD 650 to 1000* (1999).] Also, given Lambert's stated goal to focus in part on the ordinary Christian in the conversion period, it seems odd that he did not reference Fletcher's work on conversion issues, especially in terms of language and concepts. [See R.A. Fletcher, *The Barbarian Conversion* (1999)].

The text includes thirty plates, but no references in the text or footnotes to connect these. In addition there is no bibliography. This forces the reader to the often-frustrating job of searching through a chapter's worth of footnotes to locate a full reference. There were also a number of places where footnotes to additional source material would have assisted those wanting to read more in depth on the topics being discussed. Finally, there is also an overuse of colons and semi-colons, which distracted this reviewer and creates many awkward passages.

In summary, while there are some problems with this work, Lambert, on the whole, fulfills his goal of providing an up-to-date narrative of the conversion process in Britain from Roman times to the Age of Bede. This book should be accessible to upper-division undergraduates and master's students, especially those with some background in Anglo-Saxon England.