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A contribution to the identity of the medieval missionary

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**Agustín de Canterbury convirtiendo a los anglosajones:
Una contribución a la identidad de los misioneros medievales**

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Abstract: Augustine of Canterbury, who came from Rome to Kingdom of Kent in 597, is considered a founder of the English Church. This paper tries to describe his identity as a missionary preaching the Word to pagan Anglo-Saxons. The identity is discovered by analyzing descriptions of Augustine's activity presented in the works of Gregory the Great and the Venerable Bede.

Key words: Æthelberht of Kent, Anglo-Saxons, apostle, Augustine of Canterbury; baptism, Bede the Venerable; Christianization, conversion, evangelization, Kingdom of Kent, miracles, mission, missionary, Pope Gregory the Great.

Resumen: Agustín de Canterbury, que vino de Roma al Reino de Kent en 597, es considerado uno de los fundadores de la Iglesia inglesa. Este artículo trata de describir su identidad como misionero que predicó al Verbo de Dios a los paganos anglosajones. Su identidad es descubierta analizando las descripciones de la actividad de Agustín que se presentan en las obras de Gregorio Magno y Beda el Venerable

Palabras clave: Æthelberht de Kent; anglosajones; apóstol; Agustín de Canterbury; bautismo; Beda el Venerable; cristianización; conversión; evangelización; Reino de Kent; milagros; misión; misionero; Papa Gregorio Magno.

Summary: 1. Introduction. 2. Augustine's missionary expedition. 3. Æthelberht's kingdom. 4. Canterbury as "New Jerusalem". 5. *Vita apostolica* and miracles. 6. Anglo-Saxon Empire and its "New Constantine". 7. Conclusion. Sources and Bibliography.

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1. Introduction

Augustine of Canterbury can be characterized by a variety of terms: a Christian, a man of the Church, a monk and the prior of the Abbey of St Andrew's in Rome, a missionary working among the Anglo-Saxons, a bishop and the first Archbishop of Canterbury, and, last but not least, a saint.¹ This article tries to

¹ On Augustine, first of all see: *Saint Augustine and the Conversion of England*, ed. Richard GAMESON, Stroud, 1999.

capture some aspect of the identity of its hero –as the early medieval missionary leading evangelization among pagan Anglo-Saxons– by looking at his actions from the perspective of the earliest sources. Therefore, his identity will be discovered through descriptions of his missionary activity manifested during his life. The analysis will primarily cover the chronicle entitled as an *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*,² completed by the Venerable Bede³ in 731, and the letters of Pope Gregory the Great (590-604)⁴ sent either to Augustine himself, or discussing his work, what has been also used by Bede in his narrative.⁵ Author of the *Ecclesiastical History* says that he derives both oral and written information primarily from Albinus, abbot of the monastery of Sts. Peter and Paul at Canterbury (founded by Augustine), who passed him copies of papal letters through Nothhelm, later Archbishop of Canterbury. During his stay in Rome, Nothhelm made a kind of research in the papal archives and copied the papal letters Bede was interested in, that were later cited by him.⁶ It is worth noting that Bede particularly emphasizes the role of his friends from Canterbury

² *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. Bertram COLGRAVE, R. A. B. MYNORS, Oxford, 1969 (later: *H.E.*). On Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, see: John Michael WALLACE-HADRILL, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People: A Historical Commentary*, Oxford, 2002 [1st ed. 1988]; Nicholas J. HIGHAM, *(Re-)Reading Bede. The Ecclesiastical History in context*, London and New York, 2006.

³ On Bede, see: *Bede: his Life, Times, and Writings. Essays in Commemoration of the Twelfth Centenary of his Death*, ed. A. Hamilton THOMPSON, Oxford, 1969 [1st ed. 1935]; *Famulus Christi: Essays in Commemoration of the Thirteenth Centenary of the Birth of the Venerable Bede*, ed. Gerald BONNER, London, 1976; George Hardin BROWN, *Bede the Venerable*, Boston, 1987; Benedicta WARD, *The Venerable Bede*, London, 2002 [1st ed. 1990]; *Innovation and Tradition in the Writings of The Venerable Bede*, ed. Scott DEGREGORIO, Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2006; George Hardin BROWN, *A Companion to Bede*, Anglo-Saxon Studies, 12, Woodbridge, 2009; *The Cambridge Companion to Bede*, ed. Scott DEGREGORIO, Cambridge, 2010; Paul HILLIARD, "The Venerable Bede as Scholar, Gentile, and Preacher", in *Ego Trouble: Authors and Their Identities in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Richard CORRADINI et al., Wien, 2010, p. 101–109.

⁴ *Gregorii I papae Registrum epistolarum*, ed. Paul EWALD, Ludo Moritz HARTMANN, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Epistolae, vol. 1-2, Berolini 1891-1899 (later: *Greg. Reg.*). On Gregory the Great, see: Gillian Rosemary EVANS, *The Thought of Gregory the Great*, Cambridge, 1986; Carole Ellen STRAW, *Gregory the Great. Perfection in Imperfection*, Berkeley, 1988; Robert Austin MARKUS, *Grzegorz Wielki*, trans. Przemysław NEHRING, Warszawa, 2003 [original ed. Cambridge, 1997]; John MOORHEAD, *Gregory the Great*, London, 2005; Conrad LEYSER, "Pope Gregory the Great: Ego-trouble or identity politics?", in *Ego Trouble: Authors and Their Identities in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Richard CORRADINI et al., Wien, 2010, p. 67–75. On the development of the cult of Pope Gregory the Great, see: Alan T. THACKER, "Memorializing Gregory the Great: the origin and transmission of a papal cult in the seventh and early eighth centuries", *Early Medieval Europe*, 7 (1998), 1, p. 59–84; Paul A. HAYWARD, "Gregory the Great as 'Apostle of the English' in Post-Conquest Canterbury", *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 55 (2004), 1, p. 19–57.

⁵ See Paul MEYVAERT, "The Registrum of Gregory the Great and Bede", *Revue Bénédictine*, 80 (1970), p. 162–166 (also in IDEM, *Benedict, Gregory, Bede and Others*, London, 1977).

⁶ See *H.E.*, *Praefatio*, p. 4.

among his informants –one may only wonder to what extent he is looking at the described period from the angle of tradition stored in this archbishopric.⁷

2. Augustine's missionary expedition

Missionary expedition led by Augustine, sent by Pope Gregory the Great, came to the kingdom of Kent in 597.⁸ In Bede's opinion the entire initiative of the conversion of Anglo-Saxons should be assigned only to the bishop of Rome.⁹

⁷ Cf. John Michael WALLACE-HADRILL, "Gregory of Tours and Bede: their Views on the Personal Qualities of Kings", *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, 2 (1968), p. 38. It is worth mentioning, that Bede did not know the exact year of the death of Augustine. He provided only the day – 26th May (*H.E.*, II, 3), stating that Augustine died during the reign of King Æthelberht of Kent.

⁸ On the mission of Augustine and the conversion of Æthelberht of Kent, see: Frank Merry STENTON, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 2nd ed., London, 1955, p. 103–113; Robert Austin MARKUS, "The Chronology of the Gregorian Mission to England: Bede's Narrative and Gregory's Correspondence", *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 14 (1963), 1, p. 16–30; William A. CHANEY, *The Cult of Kingship in Anglo-Saxon England. The Transition from Paganism to Christianity*, Berkeley, 1970, p. 156–161; Henry MAYR-HARTING, *The Coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England*, 3rd ed., University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991, p. 51–66; Clare E. STANCLIFFE, "Kings and Conversion: some comparisons between the Roman mission to England and Patrick's to Ireland", *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, 14 (1980), p. 59–94; Peter HUNTER BLAIR, *The World of Bede*, 2nd ed., ed. Michael LAPIDGE, Cambridge, 1990 [1st ed. 1970], p. 41–88; Georg JENAL, "Gregor der Große und die Anfänge der Angelsachsenmission (596-604)", in *Angli e Sassoni al di qua e al di là del mare, Spoleto 26 apr. – 1 mag. 1984*, Settimane di studio del Centro italiano de studi sull'alto Medioevo, 32, Spoleto, 1986, p. 793–857; K. P. WITNEY, *The Kingdom of Kent*, London, 1982, p. 109–122; Ian N. WOOD, "The Mission of Augustine of Canterbury to the English", *Speculum*, 69 (1994), 1, p. 1–17; Nicholas J. HIGHAM, *The Convert Kings. Power and religious affiliation in Early Anglo-Saxon England*, Glasgow, 1997, p. 53–132; Richard A. FLETCHER, *The barbarian conversion: from paganism to Christianity*, Berkeley, 1999, p. 108–119; David Peter KIRBY, *The earliest English kings*, London, 2000, p. 24–30; Bruno DUMÉZIL, *Chrześcijańskie korzenie Europy. Konwersja i wolność w królestwach barbarzyńskich od V do VIII wieku*, trans. Piotr RAK, Kęty, 2008 [original ed. Paris, 2005], p. 644–654; Jerzy STRZELCZYK, *Iroszkoci w kulturze średniowiecznej Europy*, Warszawa, 1987, p. 56–65; IDEM, *Apostołowie Europy*, Warszawa 1997, p. 77–93; Lutz E. von PADBERG, "Konfrontation oder Akkommodation: Zu den Missionsinstruktionen Papst Gregor des Großen und ihre Wirkungsgeschichte im frühen Mittelalter", in *Martyria. Festschrift zum. 60. Geburtstag von Peter Beyerhaus am 1.2.1989*, ed. Jörg KNIFFKA, Wuppertal-Zürich, 1989, p. 93–115. Cf. IDEM, *Mission und Christianisierung. Formen und Folgen bei Angelsachsen und Franken im 7. und 8. Jahrhundert*, Stuttgart, 1995; IDEM, *Die Inszenierung religiöser Konfrontationen. Theorie und Praxis der Missionspredigt im frühen Mittelalter*, Stuttgart, 2003.

⁹ See *H.E.*, II, 1, p. 123. Bede is telling an anecdote in this paragraph to strengthen this view (p. 132–134). Namely, Gregory met at the market in Rome slaves offered for sale – handsome Anglo-Saxon boys. Talking with them determined him to undertake the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons, whose name (*Angli*) was associate by him with the angels. The anecdote of Northumbrian origin was recorded for the first time in the life of Gregory the Great from Whitby, written at the turn of VII and VIII century, cf. *The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great by an Anonymous Monk of Whitby*, ed. Bertram COLGRAVE, Lawrence, 1968, c. 9, p. 90. According to it, Gregory, before becoming the pope, wanted to go to Britain to lead the

Gregory had already tried to send Augustine's mission to the Angles, however, the missionaries then did not arrive in Britain, and Augustine returned to Rome.¹⁰ The chronicler explains this with missionaries' fears of the wild and pagan people with unknown language.¹¹ For another missionary expedition, the Pope provided Augustine with letters to the Frankish bishops and a letter to the missionaries themselves, in which he persuaded them to put their trust in God and willingly took on the task of proclaiming the Word of God.¹² In addition, he made Augustine the abbot of the monks-missionaries (thus strengthening his authority), reminding them that whatever they will make under his command, it will benefit their souls. The bishop of Rome, even though he could not personally take part in the conversion of the Angles, hoped that he would have participated in the eternal reward waiting for missionaries, who successfully fill their task of evangelization.¹³

Augustine's second expedition reached its goal –the kingdom of Kent and got to the island of Thanet, where there was a meeting of forty missionaries (as mentioned by Bede) with King Æthelberht (d. 616).¹⁴ The monks had also hired interpreters from the Franks. As noted by the author of the *Ecclesiastical History*, the King of Kent was already familiar with the Christian religion, because his wife was a Merovingian princess Bertha, daughter of King Charibert I († 567).¹⁵ Bertha had the freedom to practice her faith, therefore she brought Frankish bishop Liudhard with her to Kent.¹⁶ Bede thinks these facts are of secondary

evangelization of the Anglo-Saxons, but the bishop of Rome did not allow him to do that (*ibid.*, c. 10, p. 90-91). On Gregory's attitude towards slaves, see Adam SERFASS, "Slavery and Pope Gregory the Great", *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 14 (2006), 1, p. 77–103.

¹⁰ *H.E.*, I, 23, p. 68.

¹¹ *Ibidem*.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 70.

¹³ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, I, 25, p. 72.

¹⁵ On the role of wife-Christian in bringing about the conversion of the pagan king (husband) and the topos of *mulier suadens* or *mulier fidelis*, see: Cordula NOLTE, *Conversio und Christianitas. Frauen in der Christianisierung vom 5. bis 8. Jahrhundert*, Monographien zur Geschichte des Mittelalters, 41, Stuttgart, 1995; Jacek BANASZKIEWICZ, "Dąbrówka „christianissima" i Mieszko poganin (Thietmar, IV, 55-56, Gall, I, 5-6)", in *Nihil superfluum esse. Studia z dziejów średniowiecza ofiarowane profesor Jadwidze Krzyżaniakowej*, ed. Józef DOBOSZ, Poznań, 2000, p. 85–93; Janet Laughland NELSON, "Queens as converters of kings in the earlier Middle Ages", in *Agire da donna. Modelli e pratiche di rappresentazione (secoli VI–X). Atti del convegno (Padova, 18–19 febbraio 2005)*, ed. Cristina LA ROCCA, Collection Haut Moyen Âge, 3, Turnhout, 2007, p. 95–107. Cf. Lutz. E. von PADBERG, "Odin oder Christus? Loyalitäts- und Orientierungskonflikte in der frühmittelalterlichen Christianisierungsepoche", *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte*, 77 (1995), 2, p. 258–260.

¹⁶ On relations between Franks and Anglo-Saxons in VI–VII centuries, see: Ian N. WOOD, *The Merovingian North Sea*, Alingsås, 1983; IDEM, *The Merovingian Kingdoms, 450–751*, London and New York, 1994, p. 176–180. On relations between Franks and Gregorian mission in Kent, especially see IDEM, "Augustine and Gaul", in *Saint Augustine and the Conversion*, p. 68–82.

importance, although not conclusive in the mission of Augustine and conversion of Æthelberht, because king was not convinced by either Bertha or by Liudhard to be baptized. What's more, the Anglo-Saxon chronicler does not even cite information about their attempts to convince the ruler to be converted –this had to be done only by Augustine together with Gregory the Great.¹⁷

3. Æthelberht's kingdom

Monk of Jarrow says that the kingdom of Æthelberht upon arrival of Augustine spread *as far as the great river Humber, which divides the northern from the southern Angles*,¹⁸ and the king is described as *potentissimus*.¹⁹ Clearly, Bede believes that evangelizing mission arrived at the right moment –the kingdom is vast and the power so strong that it guarantees a large number of converts in the success of the royal conversion and facilitates the work of missionaries and thus the spread of Christianity. The same concern is revealed in a letter of Gregory the Great, addressed to the King of Kent and also quoted by Bede.²⁰ In the first words of the text Gregory is convinced that the king, even pagan one, is always chosen by God, literally, that God gives the people under his authority. Any king, also Æthelberht before baptism, is always a tool in the hands of God, because he is the person through whom the God graces all his people. Gregory shows that in the earthly world everything is dependent on the Christian God, and even pagans and their kings, who do not profess Christian faith, are subject to Him. In this context the whole reign of Æthelberht is shown as a realization of God's plan of salvation. Æthelberht is already a powerful leader and shall become more and more powerful, so to pave the way for the missionary activities and the Christianization of the largest numbers of people. Conquering other peoples is the way to the evangelization and Christianization.

Subordination of a vast area by the pagan ruler is clearly a manifestation of the plan of Divine Providence, as this facilitates the Christianization of such lands in the future. One can hypothesize that the situation of Kent, which ruler holds hegemony over the entire southern Britain, determined by Bede as the empire,²¹

On Liudhard and discovered in the nineteenth century his famous coin or medallion, see Martin WERNER, "The Liudhard medalet", *Anglo-Saxon England*, 20 (1991), p. 27–41.

¹⁷ Gregory the Great sent also a letter to Bertha, see *Greg. Reg.*, vol. 2, XI, 35, p. 304–305. However, Bede did not include this letter in his narration. Perhaps he did not know it or there was no place for overwhelming role of wife-Christian in the tradition of Æthelberht's conversion held in Canterbury and saved by Bede. Gregory himself praises Bertha for her kindness shown to Augustine. He compares her to Helena, mother of Constantine the Great, and assigns her a major role in the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons and the strengthening of Æthelberht's faith.

¹⁸ *H.E.*, I, 25, p. 72: (...) *ad confinium usque Humberae fluminis maximi, quo meridiani et septentrionales Anglorum populi dirimuntur* (...).

¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

²⁰ *H.E.*, I, 32, p. 110–114; *Greg. Reg.*, vol. 2, XI, 37, p. 308–310.

²¹ *H.E.*, I, 25, p. 72, 74 and II, 5, p. 148.

reminds the situation of the Roman Empire. Conquering of practically the whole civilized world by the pagan Roman Empire, in the belief of early Christian writers, has been regarded as a manifestation of God's grace, since unification of many people under a single authority facilitated preaching the teachings of Jesus.²² The reign of Pax Romana on extensive territories at the time of the birth of Jesus and the work of his first disciples was to prepare for victory of overwhelming peace promised in the *Book of Isaiah* (2:4), identified with Pax Christi, together with the high point of God's plan of salvation of the world, which is the conversion of Constantine the Great.²³ God, who chose the right time in which Christ came into the world and then began to proclaim the Gospel by his disciples, also chose the right time for the arrival of the Roman mission to Kent, where Augustine and his companions began to preach the Word of God.

4. Canterbury as “New Jerusalem”

Æthelberht provided missionaries with all the necessary things and allowed them to remain on the island.²⁴ After some time, he decided to come to it to meet with Augustine and his companions. However, he made a provision that the meeting shall be held in the open air, because, according to Bede, he was afraid to go with them to any house, not to be deceived by their magic arts.²⁵ Missionaries, as marked by the author of the *Ecclesiastical History*, were not endowed with demonic power, but with God's strength (*virtus*) and went to meet the King of Kent, *bearing a silver cross as their flag and the image of the Lord the Saviour painted on a panel*, singing the litanies and asking God for their salvation, as well as for those to whom they came.²⁶ Then they sat down in front

²² See *i.a.*: ORIGENES, *Przeciw Celsusowi [Contra Celsum]*, trans. Stanisław KALINKOWSKI, 2nd ed., Warszawa, 1986, II, 30, p. 109–110; EUSEBIUS PAMPHILI CAESARIENSIS, *Oration in Praise of the Emperor Constantine*, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ser. II, vol. 2, ed. Philip SCHAFF, Henry WACE, Edinburgh, 1955, 16, 3–8, <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/orat-constantine.asp>; PAULUS OROSIUS, *Histoires (Contre les Païens)*, ed. and trans. Marie-Pierre ARNAUD-LINDET, vol. 1-3, Paris, 2003, III, 8; VI, 1; VI, 22; VII, 2–3; LEO I MAGNUS, *Sermones*, PL 54, 82, 2, col. 423 B.

²³ See. Karl LÖWITH, *Historia powszechna i dzieje zbawienia. Teologiczne przesłanki filozofii dziejów*, trans. Józef MARZĘCKI, Kęty, 2002 [original ed. Stuttgart, 1983], p. 162–172; Robert Austin MARKUS, *Chrześcijaństwo w świecie rzymskim*, trans. Ryszard TURZYŃSKI, Warszawa, 1978 [original ed. New York, 1974], p. 66–70, 96–99; Marek WICHROWSKI, *Spór o naturę procesu historycznego (od Hebrajczyków do śmierci Fryderyka Nietzschego)*, Warszawa, 1995, p. 39–45; Czesław Stanisław BARTNIK, *Historia ludzka i Chrystus. Szkice z chrześcijańskiej wizji dziejów*, Katowice, 1987, p. 199–203; IDEM, *Teologia historii według Leona Wielkiego*, Lublin, 2001, p. 83–93; Leon NIEŚCIOR, *Kościół otwarty na ludy. Misyjna myśl Ojców Kościoła. Wybrane zagadnienia*, Studia i Materiały Misjologiczne, 31, Warszawa, 2011, p. 112.

²⁴ *H.E.*, I, 25, p. 74.

²⁵ *Ibidem*.

²⁶ *Ibidem*: *At illi non daemonica sed diuina uirtute praediti ueniebant, crucem pro uexillo ferentes argenteam, et imaginem Domini Saluatoris in tabula depictam, laetantiasque canentes pro sua simul et eorum, propter quos et ad quos uenerant, salute aeterna Domino supplicabant.*

of the king and preached the Gospel to him. Æthelberht did not immediately believe in it, but according to Bede, he described the teaching of missionaries as *beautiful [...] words and promises, [...] but new [...] and uncertain*.²⁷ That is why he concluded that at that moment he could not abandon his earlier belief. Despite this, the King of Kent enabled the newcomers to carry on their work of evangelization, providing them with the necessary means of existence and giving them the place in Canterbury.²⁸

The king, therefore, permitted to proselytize the Anglo-Saxons, while not accepting yet the baptism himself. Bede quotes that the missionaries were singing a litany while coming to Canterbury, where they could use the church of St. Martin, in which Queen Bertha used to pray.²⁹ Chanted litany is a paraphrase of the words of the *Book of Daniel* (9:16) in which God is begged to dismiss his anger against Jerusalem and save the city. Bede, of course, does not mention the name of Jerusalem. It seems, however, that the use of these words as a prayer is to save Canterbury against the lack of divine care and God's wrath, and perhaps show the analogy to biblical times, which are imaged during the mission of Augustine. Canterbury was to become the new Jerusalem, from which the missionaries will be sent to convert the Anglo-Saxons to Christianity, just as the apostles left Jerusalem to convert the people of Roman Empire.

5. *Vita apostolica* and miracles

According to Bede the first meeting of Augustine and his companions with Æthelberht was not successful immediately and it did not lead to the conversion of the king. The missionaries had to convince the king to the new faith with their own behavior. Therefore, first of all *they began to imitate the apostolic life of the early Church*.³⁰ Missionaries followed the life of the first apostles, by dedicating themselves to constant prayer, fasting, vigil and despising earthly things. Bede particularly highlights that in every detail they lived according to what they taught. They were also constantly prepared to incur martyrdom.³¹ According to the monk of Jarrow, it was the simplicity of life of missionaries that caused the admiration among the pagans and led to the adoption of the Christian faith by many of them.

²⁷ *Ibidem*: *Pulchra sunt quidem uerba et promissa, quae adfertis; sed quia noua sunt et incerta* (...).

²⁸ *Ibidem*.

²⁹ *H.E.*, I, 26, p. 76. Bede says that the church came back to the ancient times and it was used by the Romans, who stayed in Britain. Although the author of the *Ecclesiastical History* suggests that the dedication of the church to St. Martin also has an ancient origin, but it seems likely that the church was re-consecrated after the arrival in Kent of Bishop Liudhard (with Bertha). The Frankish bishop or Bertha also could be the initiators of the dedication of the church to St. Martin.

³⁰ *Ibidem*: (...) *coeperunt apostolicam primitiuae ecclesiae uitam imitari* (...).

³¹ *Ibidem*.

The activities of the Roman monks eventually led to the conversion of Æthelberht. Meanwhile, Augustine was ordained Archbishop of the Angles by Gallic bishops.³² The King was convinced to Christianity by promises of missionaries made to him, the truth of which was confirmed by the example of their immaculate life (*vita mundissima*) and numerous miracles. After him many other people began to accept the Christian faith, but Æthelberht did not force anyone to accept it, because the priests had taught him that *the service of Christ should be voluntary, not compulsory*.³³ The king himself was baptized under the influence of miracles performed by Augustine and his companions, and –what should be stressed– according to Bede these are some of the key arguments that convinced the ruler of Kent to convert. The belief that miracles of St. Augustine led to conversion of Æthelberht results from the role attributed to miracles by the author of the *Ecclesiastical History*, closely following in this respect the teachings of Pope Gregory the Great. Gregory, in his homily for the feast of the Epiphany, while commenting on passages from the *Gospel of Matthew* (2:1-12), expressed the belief that some people more than others need miracles, defined as *signa*, to believe in God. He quoted the example of the Magi from the East who followed the birthplace of Jesus, in the wake of the great Jewish star and the shepherds, whom the angel heralding the birth of Christ appeared to. Pagans, like infants, unable to use the mind, could get to know God above all through the signs (*signa*), i.e. miracles. The more mature, able to use their mind, needed less of miracles, because the teaching of the angel –a rational creature– was enough for them.³⁴ In case of missionaries these *signa* were outward signs of hidden reality that manifested the sanctity of the person making them, playing a supporting role in the process of evangelization, when there was the lack of faith in people who were being converted to Christianity. However, Gregory, followed by Bede, felt that the age of miracles is the time mainly related to the earliest period of development of the Church, that is to the apostolic times.³⁵ The situation in which Augustine and his companions got into, initiating the development of the Anglo-Saxon Church, clearly reminded in their minds the early days of Christianity.

Although the era of miracles generally belonged to the past, and Gregory and Bede were convinced about this fact, because they had a sense of the rarity of extraordinary events in communities that have already been Christianized, the

³² *H.E.*, I, 27, p. 78. According to Bede, Augustine was consecrated as archbishop after the conversion of Æthelberht (however, he does not give an exact date of the king's baptism). Augustine was consecrated as bishop before his arrival to Kent, what is mentioned by Gregory the Great in his letters (cf. VIII, 29), but Bede does not consider him as bishop before the conversion of the king. Cf. Nicholas J. HIGHAM, *The Convert Kings*, s. 74–80.

³³ *H.E.*, I, 26, p. 78: (...) *seruitium Christi voluntarium, non coacticum esse debere*.

³⁴ GREGORIUS MAGNUS, *Homiliae in Evangelia*, ed. Raymond ÉTAIX, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina, 141, Turnhout, 1999, hom. X, c. 1, p. 66.

³⁵ GREGORIUS MAGNUS, *Homiliae in Evangelia*, hom. XXIX, c. 4, p. 247–248. Cf. Robert Austin MARKUS, *Grzegorz Wielki*, p. 81; William D. MCCREADY, *Signs of sanctity. Miracles in the Thought of Gregory the Great*, Toronto, 1989, p. 18–20, 33–36.

particular circumstances in which Augustine was living, meant that the situation of that times required miracles.³⁶ Performing miracles made Roman missionaries look as the first apostles, putting them almost on a par with them –at the beginning of the Anglo-Saxon Church. Gregory himself, in a letter to the Patriarch of Alexandria, Eulogius (580-608), not cited by the author of the *Ecclesiastical History*, gave expression to this conviction, speaking of Augustine conducting missionary activity among the Anglo-Saxons: *because with such great miracles shine in that nation he himself or those who are with him, that it seems that in the signs they are doing, they are following the miracles of the apostles.*³⁷

In the opinion of Gregory miracles, known as *signa*, which were made by Augustine and his companions, were one of the key reasons for the large number of Anglo-Saxons converted to Christianity. In the same letter, he informed the Bishop of Alexandria that during Christmas in 598 was baptized *more than ten thousand Angles.*³⁸ Gregory in a letter to Augustine, which was cited by Bede in his chronicle, believes that *the souls of the Angles by external miracles are urged to inward grace,*³⁹ while stressing that the grace of miracles was given to Augustine in order to bring salvation to Anglo-Saxons.⁴⁰ Pope, warning Augustine from falling into pride in relation to his earthly glory and power, which is the power of doing miracles, compares him to the first apostles. The Bishop of Rome states that the first disciples of Christ were also in the same danger as Augustine and his companions, because while converting, they could do many miracles.⁴¹ Just as Jesus warned his disciples against rejoicing because

³⁶ On Gregory's and Bede's views about miracles, see Henry MAYR-HARTING, *The Coming of Christianity*, p. 47–50; IDEM, "Bede's patristic thinking as an historian", in *Historiographie im frühen Mittelalter*, ed. Anton SCHARER, Georg SCHEIBELREITER, Wien, 1994, p. 368; Joel T. ROSENTHAL, "Bede's Use of Miracles in the Ecclesiastical History", *Traditio*, 31 (1975), p. 328–335; James CAMPBELL, "Bede II", in IDEM, *Essays in Anglo-Saxon History*, London, 1986 p. 42–45; Robert Austin MARKUS, *Grzegorz Wielki*, p. 80–86, 220–221; John MOORHEAD, *Gregory the Great*, p. 14–18, 27–43; Nicholas J. HIGHAM, *The Convert Kings*, p. 60–61, 91–92. See also: William D. MCCREADY, *Signs of sanctity*; IDEM, *Miracles and The Venerable Bede*, Rome, 1994. Cf. Benedicta WARD, *Miracles and the Medieval Mind: Theory, Record, and Event, 1000–1215*, London, 1982, especially p. 3–19; Torsten FREMER, "Wunder und Magie. Zur Funktion der Heiligen im frühmittelalterlichen Christianisierungsprozeß", *Hagiographica*, 3 (1996), p. 15–88.

³⁷ *Greg. Reg.*, vol. 2, VIII, 29, p. 30–31: (...) *quia tantis miraculis vel ipse vel hi qui cum eo transmissi sunt in gente eadem coruscant, ut apostolorum virtutes in signis quae exhibent imitari videantur.*

³⁸ *Ibidem*: (...) *plus quam decem milia Angli* (...).

³⁹ *H.E.*, I, 31, p. 108; *Greg. Reg.*, vol. 2, XI, 36, p. 306: *Anglorum animae per exteriora miracula ad interiorem gratiam pertrahuntur.*

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*: *et quicquid de faciendis signis acceperis, uel accepisti, haec non tibi, sed illis deputes donata, pro quorum tibi salute collate sunt.* At these words Bede ends quoting the letter in his work.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*. See commentary: John Michael WALLACE-HADRILL, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, p. 45.

of the possibility of doing their miracles and subjugating evil spirits, so does Gregory the Great warn Augustine against falling into similar self-admiration because of his temporal earthly power. Pope, quoting and commenting on the words of Jesus to seventy-two disciples sent forth to preach the Gospel (Luke 10:17-20), advises the Roman missionaries acting in Britain, so as not to get too complacent in joy at the miracles done by them, but to rejoice due to their names being written in heaven.⁴² The Bishop of Rome, warning the missionaries in the same words as Jesus warned first apostles, at the same time compares them with the apostles, showing that through the work of evangelization among the Anglo-Saxons Roman missionaries are like the first disciples of Christ. In fact, this is the expression of conviction that Augustine and his companions, doing miracles and imitating the life of the early Church, embody the characteristics of the first apostles and continue their activities that helps to find the grace of salvation. At the same time they must be careful and, on the one hand, be humble and not rejoice in personal exaltation, on the other hand, at any time not doubt the power of God. Pope cites an example of Moses, who once doubted, whether in times of drought he will be able to put the water from the rock, which, however, prevented him from entering the Promised Land.⁴³ Ability to do miracles imposed on the missionary even greater responsibility before God.

Gregory, followed by Bede, believed that the time of evangelization is the time in which the miracles not only can, but should occur.⁴⁴ The Bishop of Rome derived this belief from a passage in the *First Letter to the Corinthians* (14:22), in which St. Paul writes: *so that the tongues are for a sign, not to the believing, but to the unbelieving; and the prophesy is not for the unbelieving, but for the believing.*⁴⁵ Gregory quoted this passage several times, when he spoke about the importance of miracles in the process of converting pagans.⁴⁶ After citing the passage in the comment of Gregory to the *Book of Job*⁴⁷, which a monk of Jarrow related to the situation in Britain after the arrival of Augustine, Bede says bluntly: *In these words St. Gregory also declares that St. Augustine and his companions led the Angles to the knowledge of the truth, not only by preaching*

⁴² *Ibidem*: (...) nomina uestra scripta sunt in caelo.

⁴³ *Greg. Reg.*, vol. 2, XI, 36, p. 306.

⁴⁴ Ian N. WOOD, "The Mission of Augustine", p. 13 and next.

⁴⁵ 1 Cor 14:22: *Itaque linguae in signum sunt non fidelibus, sed infidelibus; prophetiae autem non infidelibus, sed fidelibus* (*Biblia Sacra juxta Vulgatam Clementinam*, ed. Michael TWEEDALE, Londini, 2005, <http://vulsearch.sourceforge.net/html/>). English translation taken from *Young's Literal Translation of the Holy Bible*.

⁴⁶ GREGORIUS MAGNUS, *Homiliae in Evangelia*, hom. X, c. 1, p. 66. See Ian N. WOOD, "The Mission of Augustine", p. 13–16.

⁴⁷ Cf. GREGORIUS MAGNUS, *Moralia in Iob. Libri XXIII-XXXV*, ed. Marc ADRIAEN, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina, 143B, Turnhout, 1985, XXVII, c. 11, 27.

*the Word but also by showing heavenly signs.*⁴⁸ In the opinion of Bede teaching by the word was not sufficient to bring about the conversion of the pagans. The truthfulness of teaching of Roman missionaries had to be confirmed by the miracles that ultimately convinced the Anglo-Saxons to accept the Christian faith.

The notion of great importance of miracles done by Augustine is also confirmed by his tombstone epitaph, quoted by Bede, which says: *Here lies the Lord Augustine, first Archbishop of Canterbury, who was formerly sent hither by St. Gregory, bishop of Rome; being supported by God in the working of miracles, he led King Æthelberht and his nation from the worship of idols to faith in Christ.*⁴⁹ As it can be seen, the epitaph has once again highlighted the particularly strong link between the miracles performed by Augustine and the conversion of the ruler of Kent and his subordinate people. On the basis of this brief text, it can be concluded that these were the miracles of the Roman missionary aided by God that led to the conversion of the pagans evangelized by him.

Miracles were therefore necessary to bring about the conversion of the King of Kent and his nation. They were necessary to confirm the truth and orthodoxy of doctrine preached by the missionaries, and illustrate the power and might of the Christian God. At the same time, in the opinion of the people of the Church, doing the miracles made missionaries look as the first apostles. The knowledge of what had to be done in order to become similar to the first heralds of the Good News, was drawn from the descriptions contained in the New Testament, especially the *Gospel of Luke* (9:1-2), which says that Jesus *having called together his twelve disciples, he gave them power and authority over all the demons, and to cure sicknesses, and he sent them to proclaim the reign of God, and to heal the ailing*⁵⁰ and the apostles (9:6) *set out and went from village to village, proclaiming the good news and healing everywhere.*⁵¹ The same relation between evangelization and the miracles is included in the *Gospel of Mark* (16:15-20). A truly apostolic activity of the Roman missionaries in Kent was therefore inextricably associated with the proclamation of the Word of God and doing miracles that confirmed the truth of the Gospel preached and God's Grace and Mercy gave to people converted.

It is unknown what miracles achieved Augustine, along with his companions among the Anglo-Saxons, but it can be assumed that Gregory and Bede, in

⁴⁸ H.E., II, 1, p. 130: *Quibus uerbis beatus Gregorius hoc quoque declarat, quia sanctus Augustinus et socii eius non sola praedicatione uerborum sed etiam caelestium ostensione signiorum gentem Anglorum ad agnitionem ueritatis perducebant.*

⁴⁹ H.E., II, 3, p. 144: *Hic requiescit domnus Augustinus Doruuernensis archiepiscopus primus, qui olim huc a beato Gregorio Romanae urbis pontifice directus, et a Deo operatione miraculorum suffultus, Aedilberctum regem et gentem illius ab idolorum cultu ad Christi fidem perduxit (...).*

⁵⁰ Luke 9:1–2: *Convocatis autem duodecim Apostolis, dedit illis virtutem et potestatem super omnia daemonia, et ut languores curarent. Et misit illos praedicare regnum Dei, et sanare infirmos.* English translation taken from *Young's Literal Translation of the Holy Bible.*

⁵¹ Luke 9:6: *Egressi autem circuibant per castella evangelizantes, et curantes ubique.*

accordance with the evangelical standard, meant primarily the healing. The Bishop of Rome in a letter to the Merovingian Queen Brunhilda, writing about Angles and Augustine, says: *so what and how great miracles our Redeemer has made in the conversion of the above-mentioned people, is already known to Your Majesty*.⁵² Fame of unusual signs made among the Anglo-Saxons by Augustine and his companions, also because of their relationship with time of evangelization of pagans, went beyond the boundaries of Britain. The ability to perform miracles was given by God to the Roman missionaries in order to lead to the conversion of Kent and then the other kingdoms.

6. Anglo-Saxon Empire and its “New Constantine”

Bede, informing about the death of Æthelberht, states that this king had surpassed the glory and praise of all his predecessors, for he was the third ruler who ruled all the kingdoms to the south of the river Humber, but *first of all, who entered the kingdom of heaven*.⁵³ The promise of achieving the earthly power of the king of Kent given by the Roman missionaries during the evangelization of Kent and lined in a letter of Gregory the Great to Æthelberht, has been fulfilled. Æthelberht became the most powerful and the most famous of all the Anglo-Saxon rulers, even those who previously wielded *imperium huiusmodi*⁵⁴ over the kingdoms to the south of the river Humber, and became the first hegemonic leader, who was a Christian.⁵⁵ Next Bede mentions four successive rulers, who gained a similar power as Æthelberht: Raedwald of East Anglia, and then: Edwin, Oswald and Oswiu of Northumbria.

According to Bede at a certain time there was a king who had authority over at least some of the rulers of the other Anglo-Saxon countries. The territorial scope of that authority was not unchanging, not all of the rulers mentioned by the monk of Jarrow took dominion over all the southern kingdoms. Moreover, some achieved the supreme authority over the Britons and Picts. However, in Bede’s conception, there was a continuous period of power of these hegemonic leaders, called by later source (the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*) as *bretwalda*, which means that after the death of a king, the next one took his role.⁵⁶ All successors of

⁵² *Greg. Reg.*, vol. 2, XI, 48, p. 320: *Qualia igitur quantaque in conversione suprascriptae gentis redemptor noster fuerit operatus miracula, excellentiae vestrae iam notum est.*

⁵³ *H.E.*, II, 5, p. 148: *Qui tertius quidem in regibus gentis Anglorum cunctis australibus eorum prouinciis, quae Humberae fluuio et contiguis ei terminis sequestrantur a borealibus, imperavit; sed primus omnium caeli regna conscendit.*

⁵⁴ *Ibidem.*

⁵⁵ Cf. Nicholas J. HIGHAM, *An English Empire: Bede and the early Anglo-Saxon kings*, Manchester, 1995, p. 47–58 and *passim*.

⁵⁶ On *bretwalda*, see: Patrick WORMALD, “Bede, the «Bretwaldas» and the Origins of the «Gens Anglorum»”, in IDEM, *The Times of Bede: Studies in Early English Christian Society and its Historian*, ed. Stephen BAXTER, Oxford, 2006, p. 106–134; John Michael WALLACE-HADRILL, *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History*, p. 57–60; Steven FANNING, “Bede, Imperium, and the Bretwaldas”, *Speculum*, 66 (1991), 1, p. 1–26; Barbara YORKE, *Kings and Kingdoms of early*

Æthelberht were already Christians, although there are strong doubts to the purity of the faith of Raedwald, because at one time, in the same church, he had altars dedicated to the God of the Christian and the pagan idols.⁵⁷

The existence of a supreme ruler was apparently the implementation of the plan of Divine Providence, as it facilitated evangelization and Christianization of the areas that were under the influence of the hegemonic ruler. As it has already been stated, this fact had resemble the situation in Britain to that of the Roman Empire, as the Anglo-Saxons, in Bede's concept, also had their empire, but it was covering the territory of Britain.⁵⁸ According to the medieval concept of the term empire, it consisted of various nations and kingdoms.⁵⁹ Just as Constantine the Great was preceded by the pagan emperors, who, however, united vast areas under their authority, so was Æthelberht preceded by two pagan hegemonic rulers (Ælle of the South Saxons and Ceawlin of the West), whose power, consolidating –in Bede's belief– Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, was to facilitate their later evangelization, because the overlordship has already been taken by the ruler of Kent.

Gregory the Great in a letter addressed to Æthelberht indicated him Constantine the Great as a role model.⁶⁰ The emperor, who with his attitude contributed to the Christianization of the Roman Empire many times in the Middle Ages was held up as a model of an ideal ruler, promoter of the Christian faith.⁶¹ By his conversion Constantine became a symbol of a "new beginning"; he was the one all other pagan rulers, who were baptized and began the Christianization of their subordinate people, were compared to. In this context, Gregory of Tours named Clovis *the New Constantine*, who was baptized by St. Remigius of Reims.⁶² However, in order to be compared to Constantine, it was

Anglo-Saxon England, London and New York, 1990, p. 157–162; Arnold ANGENENDT, *Kaiserherrschaft und Königstaufe. Kaiser, Könige und Päpste als geistliche Patrone in der abendländischen Missionsgeschichte*, Berlin, 1984, p. 176–196. Cf. Nicholas J. HIGHAM, *An English Empire, passim*.

⁵⁷ *H.E.*, II, 15, p. 188–190.

⁵⁸ Cf. Nicholas J. HIGHAM, *An English Empire*, p. 21–40.

⁵⁹ On the concept of empire in the Middle Ages and in Bede's writings, see Steven FANNING, "Bede, Imperium", p. 8–14 and *passim*; Nicholas J. HIGHAM, *An English Empire, passim*. Cf. P. Wormald, "Bede, the «Bretwaldas»", p. 111–117.

⁶⁰ *Greg. Reg.*, vol. 2, XI, 37, p. 309; *H.E.*, I, 32, p. 112.

⁶¹ See Eugen EWIG, "Das Bild Constantins des Grossen in den ersten Jahrhunderten des abendländischen Mittelalters", *Historisches Jahrbuch*, 75 (1956), p. 1–46; *New Constantines. The Rhythm of Imperial Renewal in Byzantium, 4th to 13th centuries*, ed. Paul MAGDALINO, Aldershot, 1994; Zofia BRZOZOWSKA, "Ideal chrześcijańskiego władcy – św. św. Konstantyn i Helena w kulturze duchowej i politycznej Bizancjum (337–843 r.)", *Teka Historyka*, 36–37 (2009), p. 152–164. Cf. Frank KOLB, *Ideal późnoantycznego władcy. Ideologia i autoprezentacja*, trans. Anna GIERLIŃSKA, Poznań, 2008 [original ed. Berlin, 2001], p. 55–90.

⁶² *Gregorii Episcopi Turonensis Decem Libri Historiarum*, ed. Bruno KRUSCH, Wilhelm LEVISON, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptorum rerum Merovingicarum*, vol. 1, part 1, Hannoverae 1951, II, 31, p. 77.

not enough to be baptized as an adult. In order to be named like this, the ruler had to prove that he led pagan people to the baptism. Thus Gregory the Great in his letter to Æthelberht presented the person of the first Christian Roman emperor as a model to follow, saying that if he continues this work, he will surpass the glory of all the ancient kings of his people, which according to Bede happened. It seems that this parallel can visualize a way of looking at the immediate and more distant past, visible both in Gregory, as well as in the monk of Jarrow. We see, therefore, a kind of update of the situation from the time of the Christianization of the Roman Empire during the Christianization of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms in relation to the implementation of providential plans.

7. Conclusion

Identification of current events and people by reference to the analogy of the past was typical for authors of analyzed sources. The situation of Kent, during the reign of Æthelberht, who held hegemony over many Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, resembled that of the Roman Empire from the time of its Christianization. The aim of Augustine was to convert the ruler of Kent, who then had to play the role of Constantine to subordinate peoples and other nations. At the same time Augustine with his missionaries by performing miracles and leading life according to the evangelical model *vita apostolica*, imitated the actions and lives of the first apostles. Therefore, conversion time reminded old times –both biblical (evangelical) and Roman (Constantinian), which it continued but also repeated. This resulted in the identification of missionaries converting pagans with Christ's first disciples propagating the Christian faith. Certainly, the identity of Augustine and other missionaries that we receive is the reflection of what has been produced by the authors of the sources: Gregory the Great and Bede the Venerable. In fact, they create the "I" of the article's main character. One can suppose, however, that the missionaries, sent to Britain by the Bishop of Rome, familiarized with his teaching, in their work were really identifying themselves with the first apostles. Indirectly this is indicated by the tomb epitaph of Augustine –perhaps made up by his own companions.

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