

Key British Theologians – The Venerable Bede.

Saturday 12th November 2016

Introduction to the Venerable Bede c 672-735

Who was the Venerable Bede?



Bede was an English Benedictine monk, initially (from the age of 7) at St. Peter's monastery in Monkwearmouth (now part of Sunderland), and then at Jarrow on the south bank of the Tyne. He is well known as a great Author and Scholar, and has been designated as one of the few "Doctors of the Church" by Rome. He was one of only two monks in his Community to survive the plague of 686, so that much responsibility fell to him from an early age.

In addition to learning Latin, he also learned Greek and some Hebrew, had a wide circle of friends, who travelled to France and Rome and who brought back many books, which Bede rapidly assembled into a major library of 300-500 books. In general Bede was suspicious of books other than the Bible and the Fathers, although he read very widely.

In line with normal Benedictine practice, the day was divided into "ora and labora", that is prayer and work, the latter in Bede's case, generally meaning teaching (both novices, locals and – by post – those from further afield), and writing.

Books and Works. Bede's key works include:

Histories:

- Ecclesiastical History of the English-speaking peoples. A history of England from 55BC, focusing particularly on the churches and personalities, including many kings. This was based both on his own literary researches, and on discussions with many people from all over the country. Although this work is the best known, and is a valuable historical work for students of the period, in Christian terms, his other works are generally held in higher esteem.
- History of the Abbots of Monkwearmouth and Jarrow.

Schoolbooks and Student Texts (widely used throughout Europe):

Title	Contents
• de Schematibus et Tropis	Speech and grammar
• de Natura Rerum	Nature and botany
• de Orthographia	Abbreviations and language. Headings in alphabetical order.
• de Temporibus	Time and astronomy (Celtic day started at sunrise; Roman at sunset)
• de Temporum Ratione	Arithmetic and mathematics
• de Arte Metrica	Poetry and verse
• de Musica Theoretica	Music
• de Locis Sanctis	Holy Land and Jerusalem

Bible Commentaries, Sermons and Letters:

- Bible Commentaries. Detailed commentaries on most books of the Bible, including Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Kings, Samuel, Song of Songs, Gospels of Mark, Luke, Epistles, Revelation and others.
- Letters – many hundred, including many in English as opposed to Latin.

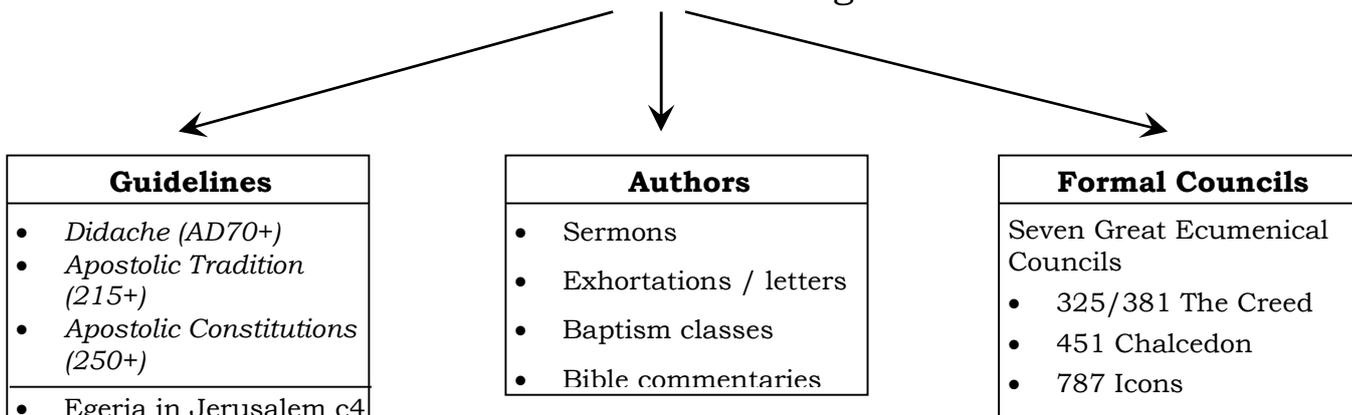
- Sermons – around 50. Frequently on the Gospel of the day, generally more relaxed, less condensed, and hence readable than the Commentaries, directed towards his parish congregation in Jarrow, whom he knew well, as opposed to pastors.
- The Condensed Psalter. A compendium of key verses from the psalms, for the benefit of those who found learning difficult. Note: Most people could not read.

Current Position

Student texts particularly were widely read and studied throughout Europe at the time. His Bible Commentaries, which he prepared with the texts of St. Augustine and St. Gregory in front of him, tend to be precise and compact (unlike Augustine for example, who is more reflective and ruminative), rather like Saxon and northern architecture in general – solid, compact and functional. Usually in these areas he wrote in Anglo Saxon, as the northerners found learning Latin difficult.

Early Church

Overview of Writings



	Literal Latin West	Mystical, Philosophical Greek East	Pictorial Syriac / Coptic
Apostolic Fathers and very early	Ignatius of Antioch (107) Polycarp (130) Clement of Rome(150)	Shepherd of Hermas (130)	
Pre-Constantine <i>Persecution to 315+</i>	Tertullian (220) Cyprian (258)	Origen (254)	Aphrahat (367), Ephraim the Syrian (373) Isaac of Nineveh (460)
			Coptic/Egyptian
Post-Constantine Major theologians <i>Social Christianity</i>	Augustine of Hippo (430)	Basil the Great (379) Gregory Nazianzus (389) Gregory of Nyssa (400) John Chrysostom (407)	Clement of Alexandria (215) Athanasius (373)
Monastics <i>Christian communities</i> Asceticism	John Cassian (430) <i>Rule of the Master</i> (520) Benedict of Norcia (543) <i>Augustine of C'bury</i> (604) <i>Cuthbert of Farne</i> (687) Venerable Bede (735)	John Climacus (of the Ladder) (606)	Desert Fathers (313+) Antony of Egypt (356) Pachomius (346), Macarius (392), Evagrius of Pontus (399)
Later periods	Bernard of Clairvaux (1153) Aelred of Rievaulx (1167)	Symeon the New Theologian (1022)	

Note: Dates given are approximate dates of death or martyrdom.