

**Transcript: [Missions Explored: Boniface, Patrick, and More With Glenn Sunshine](#)
The Missions Podcast #367
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00:00:00:03 - 00:00:27:22

Alex Kocman

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Alex Kocman

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00:01:00:21 - 00:01:26:06

Alex Kocman

Greetings and welcome to The Missions Podcast, the show that explores your hard questions on missions, theology and practice to help goers think and thinkers go. I'm Alex Kocman, director of communications and media with ABWE. Joined once again, as always, by Scott Dunford, pastor of Western Hills Church in San Mateo, California. And you are you and we're so glad that you're here before you leave.

00:01:26:06 - 00:01:52:22

Alex Kocman

If this show is a blessing to you, we ask that you would be so kind as to leave us a positive rating and review in whatever podcast app you use, but especially Apple Podcasts that helps other people be encouraged by this content and discover it. And Scott, almost 40 missionaries in the last reporting cycle, I'm seeing, are people who found out about this organization through the podcast.

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Alex Kocman

So, we're not just talking about people that decided to drop \$5 in the tip jar. We're talking about people who have gone out for the sake of the name, in part because they were encouraged by something that they heard here. And we rejoice so much in that. It's incredible.

00:02:07:15 - 00:02:17:19

Scott Dunford

Well, yeah, I mean, we thought, hey, if we got 40, listeners would be excited. And to think that there's 40 people serving with ABWE because of the podcast kind of blows our mind. So that's really exciting.

00:02:17:22 - 00:02:36:09

Alex Kocman

Well, speaking of people with podcasts that they thought would only start with 40 listeners, I want to introduce our guest in a moment who's also a host of his own show, along with several other arguably more impressive credentials. But before we do that, Scott, it's story time. And a few nights ago we were putting our children to bed.

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Alex Kocman

Our middle daughter was a little bit afraid and having some nightmares. And so we started singing a song to encourage her and to embolden her. And it's kind of a sea shanty and it's about the Lord being on our side. Well, there's this line in the song and she's singing along and it's this wonderful family time. Honestly, singing songs together as a family is such a glorious thing to do.

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Alex Kocman

But there's this line of the song that says, "We'll be sharpening the ax to cut down old Donar's oak, for the Lord is on our side." And that idea of cutting down old Donar's oak, my kids are like, who's Donar? Where are we chopping down his tree? What's going on here? And we got to share a story with them that many of our listeners may know or may not be aware of.

00:03:22:22 - 00:03:44:07

Alex Kocman

I don't want to spoil that because I don't want to take away any thunder from our guest here. Thunder pun intended. And with that, let me introduce our guest. Dr. Glenn Sunshine returns for the third time to the Missions podcast. He is the author of multiple books, most recently *32 Christians Who Changed Their World*. He also leads Every Square Inch Ministries.

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Alex Kocman

He's a retired European history professor from Central Connecticut State University, serves with ministry called Reflections Ministries and as a fellow for the Colson Center for Christian Worldview and also hosts each week The Theology Pugcast, which goes over worldview and philosophy and culture. And Glenn, we're so glad to have you back on the show.

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Glenn Sunshine

It's good to be back. Thank you for having me.

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Alex Kocman

Well, let's set this up, Glenn. I want to hear from you. We were talking before we started recording about this issue of not knowing our history and missions history in particular. You were even teaching a course recently that placed the start of missions in the 19th century. It seems to me that for many evangelicals, that's kind of a big gap in the literature, wouldn't you say?

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Glenn Sunshine

Yeah, it's surprising how little people consider, you know, if you're thinking about mission missions beginning in 1800, the question is how did the gospel get to England when they sent William Carey out? How did they get to the Americas? How did it get to the rest of Europe? I mean, Christianity had spread for a very, very long time across continents and across cultures before 1800. So why don't we ever talk about that?

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Scott Dunford

Well, because that's Catholic, if we talk about that, we're all going to become a Catholic and have to go to Rome, right? (laughter) So, I mean, I think that's probably the reason why we don't you know, we love to talk about Christian history, kind of beginning with Martin Luther in the Wittenburg door, but certainly that's not the case, right?

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Glenn Sunshine

Well, why don't we talk about then, Protestant missions in the 16th and 17th century? Because there were some.

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Scott Dunford

Yeah, well, obviously, I'm just being tongue in cheek, but I think that's the rationale, right?

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Glenn Sunshine

Yeah, I strongly suspect that's the case. But there are some problems with that on a whole bunch of different levels.

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Alex Kocman

So give us a little bit of an overview. This is your area of study. You weigh in on things of relating to theology and culture, but European history in particular, and this period of

history, especially the medieval period, is your specialty. So honestly, for those that are ignorant, what is happening in the medieval period and even earlier on in terms of Christian mission, I think we do look to William Carey because there are some things in church history that are unique and new and different about that that maybe weren't happening in the same way in other missions movements in the past.

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Alex Kocman

And so that's not a bad starting point. But sketch out for us some of the things that we can look to earlier in church history and be encouraged in our missionary endeavors.

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Glenn Sunshine

About William Carey. I should note that although he has some incredibly significant failures in his life, he is a guy I admire to no end in terms of what he did. So I am certainly not dissing William Carey. The guy was incredible. But well, the fact of the matter is that Christianity, according to well, its legendary accounts in the sense that we don't have written accounts.

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Glenn Sunshine

But these stories go far back where, well, apostles evangelized in Armenia. Thomas made it to India. We know by the fifth century Ethiopia has converted to Christianity. Armenia was the first kingdom to do so. Then Rome, then Ethiopia. Up until the year 1000, there were more Christians, roughly, outside the boundaries of the old Roman Empire than inside it.

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Glenn Sunshine

So when you look at the Orthodox world and the Catholic world combined, both of those together, there are more Christians, actually, there are Christian communities all across Central Asia, actually major centers of scholarship and learning. The first Christian missionary to arrive in China was a guy named Alopen, and in the early six hundreds and he established a church in China that continued to flourish for about 200 years when it was exterminated, Christianity was reintroduced again later.

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Glenn Sunshine

It was there for about 200 years when it was exterminated. Then it was reintroduced in the 19th century, and this time it won't be exterminated because unlike the previous times, it actually went indigenous. You know, the earlier ones. It was a lot of what we would call expats perhaps were really at the core of the church, but they're still doing this mission work. in China.

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Glenn Sunshine

In China, starting in the 600s, there were Mongol tribes that had converted to Christianity, Turkic tribes that they converted to Christianity. Genghis Khan, when his family was murdered, he fled to a nearby tribe, the Keraites, another Mongol tribe, the Keraites were Christians. Kubla Khan's mother was a Christian. And that's just the Asian side of things, right? When you go to Europe, what you see is, okay,

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Glenn Sunshine

there is a common misconception that I've heard quoted by people who really ought to know better that Christianity spread basically by conquest. That's true of Islam. It's not true of Christianity. The only example I can think of this happening through the medieval period was an attempt by Charlemagne to do it with the Saxons. And the situation there was that the Saxons had raided into his territory in the Netherlands, burned some churches and so on.

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Glenn Sunshine

So Charlemagne is sent to reprisal party in, burned down the pagan temples there. And this started a lengthy war, lasted 32 years, or Charlemagne was trying to subdue the Saxons, and at one point he forcibly baptized Saxons and made reversion to paganism, a capital offense. Now that particular fact is known, and especially among the pagans, they like to cite this as an example of the brutality of Christianity—of course, ignoring the fact that they went and started it.

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Glenn Sunshine

But the other side of this that most people don't know, the other half of the story that isn't told, is that Charlemagne's main theological adviser, a guy by the name of Alcuin of York, actually told Charlemagne, "You can't do that. Forced baptism is not legitimate baptism. They are not real Christians if they have not been baptized voluntarily." And so this entire attempt at forced conversion is just simply wrong.

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Glenn Sunshine

And so Charlemagne actually rescinded the decree. You always hear about young people who talk about this, always talk about the first death. They never note that he rescinded it because of his theological adviser's rebuke.

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Scott Dunford

Fascinating.

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Alex Kocman

Paul Harvey's rest of the story, right, Scott?

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Glenn Sunshine

So the point being that Christianity did not spread by the sword. And so, the question then becomes, how did it spread? And that's really in a lot of ways the story of late antique, early medieval mission and then some of the stuff that's going on during the Middle Ages itself.

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Scott Dunford

So maybe you could help us with that, especially as we're thinking about missiology and methodologies. What are some of the ways that that period differed in the way that they were doing missions? But also, you know, what are some of the specific theological shifts that were certainly influencing that period of time?

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Glenn Sunshine

First of all, one of the situations that's two radically different is that the early church structured itself even before it was legalized. It structured itself following the political structure of the Roman Empire. The Roman Empire was set up around city states. These city states controlled the surrounding rural countryside. Also in pretty much all cultures in that period, communities were led officially or unofficially by a group of elders.

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Glenn Sunshine

And in fact, the word senate, like the Roman Senate, comes from the Latin word *senex*, meaning an old man. It's the council of elders—in principle, or at least in origin. So it happens in the churches, what do they do? Well, they set up a church structure that's led by elders with deacons in support. The senior elder is named the bishop, the overseer.

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Glenn Sunshine

This may be reflected—this is a little bit of an exegetical side note—this may be reflected already even in the pastoral epistles, because the word *episkopos* or bishop there is always used in the singular where presbyters are in the plural. So it may be that early. But what happens then is that the senior bishop or the senior elder, the bishop in the city, oversees not just the city, but the surrounding rural countryside, the churches there, because that's the way the city state was structured.

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Glenn Sunshine

Then you move to provinces and things like that and you end up with what eventually will be called archbishops and patriarchs. You know, this is how the system grows. And the reason why that's important, the structure is important, is that once Christianity is legalized by Constantine, or to be more precise, decriminalized outside note Constantine didn't make Christianity the official religion of the empire.

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Glenn Sunshine

All he did was follow. Well, early Christians argued for religious liberty because they said worship of God that is compelled is not pleasing to him. So you must have religious liberty. That's you know, that was that was their conclusion already in the second century. And we see this with Alcuin and Charlemagne later. What Constantine did is he used the Christian argument.

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Glenn Sunshine

It's about religious liberty. And in the edict of Milan, he declares religious liberty in the empire that has the effect of decriminalized, using or legalizing Christianity. But it wasn't specific to Christianity. Later, Theodosius I will in fact make it the official religion of the Empire, the imperial religion. But he still allows paganism because they believe in religious liberty.

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Glenn Sunshine

But nonetheless, once Christianity becomes the religion of the Empire, it tends to spread through all the provinces, through the governors, through so on. So it works its way through the empire. Initially in that way, what then ends up happening and this is this is where the story gets really interesting actually within ends up happening is as Roman authority in the western half of the empire collapses, Roman administration falls apart.

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Glenn Sunshine

The only ones left standing are the church. So the net result called the bishops end up beginning taking on administrative duties that they'd never had before because somebody has to do it and they're the last man standing. So they're going to start doing that kind of thing. And then as the so-called barbarian successor states, especially the Franks and others develop, they're going to be incorporating church leaders into the administration of the state.

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Glenn Sunshine

And this is a recipe for corruption. The fact of the matter is, it's not clear to me how thoroughly Christianized the empire had been before it collapsed. But at this point, what largely ends up happening is it becomes very corrupt and very nominal. The exception, however, is over in Ireland. Ireland was a territory that Rome never conquered. Rome had considered invading Ireland.

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Glenn Sunshine

But when the merchants came back and sort of reported what was there, they decided it wasn't worth it. There was nothing there that they wanted, and the people were likely to put up a heck of a fight. So they just decided not to bother with it because there was nothing

there that was worth having. Well, Patrick ends up in Ireland—I'm not going to go through the story, but Patrick ends up leading a movement of Christian conversion in the country as a missionary, and he is sent specifically as a missionary bishop.

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Glenn Sunshine

Now Irish Christianity then develops following very different rules from the continent. What happens in Irish Christianity is, well, you have to go back to pre-Christian Ireland in pre-Christian Ireland, the pagan religion was headed by Druids, but in order to be a Druid, it took literally several decades of study and work. You had to master everything that there was to know about the culture you needed.

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Glenn Sunshine

Of course, religion and ritual and magic and all of that kind of thing. But you also needed to know history, legends, mythology. You also needed to know poetry, lore, on and on and on, virtually everything about the culture you were expected to know. This is why it took so many decades to become a Druid when Patrick arrives. Interestingly enough, some of the first people to convert are Druids, and I think the reason for that is that I can't prove this.

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Glenn Sunshine

I have no sources on this, but I suspect the reason is that Celtic religion included human sacrifice. And I think Patrick's message probably went something along the lines of your gods ask you to sacrifice your sons. To them, the true God sacrificed his son for you.

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Alex Kocman

Contextualization?

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Glenn Sunshine

Yeah. All right, let's talk about that. We've got contextualization. We also have indigenization. What happens when religion, when Christianity gets into an Ireland that has this history of pagan religion, of the sort that they had with the Druids and so on. They naturally assume that in order to be a holy man, in order to be a priest, you need to know everything there is to know about Christianity and the culture that produced it.

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Glenn Sunshine

Now, the problem here is that the Irish didn't write. They didn't have well, they had a sort a rudimentary written language, but they never used it for anything important because they probably like the Native Americans. They believed that if you write things down, it starts to die. It's only alive when it's kept in your living memory. But now they had to learn the scriptures.

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Glenn Sunshine

They had to learn all of the things that are associated with Christianity and with that, frankly, Roman culture. And they had to learn it in Latin using a language that they didn't know or Greek or Hebrew. And in that period, all of those languages were written as an unbroken string of letters with no capitalization, punctuation or words. Spaces.

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Glenn Sunshine

Right? So the Irish took a look at this and said too hard. And so they started doing things like introducing word breaks to make it easier for them to read, introducing basic kinds of punctuation and capitalization, and in the process turned to reading from a secondary form of learning to a primary form of learning. And they threw themselves into this so fervently that Ireland became known as the Island of Saints and Scholars.

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Glenn Sunshine

So Ireland becomes this center for learning and education when it's largely collapsed in Europe. And you've got a lot of people who are very, very serious about their faith at a time when Western Europe is really pretty dead in terms of real Christianity. Now, the Irish had a practice that they called *peregrinatio*, it's the Latin word for pilgrimage.

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Glenn Sunshine

And for them that meant frequently unplanned wanderings wherever God sent you with the expectation that you would never return home. A permanent exile. You can think of this like the 19th century missionaries who used to pack their goods in their coffin because they never expected to come back. They expected to die in the mission field. This is the sort of thing that they were.

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Glenn Sunshine

Yeah, many of these made their way to the continent and began to really evangelize this nominally Christian territory with a much more serious vision of the gospel. I can tell you if you're interested, I can tell you some of the stories, but there are many Irish saints that are commemorated across Germany and across Europe because of them coming in and essentially taking a very nominally and corrupt Christian culture and revitalizing it.

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Scott Dunford

So let me make sure I'm understanding you correctly. Are you saying that that pilgrimages, as understood originally in Irish Church, were really mission efforts? Yes. Wow. Yes. And really revitalization efforts, which is encouraging to people out here in California and the East Coast where you are.

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Glenn Sunshine

Yeah. Well, yeah, for them, being a peregrine or pilgrim meant that you're going wherever God sent you to do his work. We have examples, records of people arriving on the coast of Wales, for example, in boats without oars or sails, and they were Irish monks who got into the boat and then prayed, God, send us where you want us.

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Glenn Sunshine

We're not going to interfere. And the currents brought them to Wales. So they figured Wales was where they were supposed to serve. And now not all of them were quite that extreme. But that's the kind of that that looking at the extreme gives you, I think, an idea of the general trend of what they're trying to follow wherever God sends us sets where we're going to go.

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Alex Kocman

Right. These are not imperial efforts. These are no much closer to what we look at as characterizing missions and missionary efforts in the modern period.

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Glenn Sunshine

Yeah, right. Well, let me give you a concrete example, probably my favorite, a guy by the name of Columbanus, actually. It's kind of stuck between Columbanus and Colomba. Let's start with Colomba. Colomba leaves Ireland as an exile and goes to an island off the coast of Scotland in the inner Hebrides called Iona. He establishes a mission base there and from there he evangelized Scotland, which had never been evangelized before.

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Glenn Sunshine

It was called picked London and those base. And from there the Irish will well evangelize Scotland, turn it Christian. They will establish another monastery, Lindisfarne, known as the Holy Island, to this day, and they will then push south into England, establishing or reestablishing churches in places like York and elsewhere. And all of this is evangelism efforts coming from a guy who was on a *peregrinatio*.

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Glenn Sunshine

And many of these guys considered themselves on *peregrinatio* as they went out to do this kind of work. The other example is Columbanus. Columbanus, without going into his background, he was the he ended up being the teacher at a monastery in Bangor and believed at about the age of 40 that God was calling him to go on a pilgrimage.

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Glenn Sunshine

The abbot wouldn't let them go. He said, I need you here. Columbanus approached him a few years later and the abbot allowed him to go with 12 followers. They got into a boat and sailed to Carnac in Brittany, France. From there they began a preaching tour. When they were, they preached across northern France and frankly astounded everybody that ran into them because what they were people who took their faith absolutely seriously and lived a very stringent ascetic cloister while.

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Glenn Sunshine

But they were full of learning. They were full of education. They're preaching. They were teaching all of these kinds of things. Eventually they got into the territory of Burgundy, where the king there, a guy named Gontram, gave them a ruined Roman fortress, sat on a gray to start a monastery. And once they did this, now monasteries were at the heart of Irish Christianity rather than a bishop.

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Glenn Sunshine

And a cathedral was the monasteries. Once they established the monastery, people from all walks of life started to flock to them. So much so that the king had to give them a couple of other locations, most notably a place called Luxor, in order to start additional monasteries. Now, the local bishops are really upset with this because he's upstaging them and they called him.

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Glenn Sunshine

Now, on the continent, the bishops are supposed to oversee the monasteries. It's the opposite in Ireland. They call commoners to a conference and you want to set him straight and basically try to try to get control over him. His reply was, I'm sorry, I'm too busy doing God's work. Maybe you should try it. That didn't go over well with the bishops.

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Glenn Sunshine

He actually ended up writing the letter to Rome, which is much more polite than my summary of it, basically said, Look, these bishops you got out here are a bunch of bozos. They're not doing anything. This is your responsibility. You need to straighten these guys out. Yes. So he is absolutely fearless. He's afraid and nobody unfortunate in Italy.

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Glenn Sunshine

He ended up annoying the royal family by criticizing their loose morals. Maybe he should have learned a lesson from John the Baptist here. But the queen mother, a woman named Brunhilda—yes, she's the one that we associate all the names that are associated with Brunhilda coming from her, you know, Wagner and all of that—she was the prototype.

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Glenn Sunshine

She decided she couldn't just off these guys, which is what she usually did, but she did say, okay, we can exile them back to Ireland. So they stick. She had them stuck on a boat and shipped up river in the Rhine on their way back to Ireland. But a storm came up and the ship was driven aground.

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Glenn Sunshine

The ship's captain basically said, All right, look, you guys are a bunch of Jonahs, get off my boat. So they got off the boat and they began another preaching tour down the Rhine. This time they made it into Switzerland, where there was a ruined Catholic church that had turned into a Christian church. They had turned into a pagan shrine, complete with idol, on this lake.

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Glenn Sunshine

And so they, you know, they ended up blowing a trumpet or whatever, calling all the people there. And remember, the Irish are great scholars. One of them actually knew the local language, and he preached a sermon to them about Christianity, and they grabbed the idols in the former church, threw them in the lake and reconsecrated the church.

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Glenn Sunshine

Well, Columbanus later got into more political trouble there. He's the guy who knew the local language stayed. He crossed the Alps, went to northern Italy, where he was invited to set up a monastery by the Arian King of Lombardy to try to bring Orthodox Christianity into the region. So he set up a monastery at a place called Bobbio.

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Alex Kocman

So for our listeners, you know, just were unlikely bedfellows, right? Yeah.

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Glenn Sunshine

Very unlikely bedfellows. By the way, his follower's name was Gaul, and so the province of Sancti Galan in Switzerland is named after him. That's where it happened, you know, and all of these places become major centers of learning and education, which end up revitalizing Christianity on the continent and end up helping to set up the Anglo-Saxon missionary

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Glenn Sunshine

Boniface to come in and begin evangelizing in the low countries.

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Alex Kocman

Yeah, let's set that up. That's what we were teasing at the very beginning of the episode. So let's have the pay off now with that. But also, you know, if we can just make this explicit, what we're doing here is we ought to refer to this period of time, you know, from the roughly the fall of the Roman Empire to the dawn of the Reformation, not as the "dark ages,"

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Alex Kocman

not as the "medieval period"—even that assumes certain things. But so often we think of them as dark ages and, you know, were things great by all accounts or certainly not. There's things, you know, of course, that we would look at and see how the Lord is blessed society at large, and yet the light of the gospel is being carried forth and that that influences us today.

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Alex Kocman

And even with Boniface too, I think there's lessons for us today in terms of how bold we ought to be.

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Glenn Sunshine

Yeah. Now if medieval historians divide the period up into three periods, the early Middle Ages, which in England is called the Dark Ages, and by that they mean we don't have a lot of written records from the period. So it's historically dark. It's not a value judgment. It's just we can't see in there. We don't have the written records.

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Glenn Sunshine

Then you have the Central Middle Ages, which runs from roughly a thousand to roughly 1300, and then the late Middle Ages 1300 to 1500. That's the way they normally break it up. We've been dealing here almost entirely with the early Middle Ages right now in Britain, you have the Celtic Church coming down from the north, which at this point is not really under the authority of the pope.

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Glenn Sunshine

It's technically what's referred to as autocephalous, a self-headed church. As a matter of fact, this was even acknowledged as late as the 1200s by the pope. He said you need to you know, he's told the Normans in England, you need to bring the Irish under our authority. Okay.

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Scott Dunford

So theologically, are they more in line with Roman, what we think of as Roman theology

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Glenn Sunshine

of the period. Yeah, they were pretty close to it. But you have to understand that what we think of is Roman Catholicism. When you're dealing with the early Middle Ages, it doesn't really exist, right? You've got some people making claims early on for papal authority, for example. But that doesn't really become a strong thing until about the 11th century.

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Glenn Sunshine

The pope isn't making the exaggerated claims to authority until then, you are owed a lot of the doctrinal things aren't developed. You don't have a lot of Marian doctrines, things like that. They're just simply not in place. It's a different kind of church than what we see today. But you do have the pope, Gregory the Great who is a guy that's actually worth knowing—his book on a pastoral rule is, I think every Christian leader ought to read it.

00:30:33:09 - 00:31:09:05

Glenn Sunshine

There's a lot of real wisdom in there. *Pastoral Rule*, that's what it's called. But Gregory sent missionaries into England, so they're coming up from the south while the Celts are coming down from the north. And Gregory's instructions to the missionaries are really interesting because he's explicitly arguing for something like contextual realization. What he's saying is you shouldn't go in and just destroy all the pagan shrines and sanctuaries and put up churches somewhere else because this is where people are used to going for worship.

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Glenn Sunshine

Instead, put your young convert the shrine into a church, put your churches where the shrines are, because this is where people go to worship. And by doing this, you'll be able to be more effectively reach the people. You know, in essence, this is something, again, that we see in a lot of places, particularly up in northern Europe, you see a very direct effort to say, "Look, take the culture's beliefs, take the culture's practices that are compatible with Christianity and build on those, work with those."

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Glenn Sunshine

So you see these early arguments for or for contextualization going on with Gregory. He sends people in from the South, notably Augustine of Canterbury, and they begin establishing churches connected to Rome. They collide in an area called Northumbria, where you have the Celtic and the Roman churches. They've got some differences in practice for political reasons. The King of Northumbria decides to go with Rome.

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Glenn Sunshine

And so the Roman churches have young they start following Roman practices in those areas. But nonetheless, there's still a strong Celtic influence there. You're still seeing the emphasis on education and all of those things still being pushed, particularly in the northern churches.

Alcuin, Charlemagne's theological adviser, whom I mentioned earlier, was the deacon and teacher at York, a Celtic church, Celtic foundation.

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Glenn Sunshine

So Boniface is coming out of this environment where, yes, he's associated with the Roman Church, but he's heavily influenced by these ideas from Celtic Christianity, and he's got a very, very different way of looking at things than many of the people coming out of the continent. He goes on his own equivalent of a *peregrinus*, so although in his case it's authorized, and he was sent into the low countries, into the Netherlands to try to evangelize the pagans there.

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Glenn Sunshine

And among other things, Boniface was a no holds barred evangelist. I almost wanted to use "take no prisoners" here. And at one point and this was probably planned out ahead of time and announced that this was going to happen, we don't know for sure, but I would pretty much bet on it. He announced that he was going to chop down the sacred tree to Donar or Thor, the god of Thunder.

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Glenn Sunshine

The Norse call him Thor; the Germans call him Donar. Okay. So and so he one day he down, he went out and there was a crowd around and he took an ax and chopped down the sacred oak of Thor. Think about Gideon. When Gideon tears down the altar and the people say, you know, "Take him out, we're going to kill him."

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Glenn Sunshine

What is his father say? "Let Baal contend for him. He took down Baal's altar; let Baal= deal with it." And of course, Baal didn't deal with it. He's doing the same kind of thing. He's chopping down the oak really maybe also like Elijah as a direct challenge to the pagan gods too: "Okay, this is your sacred oak.

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Glenn Sunshine

What are you going to do about it?" And, you know what? Lightning didn't come from the sky. He wasn't struck down by a thunderbolt, and he chopped down the oak. And the people said, "Maybe what he's telling us is true." And the region begins converting to Christianity. He will ultimately, by the way, end up being martyred during a pagan raid into the area.

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Glenn Sunshine

But he is taking this sort of active role in confronting the spiritual forces that are at work in the area and taking them on head on in in this chopping down of the oak. This is not, you will note, a very winsome approach to evangelism, but it was effective.

00:35:30:22 - 00:35:33:03

Alex Kocman

No, this is taking every thought captive.

00:35:33:07 - 00:35:58:10

Glenn Sunshine

Now, another interesting one involves the conversion of the Vikings. And I won't go through all the history here, but King Olaf I of Norway does in fact convert to Christianity. A young Leif Erikson visits his court. He converts to Christianity, and Leif Erikson is sent back to convert his father Erik the Red's colony in Greenland, to Christianity.

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Glenn Sunshine

And this is the context—he's actually on a missionary trip when he was sort of blown off course and landed in North America. But one of the interesting things you see in Norse Christianity is they use pagan myths as a doorway for the gospel. You know, the early church would say things like, you know, the philosophers are the Greeks' road to the truth, best expressed in Christianity just like the prophets were the Hebrews' road to the truth is best expressed in Christianity.

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Glenn Sunshine

So you see this use of the things from Greek philosophy that were useful being brought in to explain the gospel to the pagan world. They do the same thing in in the Scandinavian countries with the Norse myths. And the root of this is the legend of Ragnarok, the twilight of the gods. At Ragnarok, there is a great war between the gods and their allies, and the giants, and the monsters.

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Glenn Sunshine

And basically they all wipe themselves, wipe each other out. The only ones that survived survive because there's this tree known as Yggdrasil, it's the world tree. It ties all of the worlds together. Its roots are in the underworld. It goes through Middle Earth and all that into the heavens. And Yggdrasil opens its doors and admits two of the younger gods are a few of the younger gods and two humans in, and after everything else is destroyed, Yggdrasil opens up and releases these new gods in these new people into the world to start a new world.

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Glenn Sunshine

That's the story of Ragnarok. Yeah. The Christians came to the Norse and said, "Ragnarok has already come. The gods have been defeated, the monsters have been defeated, and Yggdrasil is the cross, and it is through the cross that we enter the new world." And so when you look at that, when you look at Norse churches, they actually there are, you know, the ironwork on the doors actually depicts frequently, if you know what you're looking for,

00:38:19:12 - 00:38:52:08

Glenn Sunshine

scenes from Ragnarok. And the famous Stave churches in Norway, which are built without nails or anything like that, they're incredibly beautiful pieces of work, they have a central pillar in the middle. And when you take a look at them from the outside, they're sort of shaped like pine trees. So the church represents Yggdrasil, the world tree, that is actually the cross that you have to enter to get new life in the new world.

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Glenn Sunshine

That is you know, it's an incredible example of contextualization. I mean, even using the pagan myth, they found ways to introduce the gospel into that culture.

00:39:04:10 - 00:39:27:00

Alex Kocman

There's so much here that we need to get into, and what we'd actually like to do, Glenn, if you're okay with this, we want to give our listeners a week to just wrap their minds around the richness of what God was doing, especially in this early medieval period. And we'll come back to it in a week. For us, though, it'll be just a few minutes.

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Alex Kocman

We want to split this conversation into two parts, and we'll move to part two here for our listeners. Again, it'll be a week from now for us. It'll be in just a few moments and continue recording. But we want to talk about application of these things, then lessons that we can see today, and even ways in which later missionary efforts, are they building on things that happened in the past, or were these things totally forgotten until, well, until 2023 when Dr. Sunshine brought them to our attention?

00:39:54:06 - 00:40:10:03

Alex Kocman

And so, we're going to do that in just a moment. And if this show is an encouragement to you, remember to share it with a friend, leave a positive rating and review in your platform of choice. You can get more content at missionspodcast.com, or you can also support the show by hitting the support tab at the top.

00:40:10:05 - 00:40:22:11

Alex Kocman

And you can also learn more about serving in mission in God's mission yourself by going to abwe.org. And we'll see you in our next episode and the second part of our conversation with Glenn Sunshine.