

Excerpt from the Venerable Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (London: Penguin Books, 1990, pages 123-25), as reproduced in English translation. This text is a letter from the Pope to an Anglo-Saxon queen who has converted to Christianity. What is he arguing she should do (or rather stop doing) when he points out that her husband is not yet a Christian? What incentives does he offer her to make her stand firm in this?

Book I, Chapter 2: *The Pope writes to the Queen, urging her to exert her influence to obtain the king's salvation.*

The Pope also wrote to Queen Ethelberga as follows. A copy of the letter of the blessed and apostolic Boniface, Pope of the City of Rome, to Ethelberga, Queen of King Edwin:

"To his illustrious daughter, Queen Ethelberga, from Bishop Boniface, servant of the servants of God.

"In His great providence, our loving Redeemer has offered a saving remedy to the human race, which He has saved from the Devil's ensnaring tyranny by the shedding of His own precious Blood. Christ has made His name known to the nations in various ways, so that they may acknowledge their Creator by accepting the mysteries of the Christian Faith. God in His mercy has revealed the truth to Your Majesty's own mind in your own mystical cleansing and regeneration. We have been greatly encouraged by God's goodness in granting you, through your own profession of faith, an opportunity to kindle a spark of the true religion in your husband; for in this way He will more swiftly inspire not only the mind of your illustrious Consort to love of Him, but the minds of your subjects as well.

"We have been informed by those who came to report the laudable conversion of our glorious son King Eadbald that Your Majesty, who has also received the wonderful sacrament of the Christian Faith, shows a shining example of good works,

pleasing to God. We also know that you carefully shun idol-worship and the allurements of temples and divinations; and that, having given your allegiance to Christ, you are unshakably devoted to the love of our Redeemer and labour constantly to propagate the Christian Faith. Out of pastoral affection, we particularly enquired about your illustrious husband and learned that he still serves abominable idols and is slow to listen to the teaching of the preachers. It has caused us deep grief to hear that your partner remains a stranger to the knowledge of the most high and undivided Trinity. Our paternal responsibility moves us to urge Your Christian Majesty, imbued with the force of divine inspiration, not to avoid the duty imposed on us in season and out of season, in order that, with the assistance and strength of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the King also may be added to the Christian fold. Only in this way will you enjoy the full privileges of marriage in perfect union; for the Scripture says, '*The two shall become one flesh.*' But how can it be called a true union between you, so long as he remains alienated from the daylight of your Faith by the barrier of dark and lamentable error?

"Let it therefore be your constant prayer that God of His mercy will bless and enlighten the King, so that you, who are united in one flesh by the ties of bodily affection, may after this fleeting life remain united for ever in the bond of faith. My illustrious daughter, persevere in using every effort to soften his heart by teaching him the commandments of God. Help him to understand the excellence of the mystery that you have accepted by believing and the marvelous worth of the reward that you have been accounted worthy to receive in this new birth. Melt the coldness of his heart by teaching him about the Holy Spirit, so that the warmth of divine faith may set his mind on fire through your constant encouragement and remove the

numbing and deadening errors of paganism. If you do this, the witness of the Holy Spirit will most certainly be fulfilled in you, that '*the unbelieving husband shall be saved through the believing wife.*' For this is why you have received our Lord's merciful goodness, in order that you may restore to your Redeemer with increase the fruits of faith and of the boundless blessings entrusted to you. We shall not cease from constant prayer that God will assist and guide you to accomplish this.

"Having mentioned this matter, as fatherly duty and affection demands, we beg you to inform us, as soon as a suitable messenger is available, what measure of success God's goodness grants you in the conversion of your husband and the people over whom you reign. Good news will greatly relieve your mind, which anxiously awaits the longed-for salvation of you and yours. And when we see the glory of the divine atonement spreading ever more widely among you, we shall give glad and heartfelt thanks to God, the Giver of all good things, and to blessed Peter, Prince of the Apostles.

"We impart to you the blessing of your protector, blessed Peter, Prince of the Apostles. With it, we send you a silver mirror, together with a gold and ivory comb, asking Your Majesty to accept these gifts with the same goodwill as that with which we send them."

Excerpt from the Venerable Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (London: Penguin Books, 1990, pages 130-31), as reproduced in English translation. This text is Bede's account of the Anglo-Saxon's religious beliefs around the year 627 A.D. I have altered the spelling to match American conventions.

Book II, Chapter 13:

He [the King] summoned a council of the wise men, and asked each in turn his opinion of this strange doctrine

[Christianity] and this new way of worshipping the godhead that was being proclaimed to them.

Coifi, the chief Priest, replied without hesitation: "Your Majesty, let us give careful consideration to this new teaching;

"For I frankly admit that, in my experience, the religion that we have hitherto professed seems valueless and powerless. None of your subjects has been more devoted to the service of our gods than myself; yet there are many to whom you show greater favor, who receive greater honors, and who are more successful in all their undertakings. Now, if the gods had any power, they would surely have favored myself, who have been more zealous in their service. Therefore, if on examination you perceive that these new teachings are better and more effectual, let us not hesitate to accept them."

Another of the king's chief men signified his agreement with this prudent argument, and went on to say: "Your Majesty, when we compare the present life of man on earth with that time of which we have no knowledge, it seems to me like the swift flight of a single sparrow through the banqueting-hall where you are sitting at dinner on a winter's day with your thegns and counselors. In the midst there is a comforting fire to warm the hall; outside, the storms of winter rain or snow are raging. This sparrow flies swiftly in through one door of the hall, and out through another. While he is inside, he is safe from the winter storms; but after a few moments of comfort, he vanishes from sight into the wintry world from which he came. Even so, man appears on earth for a little while; but of what went before this life or of what follows, we know nothing. Therefore, if this new teaching has brought any more certain knowledge, it seems only right that we should follow it." The other elders and counselors of the king under God's guidance, gave similar advice.