

Public Abstract

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If religion and society are closely bound together, especially in the first few centuries of the Christian era, then what led the non-Christian peoples of Anglo-Saxon England to change their religious practice and understanding to Christianity in the seventh century? This research shows that these changes came primarily through the action of Christian clergy whose established pastoral role encompassed community leadership, religious instruction, and divinely ordained power and authority and whose primary mandates were to convert, to instruct, and to correct their followers.

From the first century of the church, the ways that bishops, priests, and deacons provided pastoral care was shaped by the communities and societies around them. This dissertation explores how pastoral care developed by exploring how pastors defined their roles within the house churches of the first and second centuries, how they wielded authority the urban Roman churches of the fourth and fifth centuries, and how they adapted to the secular and religious communities of England and Ireland in the sixth and seventh centuries. It looks at how pastors made a place for themselves as Christianity was carried into new areas and new cultures, and it reveals a few of the ways that the texts produced and used in England in the seventh through the mid-ninth centuries reflected pastoral concerns and interactions. In the end, this research shows that though clerical authority was based on established religious belief, it nevertheless remained responsive to the society around it because it was based on an active history of interaction, communication, and negotiation between pastors and their followers.