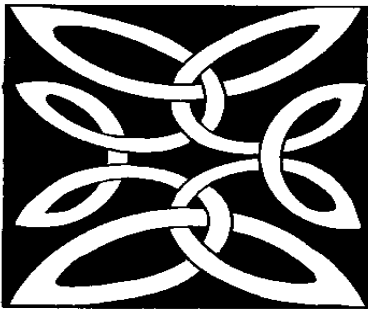




## From Yule to Christmas – the Anglo-Saxon Religious Journey

### Lesson 4 – Why did the Anglo-Saxons become Christians?



#### Time, Fate and Hope

The Pagan beliefs of the Anglo-Saxons involved a collection of gods such as Woden, Thor, Loki, Tyr, Frigga and others who were seen as 'super-versions' of the Anglo-Saxons themselves. The gods had disagreements, favourites and enemies, they influenced events and individuals and they could be appeased by gifts (sacrifices) and bargained with by humans. However, they were limited. The Anglo-Saxons believed even the gods were subject to the forces of Time and Fate, or "Wyrd" as they called it.

Time, they believed, was leading inexorably towards the destruction of all things, including the gods. They believed that, eventually, the whole universe, including the gods, would be destroyed in chaos as Time came to an end.

Fate (Wyrd) was seen as "what happens just happens", in other words, the actions and events in the lives of humans and gods just happened all by themselves and the best you could do was to face your fate bravely. If a person was doomed by Fate, the course of events could not be changed. In other words, everyone and everything (including the gods) was, eventually, doomed.

Christianity promises an eternal life after death in a Heaven that is above and beyond Time and Fate because the Christian conception of God is that He created Time and Fate and, therefore, is not bound by them. This was seen by many Anglo-Saxons as a more hopeful view of life, death and the afterlife.



## Anglo-Saxon Warrior Culture

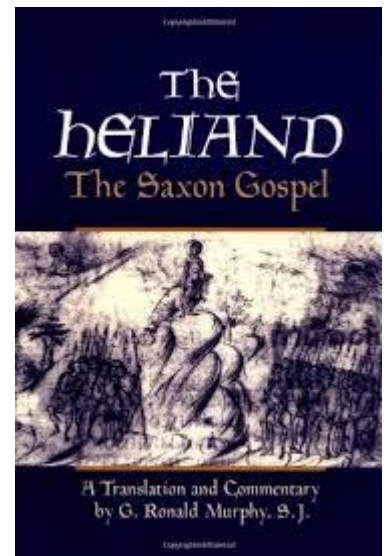


The ideals of warriorship were central to Anglo-Saxon culture, both men and women were supposed to be brave, loyal (to their Lord, their clan, their family), self-sacrificing and to put the needs of their people above their own individual interests.

Christianity was seen by many Anglo-Saxons as demonstrating the warrior ideal in the example of Jesus as the ultimate, heavenly warrior of courage, loyalty (to God and to His people) and self-sacrifice for His people.

## The Heliand

The way the Anglo-Saxons became Christians is best understood by reading “The Heliand”. This is the Gospel of St. Mark retold for an Anglo-Saxon audience and was, originally, sung as an Epic Poem in Mead Halls in Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. Travelling singers and storytellers called “Skalds” would go from village to village, kingdom to kingdom telling tales of heroes, monsters and battles. The story of Jesus became one of the most famous and popular of all. In the Heliand, Jesus is called “The Mighty Chieftan” and His disciples are His, “Warrior Companions”, Jesus is shown doing battle with the Evil One and sacrificing His life to save His people and open the Kingdom of Heaven for them before rising from the dead and reigning over Heaven and Earth as the Immortal Ruler.



## What do You Know and What do You Understand?

- 1) Use a dictionary to look up any words on this sheet you do not understand, write down the definitions in your own “Vocabulary Book”. You have just increased your word-power!
- 2) In your own words, explain why you think the Anglo-Saxons became Christians.  
**DO NOT COPY FROM THIS SHEET.**
- 3) “Anglo-Saxon warrior culture had nothing in common with Christianity.” Say whether this statement is “True” or “False” and explain in your own words what the actual relationship was.
- 4) Write down your own opinion of the Anglo-Saxon Warrior Ideal – does it make any sense today? If you think it doesn’t, explain why. If you think it does, explain why and try to think of some examples.
- 5) Research on the internet or in your local library to answer the following:
  - i) What is the “Anglosphere” and why does it have that name?
  - ii) Which countries are in the Anglosphere and who founded them?



