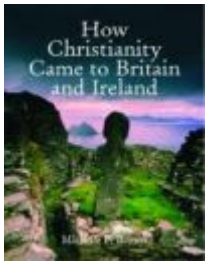


Review: How Christianity Came to Britain and Ireland



I picked up Michelle P. Brown's *How Christianity Came to Britain and Ireland* while browsing at Koorong in my recent mood of getting back into some church history. I won't tell a lie – I bought it because it was cheap and had a bunch of pretty pictures and reminded me of one of my all-time favourite TV shows, *Time Team*.

Despite the pretty pictures I found it to be quite a dry exploration of British ecclesiastical history that presumed a lot of prior knowledge. Consequently it was hard to tie the detail into any broader narrative – to gain an overall picture of the history. Simple devices such as timelines or maps would have helped this problem and it is an indictment that they are not included. It as if this book was produced with the coffee-table in mind, under the assumption that no-one was actually going to read it, just browse it and look at the pictures.

Having said that, there were the odd gem to pluck out and savour. For instance, our diocese is currently considering the “minster” model or “hub” model as a framework for arranging ministry in this state. Often this is explained by talking about it's structure (central resourcing church, outlying ministry centres etc.) and so I was heartened to see the primary description of an “Anglo-Saxon Minster” as a “missionary church to the locality” (Page 32). That's something to pick up for my own context.

I appreciated the exploration of the so-called “dark-ages” of the post-Roman, pre-Norman (or at least pre-Augustine-of-Canterbury) era which are shown to be not so dark at all. The life of Gildas (Page 55) is an example. The influence of the Celtic church is considered in detail throughout.

I delighted in how the Celtic understanding of episcopal ministry was presented – primarily apostolic and missional. I was also intrigued in the organisation of the Celtic church not so much through geography but through networks or *parochia* of relationships between monasteries. There are many parallels here for today's context. I suspect there are many lessons to learn but I was not able to through this book.

In the end I was left wanting more. Having tasted this stale bread (involuntarily overdosing on an over-abundance of expositions of illuminations and the legacy of manuscripts and the like) I now need to find a decent presentation of the story of that time so that I can learn the lessons for now.

