

The story of Saint Boniface, the Namesake

Compiled by Charlene Pierce, passim

St. Boniface was Anglo-Saxon by birth, born in England. His birth name was Winfred but was named "Boniface" by Pope St. Gregory II. He commissioned Boniface to preach the faith to all the nations of Germany.

In 730, a rift widened between Rome and the East, and Pope Gregory III found himself in the midst of the plague of Islam.

"And no wonder when those fiery sons of the desert, sworn to violence and bloodshed, continued their steady advance with swinging scimitar, conquering everything in their way..... and everywhere they left ruin and horror..... God forbid they ever rule the West." Nobody knew better than Pope Gregory that the one earthly power that could keep the Moslem at bay was the Franks.

A fierce battle was joined which lasted seven days. At the first stroke of the Moslem attack scimitar crossed with sword in a life-and-death struggle..... On the seventh day the tide turned against the invader, whose forces were mowed down by the Franks. After this battle, the war-bent King was known as Martel, the Hammer.

Charles the Hammer had little regard for the Church and viewed its power as an encroachment. The King of the Franks ran things with a free hand and rewarded his nobles with large estates of the Church.

There was decline of intelligence and character in the priesthood. Many ignorant aspirants, unable even to read Latin or preach effectively, got themselves ordained only to make money by exercising their spiritual functions. The parish church became neglected, attended only by the poor. Dioceses grew unwieldy and in many places unmanageable. Add to all this the pitiful condition of the masses, ground under by the heel of tyrants.

Charles the Hammer, died the same year as Pope Gregory III and was succeeded by his sons Carloman and Pepin. By good chance Boniface, meeting Carloman, received an invitation to a conference with his former pupil. The energetic Bishop had always admired the character of his teacher. Boniface sent word to Pope Zachary that the truly Catholic King greatly desired a synod. Carloman the Frank, in 747, gave up his throne to Pepin and entered a monastery.

Boniface's yearning to carry on among his Saxon kinsmen, the Frisians, never ceased. Boniface set out for Zuyder Zee, the scene of his first mission. No sooner had he reached the east coast than hostile foes faced him once more. One day in 754 when gathering his converts for Confirmation, the pagans on the Borne River attacked the party. The last hour had struck for 75 year old Boniface and his fifty-two companions, leaving the riverbank soaked with blood. It was June 5 (his holiday), in the year 754.

It is said that everything that has since developed politically, theologically, and intellectually in Germany stands on the foundation that Boniface laid.

Wherever German descendents settled there are St. Boniface parishes in his remembrance.