By 700, two internal parties influenced the Church in Northumbria. The first was comprised of Wilfrid and his followers and the second centered at Lindisfarne and focused on its promotion of the cult of St. Cuthbert. The competition between these two groups would fuel the creation of a number of Lives by 731: the anonymous *Life of St. Cuthbert* (699–704), a metrical *Life of St. Cuthbert* by Bede (704–16), the *Life of Wilfrid* by Stephanus (716–20), Bede’s prose *Life of St. Cuthbert* (before 721), and the chapters concerning Wilfrid and Cuthbert in Bede’s *History*.¹ While Wilfrid was bishop for almost forty-five years, Cuthbert ruled for just two from 685–87. It is clear however, that Lindisfarne pinned its hopes as a major cult center and as an important bishopric on the reputation of Cuthbert. The controversy over the alternative Celtic practices had been solved for the Northumbrian Church at the Synod of Whitby in 664, but the fact that Wilfrid’s reputation was based in part on his claim as the upholder of Roman orthodoxy created problems with the promotion of Cuthbert since he had been trained in daughter houses under Lindisfarne’s control before Whitby. Although Wilfrid had entered Lindisfarne in c.648, he departed for Rome before receiving a Celtic tonsure and quickly abandoned the Celtic-84 upon learning Roman Easter dating. Cuthbert followed the Celtic practices until ordered to change after Whitby. In the face of possible accusations by the Wilfridians, Lindisfarne needed to deal very carefully with the reputation of its saint.²
Sources Demonstrating the Heretical Nature of the Easter Controversy

In order to understand the continuing controversy over the alternative Celtic practices in Northumbria after Whitby, it is critical to examine the attitudes of the wider Anglo-Saxon Church on this issue. From the late 620s, if not before, there were accusations of heresy on both sides of the Easter controversy. Those who followed the Victorian and the Dionysian tables saw a link between the Celtic-84 and the Quartodeciman and possibly Pelagian heresies. For the supporters of the Celtic-84, the Roman tables advocated dark Easters and symbolically supported Pelagian teachings as well. As the controversy continued and as each side became even more frustrated with the other, these attitudes became more entrenched.

Letter from Pope Vitalian (657–72) to Oswiu (642–70), King of Northumbria

Soon after the Synod of Whitby, Oswiu sent Wigheard to Rome in order to be consecrated by the pope as bishop of Canterbury. All the bishops before him had been consecrated in Anglo-Saxon England or Merovingian Gaul. Oswiu may have wanted the pope to participate in Wigheard’s consecration in order to demonstrate that he was firmly in the Roman camp and to ensure that there were no questions concerning the legitimacy of his choice for bishop.

After the arrival of the Anglo-Saxon delegation, Pope Vitalian wrote to Oswiu. In this letter, Vitalian states that “by God’s protecting hand, you [Oswiu] have been converted to the true and apostolic faith.” The pope adds that he is pleased to hear that the king labors for “the conversion of all your subjects to the catholic and apostolic faith . . .” and admonishes the king to follow Roman practices, especially with regard to Easter, at all times. Since there were representatives of the Northumbrian court at Rome, Vitalian would have been well aware that Oswiu had accepted Christianity decades before Whitby. Therefore it appears that the letter is congratulating Oswiu on adopting Roman practices, thereby converting to the catholic and apostolic faith. If this interpretation is correct, it demonstrates that the papacy continued to link the Celtic-84 with heresy. Thus the king has converted from false teachings to the true faith.