Edmund, King of East Anglia, Martyr, 870
November 20, 2020
By the Reverend Stephen Gerth
1 Peter 3:14–18, 22; Psalm 21:1–7; Matthew 10:16–22

In 2017, I did a DNA test for genealogy. I didn't use a test that told you the names of the countries of origin or who your relatives might be. Instead, I used a test that tells one about the ethnic groups where one's DNA is found in concentration. My largest group turned out to be at 22.3% Fennoscandia. Its origin: Iceland and Norway and declines in Finland, England, and France—in other words, broadly speaking, the Vikings. Others in the top five are Southern France, the Orkney Islands, Basque Country, and Western Siberia. More interesting are the other seven, in declining order: Southeastern India; Tuva (South Siberia); Sardinia; Northern India, the Sonora (Native Americans); the Southern Levant (Israel & Syria); and finally, Western South America.

My hunch about the genes associated with North and South America is that those genes could have entered my gene pool in Asia before the migrations of people from Asia to the Americas. I suspect that the gene pools of most people are as diverse as my own. And I think it is correct to say that warfare and trade have

been shaping humankind before humankind developed the ability to record its history.

Edmund was a ninth-century king in East Anglia, the east coast of today's England, the counties of Norfolk and Suffolk. In 865, instead of raiding coastal communities, the Danes landed an army in the north, worked their way south to East Anglia. The Danes defeated Edmund and his army in battle. He was given a chance to live if he agreed to share his kingdom with a pagan ruler. He refused. Tradition tells us that he was shot with arrows and then beheaded. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* says his cult "started immediately.[1]

Edmund's body would be moved in the tenth century to a town in Suffolk that has been known since then as Bury St. Edmonds. A Benedictine monastery there became a pilgrimage place until the suppression of the religious orders by Henry VIII.[2] For the record, the calendars of the Episcopal Church and the Church of England give the year of Edmund's death as 870, the *Oxford Dictionary* as 869.

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[1] *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, (ODCC) 2ed. (New York: Oxford University Press 1978), s.v. "Edmund the Martyr, St.," 445.
[2] Ibid.

I should not have been surprised to read in Diarmaid MacCulloch's book *Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years* that Anglo-Saxons were part of a larger world.

MacCulloch writes about the "Thomas Christians" of South India who were evangelized by Syrians. Tradition names the Apostle Thomas as their evangelist. Archeology has shown that there was trade between the Roman Empire and India in the first century of the Christian Era. There are records of contact continuing in the early-third-century. In the fourth century, a bishop in a trading city on the Persian Gulf became responsible for these Christians. MacCulloch writes: "One of the most remarkable contacts [of this church] may have been with ninth-century England, where several versions of *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* report that a prominent Anglo-Saxon courtier called Sigehelm was sent by the great King Alfred of Wessex on a pilgrimage to the tome of St. Thomas in India."[3]

I conclude with the inscription on the tomb of Martin, Bishop of Tours, from the year 379 in Roman Gaul—France—that I quoted in my homily for him on November 11. This is an English translation of the

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[3] Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years* (New York: Viking, 2010), 249.

Latin: "Here lies Martin the bishop, of holy memory, whose soul is in the hand of God; but he is fully here, present and made plain in miracles of every kind."[4] The religion of fourth-century southern France was very much the religion of ninth-century England.

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son,
    and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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[4] Brown, 4.