

“ORDER OUR DAYS IN THY PEACE”:  
TREATMENTS OF CONFLICT IN BEDE’S HISTORIA ECCLESIASTICA  
GENTIS ANGLORUM

A Dissertation  
Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School  
of Cornell University  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

by  
Caitlin Gerhard Callaghan  
January 2009

© 2009 Caitlin Gerhard Callaghan

“ORDER OUR DAYS IN THY PEACE”:  
TREATMENTS OF CONFLICT IN BEDE’S HISTORIA ECCLESIASTICA  
GENTIS ANGLORUM

Caitlin Gerhard Callaghan, Ph. D.

Cornell University 2009

This dissertation concerns the following question: why and how does Bede minimize conflict in his Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum? As this thesis will attempt to demonstrate, the answer to this question lies in what might be described as Bede’s “rhetoric of reticence”. In the course of the Historia, Bede articulates an overall message of Christian unity, in that he implicitly argues that if the Christian Anglo-Saxons want salvation in the eternal world, then they must be committed to a solid Christian faith and unity with the universal Church in the temporal world. The term “implicit” denotes the key to Bede’s comprehensive narrative approach—he never expressly states that a commitment to faith and unification are paramount to his Anglo-Saxon audience, yet the *signa* that reveal this essential argument lie throughout his text. In order to prove that this message and argument exist, I will first explore Bede’s use of parable-like vignettes, which provide one narrative example of how Bede employs discretion throughout his text, and thus how he places the onus of interpretation on his readers. Second, I will consider Bede’s avoidance of ethnic divisiveness through his narrative treatment of non-English “others”, in particular how this mode of narrative informs his message of Christian unity. Third, I will examine Bede’s discretion in depicting Christian and pagan violence, and the ways in which these depictions underscore his “rhetoric of reticence” when he describes incidents of

conflict. Fourth, I will observe how Bede emphasizes a Christian way of living that promotes unity in the secular world while looking ahead to the eternal one; more specifically, I will compare this Bedan emphasis to Augustine's concept of the "tranquility of order". The dissertation concludes with two appendices, the first of which offers roughly contemporaneous Anglo-Saxon and Old Norse texts as narrative counterpoints to the Historia with regard to depictions of conflict, terminology, and supernatural foes. The second appendix examines some of the Anglo-Saxon kings' law-codes and the ways in which those texts also differ from the Historia in terms of language and narrative emphasis, as well as their articulation, if any, of Christian unity.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Caitlin Callaghan was born and raised in San Francisco, CA, and earned a B.A. in English from Stanford University in 2003. From 2003-2004, she was an English-Speaking Union Scholar at the University of Oxford, from which she received an M.St. in English in 2004. Caitlin then entered the Ph.D. program in Medieval Studies at Cornell University, and defended her A-exam for that degree in 2006. She also designed and taught the following two freshman writing seminars: “Turning the Other Cheek: Pacifism in the Middle Ages”, and “Scales and the Scourge: Law in Medieval Literature”. During her three years in Ithaca, Caitlin could often be found riding her road and cyclocross bikes in the Finger Lakes region, and competing throughout the Northeast for the Cornell Cycling Team. She also enjoyed the many running and cross-country ski trails around Ithaca, and her best paper and course ideas often emerged while she explored them. After completing her dissertation in 2008 in San Francisco, Caitlin moved to New York City, where she is now an Associate at D. E. Shaw Research, LLC.

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Christine Gerhard, whose faith in me has never wavered.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A big, heartfelt “thank you” goes to my chair and friend, Tom Hill, whose pithy athletic analogies (e.g. the medievalist as decathlete) and clear insights made both my dissertation and my doctorate possible, and whose mentorship so positively affected my graduate school experience. Thanks are also due to my committee member Bernadette Meyler, who graciously let me take her Cornell Law School courses, and who showed me how one could be both a literature academic and a legal scholar, and to Paul Hyams, for agreeing to join my committee post A-exam, and who provided the detailed historical analysis necessary to my project. Neither my dissertation nor my degree would exist without Dianne Ferriss, who helped me navigate four years of academic and bureaucratic quandaries, and who was always happy to help and to share new stories about her grandsons, even when I was 3000 miles away. My three years in Ithaca were enriched by many wonderful friends, the following of whom I must thank here by name as well: Debbie Marcum; Jessica Katz; Karen Bourrier; Cynthia, Nathan, Theron, and Rebekah Camp; Luat Vuong; Jamie, Sid, and Isabella Friedman; Leigh Harrison; Ada-Maria Kuskowski; Tom McSweeney; Julia Lowd; Casey Williams; Anna Barendsfeld; Jennifer Orleans; and Flint Richardson. Finally, thanks go to my family, who never completely understood why I moved to Ithaca to become a medievalist, but who supported me nonetheless.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Biographical Sketch	iii
Dedication	iv
Acknowledgments	v
Table of Contents	vi
Introduction	1
Chapter One	29
Chapter Two	71
Chapter Three	93
Chapter Four	129
Conclusion	168
Appendix One	172
Appendix Two	213
Bibliography	231

## INTRODUCTION

### I

This dissertation concerns the following fundamental question: why and how does Bede minimize conflict in his Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum? As this thesis will attempt to demonstrate, the answer to this question lies in what might be described as Bede's "rhetoric of reticence". In the course of the Historia, Bede articulates an overall message of Christian unity, in that he implicitly argues that if the Christian Anglo-Saxons<sup>1</sup> want salvation in the eternal world, then they must be committed to a solid Christian faith and unity with the universal Church in the temporal world. The term "implicit" denotes the key to Bede's comprehensive narrative approach—he never expressly states that a commitment to faith and unification are paramount to his Anglo-Saxon audience, yet the *signa* that reveal this essential argument lie throughout his text. In order to prove that this message and argument exist, I will examine the following elements throughout this dissertation. First, I will explore Bede's use of parable-like vignettes, which provide one narrative example of how Bede employs discretion throughout his text, and thus how he places the onus of interpretation on his readers. Second, I will consider Bede's avoidance of ethnic divisiveness through his narrative treatment of non-English "others", in particular how this mode of narrative informs his message of Christian unity. Third, I will examine Bede's discretion in depicting Christian and pagan violence, and the

---

<sup>1</sup>In this dissertation "Anglo-Saxon" refers to Bede's contemporaneous non-Celtic "gens Anglorum", and "Angles" and "Saxons" signify two particular Germanic tribes at the time of their invasions of the British Isles. Although, as Patrick Wormald notes, Bede does not use the term "Saxon" to describe his fellow *Angli*, I have chosen the compound "Anglo-Saxon" as a means of distinguishing both his "gens Anglorum" and contemporaneous texts (e.g. homilies, heroic poetry, etc.). See Patrick Wormald, "Bede, the *Bretwaldas* and the Origins of the *Gens Anglorum*", in Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society: Studies Presented to J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, ed. Patrick Wormald, Donald Bullough and Roger Collins, 99-129, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), 121.

ways in which these depictions underscore his “rhetoric of reticence” when he describes incidents of conflict. Fourth, I will observe how Bede emphasizes a Christian way of living that promotes unity in the secular world while looking ahead to the eternal one; more specifically, I will compare this Bedan emphasis to Augustine’s concept of the “tranquility of order”. The dissertation concludes with two appendices, the first of which offers roughly contemporaneous Anglo-Saxon and Old Norse texts as narrative counterpoints to the Historia with regard to depictions of conflict, terminology, and supernatural foes. The second appendix examines some of the Anglo-Saxon kings’ law-codes and the ways in which those texts also differ from the Historia in terms of language and narrative emphasis, as well as their articulation, if any, of Christian unity. I will now briefly detail the structure and content of the dissertation.

As a prelude to the chapters, this Introduction contains a brief assessment of Bede’s monastic upbringing and adult life, both of which would have cemented his Christian understanding of time and history, as well as perhaps impacted his relationship with conflict. As a monk living at Jarrow in the late seventh and early eighth centuries, Bede lived under some form of *regula*, or rule, and although it was probably not the Rule of St. Benedict verbatim, an examination of that text might illuminate some of the restrictions under which Bede lived. Bede’s specific elisions of conflict will be examined in the subsequent chapters, but in this introduction, I will assess the Rule’s condemnation of monastic strife. Along these same lines, I will consider one of the patristic fathers with whose works Bede was very familiar, Augustine of Hippo, and his treatises De Mendacio, or On Lying, and Contra Mendacium, or Against Lying, which may help elucidate why Bede chooses to remain silent about certain violent or hostile events and personalities in the Historia.

Once this backdrop of discipline, ordered living, and discretion has been articulated, the first chapter will argue that an important narrative strand throughout the Historia is that of the parable-like episode. One of the most puzzling things about Bede's text is the existence of episodes and chapters that readers and scholars have found very difficult to interpret; Bede will on occasion relate a seemingly odd or irrelevant story, and then simply say nothing about its significance. As a result, these narrative incidents, which may be seen as akin to parables, or parable-like, provide the reader or listener with an interpretative challenge. Furthermore, because the Historia is a didactic text designed to instruct the Christian Anglo-Saxons in good deeds and intentions, these parable-like vignettes help illuminate an overall lesson of the Historia—namely, that interpretation and subsequent behavior are ultimately the responsibility of the reader, and that there will not always be a blueprint for good behavior. If the *gentes Angli* are to achieve and maintain Christian unity, in other words, then they must hone their abilities to interpret, choose, and act as good Christians, with the goal of unification first and foremost in their minds. Along these same lines, Bede's emphasis on instruction and good, Christian action resonates with an Augustinian understanding of history, and the significance of a Christian world order versus secular and/or pagan history. Recognizing the Historia's parable-like narrative as well as its place in a Christian chronology allows us to examine why Bede might minimize conflict in his text.

In light of Bede's background, the parable-like vignettes, and a Bedan understanding of Christian chronology, the second chapter argues that Bede does not emphasize ethnic divisiveness in the Historia, but instead develops a narrative tension between the known and unknown (or familiar and non-familiar) that generally does *not* underscore conflict. Bede's metaphor of the sparrow is a primary allegorical example of this tension, and it is also conflict-free, as Edwin's decision to convert fails

to result in either disagreement or violence. The cumulative effect of Bede's narrative aversion to ethnic divisiveness is an ongoing emphasis on Christian unity; in other words, ethnic differences are not erased in the Historia, but they are superseded by whether or not one is Christian or non-Christian. By minimizing this possible ethnic point of conflict in the Historia, Bede mitigates the presence of conflict as a whole in his text. Likewise, this minimization is achieved yet again through his "rhetoric of reticence".

The development of this rhetorical technique throughout the Historia enhances the overall message of Christian unity, because just as with a parable in which the reader must find the essential meaning, with regard to incidents of conflict in the Historia, Bede is notably discrete. In other words, the rhetoric of reticence reveals itself both in the text's parable-like vignettes and in its depictions of physical and metaphorical conflict; in all of these instances, the reader must attempt to discern what is really going on. As a result, in the third chapter, I will argue that Bede manages to develop a dual Christian/non-Christian narrative that sets Christians in opposition to non-Christians in a relatively non-combative way, while also minimizing conflict and disagreement within the Christian community itself. Bede underscores violence that he sees as evidence of God's will, for example the defeat of apostate Anglo-Saxon leaders, and plays down moments in Anglo-Saxon Church history that probably did entail conflict, for example the conversion of the Anglo-Saxon people, and the council at Whitby. In attempting to prove the overriding importance of Christian unity, Bede seems to argue that as long as Christians remain resolute together in their faith, then their safe political existence in the temporal and ultimate felicity in the heavenly eternal worlds will be assured, whatever their other disagreements.

As stated previously, Bede does not offer a blueprint for Christian unity, but his text does evoke the types of choices and ways of living that could help realize that

goal, and thus perhaps entrance to heaven. Thus, the fifth chapter argues that Bede emphasizes a type of secular, temporal existence in this world in which the Christian English community lives its days in ordered peace with one another; this “ordered peace” expression is drawn from Bede’s brief biography of Gregory in the Historia. Bede’s emphasis on living in ordered peace can be seen in the way that he highlights examples of Christian unification and *disunification*, including some instances of language and translation, the letters and statements of the Church Fathers and important figures in ecclesiastical history like Gregory and Augustine of Canterbury, and an ordered understanding of sin. The pattern of these examples throughout the Historia alludes to Augustine of Hippo’s “tranquility of order”, and a comparative examination of this text also underscores Bede’s emphasis on Christian unification and its reward—becoming a citizen of heaven in the eternal world.

The dissertation’s appendices underscore some of the discrepancies between Bede’s muted approach to and articulation of conflict and the straightforward narrative techniques in a few roughly contemporaneous Anglo-Saxon and Old Norse texts. The first appendix includes Anglo-Saxon heroic poetry and homilies, as well as an Old Norse Eddic poem. These texts, in particular the Anglo-Saxon Beowulf and Old Norse Hamðismál, provide paradigmatic examples of conflict, and their concerns with secular violence, and between men and creatures on the edge of the world, contrast with Bede’s reticence about physical and metaphorical conflict. In addition, an analysis of *litotes*, or understatement, in Beowulf illuminates the ways in which Bede often remains silent or reticent in the Historia. Along these same lines, this appendix includes examinations of Anglo-Saxon texts like the homilies in the Vercelli Book, and poems such as Judith, “The Battle of Maldon”, and “The Dream of the Rood”, which play upon the tension of known versus unknown that I consider in the Historia in Chapter Two of this dissertation. However, in the case of these texts, known versus

unknown is primarily articulated in the thematically universal shape of friend versus foe, which, as a result, heightens conflict in those texts.

The second appendix includes an assessment of the Anglo-Saxon kings' law-codes and the ways in which they prescribe behavior, particularly because they also often emphasize Christian unity and faith while simultaneously outlining consequences for bad actions. Again, this examination serves as a counterpoint to Bede's implicit, as opposed to straightforwardly prescribed, endorsement of behavior in the Historia. Likewise, in this appendix I will compare these codes' identification and classification of subjects—such as *ceorl* and *frigman*—and the types of punishment accorded to each with the simple classification that Bede considers throughout his text: Christian and non-Christian. In tandem with this comparative assessment, I will examine the terminology of known versus unknown, or friend versus foe, that exists in the law-codes, and the discrepancies and similarities between this terminology and that of both the Historia and the Anglo-Saxon non-legal texts.

It is now time to turn our attention to Bede's monastic life and education, and the ways in which they may have impacted his understanding of, and relationship to, physical, metaphorical, and Christian conflict in early Anglo-Saxon England.

## II

Bede entered the monastery at Wearmouth, in Northumbria, at the age of seven, and a couple of years later, he moved to the new neighboring house at Jarrow. With the exception of local travel, Bede lived at Jarrow for the rest of his life, but he seems to have engaged in intellectual journeys that distinguished him from his clerical peers. The scholastic curriculum at Wearmouth and Jarrow for oblates like Bede

probably resembled that of Canterbury,<sup>2</sup>—at least one of his teachers, Ceolfrid, had studied in Kent<sup>3</sup>—and he learned his written tongue from “persons who knew Latin well”.<sup>4</sup> As Albrecht Diem points out, “it was only in the Carolingian world that a [monastic] *schola* became an institutionalized ‘location of learning’”,<sup>5</sup> and were it not for the magnificent library that Benedict Biscop built at Jarrow through his continental travels,<sup>6</sup> Bede’s early intellectual education might have been minimal. Bede celebrates Biscop’s dedicated collection and his consequent education in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*’s “autobiographical note”, in which he writes, “semper aut discere, aut docere, aut scribere dulce habui”,<sup>7</sup> or “I have always delighted in learning, teaching, and writing”.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, Bede consciously perpetuates this image of provincial study; throughout many of his texts, Bede develops a depiction of himself and of Jarrow that cements the distinction between the secular world and the sacred one in which he lived. However, this depiction may be illusory, as Ian Wood aptly comments, “from what Bede has to say, one could imagine that Jarrow was usually an isolated haven of calm, only occasionally drawn into the wider world by the arrival from distant parts of

---

<sup>2</sup>Verity Allen, “Bede: Educating the Educators of Barbarians” (*Quaestio: Selected Proceedings of the Cambridge Colloquium in Anglo-Saxon Norse and Celtic* 3 (2002): 28-44), 30.

<sup>3</sup>Ruby Davis, “Bede’s Early Reading” (*Speculum* 8, no. 2 (1933): 179-195), 190.

<sup>4</sup>Dorothy Whitelock, “Bede and his Teachers and Friends”, in *Famulus Christi: Essays in Commemoration of the Thirteenth Centenary of the Birth of the Venerable Bede*, ed. Gerald Bonner, 19-39 (London: SPCK, 1976), 24.

<sup>5</sup>Albrecht Diem, “The Emergence of Monastic Schools: The Role of Alcuin”, in *Alcuin of York: Scholar at the Carolingian Court*, ed. L.A.J.R. Houwen and A.A. MacDonald, 27-44, *Germania Latina III* (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1995), 30.

<sup>6</sup>Whitelock, “Bede and his Teachers and Friends”, 23.

<sup>7</sup>Bede, *Historiam Ecclesiasticam Gentis Anglorum Historiam Abbatum Epistolam ad Ecgbertum, una cum Historia Abbatum Auctore Anonymo*, ed. Charles Plummer, Vol. I (Oxford: Clarendon, 1896), Bk. V, Ch. 24, 357. All quotations from this text are cited as “Plummer” with the corresponding Book, Chapter, and page numbers. Any quotations from Vol. II of Plummer’s edition are cited as such.

<sup>8</sup>Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People and Other Selections*, ed. James Campbell (New York: Washington Square Press, 1968), 311. All Modern English translations of Bede’s *Historia* are from Campbell’s edition unless otherwise noted.

Benedict Biscop, or of a letter from the Pictish King Nechtan [but in fact] the leaders [of Jarrow] had to deal regularly with the powers of this world”.<sup>9</sup>

Just as those leaders often had to interact with the “powers of this world”, Bede wrote the Historia Ecclesiastica for Christians outside of Jarrow’s walls,<sup>10</sup> as its grammar, which is “somewhat easier than the grammar used in most of [his] commentaries”,<sup>11</sup> helps demonstrate (Bede’s dedication to King Ceolwulf likewise contains “easier” grammar). Walter Goffart interprets the text as follows: “[It is] a tale of origins framed dynamically as the Providence-guided advance of a people from heathendom to Christianity; a cast of saints rather than rude warriors; a mastery of historical technique incomparable for its time; beauty of form and diction; and, not least, an author whose qualities of life and spirit set a model of dedicated scholarship”.<sup>12</sup> Goffart’s analysis of the Historia as “a tale of origins framed dynamically as the Providence-guided advance of a people from heathendom to Christianity” conveys both the larger sense of a Christian history—for one could argue that the story of Christianity as a whole, not just Christianity in England, is one of “Providence-guided advance”—and an authorial presence of colloquial instruction. In addition, Goffart’s identification of the Historia as “a tale of origins” emphasizes the plurality of groups that came together in this “Providence-guided advance”, and even this representation may be traced back to Bede’s education as a monk. For example, with regard to Bede’s portrayal of the Irish in the Historia, Dorothy Whitelock relates that one of Bede’s “teachers of the Scriptures” was a monk named Trumberht, “who

---

<sup>9</sup>Ian Wood, “Bede’s Jarrow”, in A Place to Believe in: Locating Medieval Landscapes, ed. Clare A. Lees and Gillian R. Overing, 67-84 (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 82-83.

<sup>10</sup>Allen, 34.

<sup>11</sup>Allen, 38. Also see Roger Ray, Bede, Rhetoric, and the Creation of Christian Latin Culture (Jarrow Lecture, 1997), 9-10.

<sup>12</sup>Walter Goffart, The Narrators of Barbarian History (A.D. 550-800): Jordanes, Gregory of Tours, Bede, and Paul the Deacon (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 235.

had been educated in the monastery of Chad [...] Trumberht would be in a position to tell Bede a lot about the Church in Northumbria about the time of the Synod of Whitby. It is of interest to know that Bede was taught by a man whose early education would be likely to make him sympathetic towards those trained by the Celtic Church”.<sup>13</sup> Two things of note emerge from Whitelock’s analysis; first, that Bede’s education was one of reception from monastery to monastery, and monk to monk, and second, that this education transcended ethnic boundaries *inter gentibus*. Trumberht’s instruction might have made Bede more “sympathetic” to a Celtic Church—particularly as his issues, so to speak, concerned the persistence of some Celts to observe a non-canonical Easter, and not all Celts in general—but it also may have influenced his understanding of Christian disagreement in the British Isles as a whole. The Synod of Whitby, among other council meetings concerning observance and belief, was no doubt contentious, but in Bede’s view, as I will discuss in the third chapter, a shared Christian faith was much more important than squabbles between Christians.

Although the Historia may be their best-known product, Bede’s analytic and written skills grew out of the texts he read as a monk, and revealed their considerable power in those he wrote for his fellow clergy. Aside from the Historia, Bede wrote two kinds of texts, “reference” and “commentaries”,<sup>14</sup> and they were texts “that were used to educate priests”.<sup>15</sup> As Roger Ray elaborates, “Bede wanted it known that among his works there was nothing superfluous. Every title, including the Historia no less than such treatises as De Arte Metrica, fell precisely within the tight biblical economy of his learned purposes”.<sup>16</sup> In addition, Bede composed his treatise at a time

---

<sup>13</sup>Whitelock, “Bede and his Teachers and Friends”, 24.

<sup>14</sup>Allen, 31.

<sup>15</sup>Allen, 43.

<sup>16</sup>Roger Ray, “Bede, the Exegete, as Historian”, in Famulus Christi: Essays in

when recognition of patristic authority was being consolidated in medieval Europe as a whole,<sup>17</sup> and the idea of Christian history was being heavily emphasized. James Campbell notes that Bede “set out to master and pass on a large part of the learning of the Christian Church; and [he] succeeded in this”,<sup>18</sup> and as Joyce Hill explains, a hundred years after the monk’s death, the Council of Aachen in 836 accorded Bede “the same authority as that of the [Church] Fathers, an extraordinary elevation which was a measure of his command of the patristic tradition and the extent to which he was an authority figure for the [Carolingian] reformers”.<sup>19</sup>

Knowledge of the patristic tradition in seventh and eighth century England depended on monasteries and libraries like those that Benedict Biscop created, and as Stephanus Hilpisch notes, “the early Anglo-Saxon Church may justly be described as a monk’s church, for everywhere in the country the monasteries were the centers of ecclesiastical life”.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, as Bede often indicates, monasteries could provide an intellectual and physical refuge, however illusory, from a country that was marked by “unease” and “agitation”<sup>21</sup> in the seventh and eighth centuries. But the Anglo-Saxon Church, even as it struggled to establish distinctions between secular and clerical life and to align itself with Rome, remained a product of its time and place. As James Campbell contends, “as the [Anglo-Saxon] Church grew, and grew acclimatized [to England], much of its way of life seems to have been assimilated to that of lay society and the *mores* of its rulers to those of the aristocracy from which so many of them

---

Commemoration of the Thirteenth Centenary of the Birth of the Venerable Bede, ed. Gerald Bonner, 125-140 (London: SPCK, 1976), 125.

<sup>17</sup>Bernice M. Kaczynski, “Bede’s Commentaries on Luke and Mark and the Formation of a Patristic Canon”, in Anglo-Latin and its Heritage: Essays in Honour of A.G. Rigg on his 64<sup>th</sup> Birthday, ed. Siân Echard and Gernot R. Wieland, 17-26 (Toronto: Brepolis, 2001), 18.

<sup>18</sup>James Campbell, “Bede”, in Latin Historians, ed. T.A. Dorey, 159-160 (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), 159.

<sup>19</sup>Joyce Hill, Bede and the Benedictine Reform (Jarrow Lecture, 1998), 4.

<sup>20</sup>Stephanus Hilpisch, Benedictinism Through Changing Centuries, trans. Leonard J. Doyle (Collegeville, MN: St. John’s Abbey Press, 1958), 19.

<sup>21</sup>D.P. Kirby, “Bede, Eddius Stephanus, and the Life of Wilfrid” (The English Historical Review 98, no. 386 (1983): 101-114), 114.

came”.<sup>22</sup> Again, Bede’s occasional evocation of the parallel, separate existences of the monastic and secular worlds may be seen as more idealistic than realistic, yet the Anglo-Saxon Church probably had little choice but to concede some “assimilation” in order to maintain sovereignty over effects like its properties. Along these same lines, “assimilation” could lead to some unique developments within the Anglo-Saxon monastic world. As Sarah Foot notes, “early Anglo-Saxon monastic congregations were in essence local communities, assuming their peculiar characters from a number of individual factors, both personal and regional, which were unlikely to be replicated elsewhere in England”.<sup>23</sup> Given the plethora of possible influences that could impact a monastic congregation, ranging from a zealous local ruler to a mix of Christian and pagan residents, it is intriguing to imagine the types of personalities and practices that might distinguish a monastery on the Humber from one in Ely, much less the ones at Wearmouth and Jarrow.

One notable question that emerges from study of these monastic “local communities” and their “peculiar characters” is whether or not their abbots or abbesses imposed a *regula*, or “rule”, and if so, which type. While the Benedictine Reform of the English monasteries lay hundreds of years in the future, St. Benedict’s Rule was known in Anglo-Saxon England by Bede’s lifetime,<sup>24</sup> having probably made its way from monasteries in neighboring northern Gaul.<sup>25</sup> Yet familiarity with Benedict’s Rule did not necessarily translate into adherence to it; indeed, as Foot asserts, it is unlikely that every early Anglo-Saxon monastery had a rule at all, much

---

<sup>22</sup>James Campbell, “Bede I”, in Essays in Anglo-Saxon History, 1-28, originally published 1966 (London: Hambledon, 1986), 16.

<sup>23</sup>Sarah Foot, Monastic Life in Anglo-Saxon England, c. 600-900 (Cambridge: CUP, 2006), 185.

<sup>24</sup>Henry Mayr-Harting, The Coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1972), 148. Also Patrick Wormald, “Bede and Benedict Biscop”, in Famulus Christi: Essays in Commemoration of the Thirteenth Centenary of the Birth of the Venerable Bede, ed. Gerald Bonner, 141-169 (London: SPCK, 1976), 142. Also Foot, 50.

<sup>25</sup>Foot, 54.

less one based on Benedict's. As she writes, "what [seventh and eighth century ecclesiastics] never sought to do was to make all minsters the same. Regularity of observance, especially adherence to a single set of organizing precepts, was not an ideal to which they aspired".<sup>26</sup> And although Peter Hunter Blair argues that in seventh century Northumbria monastic life "made heavy demands, with all hours of the day and night governed by strict rule",<sup>27</sup> Patrick Wormald designates this period of Anglo-Saxon monasticism as "the age of the *regula mixta*",<sup>28</sup> in which each abbot or abbess chooses which rule, or combination thereof, his or her community will follow, if any. Even centuries later, with the Benedictine Reform in full swing, some monasteries remained self-determining with regard to their *regulae*; as Lowrie Daly elaborates, by 1100, "the Benedictine Rule was the common property of monasticism throughout Europe, but the interpretation of the Rule was by no means the same in every area".<sup>29</sup>

What is clear, however, is that the late seventh and early eighth century communities at Wearmouth and Jarrow *did* follow a *regula*, as Bede himself notes,<sup>30</sup> and that observation of a discipline in these communities was one of Biscop's preoccupations. Wilhelm Levison suggests that the *regula* in existence at the Wearmouth-Jarrow houses was "based on the experience of seventeen monasteries that [Biscop] had visited during his travels",<sup>31</sup> and Wormald echoes this observation as follows: "the *decreta* which [Biscop] had ordained for his monks were not his own untaught creation; they represented a selection of what he had found best in seventeen different monasteries which he had visited on his travels. This rule is, of course,

---

<sup>26</sup>Foot, 348.

<sup>27</sup>Peter Hunter Blair, *Northumbria in the Days of Bede*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1976), 113.

<sup>28</sup>Wormald, "Bede and Biscop", 142.

<sup>29</sup>Lowrie J. Daly, *Benedictine Monasticism: Its Formation and Development Through the 12<sup>th</sup> Century* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1965), 173.

<sup>30</sup>"obseruantiam disciplinae regularis", Plummer, Bk. V, Ch. 14, 155

<sup>31</sup>Wilhelm Levison, *England and the Continent in the Eighth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1946), 23.

lost”.<sup>32</sup> Yet even though this *regula* is now “lost”, drawing some connections between Benedict’s Rule and Bede’s “lost” *regula* is not wholly unjustified. Henry Mayr-Harting maintains that with regard to Biscop, “on some points at least he regarded the Rule of St. Benedict as having special authority. Moreover, his general pattern of monastic offices would probably have approximated to that of St. Benedict, so apparently did his idea of manual labor”.<sup>33</sup> Wormald concurs—“very little of what we can find out about Monkwearmouth-Jarrow is actually incompatible with the Benedictine Rule”<sup>34</sup>—and even Foot, while arguing against the perspective that most early Anglo-Saxon monasteries were Benedictine, concedes that with regard to Bede, “such was the strength of [his] own devotion to St. Benedict’s Rule and so convincing are the references to its observance in his own lifetime”<sup>35</sup> that one can see why scholars long thought all Anglo-Saxon monks lived according to the same discipline. As a result, we may agree that Bede certainly followed a *regula*, and in addition to scholarly evidence, his own words declare his adherence to a rule at the end of the Historia, in which he writes of his “obseruantiam disciplinae regularis”,<sup>36</sup> or “observance of regular discipline”.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, dicta of this rule would probably have circumscribed his relationships, his daily tasks, and the very objectives of his life itself.

For the purposes of illumination and comparison, we may now turn our attention to Benedict’s Rule. The Rule itself was probably “not written as a single clear rule for all of Western monachism”,<sup>38</sup> although Gregory the Great arguably promotes it that way. In Book II of his Dialogues, the Pope writes, “nam scripsit

---

<sup>32</sup>Wormald, “Bede and Biscop”, 141.

<sup>33</sup>Mayr-Harting, Coming of Christianity, 154.

<sup>34</sup>Wormald, “Bede and Biscop”, 144.

<sup>35</sup>Foot, 50.

<sup>36</sup>Plummer, Bk. V, Ch. 14, 155.

<sup>37</sup>Campbell, 311.

<sup>38</sup>Daly, 83.

monachorum regulam discretione praecipuam, sermone luculentam. Cuius si quis velit subtilius mores vitamque cognoscere, potest in eadem institutione regulae omnes magisterii illius actus invenire. Quia sanctus vir nullo modo potuit aliter docere quam vixit”,<sup>39</sup> or “[Benedict] wrote a [particular] Rule [for] monks [with discretion], [brilliant in its words]. Whoever may wish [to know more exactly] his [morals] and his life can find all the acts of his administration in the [instruction of that rule]. For that [blessed man could in no way teach differently than he lived]”.<sup>40</sup> Benedict’s objective, in creating his Rule, had been “to form men according to the Beatitudes”,<sup>41</sup> and at least one passage from the Rule would have been read out loud each day in later Benedictine monasteries;<sup>42</sup> some form of this ritual was perhaps practiced at Wearmouth-Jarrow. As a result, perhaps the greatest influence on Bede’s thought, his textual output, and his relationship to conflict was the monastic rule under which he lived. In terms of better understanding Bede’s background, a review of Benedict’s Rule is particularly useful, even if it is not the exact rule that prescribed the duties and goals of his life, because its principles may have been similar. The Rule of Benedict outlines the ways in which Benedictine monks interact with one another and within the monastery as a whole, and thus outlines the way in which conflict is de-emphasized and censured in those communities.

A central objective of the Rule is its emphasis on acting with humility, and this aim is expressed through different precepts. Benedict exhorts the monks to be obedient through respecting their brethren—“nullus quod sibi utile iudicat sequatar, sed quod

---

<sup>39</sup>Gregorius Magnus, Dialogi Libri IV, ed. Umberto Moricca, Vol. I (Rome: Tipografia del Senato, 1924), 131-132.

<sup>40</sup>Gregory the Great, Dialogues, Book II: Saint Benedict, trans. Myra L. Uhlfelder (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1967), 46.

<sup>41</sup>George Holzherr, The Rule of Benedict: A Guide to Christian Living, trans. the Monks of Glenstal Abbey (Dublin: Four Courts, 1994), 1.

<sup>42</sup>Holzherr, 2.

magis alio”,<sup>43</sup> or “let no one follow what he judges useful for himself, but rather what is useful for another”<sup>44</sup>—and as A.W. Richard Sipe writes regarding the psychological dimensions of the Rule, “the community ideal [of the Benedictine Rule] is to make love of neighbor a practical reality”.<sup>45</sup> This “community ideal” made real through “practical” dicta informs the Rule’s emphasis on rank in determining duties and power. Benedict writes, “ordines suos in monasterio ita conservent ut conversationis tempus, ut vitae meritum discernit utque abbas constituerit”, or “they shall keep to their ranks in the monastery as determined by their time of entry into the monastery, the merit of [their monastic] life, and the abbot’s decision”, and he continues, “ergo secundum ordines quos constituerit vel quos habuerint ipsi fratres, sic accedant ad pacem, ad communionem, ad psalmum inponendum, in choro standum”, or “therefore it is according to the ranks which [the abbot] has established or which the brethren have of themselves that they come to the Pax, to Communion, to reciting a psalm, to standing in choir”.<sup>46</sup> This premium on occupation and an ordering of tasks is echoed in the chapter entitled “De Opera Manuum Cotidiana”, or “Of Each Day’s Manual Work”, which reminds the monks, “otiositas inimica est animae, et ideo certis temporibus occupari debent fratres in labore manuum, certis iterum horis in lectione divina”, or “[leisure] is bad for the soul. And therefore the [monks should be occupied] at [fixed] times in the work of their hands, and again at [other fixed hours] in [divine] reading”.<sup>47</sup> The text almost seems to suggest an anxiety regarding entities that are *unfixed*, be they rank, attitude, or hours of the day. Unfixed time or rank could lead to internal strife, which would inhibit the monastery’s goal of Christian

---

<sup>43</sup>Holzherr, 319. Chapter 72:7. Both the Latin citations and Modern English translations are from Holzherr’s edition.

<sup>44</sup>My own translation.

<sup>45</sup>A.W. Richard Sipe, “The Psychological Dimensions of the *Rule* of St. Benedict” (American Benedictine Review 34, no. 4 (1983): 424-435), 426.

<sup>46</sup>Holzherr, 285, Chapter 63:1 and 63:4, respectively.

<sup>47</sup>Holzherr, 227, Chapter 48:1.

unity and service. Indeed, Gregory sees this time of disorder as a threat to the Church as a whole, and not just to monasteries. He writes as follows in a letter to the bishops of Gaul in 595:

[A]d hoc dispensationis divinae provisio gradus diversos et ordines constituit esse distinctos, ut dum reverentiam minores potioribus exhiberent, et potiores minoribus dilectionem impenderent, una concordiae fieret, ex diversitate contextio, et recte officiorum gereretur administratio singulorum. Neque enim universitas alia poterat ratione subsistere, nisi huiusmodi magnus eam differentiae ordo servaret.<sup>48</sup>

[The provision of the divine dispensation decided that there should be different grades and distinct orders for this reason, that while inferiors show reverence to the more [superior], and the more [superior] bestow love on their inferiors, [out of diversity may come concord], and the administration of individual offices may be properly carried out. For the universality [of the Church] could [by no other reason] survive unless a great order of these different [ranks] [protected] it.]<sup>49</sup>

Gregory's emphasis on "concord" emerging "out of diversity" finds an echo in Bede's emphasis on one's Christian identity—and by extension, unification with other Christians—superseding other secular world identities and thus divisions in the *Historia*. Likewise, Gregory's insistence that "a great order of these different ranks" is essential to preserving "the universality of the Church" evokes the stratified guidelines of monastic *regulae*, for as Benedict's *Rule* shows, ordered discipline, which ensures unification and peace, depends on clear rules that leave no ambiguities or questions. Disorder, in other words, problematizes unification both within a monastic community, and within the larger Christian community.

---

<sup>48</sup>Gregorius Magnus, *S. Gregorii Magni Registrum epistularum libri*, ed. D. Norberg, CCSL 140 (Turnholt: Brepols, 1982), lib.: 5, epist: 59, col. 785-786.

<sup>49</sup>Gregory the Great, *The Letters of Gregory the Great*, Vol. II, trans. John R.C. Martyn (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2004), Letter 5.59, pp. 394-395.

Sipe notes that Benedict's objective in composing the Rule was to make it "a document that would guide others in their living, in order 'to save their souls'",<sup>50</sup> and this purpose sounds like it could be part of Bede's objective for the Historia. Along these same lines, the sections of the Rule that most pertain to the minimization of conflict in Bede's Historia Ecclesiastica include Chapters Thirty-three, Fifty-four, and Sixty-nine. Chapter Thirty-three concerns personal property, and it states that within the monastery, "omniaque omnibus sint communia [...] ne quisquam suum aliquid dicat vel praesumat", or "let everything be common to all, nor let anyone call anything his own or presume [it to be so]".<sup>51</sup> Along these same lines, Chapter Fifty-four, which regards the receipt of letters or gifts, explains, "nullatenus liceat monacho neque a parentibus suis neque a quoquam hominum nec sibi invicem litteras, eulogias vel quaelibet munuscula accipere aut dare sine praecepto abbatis", or "[it is by no means permitted that] without a directive from the abbot may a monk accept or give letters, religious [gifts] or any [little presents] from his parents or from anyone else or from one another".<sup>52</sup> Modern scholarship has revealed no more about Bede's familial background than earlier historical attempts, and there is something poignant in encountering a text that may help explain that mystery. The Rule effectively erases personal identity, to the extent that when others try to re-affirm it—through gifts or letters—it can be denied, over and over again.

Yet even in turning their backs on the non-religious world, the most devoted adherents of the Rule must have occasionally felt tempted by the items and activities that the text censures, and as a result, within the Rule the threat of excommunication hangs over any extreme transgression. Chapter Sixty-nine of that text, however, may have pandered to a particular Anglo-Saxon fear belonging to both the sacred and

---

<sup>50</sup>Sipe, 427.

<sup>51</sup>Holzherr, 183, Chapter 33:6.

<sup>52</sup>Holzherr, 251. Chapter 54:1.

secular spheres—that of the blood feud. The chapter reads as follows: “*Praecavendum est ne quavis occasione praesumat alter alium defendere monachum in monasterio aut quasi tueri, etiam si qualivis consanguinitatis propinquitate iugantur. Nec quolibet modo id a monachis praesumatur, quia exinde gravissima occasio scandalorum oriri potest. Quod si quis haec transgressus fuerit, acrius coerceatur*”, or “[It must be guarded against on every occasion] that [a monk] presume to defend another in the monastery or [act as if to protect him], even [if they are joined] by any degree of blood relationship. Nor shall it be presumed by monks in any way whatever, because a most serious [chance of] scandals can [thereafter] originate. But if anyone has transgressed in these things let him be corrected [very] sharply”.<sup>53</sup> This chapter annuls, forcefully, one of the contingencies of maintaining a personal identity, which is the inevitability of inter-personal relationships. Not only may you not mimic those relationships through obligation and “patronage”, the Rule says, but you must also abandon those more visceral ones that are claimed by “blood”.

In a society in which a “blood relationship” could demand participation in violent retribution, this chapter is particularly striking. Jarrow did not want embroilment in a blood feud, nor a monastic mimicking of that system, any more than the monks at Monte Cassino did. And while no one laments monkish absence in these vendettas, there is the sense that by denying the “patronage” engendered by personal relationships, the Rule strips away the most fundamental element of one’s non-monastic self. An interesting parallel to this Rule precept may be found in the law-code of King Canute. Although the code was composed in the eleventh century, hundreds of years after both the Rule and Bede’s Historia were written, it underscores the discrepancies between monk and layman when it comes to blood-feud participation and personal identity. It reads as follows: “*And na þearf ænig*

---

<sup>53</sup>Holzherr, 311. Chapter 69: 1-4.

mynstermunuc ahwær mid rihte fæðbohte biddan ne fæhþbote betan; he gæð of his mægðlage, þonne he gebyhð to regollage”,<sup>54</sup> or “and not any mynster-monk from anywhere may rightfully ask for feud compensation nor offer feud compensation; he departed from the law of his kin when he submitted to rule-law [or monk-law]”. This excerpt acknowledges essentially two parallel legal systems in the temporal world, and in doing so it further classifies those who follow them. In addition to being a “ceorl”, “frigman”, “þeowa”, or “cyning”, one can be an adherent of “mægðlagu” or “regollagu”. Even the different linguistic origins of the two terms underscores the separate, parallel existence of their systems—the Germanic “mægð” speaks to the “family” that is the root of Anglo-Saxon society, and to all the potential conflict that a “mægð” may bring forth, while the Latinate “regol” alludes to the Christian tradition from which it emerges and to the nebulously identified practitioners who honor its precepts.

In the subsequent chapters I will examine specific incidents of Bede’s elision of conflict, but in the meantime, it may be useful to explore another reason besides monastic co-habitation that may lead to his de-emphasis on strife in the *Historia*. As has been discussed, Bede was well acquainted with the works of Augustine of Hippo, and T. R. Eckenrode contends that Bede’s knowledge of Augustine “far outstripped his familiarity with Jerome, Ambrose, and Gregory the Great, the other three most significant writers in this monk’s purview”.<sup>55</sup> One explanation for Bede’s reticence about conflict, as a result, might be traced to Augustine’s 395 A.D. treatise *De Mendacio*, or *On Lying*, in which the North African saint equates falsehood with eternal death, and his 420 A.D. treatise *Contra Mendacium*, or *Against Lying*, in

---

<sup>54</sup>A.J. Robertson, ed. and trans., *The Laws of the Kings of England from Edmund to Henry I* (Cambridge: CUP, 1925), 160. I Canute 5 2d.

<sup>55</sup>T.R. Eckenrode, “The Venerable Bede and the Pastoral Affirmation of the Christian Message in Anglo-Saxon England” (*Downside Review* 99, no. 337 (1981): 258-278), 270.

which he argues that lying is equivalent to rejecting God. As James Campbell notes, Bede's Historia is a work of "great discretion",<sup>56</sup> and one major effect of this "discretion" is that throughout the Historia contentious ecclesiastical figures, like Bishop Wilfrid, or ecclesiastical events marked by dispute, like the Synod of Whitby, are presented with minimal to non-existent commentary.<sup>57</sup> As Walter Goffart notes, "Bede's discretion cannot have been an inborn gift; it presumably resulted from a sustained and painful effort to say no more or less than had to be said".<sup>58</sup> It is as though Bede has chosen not to say anything negative or condemnatory, because he would not be able to comment positively on these examples without lying; as a result, the reader may be able to detect the roots of his "rhetoric of reticence".

In his earlier De Mendacio, Augustine does not condemn falsehood with the same ferocity as he does in his later treatise, Contra Mendacium, but his argument with regard to concealing the truth—as opposed to making a straightforward lie—is similar in both texts. He does, however, draw a distinction between this concealment and outright falsehood; as he explains in De Mendacio, "ad sempiternam vero salutem nullus ducendus est opitulante mendacio",<sup>59</sup> or "unto eternal salvation none is to be led by aid of a lie",<sup>60</sup> and he elaborates as follows: "Si ad te homo confugiat, qui mendacio tuo possit a morte liberari?"<sup>61</sup> [...] os autem, quod mentitur, non corpus, sed animam occidit<sup>62</sup> [...] cum igitur mentiando vita aeterna amittatur, numquam pro

---

<sup>56</sup>Campbell, "Bede", 176.

<sup>57</sup>I analyze Bede's reticence on both Wilfrid and the Synod of Whitby in Chapter Three.

<sup>58</sup>Walter Goffart, The Narrators of Barbarian History (A.D. 550-800): Jordanes, Gregory of Tours, Bede, and Paul the Deacon (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 436.

<sup>59</sup>Augustinus Hipponensis, De Mendacio, Liber Unus, in Opera Omnia, Maurist Edition, reprinted in Patrologia Latinae Cursus Completus 40 (Turnholt: Brepols, 1970), cap. 21, col. 516.

<sup>60</sup>Augustine of Hippo, On Lying (De Mendacio), trans. H. Browne, in A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, ed. Philip Schaff, Vol. III (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1887), 476. All Modern English translations of De Mendacio are from this edition unless otherwise cited.

<sup>61</sup>Augustinus, De Mendacio, cap. 6, col. 494.

<sup>62</sup>Augustinus, De Mendacio, cap. 6, col. 494.

culusquam temporali vita mentiendum est”<sup>63</sup>, or “Suppose a man [seeks] shelter with [you], who by [your] lie may be saved from death? [...] But the mouth which lies kills not the body but the soul [...] Since then by lying eternal life is lost, never for [the temporal life of anyone should] a lie be told”.<sup>64</sup> In other words, by seeing the temporal world in contrast with the eternal, Augustine argues that salvation in the present is worthless next to salvation in the future. This passage might not conspicuously illuminate Bede’s reticence on conflict, but consider what might happen if he did lie about the Synod of Whitby. Suppose that he wrote that it was a harmonious conference in which both sides felt fairly represented, and the non-canonical Irish acquiesced to the superior reason of the followers of the universal Church. Such a depiction might strengthen Bede’s lesson of Christian unification, but it would be false. Even more significantly, as a liar, regardless of his intentions, he could lose his “eternal life”. How, then, does Augustine propose one resolve the dilemma of not wanting to lie, but also not wanting to betray one’s true feelings by remaining silent? The North African saint offers the following solution, which only partly addresses this question, by returning to the hypothetical hidden man: “Si autem scis ubi sit, sive ibi sit, ubi quaeritur, sive alibi, non est dicendum, cum quaesitum fuerit, utrum ibi sit an non sit: non dico quod quaeris, sed dicendum: scio, ubi sit, sed numquam monstrabo”,<sup>65</sup> or “If [you] know where he is, [whether] in [that] place which is named in the question or elsewhere; [you must] not say, when it is asked whether he [is in that place] or not, ‘I will not tell what [you] ask’, but [you must] say, ‘I know where he is, but I will never show’”.<sup>66</sup> Yet by acknowledging that one possesses an answer to this question, as Augustine suggests, even stating “I will never show” can allow an

---

<sup>63</sup>Augustinus, *De Mendacio*, cap. 6, col. 495.

<sup>64</sup>Augustine, *On Lying*, 462.

<sup>65</sup>Augustinus Hipponensis, *De Mendacio*, cap. 13, col. 505.

<sup>66</sup>Augustine, *On Lying*, 469.

interrogator to discover what he wants by inferring from one's principled silence. Likewise, Bede's taciturn commentary on contentious personalities and events in ecclesiastical Anglo-Saxon history often suggests his true views.

An interesting parallel in the Historia to Augustine's hypothetical "concealed man" in De Mendacio concerns King Oswine of Deira, whom King Oswy of Bernicia eventually murdered. As Bede relates, the two kings were going to fight one another, but as Oswine realized that his troops were outnumbered, he sent his men home and with one soldier "celandus in domum comitis Hunualdi, quem etiam ipsum sibi amicissimum autumabat", or decided "to hide at the house of his thegn Hunwald, who was, he used to say, a very good friend of his". Bede writes, "Sed heu, pro dolor! longe aliter erat; nam ab eodem comite proditum eum Osuiu cum praefato ipsius milite per praefectum suum Ediluinum detestanda omnibus morte interfecit",<sup>67</sup> or "But alas, it was far otherwise, for Oswine was betrayed by that thegn and Oswy had him killed, with the aforesaid [man], by the hand of his reeve Aethelwine, in a manner that [should be] loathed by all".<sup>68</sup> Several important issues arise in this passage that are indicative of both Augustine's views on lying and Bede's narrative style. First, Bede does not explain whether or not Hunwald offered the information or was interrogated about Oswine's location—if so, did he use Augustine's phrase, "I know where he is, but I will never show", and thus betray his friend that way, or did he seek out Oswy with the knowledge? Second, Bede's usage of the phrase "should be loathed by all" suggests that while he shares in the disgust at Oswy's act, he does not explicitly say so, but instead ambiguously includes himself in the "all". This uncertainty is further underscored by Bede's statement a couple sentences later, "postmodum [...] monasterium constructum est; in quo pro utriusque regis, et occisi uidelicet, et eius,

---

<sup>67</sup>Plummer, Bk, III, Ch. 14, 155.

<sup>68</sup>Campbell, 135.

qui occidere iussit, animae redemptione cotidie Domino preces offerri deberent”,<sup>69</sup> or “afterwards a monastery was built to atone for this crime. There prayers were to be daily offered up to the Lord for the redemption of the souls of both kings, that is, of him who was murdered and of him who ordered the other’s murder”.<sup>70</sup> It is unclear why anyone would pray for Oswy (or at least, not for Hunwald as well), but this statement suggests that for Bede at least, resolution had been reached over the death of the beloved Oswine. Third, “detestanda omnibus”, or “[should be] loathed by all” is the only phrase that concerns this crime: Bede does not elaborate on any consequences of the deed, nor any particular reactions to it. As a result, the entire incident reads as though it took place in isolation from other people and events. What more was there to say that Bede chose not to?

The idea that Bede could have commented further on the Oswine episode, and that he possibly *chose* to remain silent on other details concerning these events, is additionally illuminated by Augustine’s views on silence and concealment in Contra Mendacium. In this text, as stated previously, Augustine is considerably harsher on those who commit falsehoods than he is in his earlier treatise, but his argument concerning the distinction between lying and concealing the truth remains similar. The evidence for Augustine’s argument in favor of concealment lies in John 16:12, in which Jesus tells his disciples, “adhuc multa habeo vobis dicere sed non potestis portare modo”,<sup>71</sup> or “I have yet many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now”.<sup>72</sup> Augustine interprets this passage as follows:

non autem hoc est occultare ueritatem, quod est proferre mendacium.

---

<sup>69</sup>Plummer, Bk. III, Ch. 14, 155.

<sup>70</sup>Campbell, 135.

<sup>71</sup>Biblia Sacra: Iuxta Vulgatam Versionem, altera emendata edition (Stuttgart: Wurttembergische Bibelanstalt, 1975), s.v. John 16:12.

<sup>72</sup>The Holy Bible: Douay Rheims Version, ed. James Gibbons, trans. Richard Challoner (Rockford, IL: Tan Books, 1989), s.v. John 16:12.

quamuis enim omnis qui mentitur uelit celare quod uerum est, non tamen omnis, qui uult quod uerum est celare, mentitur. plerumque enim uera non mentiendo occulimus, sed tacendo. neque enim mentitus est dominus, ubi ait: multa habeo uobis dicere, sed non potestis illa portare modo. uera tacuit, non falsa locutus est, quibus ueris audiendis eos minus idoneos iudicauit. quodsi eis hoc ipsum non indicasset, id est non eos posse portare, quae dicere noluit, occultaret quidem nihilominus aliquid ueritatis, sed posse hoc recte fieri forsitan nesciremus aut non tanto firmaremur exemplo.<sup>73</sup>

[It is not, however, the same thing to hide the truth as it is to utter a lie. For although every one who lies wishes to hide what is true, yet not every one who wishes to hide what is true, tells a lie. For in general we hide truths not by telling a lie, but by [being silent]. For the Lord lied not when He said, “I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.” He [remained silent] from true things, [and did not speak] false things; for the hearing of which truths He judged them to be less fit. But if He had not indicated this same to them, that is, that they were not able to bear [those] things [about] which He was unwilling to speak, He would indeed hide nevertheless [something] of the truth, but that this may be rightly done we should peradventure not know, or not have so great an example to confirm us.]<sup>74</sup>

That Augustine recognizes and promotes a distinction between “hiding the truth” and “telling a lie” allows Christians some latitude in how they might face interrogation, describe a situation, or in Bede’s case, relate a narrative. Indeed, the fact that Jesus withholds “multa”, or “many things”, from his disciples sets a precedent for storytellers intent on narrative pacing, or for instructors who feel that their students must work to discover the true meaning of a confusing lesson. The key to this concealment, however, lies in the latter half of Augustine’s analysis; as he explains, it is crucial that Jesus “indicated this same to them, that is, that they were not able to bear [those] things [about] which He was unwilling to speak”. In other words, must one acknowledge that something is being hidden? As this examination of the Historia

---

<sup>73</sup>Augustinus Hipponensis, Contra Mendacium, ed. Joseph Zycha, CSEL 41 (Vienna: F. Tempsky, 1900), cap. 10, par. 23.

<sup>74</sup>Augustine of Hippo, To Consentius: Against Lying, trans. H. Browne, in A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, ed. Philip Schaff, Vol. III (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1887), 491.

and its parable-like narratives attempts to show, Bede often does gesture towards an elision of details, emotions, and conflict in the events that he depicts; does the thegn, for example, reveal Oswin through an implicit silence, or straightforward betrayal? Perhaps Bede's reticence in this passage is an example of him "holding his peace from true things".

A brief, targeted examination of De Mendacio and Contra Mendacium, in combination with a reading of the vignette about King Oswin, foreshadows the examination of the Historia's parable-like narrative strand in Chapter One, and also provides an initial example of the "rhetoric of reticence" that permeates that text. As this introductory survey has attempted to show, Bede's monastic life, spent under a *regula* and filled with intellectual pursuits, perhaps informed his minimization and treatment of physical and metaphorical conflict in his seminal text. At the same time, the comparative analyses of De Mendacio, Contra Mendacium, and the King Oswin digression help demonstrate the discrete, and often puzzling, ways in which Bede relates the events in the Historia, and his cryptic or absent commentary thus leaves the task of interpretation to the careful reader or listener.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Bede's Parable-Like Narrative

The Historia Ecclesiastica is a didactic text designed to instruct Christian Anglo-Saxons through stories and events that demonstrate good deeds and intentions. In light of this purpose, a narrative form that occurs in the Historia is that of the parable-like episode. One of the most puzzling things about Bede's text is the existence of episodes and chapters that readers and scholars have found very difficult to interpret; for example, Bede will on occasion relate a seemingly odd or irrelevant story, and then simply say nothing about its significance. As a result, these narrative incidents, which may be seen as akin to parables, or parable-like, provide the reader or listener with an interpretative challenge, particularly with regard to how conflict is depicted throughout the text. For just as with a parable, in which the reader must find the true meaning of the story, Bede is circumspect about conflict in the Historia, and due to this circumspect "rhetoric of reticence", the reader must be vigilant if he or she wants to find out what particularly is happening in narrative moments of discord.

As an example of this "rhetoric of reticence", then, these parable-like vignettes help illuminate an overall lesson of the Historia—namely, that interpretation and subsequent behavior are ultimately the responsibility of the reader, and that there will not always be a blueprint for good choices and behavior. If the Anglo-Saxons are to achieve and maintain Christian unity and transcend intra-Christian strife, in other words, then they must hone their abilities to interpret, choose, and act correctly, with the goal of Christian unification first and foremost in their minds. Along these same lines, Bede's emphasis on instruction and positive Christian action resonates with an Augustinian understanding of history, and the significance of a Christian world order versus secular and pagan history. Recognizing the Historia's parable-like mode of

narrative as well as its place in a Christian history allows us to examine why Bede might minimize conflict, and how he creates a “rhetoric of reticence” in his text.

The Historia’s parable-like episodes and the text’s consequential “rhetoric of reticence” often suggest Augustine’s stance on silence and concealment of the truth; in other words, Bede is not obligated to tell his audience everything that occurs in particular incidents, much less their overall meaning. Instead, as long as he is not committing falsehoods, Bede may employ silence, elision, and cryptic description in relating his narrative as it suits him, specifically when it suits his text’s didactic purpose. These difficult episodes, when seen in light of the readers’ interpretative challenge, also find a biblical parallel in John 16:25, in which Jesus tells his disciples, “haec in proverbii locutus sum vobis venit hora cum iam non in proverbii loquar vobis sed palam de Patre adnuntiabo vobis”,<sup>75</sup> or “These things I have spoken to you in proverbs. The hour cometh, when I will no more speak to you in proverbs, but will show you plainly of the Father”.<sup>76</sup> Bede’s Historia could, from a didactic standpoint, be seen as training for interpreting Jesus’ message, and these episodes could thus be viewed as apropos of a text written before “venit hora”, when Jesus will at last speak straightforwardly to faithful Christians. In the meantime, however, Bede commits himself to demonstrating the difficulty of understanding “proverbi” throughout the Historia.

Primary evidence for Bede’s perspective on parables can be found in his text In Marci Evangelium Expositio, particularly in his comments on Matthew 13. In that piece of scripture, Jesus relates the Parable of the Sower to a group of people by the seaside—of the Sower’s seeds, some are eaten by birds, some fall on rocks instead of

---

<sup>75</sup>Biblia Sacra: Iuxta Vulgatam Versionem, altera emendata edition (Stuttgart: Wurttembergische Bibelanstalt, 1975), s.v. John 16:25.

<sup>76</sup>The Holy Bible: Douay Rheims Version, ed. James Gibbons, trans. Richard Challoner (Rockford, IL: Tan Books, 1989), s.v. John 16:25.

earth, some are scorched by the sun, and some fall among thorns. However, some of the seeds do fall on fertile ground, and these seeds grow and bear prolific fruit. When Jesus finishes this parable, his disciples ask him why he speaks in parables, and he responds as follows:

quia vobis datum est nosse mysteria regni caelorum illis autem non est datum [...] ideo in parabolis loquor eis quia videntes non vident et audientes non audiunt neque intellegunt [...] incrassatum est enim cor populi huius et auribus graviter audierunt et oculos suos cluserunt nequando oculis videant et auribus audiant et corde intellegant et convertantur et sanem eos<sup>77</sup>

[Because to you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven: but to them it is not given [...] Therefore do I speak to them in parables: because seeing they see not, and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand [...] For the heart of this people is grown gross, and with their ears they have been dull of hearing, and their eyes they have shut: lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand.]<sup>78</sup>

Jesus recognizes that because the disciples are privileged in their understanding of “mysteria regni caelorum”, or “the mysteries of heaven”, they do not have the same need for parables as the multitudes at the seaside. Instead, these multitudes, in order to receive his teachings, require some type of narrative that demonstrates the “mysteria” through different, understandable symbols. Bede, as evidenced by In Marci, perhaps sees himself as a type of disciple who does not need parables to understand those “mysteria” in the same way that his audience might, but he considers that public need paramount in spreading Jesus’ teachings. As he writes in that text, “Notandum in his Domini verbis quod non solum ea quae loquebatur, verum etiam quae faciebat parabola fuerunt, id est rerum signa mysticarum, cum dicuntur illi quibus in parabolis omnia fiebant, neque quae videbant neque quae audiebant, ad

---

<sup>77</sup>Biblia Sacra, s.v. Matthew 13:11-15.

<sup>78</sup>The Holy Bible: Douay Rheims Version, s.v. Matthew 13: 11-15.

intellectum potuisse perducere”,<sup>79</sup> or “It should be noted in these words of the Lord that not only those things which he said, but also those things which he did were parables, that is, signs of mystical things, when those to whom everything happened in parables are said to have been able to bring to understanding neither what they saw nor what they heard”.<sup>80</sup> In other words, Bede also seems to believe that for those who could neither “vident”, or “see”, nor “audient”, or “hear” the “mysteria regni caelorum”, there must be some access Jesus’ message through “signa”, or “signs”, and “parabola” represent the best type of “signa”, for they lead the multitudes to “intellectus”, or “understanding”.

For the purposes of this thesis, however, I will use a more specific definition than *signum* for “parable”, and for that definition I cite the medieval bishop Isidore of Seville, with whom Bede was also familiar. Isidore, in his comprehensive and influential *Etymologiae*, identifies “parabola” as a type of “similitudo”. He writes, “Homoeosis est, quae Latine interpretatur similitudo, per quam minus notae rei per similitudinem eius, quae magis nota est, panditur demonstratio. Huius species sunt tres: icon, parabola, paradigma, id est imago, comparatio, exemplum”,<sup>81</sup> or “*Homoeosis*, which is translated in Latin as similitude (*similitudo*), is that by which the description of some less known thing is made clear by something better known which is similar to it. There are three types: icon, parabola, and paradigm, that is image, comparison, and model”.<sup>82</sup> Isidore defines parabola in particular as follows: “parabola comparatio ex dissimilibus rebus, ut [...] Qualis in arvis aestiferae Libyae

---

<sup>79</sup>Beda Venerabilis, *In Marci Evangelium Expositio*, in *Opera Omnia*, Migne Edition, Patrologiae Latinae 92 (Paris: 1862), lib. 1, cap. 4, col. 168-169.

<sup>80</sup>My own translation, with many thanks to Carin Ruff of Cornell University, who clarified the difficult second half of this quotation.

<sup>81</sup>Isidorus Hispalensis, *Etymologiarum sive Originum libri XX*, ed. W.M. Lindsay, Vol. I (Oxford: Clarendon, 1910), lib. 1, cap. 37, par. 31.

<sup>82</sup>Isidore of Seville, *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, ed. and trans. Stephen A. Barney, W.J. Lewis, J.A. Beach, Oliver Berghof, with collaboration of Muriel Hall (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 63-64, I.xxxvii.31.

visus leo comminus hostem consedit; ubi leoni Caesarem conparavit, non ex suo, sed ex alio genere similitudinem faciens”,<sup>83</sup> or “parabola (*parabola*) is a comparison (*conparatio*) from dissimilar things, as (Lucan, *Civil War* 1.205): Like a lion seen hard by in the fields of heat-bearing / Libya, he beset the enemy, where he compares Caesar to a lion, making a comparison, not from his own kind, but from another”.<sup>84</sup> Isidore’s definition of “parable” reads very much like modern definitions of “allegory”. For example, as The Oxford English Dictionary notes, an allegory can be either “a description of a subject under the guise of some other subject of aptly suggestive resemblance”, or “an instance of such description; a figurative sentence, discourse, or narrative, in which properties and circumstances attributed to the apparent subject really refer to the subject they are meant to suggest; an extended or continued metaphor”.<sup>85</sup> Elements of the parable-like sections in the *Historia* coincide with these “allegory” definitions, in particular with the part of the definition that notes, “properties and circumstances attributed to the apparent subject really refer to the subject they are meant to suggest”. Yet even if some of the parable-like sections could also justifiably be called allegorical, Isidore’s “parabola” is more appropriate than the modern “allegory” in describing Bede’s *Historia* for two important reasons.

First, Isidore does distinguish “parabola” from both “allegoria” and “aenigma”, or “riddle”, two terms that also sound like plausible descriptions for Bede’s text. In identifying and distinguishing “allegoria” and “aenigma”, Isidore writes, “inter allegoriam autem et aenigma hoc interest, quod allegoriae vis gemina est et sub res alias aliud figuraliter indicat; aenigma vero sensus tantum obscurus est, et per quasdam imagines adumbratus”,<sup>86</sup> or “between allegory and the riddle there is this

---

<sup>83</sup>Isidorus Hispalensis, *Etymologiarum*, lib. 1, cap. 37, par. 33.

<sup>84</sup>Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies*, p. 64, l.xxxvii.33.

<sup>85</sup>The Oxford English Dictionary, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1989 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), s.v. “allegory”.

<sup>86</sup>Isidorus Hispalensis, *Etymologiarum*, lib. 1, cap. 37, par. 26.

difference, that the force of the allegory is twofold and figuratively indicates one subject under the guise of other subjects, while a riddle merely has an obscure meaning, and its solution is hinted at through certain images”.<sup>87</sup> Similar to their coinciding with the definitions of the modern “allegory”, the parable-like parts of the Historia could be seen as having both a “twofold” allegorical emphasis as well as certain passages with simply “obscure meaning”, but what these definitions lack is an emphasis on an instructive “conparatio”, or comparison, that the “similitude”, and thus “parabola”, definitions contain. The key to Isidore’s identification of “parabola” and its “conparatio” lies in the definition of “similitude”, in which he infers a type of revelatory instruction: “the description of some less known thing is made clear by something better known which is similar to it”. As a result, I characterize the Historia as possessing a *parable-like* narrative strand, as opposed to being an actual *parable*, because as a whole the text conveys moments of parable-like narrative without literally being one.

Second, “allegory” does not suggest the significance of the tradition of Christian instruction in the way that “parabola” does, in particular its role as a vehicle for moral models and lessons. As I will argue throughout this dissertation, it is through “conparatio” and an ongoing evocation of the traditions of Christian moral instruction that Bede underscores the goal of achieving Christian unity on earth and a heavenly reward in eternity. Similarly, when contextualized within other patristic writings, Isidore’s definition of “parable” contributes to a richer understanding of the term in texts that Bede may have read. As Stepehn Wailes writes, “It is the consensus of Biblical scholars that the early Christian community, rather than Jesus, originated the allegorical tradition associated with the parables and formulated the parable theory

---

<sup>87</sup>Isidore of Seville, Etymologies, p. 63, I.xxxvii.26.

in Mark”.<sup>88</sup> In other words, the concept of using *signa* to elucidate *mysteria* may have its roots in the same intellectual and ecclesiastical tradition in which Bede was educated, and which thus would have shaped his own understanding of exegetical interpretation and instruction. In his informative study on medieval allegories, Wailes further writes regarding parables, “Exegetes understood that *parabola* was a word of Greek origin with an acknowledged place in the art of rhetoric and took it as a synonym for *similitude*. The stories that we call parables were understood by medieval readers to fall within a large body of likenesses or similitudes that communicated Christian truth when properly interpreted”.<sup>89</sup> Wailes’s study on medieval allegories provides an analysis on parable that may be broken down into three components. First, he notes that in the medieval period there is “the impossibility of making a final distinction between the metaphors, similes, and stories of Jesus’ teaching”.<sup>90</sup> Second, “patristic and medieval readers understood that parables were a fundamental part of Jesus’ method of communication [...] they also knew that certain teachings were *parabola*e because Scripture so identified them”,<sup>91</sup> and third, “the Vulgate also used *parabola* for metaphorical expressions spoken by Jesus in the New Testament, and for a wide range of figurative expressions in the Old”.<sup>92</sup> Wailes identifies a general tension in medieval understandings of *parabola*; that is to say, that *parabola* could signify either instruction or merely “metaphorical expression”. For the purposes of this argument, however, “parable” or “parable-like” will adhere to Isidore’s definition—the *Historia* is a narrative concerning human beings that stresses a *comparatio* between dissimilar things in order to make clear

---

<sup>88</sup>Stephen Wailes, “Why did Jesus use Parables? The Medieval Discussion” (*Medievalia et Humanistica: Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Culture* 13 (1985): 43-64), 55.

<sup>89</sup>Stephen L. Wailes, *Medieval Allegories of Jesus’ Parables* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987), 3.

<sup>90</sup>Wailes, *Medieval Allegories*, 3.

<sup>91</sup>Wailes, *Medieval Allegories*, 3.

<sup>92</sup>Wailes, *Medieval Allegories*, 3.

“some less known thing”. In Bede’s case, the purpose of this *comparatio* is to emphasize the importance of Christian unity and eternal reward by elucidating the various “less known” or unknown histories and personalities of Anglo-Saxon England.

The central evidence for seeing the Historia as possessing a parable-like narrative strand lies in a statement that Bede makes in his Prologue, which is as follows: “Siue enim historia de bonis bona referat, ad imitandum bonum auditor sollicitus instigatur; seu mala commemoret de prauis, nihilominus religiosus ac pius auditor siue lector deuitando quod noxium est ac peruersum, ipse sollertius ad exsequenda ea, quae bona ac Deo digna esse cognouerit, accenditur”,<sup>93</sup> or, “For if history relates good things of good men then the [concerned listener] is incited to imitate that which is good. If it records evil things of wicked men, nevertheless, the religious and pious hearer or reader in shunning that which is hurtful or perverse is fired more earnestly to perform those things which he has learned to be good and worthy of God”.<sup>94</sup> Bede’s text *does* record many “bonis bona” or “good things of good men”, and on occasion “mala [...] prauis”, or “evil things of wicked men”, but interestingly, Bede tends to focus more visibly on good deeds throughout the Historia. He illustrates these “bonae” with allusions to or details about bad deeds, so that a comparison between the two almost always exists, but one could not read the Historia as an absolute guide on what to avoid (for example, in contrast to the Anglo-Saxon kings’ law-codes). As Henry Mayr-Harting elaborates, “On the whole, Bede thought it was safer not to say too much about wicked persons. Still less did he think it worth

---

<sup>93</sup>Bede, Historiam Ecclesiasticam Gentis Anglorum Historiam Abbatum Epistolam ad Ecgbertum, una cum Historia Abbatum Auctore Anonymo, ed. Charles Plummer, Vol. I (Oxford: Clarendon, 1896), Praefatio, 5. All quotations from this text are cited as “Plummer” with the corresponding Book, Chapter, and page numbers. Any quotations from Vol. II of Plummer’s edition are cited as such.

<sup>94</sup>Bede, The Ecclesiastical History of the English People and Other Selections, ed. James Campbell (New York: Washington Square Press, 1968), 3. All Modern English translations of Bede’s Historia are from Campbell’s edition unless otherwise noted.

mentioning evil things about those whom he thought good; his history was marked throughout by utmost discretion”.<sup>95</sup> Along these same lines, perhaps Bede chooses not to highlight bad deeds in order to avoid being seen by his readers as somehow endorsing them, yet the “mala” still remain a presence within the text, even if largely through suggestion.

With regard to the structure of the parable-like sections in the *Historia*, Roger Ray writes, “[Bede] appears to have capitulated the *Historia* for such short-term readings as he knew in his abbey’s refectory”,<sup>96</sup> and Bede may have been particularly disposed towards the parable genre as Gregory the Great, one of his patristic heroes, promoted parable-like teaching. Wailes asserts that Gregory made “the single most influential remark on the parable as a teaching device”,<sup>97</sup> and that this remark is “quoted or paraphrased by virtually all later authorities”.<sup>98</sup> Gregory’s statement concerning the parable as a teaching method occurs in “Homily 11” of his *Homiliae in Evangelia*, in which he writes as follows: “Caelorum regnum, fratres carissimi, idcirco terrenis rebus simile dicitur, ut ex his quae animus novit surgat ad incognita, quatenus exemplo visibilium se ad invisibilia rapiat, et per ea quae usu didicit, quasi confricatus, incalescat, ut per hoc quod scit notum diligere, discat et incognita amare”,<sup>99</sup> or “We say that the kingdom of heaven, [most beloved brothers], is like earthly things for this reason, that the mind may rise from what it knows to what it does not know. From the example of visible things it may be transported to invisible things; and warmed, so to speak, by what it has learned from experience, it may be set

---

<sup>95</sup>Henry Mayr-Harting, *The Coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1972), 43.

<sup>96</sup>Roger Ray, “Bede, the Exegete, as Historian”, in *Famulus Christi: Essays in Commemoration of the Thirteenth Centenary of the Birth of the Venerable Bede*, ed. Gerald Bonner, 125-140 (London: SPCK, 1976), 133.

<sup>97</sup>Wailes, “Why did Jesus use Parables?”, 50.

<sup>98</sup>Wailes, “Why did Jesus use Parables?”, 63, n. 29.

<sup>99</sup>Gregorius Magnus, *Homilia XI*, in *Homiliae in Evangelia*, Ed. Raymond Etaix, CCSL 141 (Turnholt: Brepols, 1999), lib. 1, col. 1115.

aglow, and learn [from what it does not know] to love things both known and unknown”.<sup>100</sup> Gregory’s interpretation, that comparison of the what the soul “novit”, or “knows” leads it to understanding of the “incognita” and “invisibilia”, or “unknown” and “invisible”, is, as mentioned above, echoed by Bede himself in his commentary on Mark, in which he argues that “signa” are requisite for “intellectus” for those who cannot see or hear the “mysteria regni caelorum”, or “mysteries of the kingdom of heaven”.

Along similar lines, Augustine emphasizes the important partnership of instruction and figurative speech; he writes in Contra Mendacium:

locutiones actiones que propheticae ad ea, quae uera sunt intellegenda, referendae. quae propterea figuratis uelut amictibus obteguntur, ut sensum pie quaerentis exerceant et ne nuda ac prompta uilescant. quamuis quae aliis locis aperte ac manifeste dicta didicimus, cum ea ipsa de abditis eruuntur, quodam modo in nostra cognitione renouantur et renouata dulcescunt. nec inuidentur discentibus, quod his modis obscurantur, sed commendantur magis, ut quasi subtracta desiderentur ardentius et inueniantur desiderata iucundius.<sup>101</sup>

[prophetic speeches and actions, [are] to be referred to the understanding of those things which are true; which are covered as it were with a garb of figure on purpose to exercise the sense of the pious inquirer, and that they may not become cheap by lying bare and on the surface. Though even the things which we have learned from other places, where they are spoken openly and manifestly, these, when they are brought out from their hidden retreats, do, by our (in some sort) discovering of them, become renewed, and by renewal sweet. Nor is it that they are begrudged to the learners, in that they are in these ways obscured; but are presented in a more winning manner, that being as it were withdrawn, they may be desired more ardently, and being desired may with more pleasure be found.]<sup>102</sup>

---

<sup>100</sup>Gregory the Great, “Homily 9”, in Forty Gospel Homilies, ed. and trans. Dom David Hurst (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian, 1990), 62.

<sup>101</sup>Augustinus Hipponensis, Contra Mendacium, ed. Joseph Zycha, CSEL 41 (Vienna: F. Tempsky, 1900), cap. 10, par. 24.

<sup>102</sup>Augustine of Hippo, To Consentius: Against Lying, trans. H. Browne, in A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, ed. Philip Schaff, Vol. III (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1887), 491-492.

Augustine contends that a “dulcedo” or “sweetness” exists for the “pius” student who attempts to discover the true meanings hidden behind “figura”, and by placing a premium on this process of discovery, Augustine could be seen as a proponent of Bede’s sometimes cryptic narrative style. Indeed, when read in combination with Gregory’s statement on the parable as teaching device, Augustine’s words could perhaps be seen, from Bede’s perspective, as further evidence in favor of using parable-like vignettes to improve his readers’ and listeners’ exegetical skills.

Yet despite Bede’s and Gregory’s emphasis on *parabola* and *signa*, and Augustine’s advocacy of the sweet interpretation of figurative language, many of the short narratives in the Historia are *not* parable-like—that is, they do not create a comparison “from dissimilar things” with the intent of Christian instruction—nor are all parable-like inferences in the text expressed in short narrative form, as I will examine later in the dissertation. The cumulative effect of Bede’s explicit and implicit instruction, (in other words, the effect of the entire text), is a narrative advocacy for Christian cooperation and consideration for one’s place in the forthcoming eternal world. N.J. Higham deduces that the primary objectives of the Historia are as follows: “examples of past behavior—both good and bad—were to be understood by [Bede’s] audience in terms of their capacity to present cautionary tales in an insular context, to persuade them to reorder their own behavior into closer conformity with a divinely sanctioned model of human life”,<sup>103</sup> and his analysis complements that of James Campbell, who writes, “[Bede’s] principal intention was not just to record the past, but to use it to teach lessons to the present, mainly by treating seventh century England as a gallery of good examples”.<sup>104</sup> Many of these “cautionary tales” and “good

---

<sup>103</sup>N.J. Higham, (Re-) Reading Bede: The Ecclesiastical History in Context (London: Routledge, 2006), 70.

<sup>104</sup>James Campbell, “Bede I”, in Essays in Anglo-Saxon History, 1-28, originally published 1966 (London: Hambledon, 1986), 25.

examples” are not related in a discrete manner at all, but instead are clearly emphasized by Bede, often under the guise of saints’ lives and miracle stories. Furthermore, it is these more emphatic episodes that help underscore the didactic intent of Bede’s text, and thus make those moments of narrative discretion all the more puzzling.

An emphasis on good behavior, with the overall objective of Christian unity, explains much of why the *Historia* may be characterized as parable-like, but it is important to highlight the *comparatio* inherent in any parable, if only because some “bonis bona” are not allegorical, but straightforward descriptions. Bede’s saints’ lives and miracle stories, for example, are *not* parable-like because of their direct recounting; instead, they read like step-by-step guides to commendable Christian conduct. For example, when Bede describes the life and death of Abbess Hilda, he writes, “post multa, quae fecit in terris, opera caelestia, ad percipienda praemia uitae caelestis de terris ablat”,<sup>105</sup> or “after having performed many heavenly works on earth, [she] was taken from [the earth] to receive the rewards of the heavenly life”.<sup>106</sup> He then proceeds to detail the “heavenly works” that Hilda’s earthly life constituted: “XXXIII primos in saeculari habitu nobilissime conuersata compleuit, et totidem sequentes nobilius in monachica uita Domino consecrauit”,<sup>107</sup> or “the first thirty-three [years of her life] she spent living most nobly in the secular state, and she more nobly dedicated the remaining thirty-three to our Lord in the monastic life”,<sup>108</sup> she spent one year at a monastery in Gaul; another year in a monastery near the Wear River; she became abbess of the Heruteu monastery; she became abbess of another monastery, near Calcaria; she founded the monastery at Streanaeshalch, which she modeled after

---

<sup>105</sup>Plummer, Bk. IV, Ch. 21 (23), 252.

<sup>106</sup>Campbell, 221.

<sup>107</sup>Plummer, Bk. IV, Ch. 21 (23), 252.

<sup>108</sup>Campbell, 221.

the “*primitivae ecclesiae*”,<sup>109</sup> or “primitive Church”, and became abbess there as well; she inspired “*non solum mediocres*”, or not only the “mediocre [i.e. people of middling power] folk”, but also “*reges and principes*”,<sup>110</sup> or “kings and princes”; a burning fever tormented her for six years yet she always thanked God; a dream about a jewel preceeded her birth, and a great light seen by a nun at the Hackness monastery notified the world of her death. Bede outlines every decision and movement that brought Hilda to “*praemia vitae caelestis*”, or “the rewards of a heavenly life”. He notes her impact on people of different classes, her inspiration to pursue a life of spiritual service, and even her administrative skills, and in doing so, he nearly guarantees a ticket to that “*vitae caelestis*” to that rare reader who can follow in Hilda’s carefully marked footsteps. In fact, the unlikelihood of most readers possessing the capabilities necessary to follow Hilda’s step-by-step salvation guide underscores the strength of the parable format, and thus the efficacy of Bede’s text. In order to motivate as many Christians as possible, and in order for them not to give up in their quest for the heavenly reward, Bede cannot set the bar too high; instead, he must utilize a less direct, obliquely instructive narrative that can allow each reader to shape his or her own life to the goals of Christian teaching and ultimate salvation.

Likewise, Bede’s miracle stories are not parable-like because they detail the steps that allow miraculous action to take place, and while they do not assure that the same will happen for every reader (these are miracles, after all), their significance, and the circumstances that ensured their occurrence, are explicit. When Bede recounts Archbishop Mellitus’s rescue of a burning Canterbury through prayer, he writes as follows:

Atque ad episcopium furens se flamma dilataret, confidens episcopus in

---

<sup>109</sup>Plummer, Bk. IV, Ch. 21 (23), 254.

<sup>110</sup>Plummer, Bk. IV, Ch. 21 (23), 254.

diuinum, ubi humanum deerat, auxilium, iussit se obuam saeuientibus et huc illucque uolantibus ignium globis efferri. Erat autem eo loci, ubi flammarum impetus maxime incumbibat, martyrium beatorum IIII Coronatorum. Ibi ergo perlatus obsequentum manibus episcopus coepit orando periculum infirmus abigere, quod firma fortium manus multum laborando nequiuera. Nec mora, uentus, qui a meridie flans urbi incendia sparserat, contra meridiem reflexus, primo uim sui furoris a lesione locorum, quae contra erant, abstraxit, ac mox funditus quiescendo, flammis pariter sopitis atque extinctis, conpescuit. Et quia uir Dei igne diuinae caritatis fortiter ardebat, quia tempestates potestatum aeriarum a sua suorumque lesione crebris orationibus uel exhortationibus repellere consuebat, merito uentis flammisque mundialibus praeualere, et, ne sibi suisque nocerent, obtinere poterat.<sup>111</sup>

[[As] the furious flame was extending towards bishop's house, the [bishop] Mellitus, confident in Divine aid when human aid was lacking, ordered that he should be carried into the path of the raging fire, which flew now here, now there. In the places where the fire pressed its [greatest] attack, there was a shrine of the blessed Four Crowned Martyrs. It was there that the bishop was carried by [the hands of his servants], and began, sick though he was, to drive away the danger by prayer, [because the many sturdy hands of strong men] had been unable to accomplish this [in their labor]. At once the wind, which had been blowing from the south and spreading the fire in the city, veered right around, and first withdrew its furious strength from harming the places which had been in its path, then [stopped and soon completely ceased], while the flames sank and died. Because the man of God [strongly] burned with the fire of Divine love, and because he had been accustomed by frequent prayers and exhortations to repulse the stormy powers of the air from wounding him and his, he deserved to be able to prevail over earthly winds and flames and to secure that they should not harm him and his.]<sup>112</sup>

Again, Bede explains the conditions that allowed this miracle to happen—Mellitus, “confidens episcopus in diuinum, ubi humanum deerat, auxilium”, or “confident in Divine aid when human aid was lacking”, through the sheer force of “crebris orationibus”, or “abundant prayers” manages to save the Church and Canterbury. Bede also develops a binary of physical and spiritual strength and weakness to

---

<sup>111</sup>Plummer, Bk. II, Ch. 7, 94-95.

<sup>112</sup>Campbell, 79.

highlight further the magnitude of Mellitus's deed; he may be physically "infirmus", or "infirm", but he persevered where "firma manus", or "strong hands" of strong men had failed. Indeed, Bede emphasizes the finer points of Mellitus's character in the sentences leading up to this passage. He notes that the Archbishop possessed a "mentis sanis", or "sound mind", and that he was always forgoing thoughts about earthly matters for "ad caelestia semper amanda, petenda, et quaerenda peruolans",<sup>113</sup> or "those heavenly things which ever ought to be loved, striven after, and searched for".<sup>114</sup> "Erat carnis origine nobilis", Bede writes, "sed culmine mentis nobilior",<sup>115</sup> or "Of noble origin after the flesh, he was nobler in loftiness of mind".<sup>116</sup> The average Anglo-Saxon reader or listener of Bede's text might not be able to rescue a city through prayer, but he or she *can* strive to achieve a nobility of mind that mirrors Mellitus's. Yet this—a reference to the character of one's mind, one of the few things that anyone in Anglo-Saxon England could perhaps control—is the extent of Bede's implicit instruction in the Mellitus miracle story. Similar to his description of Hilda, Bede may realize that the miracle genre might not be the most effective in terms of instructing his readers because not only are these actors guaranteed divine intervention, but they themselves are also practically supernatural, and thus their achievements are profoundly different from those of the ordinary Christians who are Bede's auditors. Most importantly in terms of this argument, Bede does not analogize the Archbishop's "sound mind" through this miracle story; instead, that remains an instructive aside while he offers a straightforward analysis of Mellitus's character and faith, and the miracle that they work.

---

<sup>113</sup>Plummer, Bk. II, Ch. 7, 94.

<sup>114</sup>Campbell, 78.

<sup>115</sup>Plummer, Bk. II, Ch. 7, 94.

<sup>116</sup>Campbell, 78.

At one important point in the text, however, Bede does bridge the gap between straightforward depictions of the saints' lives and miracle stories and the suggestive, parable-like vignettes. The moment occurs in a description of Aidan and his contested view on Easter, and Bede's words manage to be clear while simultaneously requiring a little interpretation on the part of the reader. Of Aidan's belief Bede writes, "*Haec autem dissonantia paschalis obseruantiae uiuente Aidano patienter ab omnibus tolerabatur, qui patenter intellexerant, quia, etsi pascha contra morem eorum, qui ipsum miserant, facere non potuit, opera tamen fidei, pietatis, et dilectionis, iuxta morem omnibus sanctis consuetum, diligenter exsequi curauit. Unde ab omnibus, etiam his, qui de pascha aliter sentiebant, merito diligebatur*",<sup>117</sup> or "[but this dissonance in the observation of Easter was patiently tolerated by all while Aiden was living, because they openly understood that although Aidan [observed] Easter against their custom, which they themselves disregarded and could not do], he nevertheless took diligent care to perform works of faith, piety, and love according to the accustomed manner of all holy men. Therefore, he was deservedly loved by all, even those who thought otherwise about Easter".<sup>118</sup> Aidan's "dissonant" belief poses a problem for Bede, because this bishop is doubtlessly a "bonus" man whose actions serve as positive instruction for Bede's audience. As a result, Roger Ray believes that Bede manages the tension between Aidan's inherent goodness and this problematic belief as follows:

[Bede's statement concerning "bonis bona" and "mala pravis"] makes it clear enough that one gives paradigmatic lessons from the lives of good men and cautionary instruction from the conduct of evil persons. It would therefore be at least odd to exemplify bad things from the biography of an unmistakably good man and no doubt stranger still to do the opposite [...] But Aidan's one flaw was too important to

---

<sup>117</sup>Plummer, Bk. III, Ch. 25, 183.

<sup>118</sup>Campbell, 159.

overlook; it was the error that the Synod of Whitby had rejected, as Bede would relate farther on in Book Three. Hence Bede seems to have concluded that the reader's recognition of his habitual faithfulness to genre would perhaps excuse his having mentioned this one bad thing about an otherwise exemplary bishop.<sup>119</sup>

In other words, Bede trusts—or at least hopes—that his readers and listeners will make an important interpretative leap, that they will “excuse his having mentioned this one bad thing about an otherwise exemplary bishop”. The significance of this example, then, is that Bede momentarily goes against the stated objective of his text—“bonis bona”—but at the same time, he *explains* why he is doing so—that Aidan's belief was “patiently tolerated” because “he was deservedly loved by all”. As the examination of the parable-like narratives will demonstrate, Bede does not comment on or explains puzzling episodes in the *Historia*, with the exception of this instance; likewise, he does not depict good men doing bad things in his saints' lives and miracle stories, with the exception of this one instance. Yet in these few lines, the audience receives a glimpse of both.

In order to piece together the over-arching lessons of the *Historia*, however, the careful reader must look beyond these explicit stories and search for those in which Bede does not outline or explain, but instead suggests. The components of the *Historia*'s ultimate message—exactly how does one achieve unity with other Christians, much less a heavenly reward?—and the message of some parable-like vignettes in particular, are opaque in comparison to those of the saints' lives, miracle stories, and description of Aidan. Parables, by their nature, possess meanings that require elucidation, and Bede is a writer who, as James Campbell characterizes, “is distinguished by great discretion”.<sup>120</sup> Furthermore, as Roger Ray analyzes, “Bede

---

<sup>119</sup>Roger Ray, “Bede's Vera Lex Historiae” (*Speculum* 55, no. 1 (1980): 1-21), 20.

<sup>120</sup>Campbell, “Bede”, 176.

thought of the customs of scriptural narrative as the habits of perfect history”,<sup>121</sup> and as these parable-like vignettes demonstrate, there is reason to believe that he might have viewed the parable as a scriptural “custom” suitable to an instructive history. While it is not possible to catalogue all Bedan understatement, some of the more puzzling vignettes are particularly illuminating when one attempts to track this particular narrative strand. The three parable-like stories examined here help demonstrate that Bedan understatement; they are the stories of Wilfrid and the South Saxons, Oswald’s and Aidan’s Easter feast, and Augustine of Canterbury’s meeting with the British bishops.

The parable-like narrative of Wilfrid and the South Saxons contains the least opaque message of the examples, and it possesses an immediately identifiable biblical corollary. Bede relates that when the Bishop converted the South Saxons, he did so by first teaching them how to fish in the midst of famine. The vignette is as follows:

Nam et antistes cum uenisset in prouinciam, tantamque ibi famis poenam uideret, docuit eos piscando uictum quaerere. Namque mare et flumina eorum piscibus abundabant; sed piscandi peritia genti nulla nisi ad anguillas tantum inerat. Collectis ergo undecumque retibus anguillaribus, homines antistitis miserunt in mare, et diuina se iuuante gratia, mox cepere pisces diuersi generis CCC. Quibus trifariam diuisis, C pauperibus dederunt, centum his, a quibus retia acceperant, centum in suos usus habebant. Quo beneficio multum antistes cor omnium in suum conuertit amorem, et libentius eo praedicante caelestia sperare coeperunt, cuius ministerio temporalia bona sumserunt.<sup>122</sup>

[For the bishop, when he first came to the [province] and [saw] such great misery from famine, also taught them to get their food by fishing; for their seas and rivers abounded in fish, but the people had no skill in fishing for them, except in the case of eels. Therefore, the bishop’s men, having gathered eel nets everywhere, cast them into the sea, and by the help of [divine] grace soon caught three hundred fish of various kinds. They divided them into three parts, giving a hundred to the poor,

---

<sup>121</sup>Ray, “Bede the Exegete”, 132.

<sup>122</sup>Plummer, Bk. IV, Ch. 13, 231-232.

a hundred to those of whom they had had the nets, and keeping a hundred for their own use. By this benefit, the bishop [won the heart of all and converted [many of them] in his love; and they began more readily to hope for heavenly goods when he preached to them, seeing that by his help they had received those goods which are temporal.]<sup>123</sup>

This story has an enigmatic quality, and it raises a couple of important questions. First, does just knowing how to catch a fish make one a better Christian? On the surface the appropriate answer to this question seems to be yes. Not only are the Saxons now able to feed themselves, but they are also able to help others, explicitly with food (by giving them a third of the fish), and implicitly through spirituality (by making potential converts amenable to them through this charity). As a result, because of fishing the Saxons can now cement their relationships with both fellow and future Christians, which helps further the objective of Christian unity. Second, why do the Saxons not know how to fish if they already know how to catch eels with nets? The combination of this question with the first one raises the idea that Christians are privileged to see everyday things in new, innovative ways, and that not only does this allow them to feed themselves immediately, but also that they might possess what could be seen as a survival advantage over their pagan contemporaries. The particular significance of eel versus fish net-catching, however, would ultimately need to be parsed by readers of Bede's text. Additionally, the story alludes to the biblical parable of the draught of fishes, and the allusion seems to be more than coincidental. The Gospels of Matthew and Mark record brief versions of the central allegory of this parable—Jesus recruits Simon and Andrew to be “*piscatores hominum*”, or “fishers of men”<sup>124</sup>—but Luke 5: 1-11 relates the entire parable narrative. The text is as follows:

---

<sup>123</sup>Campbell, 204.

<sup>124</sup>Matthew 4: 19, “*et ait illis venite post me et faciam vos fieri piscatores hominum*”, or “and he said to them, ‘come after me, and I will make you to be fishers of men’”. Mark 1: 17, “*et dixit eis Iesus venite post me et faciam vos fieri piscatores hominum*”, or “and Jesus said to them, ‘come after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men’”. Latin text cited from Biblia Sacra; Modern English translation from The Holy Bible: Douay Rheims Version.

factum est autem cum turbae inruerent in eum ut audirent verbum Dei et ipse stabat secus stagnum Gennesareth et vidit duas naves stantes secus stagnum piscatores autem descenderant et lavabant retia ascendens autem in unam navem quae erat Simonis rogavit eum a terra reducere pusillum et sedens docebat de navicula turbas ut cessavit autem loqui dixit ad Simonem duc in altum et laxate retia vestra in capturam et respondens Simon dixit illi praeceptor per totam noctem laborantes nihil cepimus in verbo autem tuo laxabo rete et cum hoc fecissent concluserunt piscium multitudinem copiosam rumpebatur autem rete eorum et annuerunt sociis qui erant in alia navi ut venirent et adiuverent eos et venerunt et impleverunt ambas naviculas ita ut mergerentur quod cum videret Simon Petrus procidit ad genua Iesu dicens exi a me quia homo peccator sum Domine stupor enim circumdederat eum et omnes qui cum illo erant in captura piscium quam ceperant similiter autem Iacobum et Iohannem filios Zebedaei qui erant socii Simonis et ait ad Simonem Iesus noli timere ex hoc iam homines eris capiens et subductis ad terram navibus relictis omnibus secuti sunt illum.<sup>125</sup>

[And it came to pass, that when the multitudes pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he stood by the lake of Genesareth. And he saw two ships standing by the lake: but the fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing their nets. And going into one of the ships that was Simon's, he desired him to draw back a little from the land. And sitting he taught the multitudes out of the ship. Now when he ceased to speak, he said to Simon: Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught. And Simon answering said to him: Master, we have laboured all the night, and have taken nothing: but at thy word I will let down the net. And when they had done this, they enclosed a very great multitude of fishes, and their net broke. And they were beckoned to their partners that were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both ships, so that they were almost sinking. Which when Simon Peter saw, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying: Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord. For he was wholly astonished, and all that were with him, at the draught of the fishes which they had taken. And so were also James and John the sons of Zebedee, who were Simon's partners. And Jesus saith to Simon: Fear not: from henceforth thou shalt catch men. And having brought their ships to land, leaving all things, they followed him.]<sup>126</sup>

---

<sup>125</sup>Biblia Sacra, s.v. Luke 5: 1-11.

<sup>126</sup>The Holy Bible: Douay Rheims Version, Luke 5: 1-11.

In Bede's narrative, Wilfrid assumes the Christological role of teaching the multitudes to fish, and thus to find sustenance where none could previously be found. By privileging the act of fishing before that of converting, Bede structures the story like a parable, the overall lesson of which is conversion. Furthermore, the generosity with which the South Saxons repay their acquisition of this new skill underscores Christian unity and service—in other words, give to the poor and give to those who helped you. Yet in the grand *plot* scheme of the Historia, this quick narrative seems insignificant; Wilfrid is one of many powerful ecclesiastical figures, and the South Saxons are one of several converted peoples. Furthermore, as D.P. Kirby notes, “[the account] is relatively brief [and] there are also inaccuracies or misrepresentations, though these may have been deliberate to heighten Wilfrid's achievement”.<sup>127</sup> But from a comprehensive textual standpoint, the parable of Wilfrid and the South Saxons is crucial, not only because Bede may “deliberately” be amending Wilfrid's “achievement”, but also because the story is emblematic of the nature and message of the entire Historia. At no point, as I will demonstrate throughout this dissertation, does Bede argue forthrightly that Christian cooperation and unification are the primary duty of each believer, but this message lies behind nearly every story and event in the text.

The parable-like account of Oswald and Aidan at Easter also evokes the loaves and the fishes parable, and like the story of Wilfrid and the South Saxons, it plays upon the theme of a powerful figure feeding the hungry. Bede describes the event as follows:

[episcopus] consedisset ad prandium, positusque esset in mensa coram eo discus argenteus regalibus epulis refertus, et iamiamque essent manus ad panem benedicendum missuri, intrasse subito ministrum

---

<sup>127</sup>D.P. Kirby, “Bede, Eddius Stephanus, and the ‘Life of Wilfrid’” (The English Historical Review 98, no. 386 (1983): 101-114), 103.

ipsius, cui suscipiendorum inopum erat cura delegata, et indicasse regi, quia multitudo pauperum undecumque adueniens maxima per plateas sederet, postulans aliquid elemosynae a rege. Qui mox dapes sibimet adpositas deferri pauperibus, sed et discum confringi, atque eisdem minutatim diuidi praecepit. Quo uiso pontifex, qui adsidebat, delectatus tali facto pietatis, adprehendit dexteram eius, et ait: ‘Numquam inueterascat haec manus.’ Quod et ita iuxta uotum benedictionis eius prouenit. Nam cum interfecto illo in pugna, manus cum brachio a cetero essent corpore resectae, contigit, ut hactenus incorruptae perdurent. Denique in urbe regia, quae a regina quondam uocabulo Bebbia cognominatur, loculo inclusae argenteo in ecclesia sancti Petri seruantur, ac digno a cunctis honore uenerantur.<sup>128</sup>

[[Oswald] was seated at lunch with Bishop Aidan], with a silver dish full of royal delicacies placed on the table before him, and they were just about to stretch out their hands to bless the bread. Suddenly, in came his thegn who had been appointed to relieve the poor, and he told the king that a great multitude of the needy had come from all about and were sitting in the streets begging some alms of the king. He at once ordered the food that was set before him to be carried to the poor and, furthermore, that the dish be broken up in little pieces and divided among them. When the bishop who was sitting beside him saw this, he was delighted at such an act of piety; he grasped his right hand and said, ‘May this hand never grow old.’ So it came about, in accordance with his prayer and blessing. For when Oswald was killed in battle, his hands and arm were cut off from the rest of his body, and it has come about that they remain uncorrupted to this day. They are kept in the king’s town, which is named after a former queen called Bebbia; they are enclosed in a silver case in the church of St. Peter and are venerated with fitting honor by all].<sup>129</sup>

Even though he does not teach the poor how to feed themselves as Wilfrid does, Oswald is equally lauded for his act, and Bede tacitly expresses his own approval of Oswald’s behavior by having Aidan praise him. The message, or “general thesis”, of Christian cooperation and service rings clear, even though it is not explicitly stated. Bede does note earlier that the Christian faith was brought to Oswald and his people,<sup>130</sup> which suggests that the “multitudo pauperum”, or “multitude of the needy”

---

<sup>128</sup>Plummer, Bk. III, Ch. 6, 138.

<sup>129</sup>Campbell, 120.

<sup>130</sup>Plummer, Bk. III, Ch. 6, 137-138. See also Campbell, 120.

are Christian as well. The blessing and preservation of Oswald's hand and arm, however, add a few other interesting elements to this parable-like vignette. First, Aidan's blessing of the arm alone—"numquam inveterascit haec manus"—could be seen as an example of synecdoche gone horribly wrong. Perhaps Aidan, by using that rhetorical device, meant, "may the *owner* of this hand never age", but instead, his imperative is literalized in a rather gruesome way. For what purpose might this literalizing have occurred, other than to provide inspirational relics for future Christians? And if Oswald's cut-off arm did remain uncorrupted for the objective of inspiration, then the relics that are "digno a cunctis honore uenerantur", or "venerated with fitting honor by all" could be seen as another elaboration on the Christian unification message—in other words, they are a physical point of unification for Christians coming to view them at St. Peter's Church. Alternatively, the hand and arm might be a reconciliation of the "ahistorical" miracles and "local history" that Sharon Rowley sees in the *Historia*. Rowley argues, "while reading miracles according to the exegetical paradigm helps explain Bede's world view, it also renders miracles ahistorical. If miracles always refer to salvation and Christian authority, they remain separate from local history, even if we acknowledge that Bede genuinely believed in them".<sup>131</sup> However, seeing the blessing and preservation of Oswald's arm, after his feeding of the hungry, as parable-like both explains the context of "local history" that they provide *and* maintains the emphasis on "salvation and Christian authority" that they impart. In other words, the story analogizes both the "spiritual salvation and Christian authority" *and* Christian unification through local historical figures and events.

The third parable-like narrative in this analysis, and the most opaque, concerns

---

<sup>131</sup>Sharon M. Rowley, "Reassessing Exegetical Interpretations of Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*" (*Literature and Theology* 17, no. 3 (2003): 227-243), 230.

Augustine of Canterbury and the British bishops. It consists of two parts; in the first, Augustine has arranged to meet with the bishops to discuss their various deviations from the practices of the universal Church; as Bede writes, Augustine “coepitque eis fraterna admonitione suadere, ut pace catholica secum habita communem euangelizandi gentibus pro Domino laborem susciperent”,<sup>132</sup> or “he began by urging them in brotherly admonition to enter into Catholic peace with him and to undertake the common task of preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles [heathens] for the Lord’s sake”.<sup>133</sup> At the meeting, the bishops remain unconvinced that they should in particular practice the canonical observance of Easter, and Bede relates that the following occurs:

Adducatur aliquis eger, et per cuius preces fuerit curatus, huius fides et operatio Deo deuota atque omnibus sequenda credatur.’ Quod cum aduersarii, inuiti licet, concederent, adlatus est quidam de genere Anglorum, oculorum luce priuatus; qui cum oblatus Brettonum sacerdotibus nil curationis uel sanationis horum ministerio perciperet, tandem Augustinus, iusta necessitate compulsus, flectit genua sua ad Patrem Domini nostri Iesu Christi, deprecans, ut uisum caeco, quem amiserat, restitueret, et per inlumenationem unius hominis corporalem, in plurimorum corde fidelium spiritalis gratiam lucis accenderet. Nec mora, inluminatur caecus, ac uerus summae lucis praeco ab omnibus praedicatur Augustinus.<sup>134</sup>

[[Augustine said] ‘Let some sick man be brought, and let the faith and practice of him by whose prayers he shall be healed be accepted as Divinely consecrated and binding upon all.’ The opposite party agreed to this, unwillingly enough, and a certain Englishman who was blind was brought forward. He was presented to the Britons’ priests, and gained no cure or benefit from their ministrations. At length, Augustine, compelled by a righteous necessity, knelt and prayed to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ that he would restore sight to the blind man who had lost it, and that by giving physical light to one man, He would kindle the grace of spiritual light in the hearts of many of the

---

<sup>132</sup>Plummer, Bk. II, Ch. 2, 81.

<sup>133</sup>Campbell, 67.

<sup>134</sup>Plummer, Bk. II, Ch. 2, 81-82.

faithful. At once the blind man was given light, and all proclaimed Augustine as the true herald of the highest light.]<sup>135</sup>

Augustine performs a miraculous act and its significance is clear: Jesus brings “*spiritalis gratiam lucis*”, or “the grace of spiritual light” to the mind of the believer. The passage immediately relates the allegory of sight and blindness to true and false belief, and it evokes similar Christological acts in the Bible itself. Bede may even be further solidifying this corollary by having the blindman be “*de genere Anglorum*”, or “of the English people”. If the blind man had been British, would the miracle have still worked, or would the British bishops have been successful instead? What significance might there be in a non-British blind man being chosen, and what dimension might he be bringing to the narrative? These questions are further enhanced by the second part of this passage, where the meat of this parable-like account lies, and this part raises even more questions than it answers. After the initial unsuccessful conference with the bishops, Augustine decides to hold another meeting with them. But before the meeting takes place, the bishops “*uenerunt primo ad quendam uirum sanctum ac prudentem, qui apud eos anachoreticam ducere uitam solebat, consulentes, an ad praedicationem Augustini suas deserere traditiones deberent*”,<sup>136</sup> or first “went to a certain saintly and wise man, who led the life of a hermit among them, and asked whether they ought to abandon their traditions in accordance with Augustine’s preachings”.<sup>137</sup> Bede writes as follows:

Qui respondebat: ‘Si homo Dei est, sequimini illum.’ Dixerunt: ‘Et unde hoc possumus probare?’ At ille: ‘Dominus,’ inquit, ‘ait: “Tollite iugum meum super uos, et discite a me, quia mitis sum et humilis corde.” Si ergo Augustinus ille mitis est et humilis corde, credibile est, quia iugum Christi et ipse portet, et uobis portandum offerat; sin autem inmitis ac superbus est, constat, quia non est de Deo, neque nobis eius

---

<sup>135</sup>Campbell, 67-68.

<sup>136</sup>Plummer, Bk. II, Ch. 2, 82.

<sup>137</sup>Campbell, 68.

sermo curandus.’ Qui rursus aiebant: ‘Et unde uel hoc dinoscere ualemus?’ ‘Procurate,’ inquit, ‘ut ipse prior cum suis ad locum synodi adueniat, et, si uobis adpropinquantibus adsurrexerit, scientes, quia famulus Christi est, obtemperanter illum audite; sin autem uos spreuerit, nec coram uobis adsurgere uoluerit, cum sitis numero plures, et ipse spernatur a uobis.’<sup>138</sup>

[He replied, ‘If he is a man of God, follow him.’ ‘How can we put that to the test?’ said they. He replied, ‘Our Lord says, ‘Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly of heart.’ If, therefore, that Augustine is meek and lowly of heart, it may be believed that he also bears Christ’s yoke and offers it to you to bear. But if he is stern and haughty, it is certain that he is not of God, and that we are not to pay attention to what he says.’ But they continued, ‘And how are we to discern even this?’ He answered, ‘Arrange that he and his followers come to the place for the synod first; and if he rises to meet you as you approach, be assured that he is Christ’s servant, and hear him submissively. But if he spurns you and is unwilling to stand up in your presence, when you are more numerous, then let him be spurned by you.’]<sup>139</sup>

This passage opens itself to various interpretations, but the consequences of the hermit’s advice bear some illumination on what Bede might be saying. Augustine does not stand to greet the bishops, and as a result, they do not adopt canonical custom. The Archbishop proceeds to threaten them with “bellum ab hostibus” or “war with their enemies” as the price for not accepting “pacem cum fratribus”<sup>140</sup> or “peace with their brothers”, and Bede states that this prophecy is realized through the later British defeat by the pagan King Ethelfrid. Why, then, does Bede emphasize that the hermit the bishops visit is “sanctum ac prudentum” or “saintly and wise” if his advice is disastrous for the British? There may be more than one answer to this question, but each affirms, to some extent, the overall message of Christian cooperation and unity of the Historia. First, the British bishops are unable to interpret the hermit’s counsel on

---

<sup>138</sup>Plummer, Bk. II, Ch. 2, 82-83.

<sup>139</sup>Campbell, 68-69.

<sup>140</sup>Plummer, Bk, II, Ch. 2, 83.

their own; in other words, they are incompetent exegetes, and their incomplete faith prefigures their inability to repel later the pagan attack. Second, perhaps the hermit's wisdom and prudence lie in his recognition of Augustine as a superior man of God to the bishops, and his purposely odd advice is a sign to the bishops that they should have consented to canonical custom long before. Third, the hermit says that if Augustine "non est de Deo" or "is not of God", then "neque nobis eius sermo curandus", or "we are not to pay attention to what he says" (or more literally, "we should not undertake his preaching")—the first-person plural *we* could suggest that the hermit shares the bishops' beliefs. Because his counsel proves disastrously ineffective, Bede may be suggesting that anyone who maintained the British bishops' beliefs was incapable of interpreting God's words and providing good advice. Fourth, Bede may be bound by his sources, and thus be attempting to fit his overall point within the inflexible framework of what he believes actually happened.

However, there is a fifth interpretation that could turn all of these possibilities on their heads, and yet still affirm that Bede's message in these parable-like passages can be incredibly subtle. This entire narrative concerning Augustine and the British bishops could be seen as a negative statement about Augustine, because ultimately Augustine's failure to persuade the British bishops to observe universal church customs is a setback for the Church in England. Is Bede implying that Augustine bears some responsibility for their intransigence, and could he have been more effective? For example, with regard to the blind man "de genere Anglorum" mentioned above, it is interesting that Bede chooses to mention this man's ethnicity, when Augustine's request was merely for "some sick man". Perhaps by not choosing a man who was "de genere Brettorum", or at the very least, *not* "de genere Anglorum", Augustine's miracle was less meaningful—how were the British bishops to know that the man was actually blind, and/or would they have succeeded in their

ministrations if he had been one of their own? As I will demonstrate in Chapter Two, Bede rarely plays upon ethnic divisiveness in the Historia, and instead chooses to emphasize Christian unity and the consequences of Christian versus non-Christian divisiveness, so the occasions when he does mention ethnicity are often instructive. Could the issue of the British bishops assenting to universal catholic custom have been resolved at the first synod if Augustine had given sight to a British man?

Similarly, Augustine's failure to stand in greeting at the second synod could be read as an example of the Bishop of Canterbury being in the wrong. Throughout both of these synods, Augustine does not seem to be offering "iugum Christi", or "the yoke of Christ", as the hermit asserts he should if he is "homo Dei", or "a man of God"; instead, Augustine appears to be offering somewhat nasty ultimatums. Bede may be commenting on the negative outcome of this approach, namely that Augustine is not using honey to capture more flies, and thus implicitly offering a lesson on how best to win over believers (see Wilfrid and the South Saxons). The hermit's emphasis on the British bishops' majority, "cum sitis numero plures", or "when you are more numerous [than him and his followers]", also speaks to these ineffective exhortations and Augustine's general lack of humility. If he had been more conciliatory and, as the hermit says, "mitis est et humilis corde", or "meek and lowly of heart", particularly considering his status both as a newcomer in a strange land and as a man in the minority, then the Church in England might have been unified sooner. For although Augustine does accurately prophesize the British defeat by the pagan Ethelfrid, a victorious pagan is still ultimately a defeat for Christianity in general, and when combined with the ongoing fissures in the Church, the blame might not lie on the British bishops' shoulders alone.

Nevertheless, all of these possible interpretations demonstrate that Bede's narratives can be ambiguous in their meanings, and this opacity again places the

impetus on the good Christian reader to divine any *mysteria* from the *signa*. However, an example of straightforward Bedan exegesis provides an important contrast in both style and content to the parable-like elements of the *Historia*. As W. Trent Foley notes, unlike the work in Bede's *magnus opus*, "many of Bede's biblical commentaries elucidate almost exclusively the figurative or allegorical sense of a work of Scripture",<sup>141</sup> but it may be the nature of his commentaries' subject, Scripture, accounts for the difference in degrees of analyzation and explanation. A passage in Bede's commentary on the Book of Tobias (or the Book of Tobit), *In Librum Beati Patris Tobiae*, demonstrates how Bede would "elucidate" the "allegorical", or indeed, parable-like, sense of Scripture. In this section, Bede describes how Tobias roasts and salts a fish, and that he and the Angel accompanying him take some of the fish on their journey. The passage is as follows:

Quidquid ex pisce sibi assumpserunt, eos significat qui de membris diaboli in Christi membra transferuntur, id est de infidelitate convertuntur ad fidem. Quidquid vero dimiserunt, eos econtra demonstrat, qui, audito Dei verbo, malunt inter membra mortua ac putida sui deceptoris residere, quam in societatem Salvatoris reverti. Assavit carnes eius in eis quos carnales invenit, sed igne sui amoris spirituales ac fortes reddidit. Denique Spiritus sanctus in apostolos in ignis visione descendit. Cetera, inquit, salierunt; quod ad doctores spiritualiter pertinet, quibus dicitur: Vos estis sal terrae. Salierunt autem, id est, Tobias et angelus; quia idem Mediator Dei et hominum, et humanitus apostolos docuit loquendo, et divinitus eis in corde salem sapientiae tribuit.<sup>142</sup>

[[Whatever part of the fish] they took with them represents those who were transferred from being the devil's members to Christ's, that is, those who were converted from unbelief to faith. By contrast, [whatever part] they threw out represents those who have heard God's word yet would rather dwell among their deceiver's dead and rotten

---

<sup>141</sup>Bede, *Bede: A Biblical Miscellany*, trans. W. Trent Foley and Arthur G. Holder (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999), 82.

<sup>142</sup>Beda Venerabilis, *In Librum Beati Patris Tobiae*, in *Opera Omnia*, Migne ed., Patrologiae Latinae 91 (Paris: 1862), cap. 6, col. 929.

members than return to the company of the Saviour. [Tobias] cooked the fish's flesh in those whom he found to be fleshly-minded, but by the fire of his love he rendered them spiritual and strong. And so the Holy Spirit descended on the apostles in a vision of fire. The rest, it says, they salted. This pertains especially to the teachers to whom it is said, you are the salt of the earth. Now they (that is Tobias and the Angel) salted because the same mediator between God and humans both humanly taught the apostles by his speech and divinely granted them the salt of wisdom in their hearts.]<sup>143</sup>

As opposed to the minimal, if any, explanation that Bede provides with the parable-like sections of the Historia, in this passage Bede elaborates almost word by word on the exegetical significance of Tobias's actions with the fish that almost killed him. The division of the fish is not merely a practicality for a long journey, but also a separation of "those who were transferred from being the devil's members to Christ's" from "those who have heard God's Word yet would rather dwell among their deceiver's dead". The cooking fire does not only roast the fish, but also "by the fire of his love" allows the faithful to be "rendered [...] spiritual and strong". Perhaps most importantly, Bede's exegesis singles out "doctores", or "teachers", by comparing them to the "salt of the earth" in which the fish is preserved. This exegetical allusion to Matthew 5:13<sup>144</sup> allows Bede to conclude that these "doctores" are "salted because the same mediator between God and humans" instructed through both words and "the salt of wisdom in their hearts". Yet in terms of the argument of this thesis, this exegetical passage is most significant because of how and why it contrasts with potentially exegetical passages in the Historia, and perhaps the primary reason for this discrepancy lies in Bede's pragmatism. In order for the Historia and its central message regarding Christian unity to reach as many Anglo-Saxon Christians as possible, and to alienate minimally those whom it does reach, Bede must shrewdly pick his exegetical moments. He can praise a monk like Aidan, who was revered by

---

<sup>143</sup>Bede, "On Tobias", trans. Foley, Biblical Miscellany, 67.

<sup>144</sup>"vos estis sal terrae", Biblia Sacra, s.v. Matthew 5:13.

many despite his contrary beliefs regarding the Easter calendar, and he can thus choose Aidan to praise a ruler like Oswald by proxy, as he does in the Oswald and Aidan narrative detailed above, but Bede must not necessarily praise Oswald directly on *all* occasions without perhaps igniting old secular world rivalries and emotions. Bede's audience is intimate with the content of the Historia in such a way that could preclude him from planting his flag firmly in one king's camp if he wants his message to be heard by those Christians who might despise that king. In contrast, Tobias and his Old Testament peers are long gone.

In addition to revealing how they contrast with Bede's actual exegetical work, the parable-like incidents in the Historia also help demonstrate Bede's understanding of where the Anglo-Saxon people fit within the context of Christian history. The Historia, when discussing one's failure to act as a good Christian, evokes possible condemnation in the eternal world, and the threat of damnation remains one of the most powerful temporal world tools that Bede possesses as an ecclesiastical writer. Indeed, perhaps one reason why Bede could be seen as making a negative statement about Augustine of Canterbury in the passage on the British bishops is because he knows intimately that as a monk or a bishop, the arrows in one's quiver are those of language, persuasion, and instruction, and that to fail in deploying these weapons successfully is to be like a king who fails to win a strategic battle. Yet because he lacks the possibility of physical recourse in trying to achieve his textual objectives, Bede's narrative weapons must be that much stronger if he is to win the battle of faith. As a result, one of the narrative tools that Bede employs might be the way in which he situates his text in the context of Christian history—in particular, the Historia often resonates with an Augustinian understanding of history. Indeed, Bede may be seen as another chronologist in the tradition of Christian historians, in which history is viewed as linear and a Christian world order is privileged over a secular or pagan one. Thus,

his parable-like narrative strand not only alludes to an overreaching message of Christian unity through instruction, but also suggests the place of the Anglo-Saxon people within Christian history as a whole.

Demonstrating that a stress on good Christian behavior and instruction resonates with an Augustinian understanding of history requires an analysis of what that history constitutes, and how Bede himself expressed that understanding. First, it is important to note that, as Alan Thacker suggests, Bede constructs the *Historia* in such a way that Anglo-Saxon England is depicted as “a new Israel with a divine mission”,<sup>145</sup> and that this “mission” demonstrates ‘the urgent need for exemplary *doctores*, preachers, and pastors to guide the *gens* along that path in the present’,<sup>146</sup> a distinguished group in which Bede obliquely places himself through the use of both explicit miracle stories and implicit parable-like narratives. Roger Ray further affirms this idea of a “new Israel”; as he writes, “perhaps Bede imposed on his own account of Christian beginnings in England the same pattern by which he thought Moses had shaped the earliest history of all religion”.<sup>147</sup> An alignment of the British Isles with ancient Israel establishes Anglo-Saxon England firmly within the tradition of linear Christian history, and many scholars before me have drawn connections between this alignment and an Augustinian sense of moral instruction. Roger Ray argues that for Bede, the “great historical problem was assuredly not the ecclesiastical history of England. It was *sacra historia*, the biblical past”,<sup>148</sup> and as Stephen J. Harris notes, “an Augustinian historiographical tradition [...] cast[s] the past as a moral lesson”.<sup>149</sup>

---

<sup>145</sup>Alan Thacker, “Bede and the Ordering of Understanding”, in *Innovation and Tradition in the Writings of The Venerable Bede*, ed. Scott DeGregorio, 37-63 (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia University Press, 2006), 60.

<sup>146</sup>Thacker, “Bede and the Ordering of Understanding”, 61.

<sup>147</sup>Ray, “Bede, the Exegete”, 134.

<sup>148</sup>Ray, “Bede, the Exegete”, 125.

<sup>149</sup>Stephen J. Harris, “The Alfredian *World History* and Anglo-Saxon Identity” (*JPEG* 100, no. 4 (2001): 482-510), 494.

Similarly, George Brown adds that Bede “came to history as an exegete, who had learned his trade from immersion in the hermeneutics of Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine (particularly), and Gregory”,<sup>150</sup> and that for the Jarrow monk, “history and hagiography are not different categories”.<sup>151</sup> According to Ray, both Bede and Augustine agree, “the Bible is the unparalleled book of history. From it, above all, one learns about the relevant past. Other historical works are of value only in some illuminating relationship to *sacra historia*”.<sup>152</sup> An emphasis on a biblical view of history also allows Bede to shape English history to his objectives; as Walter Goffart elaborates, “Bede was not a slave to chronology; without taking undue liberties, he manipulates time sequences to suit his narrative [...] Christian historians considered major events to be metaphysically significant; disasters were divine retribution for human misdeeds”.<sup>153</sup> By highlighting “metaphysically significant” events as evidence of God’s master plan, Bede reveals the impact of his monastic background. He “was at every instant conscious of being a Catholic teacher”, Donald Nicholl explains, “whose duty it is to come even closer to the mind of the Catholic Church: whoever wishes to be united to God must first become united with the Church, learn its faith, and be imbued with its sacraments”.<sup>154</sup>

In terms of the components of an Augustinian understanding of history, Jan Davidse further illuminates the significance of linear Christian history as follows: “Augustine demonstrates for his followers what *historia* really is: it relates what people in the past have done and it shows that that past had an order [...] For

---

<sup>150</sup>George Hardin Brown, Bede the Venerable (Boston: Twayne, 1987), 94.

<sup>151</sup>Brown, 95.

<sup>152</sup>Ray, “Bede, the Exegete”, 127.

<sup>153</sup>Walter Goffart, “Bede’s History in a Harsher Climate”, in Innovation and Tradition in the Writings of the Venerable Bede, ed. Scott DeGregorio, 203-226 (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia University Press, 2006), 223.

<sup>154</sup>David Nicholl, “St. Bede”, in Pre-Reformation English Spirituality, ed. James Walsh, S.J., 1-14. (Bronx, NY: Fordham University Press, 1965), 2.

Augustine, everything is focused on the order of time, and this is what prevents events from dropping out of sight and becoming incomprehensible to us. The order of time is God's work, and that is why *historia* is not a human institution, even though it concerns matters human".<sup>155</sup> In other words, in Augustinian *historia*, there is a clear connection between "what people in the past have done" and the consequences of their actions, as both the deed and its effect—e.g. whether or not it is eternal reward—constitute "the order of time" that is "God's work". Furthermore, from a narrative standpoint Bede replicates an "order of time", which acts as a net that catches seemingly "incomprehensible" or marginal "events" from "dropping out of sight". As Peter Hunter Blair explains in a prefiguration of Goffart's observation regarding time sequences,<sup>156</sup> Bede possesses the "ability to see how events which were removed from one another geographically and isolated from one another in their nature, had nevertheless a close relationship in time".<sup>157</sup> Additional scholars acknowledge the importance of "God's work" in Augustinian *historia*, which G.L. Keyes emphasizes along with the linear nature of this history. "Augustine's most important historical belief", Keyes writes, "is that the historical process is teleological [...] we were not present at the beginning of things, and have not yet seen their culmination".<sup>158</sup>

Further examination of what this *historia* signifies may be beneficial. According to Gerhard Von Rad, in Old Testament theology, Israel did not envision the world as a "cosmos" or "ordered organism in repose", as the Greeks did, but instead an "event"<sup>159</sup> that was determined "solely in its relationship to God [and in] his

---

<sup>155</sup>Jan Davidse, "On Bede as Christian Historian", in *Beda Venerabilis: Historian, Monk & Northumbrian*, ed. L.A.J.R. Houwen and A.A. MacDonald, 1-15 (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1996), 9.

<sup>156</sup>See footnote 79.

<sup>157</sup>Peter Hunter Blair, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation and its Importance Today* (Jarrow Lecture, 1959), 4.

<sup>158</sup>G.L. Keyes, *Christian Faith and the Interpretation of History: A Study of St. Augustine's Philosophy of History* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), 190.

<sup>159</sup>Gerhard Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology: The Theology of Israel's Historical Traditions*, trans. D.M.G. Stalker, Vol. I (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1962), 152.

continued sustaining of it”.<sup>160</sup> In other words, “Israel’s faith is based on history rather than cosmology”,<sup>161</sup> and as a result, worship adheres to an “order of time”—for example, hallowing the Sabbath every seventh day—rather than an order of sacred places. Israel’s “ideas about the place of worship”, von Rad explains, “did not derive from a belief in an absolute and inherent holiness belonging to such a place”.<sup>162</sup>

Augustine himself writes in De Civitatis Dei as follows regarding the Greek philosophers:

Ita deinceps fore sine cessatione adseverarent volumina venientum et praetereuntium saeculorum; sive in mundo permanente isti circuitus fierent, sive certis intervalis oriens et occidens mundus eadem semper quasi nova, quaetransacta et ventura sunt, exhiberet. A quo ludibrio prorsus immortalem animam, etiam cum sapientiam perceperit, liberare non possunt, euntem sine cessatione ad falsam beatitudinem et ad veram miseriam sine cessatione redeuntem.<sup>163</sup>

[[Thus they] asserted that this sequence of ages passing away and coming to be will recur without [cessation], either [to be cycling through a permanent world], or the world waxing and waning at fixed intervals in such a new way as always to exhibit [events that are completed and coming]. From this ridiculous cycle they cannot find a way of freeing even the immortal soul, which, even when it has achieved wisdom, still [without cessation] passes back and forth between false blessedness and true misery.]<sup>164</sup>

He then articulates the concept of God-created linear history, which began at an exact moment of time, and which allows the “immortal soul” an eternal existence.

Augustine writes of God, “qua, cum ipse sit aeternus et sine initio, ab aliquo tamen

---

<sup>160</sup>Gerhard Von Rad, Old Testament Theology: The Theology of Israel’s Prophetic Traditions, trans. D.M.G. Stalker, Vol. II (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1965), 339.

<sup>161</sup>Von Rad, Old Testament Theology, II, 347.

<sup>162</sup>Von Rad, Old Testament Theology, II, 345.

<sup>163</sup>Augustinus Hipponensis, De Civitate Dei, ed. B. Dombart and A. Kalb, CCSL 48 (Turnholt: Brepols, 1955), lib. 12, cap. 14.

<sup>164</sup>Augustine of Hippo, The City of God Against the Pagans, ed. and trans. R.W. Dyson (Cambridge: CUP, 2005), Bk. 12, Ch. 14, 516. All Modern English translations from The City of God are from this edition unless otherwise cited.

initio exorsus est tempora et hominem, quem numquam antea fecerat, fecit in tempore, non tamen novo et repentino, sed inmutabili aeterno que consilio<sup>165</sup> [...] valde quippe altum est et semper fuisse, et hominem, quem numquam fecerat, ex aliquo tempore facere voluisse,”<sup>166</sup> or “for though He is Himself eternal, and without beginning, He has nonetheless [by another beginning made time and man, who had never been made before, he made in time, yet not by new and hasty [means], but through his immutable and eternal resolve]<sup>167</sup> [...] For it is a very deep thing indeed, that God has always existed, and that He wanted to make man, whom He had never before made, at some moment of time”.<sup>168</sup>

By emphasizing hallowed time and an unfolding history dependent on God’s “continued sustaining of it”, one emerges with a clearer understanding of how individual actions and their consequences play a role in *sacra historia*. Indeed, as Von Rad elaborates, “already before time began, God’s decisions about life and death, salvation and judgment have been accomplished, and now the prescribed times materialize precisely in accordance with the order which was given to them”.<sup>169</sup> Augustine’s understanding of history further clarifies this concept of God’s decisions taking place “before time began”, as it is a concept that transcends political and national identification. As Andrew Rabin writes, “Augustinian *historia* culminates in universal conversion rather than the Christianization of any single political entity, a move which divorces the triumph of God’s Church from the temporal institution of the Roman empire”.<sup>170</sup> Bede’s own emphasis on Christian unification—a stress that

---

<sup>165</sup>Augustinus Hipponensis, *De Civitate Dei*, lib. 12, cap. 15.

<sup>166</sup>Augustinus Hipponensis, *De Civitate Dei*, lib. 12, cap. 15.

<sup>167</sup>Dyson, *The City of God*, Bk. 12, Ch. 15, 518.

<sup>168</sup>Dyson, *The City of God*, Bk. 12, Ch. 15, 519.

<sup>169</sup>Gerhard Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, trans. James D. Martin (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1972), 268-269.

<sup>170</sup>Andrew Rabin, “Historical Re-Collections: Rewriting the World Chronicle in Bede’s *De Tempore Ratione*” (*Viator: Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 36 (2005): 23-29), 25.

transcends ethnic and political boundaries, and draws a distinction between the “temporal” and the eternal—evokes this concept of *historia*, and New Testament theology continues this view of God-sustained “event”, or history. As Von Rad explains, “one intrinsic likeness between the message of the New and Old Testaments is that both speak of man and his potentialities, of the ‘flesh’, and of the world and the realm of secular history, as the sphere in which God reveals himself”.<sup>171</sup>

Bede recognizes the difficulties of one person writing the history in which “God reveals himself”; as he writes, “lectoremque suppliciter obsecro, ut, siqua in his, quae scripsimus, aliter quam se ueritas habet, posita reppererit, non hoc nobis imputet, qui, quod uera lex historiae est, simpliciter ea, quae fama uulgante collegimus, ad instructionem posteritatis litteris mandare studuimus”,<sup>172</sup> or “I humbly entreat the reader not to blame me if he finds in what I have written anything which he does not hold to be true. As the true rule of history requires, I have labored in simplicity to commit to writing such things as I gathered from the common report for the instruction of posterity”,<sup>173</sup> and he occasionally notes the limit of his singular knowledge, as he writes with regard to Earcongota’s miracles, “haec [...] suis narrare permittimus”,<sup>174</sup> or “we entrust [these] to her own [people] to tell”.<sup>175</sup> Along these same lines, Bede informs the reader of his choices in terms of the content of the Historia; for example, he surmises after writing about King Colman, “sed de his satis dictum”,<sup>176</sup> or “but enough has been said on these things”.<sup>177</sup> But in modestly recognizing these limitations and choices, Bede positions his narrative subjects as models of good Christian behavior. When he writes of Cædmon, England’s first poet,

---

<sup>171</sup>Von Rad, Old Testament Theology, II, 350.

<sup>172</sup>Plummer, Praefatio, 8.

<sup>173</sup>Campbell, 5.

<sup>174</sup>Plummer, Bk III, Ch. 8, 143.

<sup>175</sup>My own translation.

<sup>176</sup>Plummer, Bk. III, Ch. 26, 191.

<sup>177</sup>Campbell, 168.

as one who “nil umquam friuoli et superuacui poematis facere potuit, sed ea tantummodo, quae ad religionem pertinent, religiosam eius linguam decebant”,<sup>178</sup> or “he could never compose any trivial or vain poem, but only those which relate to religion suited his religious tongue”,<sup>179</sup> one can hear that echo from the Benedictine Rule: “if you wish to have a true and eternal life, then keep your tongue from evil and your lips from uttering lies; turn from evil and do good, seek peace and pursue it”.<sup>180</sup>

Bede imbues the Historia with the sense that both “God’s decisions” had been made “before time began”, and that Anglo-Saxon history was a “sphere in which God [revealed] himself”. In terms of his incidents of parable-like narrative, Bede plays upon the idea of God’s revelation *in* history by instructing his readers with events *from* that history, which he uses as educational material. As a result, he establishes himself as a historian in both the Augustinian and classical traditions. Roger Ray further explains as follows: “Like Cicero, Bede, thought that history teaches by example through verisimilar subject matter—materials which to the reader or auditor will above all *seem* true and so have impact [...] Yet Bede, like Cicero, also believed that the preferred materials of history are actual events, *res verae*”.<sup>181</sup> For Bede, these “actual events” serve as both “examples” of good behavior—which is necessary if one wants the eternal reward—and as indicative of God’s “order of time”, which has already established whether or not one receives that eternal reward. By coupling example with indication, or instruction with parable, Bede creates a parable-like narrative strand that illuminates some of the text’s more explicit stories, such as that of Abbess Hilda. But with regard to the text’s ultimate lesson, which concerns whether or not the

---

<sup>178</sup>Plummer, Bk. IV, Ch. 22 (24), 259.

<sup>179</sup>Campbell, 227.

<sup>180</sup>Holzherr, 22. Prologue: 17.

<sup>181</sup>Roger Ray, Bede, Rhetoric, and the Creation of Christian Latin Culture (Jarrow Lecture, 1997), 12.

reader will reach heaven *even* if he or she mimics that good behavior and stands in unity with his fellow Christians, a guaranteed receipt of an eternal reward will, in the temporal world, always remain unknown. As Augustine writes, “ambulandum est, proficiendum est, crescendo est, ut sint corda nostra capacia earum rerum quas capere modo non possumus. quod si nos ultimus dies proficientes inuenerit, ibi discemus quod hic non potuimus”,<sup>182</sup> or “We must be walking, making progress, and growing, that our hearts may become fit to receive the things which we cannot receive at present. And if the last day shall find us sufficiently advanced, we shall then learn what here we were unable to know”.<sup>183</sup>

---

<sup>182</sup>Augustinus Hipponensis, In Iohannis euangelium tractatus, ed. R. Willems, CCSL 36. (Turnholt: Brepols, 1954), tractatus 53, par. 7.

<sup>183</sup>Lectures or Tractates on the Gospel According to St. John, trans. John Gibb and James Innes, in A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, ed. Philip Schaff, Vol. VII (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1886), tractatus 53, p. 293.

## CHAPTER TWO

### **“Quid ad te pertinet, qua sim stirpe genitus?”: Divisive “otherness” in the Historia Ecclesiastica**

In light of Bede’s background, the parable-like vignettes, and a Bedan sense of Christian history and chronology, with regard to ethnic differences in the Historia, Bede seems to choose *not* to emphasize ethnic divisiveness in his text. Instead, he develops a narrative tension between the known and unknown (or familiar and non-familiar) that generally does *not* underscore conflict. Bede’s metaphor of the sparrow is a primary allegorical example of this tension, and it is also conflict-free, as Edwin’s decision to convert fails to result in either disagreement or violence. The cumulative effect of Bede’s narrative aversion to ethnic divisiveness is an ongoing emphasis on Christian unity; in other words, ethnic differences are not erased in the Historia, but they are superseded by whether or not one is Christian or non-Christian. By minimizing this possible ethnic point of conflict in the Historia, Bede mitigates the presence of conflict as a whole in his text. Likewise, this minimization of potential ethnic divisiveness is achieved yet again through his “rhetoric of reticence”.

Bede manages to touch upon many of the inhabitants of the British Isles at some point in his Historia, and the narrative deftness with which he handles disparate ethnic and religious groups elides the contentious physical and verbal exchanges that they probably experienced. As a result, the ways in which Bede depicts both these tribes and their interactions helps inform the larger treatment of conflict within the text. The Historia covers two invasions, Roman and Saxon, as well as the inevitable inter-tribal jostling that comes with different ethnic groups trying to stake their claims on the same relatively small island. True, Bede focuses the Historia on eastern England, thereby ignoring large sections of the West, but this focus may be explained by

Northumbria's distance from these regions, the concentration of ecclesiastical activity and power in the East and North, and the availability of source material. At the same time, however, the absence of the western and southern regions in the *Historia* does not necessarily preclude discussion of the many of the violent events that occurred in the British Isles at that time from the text. In light of these events, it is remarkable that Bede's commentary on the characteristics of most non-Northumbrian peoples—be they Pictish, Irish, Saxon, or Roman—is few and far between, and mildly negative at its worst. Even the British, whom Bede depicts less favorably, and about whose suffering he is often taciturn, are judged on the basis of their poor adherence to Christianity rather than any inherent ethnic characteristics. Bede's reticence, of course, depends on his view that it is ultimately Christianity, and not national or ethnic identity, that is the unifying force between his narrative subjects, whether they are Anglo-Saxon or not.<sup>184</sup>

The issue of ethnicity itself can be complicated within the context of early Anglo-Saxon England, and in the *Historia* the most famous ethnic statement, so to speak, occurs when Bede describes the Anglo-Saxon invasions as consisting of Angles, Saxons, and Jutes.<sup>185</sup> Many scholars have commented on Bede's division, arguing whether or not additional or fewer Germanic tribes participated in the

---

<sup>184</sup>In this dissertation "Anglo-Saxon" refers to Bede's contemporaneous non-Celtic "gens Anglorum", and "Angles" and "Saxons" signify two particular Germanic tribes at the time of their invasions of the British Isles. Although, as Patrick Wormald notes, Bede does not use the term "Saxon" to describe his fellow *Angli*, I have chosen the compound "Anglo-Saxon" as a means of distinguishing both his "gens Anglorum" and contemporaneous texts (e.g. homilies, heroic poetry, etc.). See Patrick Wormald, "Bede, the *Bretwaldas* and the Origins of the *Gens Anglorum*", in *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society: Studies Presented to J.M. Wallace-Hadrill*, ed. Patrick Wormald, Donald Bullough and Roger Collins, 99-129, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), 121.

<sup>185</sup>Bede, *Historiam Ecclesiasticam Gentis Anglorum Historiam Abbatum Epistolam ad Ecgbertum, una cum Historia Abbatum Auctore Anonymo*, ed. Charles Plummer, Vol. I (Oxford: Clarendon, 1896), Bk. I, Ch. 15, 31. All quotations from this text are cited as "Plummer" with the corresponding Book, Chapter, and page numbers. Any quotations from Vol. II of Plummer's edition are cited as such.

invasions, as well as what Bede means by these names in the first place.<sup>186</sup> As Susan Reynolds writes, “we do not know how consistently the Germanic-speaking invaders of Britain behaved like a group during the fifth and sixth centuries. We do not know what they called themselves or what others called them, if indeed they had any collective name”.<sup>187</sup> Michael Wallace-Hadrill elaborates further in his historical commentary on the *Historia*, “this much-discussed distinction stands up fairly well to modern archeological evidence, even when we include parties of Frisians, Franks, and others among the earliest settlers”, and he adds, “the Franks cannot have been a significant element at this stage”, while “place-name study also tends to support Bede”.<sup>188</sup> Still, even if one could prove the uncontested veracity of Bede’s identification of these three tribes, the difficulties in understanding ethnic identity within the *Historia* remain, and they raise several questions about what constitutes a *gens* in Anglo-Saxon England.

David Townsend suggests that these questions are indicative of the nebulous role that ethnic identity, and Bede’s understanding of that identity, plays in the *Historia*. As he writes in reference to the titular term “gens Anglorum”, it is “unclear how widely Bede understands the label *Angli* to apply. It could be taken to mean the members of all the Germanic groups that had invaded Britain in the fifth century, or it

---

<sup>186</sup>See James Campbell, “The First Century of Christianity in England”, in *Essays in Anglo-Saxon History*, 49-67 (London: Hambledon, 1986), 53-54; H.M. Chadwick, *Origins of the English Nation* (Cambridge: CUP, 1907), 12-14; Vera Evison, *The 5<sup>th</sup> Century Invasions South of the Thames* (London: Athlone, 1965), 83-86; Henry Mayr-Harting, *The Coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1972), 13-16; Uppinder Mehan and David Townsend, “‘Nation’ and the Gaze of the Other in Eighth-Century Northumbria” (*Comparative Literature* 53, no. 1 (2001): 1-26), 4; Susan Reynolds, “What do we mean by ‘Anglo-Saxon’ and ‘Anglo-Saxons’?” (*Journal of British Studies* 24, no. 4 (1985): 395-414), 398-405; Patrick Wormald, “Bede, the *Bretwaldas* and the Origins of the *Gens Anglorum*”, in *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society: Studies Presented to J.M. Wallace-Hadrill*, ed. Patrick Wormald, Donald Bullough and Roger Collins, 99-129 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), 121.

<sup>187</sup>Susan Reynolds, “What do we mean by ‘Anglo-Saxon’ and ‘Anglo-Saxons’?” (*Journal of British Studies* 24, no. 4 (1985): 395-414), 401.

<sup>188</sup>J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History of the English People: A Historical Commentary* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), 22.

could perhaps refer only to the Angles inhabiting the northernmost kingdoms of Bernicia and Deira, which were eventually unified into the larger kingdom of Northumbria”.<sup>189</sup> In contrast, Reynolds argues, with no evidence other than a footnote to Wormald’s “Bede, the *Bretwaldas*” article, “the inhabitants of what would come to be called England were, by the early eighth century if not before, using the simple word ‘English’ (*Angli, Anglici*) to refer to themselves”,<sup>190</sup> and she thus refutes Townsend’s thesis by arguing that residence within a broad geographical area, “what would come to be called England”, largely earned one the name *Angli*. Stephen J. Harris offers yet another possibly contentious interpretation. He argues that the identity tied to “gens Anglorum”, and perhaps by extension other ethnic identities within the British Isles at this time, is “received”; as he writes, “Bede’s *gens Anglorum* might not actually refer to an ethnically homogenous group, [and] we may conclude that ethnic or tribal identity, rather than being a material or physical quality, belongs instead to the realm of received or proffered myths and names”.<sup>191</sup> Bede, by virtue of his minimization of ethnic caricature throughout the *Historia*, could be seen as advocating ethnic identity as “received or proffered myths and names” rather than “material or physical quality”, particularly as he privileges Christianity as a means of identifying his narrative subjects. However, ultimately Bede does acknowledge ethnic distinction, and this acknowledgement constitutes more than just names.

Bede maintains a certain strategy in de-emphasizing both the negative and the positive attributes of any one ethnic group in the British Isles. The characteristics and terms that Bede attributes to the non-English others in his text are minimal, and negative terms and descriptions tend to be ascribed to other writers and authority

---

<sup>189</sup>Uppinder Mehand and David Townsend, “‘Nation’ and the Gaze of the Other in Eighth-Century Northumbria” (*Comparative Literature* 53, no. 1 (2001): 1-26), 4.

<sup>190</sup>Reynolds, 398.

<sup>191</sup>Stephen J. Harris, “Bede, Social Practice, and the Problem with Foreigners” (*Essays in Medieval Studies* 13 (1996): 97-107), 99.

figures that he cites. He resists what would be an understandable tendency to demonize, through caricature or prejudice, old enemies of the Northumbrians or the contemporaneous Anglo-Saxons. Along these same lines, Bede tends to focus on individuals of a certain ethnicity, rather than blatantly assigning formulaic characteristics to the groups as a whole. The primary result of this approach is that Bede can appropriate the best Christians from these ethnic groups as fodder for his master narrative of Christian unity, and leave the lesser Christians to their tribal identities. For example, when discussing Pelagius early in the *Historia*, Bede immediately identifies the heretic as a Briton—"Pelagius Bretto"<sup>192</sup>—and then proceeds to describe his heresy. He does *not* argue that the British sinfulness is ethnically inherent, and thus inevitably produced a heretic of such grand proportions; instead, he simply labels Pelagius the moment he enters the text. In contrast, when relating the story of the British Saint Alban, Bede does not personally identify the saint's ethnicity; he allows Fortunatus to do so in a poetic digression,<sup>193</sup> "Albanum egregium fecunda Britannia profert", or "Fertile Britain brought forth the excellent Albanus",<sup>194</sup> and then suspends any discussion of Alban's ethnic identity while recounting the martyr's tale. When the pagan priest demands of Alban, "Cuius [...] familiae vel generis es?",<sup>195</sup> or "Of what family or people are you?",<sup>196</sup> Alban answers, "Quid ad te pertinet, qua sim stirpe genitus? Sed si veritatem religionis audire desideras, Christianum iam me esse [cognosce]",<sup>197</sup> or "What business is it of yours, from which race I was born? But if you desire to hear the truth of my religion, then

---

<sup>192</sup>Plummer, Bk. I, Ch. 10, 23.

<sup>193</sup>Plummer, Bk. I, Ch. 7, 18.

<sup>194</sup>My own translation.

<sup>195</sup>Plummer, Bk. I, Ch. 7, 19.

<sup>196</sup>My own translation.

<sup>197</sup>Plummer, Bk. I, Ch. 7, 19. "stirpe" could also be glossed as "stock", "lineage", or "plant", perhaps in the sense of one's race being a branch of a larger tree.

know now that I am Christian”.<sup>198</sup> Both Pelagius and Alban are Britons, and while Bede does not explicitly deny their shared ethnic identity, he claims Alban for his Christian/non-Christian narrative binary while leaving Pelagius to the de-emphasized divisions between tribes. When recounting these two figures, the reader remembers Alban as a Christian first and a Briton second.

On the few occasions that Bede does ascribe certain attributes to these different ethnic groups, his commentary is firmly embedded in the context of volatile events. He identifies the Irish and the Picts, while describing their violent attacks on the British, as “*duabus gentibus [...] saevis*”,<sup>199</sup> or “two savage races”,<sup>200</sup> he names the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes “*tribus Germaniae populis fortioribus*”,<sup>201</sup> or “three mightier peoples of Germania”<sup>202</sup> when narrating their invasions of the British Isles; and he labels the British “*miseri cives*”,<sup>203</sup> or “miserable citizens”<sup>204</sup> as they suffer these events. Yet these descriptions seem muted next to those of other figures whom Bede quotes. For example, King Oswald’s first Irish bishop says of the English, “*essent homines indomabiles, et durae ac barbarae mentis*”,<sup>205</sup> or “they are unmasterable people, and of rough and barbaric mind”,<sup>206</sup> and the Northumbrian Bishop Wilfrid says of the Irish, Picts, and Britons, “*praeter hos tantum et obstinationis eorum complices, Pictos dico et Brettones, cum quibus de duabus ultimis oceani insulis, et his non totis, contra totum orbem stulto labore pugnant*”,<sup>207</sup> or “[they are] so greatly contrary to others in their shared stubbornness, the Picts and the Britons, who live on the two most distant islands of the ocean, foolishly dispute against the whole

---

<sup>198</sup>My own translation.

<sup>199</sup>Plummer, Bk. I, Ch. 12, 25.

<sup>200</sup>My own translation.

<sup>201</sup>Plummer, Bk. I, Ch. 15, 32.

<sup>202</sup>My own translation.

<sup>203</sup>Plummer, Bk. I, Ch. 12, 28.

<sup>204</sup>My own translation.

<sup>205</sup>Plummer, Bk. III, Ch. 6, 137.

<sup>206</sup>My own translation.

<sup>207</sup>Plummer, Bk. III, Ch. 25, 184.

world”.<sup>208</sup> Interestingly, in each of these examples it is a Christian authority figure who steps outside the Christian/non-Christian narrative binary that Bede has established, and instead chooses to play up the ethnic otherness that Bede does not find nearly as relevant as his subjects’ faith.

Yet, as mentioned previously, while Bede might not be that interested in pursuing specific ethnic descriptions, he does not deny that ethnic otherness exists. As A.T. Thacker relates in his article on Bede and the Irish, “Bede treats the Irish like the English and the Picts [...] no common qualities are attributed to these groups, and indeed the diversity of the origins of the English in particular is emphasized”.<sup>209</sup> Bede’s textual inclusion of the various tribes speaks to his recognition of “the diversity of the origins of the English”, and while he might not caricaturize that ethnic diversity, he does see a distinction between ethnic identity and Christian identity. Stephen J. Harris, in his juxtaposition of King Alfred to Bede, argues, “Alfred seems to see one common identity as extending ethnically and religiously to all the Christian Germanic inhabitants of Britain. In other words, Bede considered ethnic identity and Christian identity as each capable of constituting a people, a *gens*. But participation in the Christian religion did not extend ethnic identity: Saxons did not become Angles simply by joining the Church”.<sup>210</sup> Harris’s conclusion regarding Bede strikes me as relatively accurate; for example, when Bede relates the Frisians’ conversion to Christianity, he names them “nova Dei plebe”,<sup>211</sup> or “the new people of God”.<sup>212</sup> But Bede does not imply that an identity as God’s people erases national borders; in other words, Frisians may be the new people of God, but they also remain Frisians, just as

---

<sup>208</sup>My own translation.

<sup>209</sup>A.T. Thacker, “Bede and the Irish”, in *Beda Venerabilis: Historian, Monk & Northumbrian*, ed. L.A.J.R. Houwen and A.A. MacDonald, 31-59 (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1996), 33.

<sup>210</sup>Stephen J. Harris, “The Alfredian *World History* and Anglo-Saxon Identity” (*JPEG* 100, no. 4 (2001): 482-510), 484.

<sup>211</sup>Plummer, Bk. V, Ch. 19, 326.

<sup>212</sup>My own translation.

Northumbrians remain Northumbrians.

Ultimately, however, Bede is more concerned with whether or not his narrative subjects are Christian, and this concern might be explained by his own identification of the British Isles and its people with the universal Church rather than any one ethnic group. As Walter Goffart writes, Bede “cared more about the Christian face of his compatriots than about their ethnic peculiarities”,<sup>213</sup> and this interest in his compatriots’ “Christian face” might explain his silence about contemporaneous, local pagan practice. As R.I. Page asserts, “[Bede] was born too late to have known the formal heathenism of his land at first hand; in 673, some thirty years after the death of King Oswald under whom Northumbria became officially Christian. Professional Christians brought him up from the age of seven, and to that extent he was isolated from pagan traditions that must have continued among the northern English”.<sup>214</sup> The inculcation of Bede’s monastic upbringing and education might elucidate his emphasis on “Christian faces” rather than ethnic ones in the *Historia*, but regardless, the existence of this emphasis cannot be denied, and it is worth exploring. Bede not only aligns the Anglo-Saxon people and the Anglo-Saxon Church with Christian history and the Roman Church, but he also even adopts the Roman Christian perspective himself. As David Townsend writes of Bede’s story of Gregory and the Anglo-Saxon slave boys, “[Bede] seems to assume a cultural authority that mimics the metropolitan center’s objectification of the English as ‘the other’”,<sup>215</sup> and as Townsend’s insight suggests, this assumed “cultural authority” allows Bede to maintain both an objective

---

<sup>213</sup>Walter Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History (A.D. 550-800): Jordanes, Gregory of Tours, Bede, and Paul the Deacon* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 6.

<sup>214</sup>R.I. Page, “Anglo-Saxon Paganism: The Evidence of Bede”, in *Pagans and Christians: The Interplay Between Christian Latin and Traditional Germanic Cultures in Early Medieval Europe*, ed. T. Hofstra, L.A.J.R. Houwen and A.A. MacDonald, 99-130, *Germania Latina II* (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1995), 101. Page’s hypothesis that pagan practice may have continued among the Northern English within Bede’s lifetime seems plausible; thirty years of “official” Christendom does not prove that paganism had been completely eradicated, particularly as it is uncertain exactly what shape that “official” Christianity took, or whether or not it was rigorously enforced.

<sup>215</sup>Mehan and Townsend, 4.

and *objectified* view of all the ethnic groups in the British Isles, even if his commentary on them is relatively minimal.

In addition, Bede's perspective enables him to cement further his positioning of the Anglo-Saxons with the Roman Church. A.T. Thacker observes, "it is to Gregory and his successors at Rome, far more than to Canterbury, that Bede depicts the English church as looking for guidance",<sup>216</sup> and Nicholas Howe concurred, "if Jerusalem stood at the center of the earth in Bede's cosmology, as it did for his contemporaries, Rome figured in his historical imagination as capital city when he engaged with the here and now of the English church and people".<sup>217</sup> Thomas Renna even identifies a "Bedan paradox", which he defines as follows: "we English are the new chosen people because we are joined to the Roman Church".<sup>218</sup> Renna's "Bedan paradox" alludes to Bede's understanding of Christian history and teleology that I discussed in Chapter One, but in the context of ethnic identification, it suggests the negation of ethnic identity in favor of a Christian/non-Christian binary, while at the same time it infers the supremacy of a Roman Christian "cultural authority". Bede's usage of the expression "gens Anglorum" also reflects this allegiance to Roman Christian thought. As David Townsend explains of the slave-boy story, "Gregory in effect organizes the

---

<sup>216</sup>Thacker, "Bede and the Irish", 35.

<sup>217</sup>Nicholas Howe, "Rome: Capital of Anglo-Saxon England" (*The Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 34, no. 1 (2004): 147-172), 156. Howe explains that Rome may legitimately be seen as the capital of Anglo-Saxon England in terms of "a more etymological sense as the head (*caput*) or chief city of a culture" (155, also footnoting Robert Bartlett, *The Making of Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993)). Howe contends, "Rome had been the island's capital while it was still Britannia, a province of the empire, and arguably retained if only in the aura of memory, something of that position after the last legions were withdrawn in A.D. 410. But that political aura, even if it were possible for us to locate its presence in extant works from Anglo-Saxon England, would most likely have appeared as a kind of subtext to Rome's emergent, postimperial status as a religious capital [...] the felt presence of Rome as the imperial and papal capital registers throughout the *History*, especially in its early books and then again towards its conclusion as Bede relates the many pilgrimages made there by the English (*EH* V.20) The distinction between the two cities needs to be understood and maintained: within the abstract cosmology of the universal church, Jerusalem was the center of the world for Bede; within the political and conversion history of the Anglo-Saxons, Rome was the capital of England" (156).

<sup>218</sup>Thomas Renna, "Bernard and Bede" (*American Benedictine Review* 44, no. 3 (1993) 223-235), 233.

English into a field that is intelligible in spite of the internecine vagaries of political allegiance in the ephemeral minor kingdoms of the sixth-century English. The English are thus a *gens* (however we choose to translate that term) because Gregory identifies them as such and dispatches a mission whose aim is their conversion as a single entity”.<sup>219</sup>

Bede’s emphasis on Christian identity versus ethnic identity might explain his treatment of the British, who receive the brunt of his negative commentary. Much of Bede’s condemnation of the British as a group concerns their failure to convert the invading Germanic tribes; as Gerald Bonner writes, the “refusal” of the British “to work for the conversion of the heathen Saxons was never forgiven them”.<sup>220</sup> Yet I do not think that Bede condemns the British wholesale, nor do I think that Bede portrays the entire ethnic group as “intrinsically heretical”, as N.J. Higham writes.<sup>221</sup> After all, Alban is British and Bede is happy to appropriate him for the Christian cause; likewise, his censure of the British in the *Historia* refers to specific deeds, and not inherent flaws. For example, in an odd, single-sentence interjection in his vignette on the death of King Edwin, Bede writes of the British as follows: “Quippe cum usque hodie moris sit Brettonum, fidem religionemque Anglorum pro nihil habere, neque in aliquo eis magis communicare quam paganis”,<sup>222</sup> or “Of course up to today the Britons have no concern for the faith and religion of the Anglo-Saxons, nor do they have anything more to do with them than with pagans”.<sup>223</sup> As in his description of Pelagius, Bede does not argue that the British are ethnically inherently incapable of practicing proper “fide”, or “faith”, but that they are not acting in the appropriate way,

---

<sup>219</sup>Mehan and Townsend, 7.

<sup>220</sup>Gerald Bonner, “The Christian Life in the Thought of the Venerable Bede” (*Durham University Journal* 63, no. 32 (1970): 39-55), 40.

<sup>221</sup>N.J. Higham, *An English Empire: Bede and the Early Anglo-Saxon Kings* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1995), 251.

<sup>222</sup>Plummer, Bk. II, Ch. 20, 125

<sup>223</sup>My own translation.

and that they have failed to maximize opportunities, such as converting the Anglo-Saxons, when they arose. Most importantly, from this viewpoint, they are not acting as appropriate *Christians*—the issue of whether or not their behavior is appropriate British conduct is not considered. Similarly, towards the end of the *Historia* in Book Five, Bede rebukes the deplorable faith of the British, in which he explicitly blames them for not converting the Germanic invaders, and contemptuously describes their current non-canonical practice. He writes as follows: “Sicut econtra Brettones, qui nolebant Anglis eam, quam habebant, fidei Christianae notitiam pandere, credentibus iam populis Anglorum, et in regula fidei catholicae per omnia instructis, ipsi adhuc inueterati et claudicantes a semitis suis, et capita sine corona praetendunt, et sollemnia Christi sine ecclesiae Christi societate uenerantur”,<sup>224</sup> or “On the contrary the Britons, who have been unwilling to share their acquaintance with the Christian faith with the Anglo-Saxons, as the Anglo-Saxon people now believe, and have all been instructed by in rules of catholic faith, they are still inveterately limping on their path, and [stretch out] their heads without tonsure [corona], and are venerating Christ’s solemnity without the fellowship of the church of Christ”. This passage is the closest that Bede comes to stereotyping the entire ethnic group as “intrinsically heretical”, but even in this heated moment Bede’s language lacks the condemnatory thunder of texts like Anglo-Saxon homilies. Again, Bede focuses on their failure as true Christians, and he limits his lambasting to their non-canonical observance. Were they to join in “ecclesiae Christi societate”, or “fellowship of the Christian Church”, his depiction of them would probably change.

It may be useful to compare Bede’s portrayal and description of these different ethnic groups, and in particular his minimization of ethnic divisiveness and possible conflict, with an earlier but relatively contemporaneous historian, Gregory of Tours.

---

<sup>224</sup>Plummer, Bk. V, Ch. 22, 347

As an ecclesiastic himself—he was the Bishop of Tours for twenty years—Gregory composed a text entitled Historiae Francorum libri decem, or The Ten Books of the History of the Franks, in which he provides an account of sixth century Merovingian Gaul. An analysis of these two texts in tandem is particularly significant because each concerns a “national” history, and as a result, their respective depictions of ethnic groups are more illuminating.<sup>225</sup> Furthermore, as James Campbell notes, Gregory’s text and thus his narrative approach were known to Bede: “Bede was not the first Christian historian to write on the history of one people [but] the only such national historian whose work was certainly known to him was Gregory of Tours”.<sup>226</sup> Michael Wallace-Hadrill takes a broader view of both Bede and Gregory when he writes, “we cannot call them ancient historians, and only in a particular sense are they ecclesiastical historians. What they really are is medieval historians, the first of their kind”.<sup>227</sup> In some ways Gregory’s Historia is ostensibly more “ecclesiastical” than Bede’s; for example, his Book One recounts the story of creation. However, his text as a whole is less concerned with the legacy of the Roman Church and ecclesiastical squabbles than is Bede’s Historia, and the issues of Christian unification and identity seem secondary to those of secular and ecclesiastical power struggles.

Comparing and contrasting the Historia Ecclesiastica and Historia Francorum<sup>228</sup> provides an interesting counterpoint in terms of their differing rhetorical styles and

---

<sup>225</sup>Some scholars contend that Bede’s Historia is a “national” addition to Eusebius’ Historia Ecclesiastica, which is a fourth century history of the Church. Bede’s attention to Eusebius’ text was arguably greater than his attention to Gregory’s, mainly because he viewed the former as a paradigmatic example for his own Historia. With regard to depictions of ethnic divisiveness, however, and as an issue within the context of “national” histories, I only examine Gregory’s Historiarum Francorum here. For a good comparative analysis of Bede and Eusebius, see specifically L.W. Barnard, “Bede and Eusebius as Church Historians”, in Famulus Christi: Essays in Commemoration of the Thirteenth Centenary of the Birth of the Venerable Bede, ed. Gerald Bonner, 106-124 (London: SPCK, 1976).

<sup>226</sup>James Campbell, “Bede II”, in Essays in Anglo-Saxon History, 29-48, originally published 1968 (London: Hambledon, 1986), 34.

<sup>227</sup>J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, Early Medieval History (Oxford: Blackwell, 1975), 96.

<sup>228</sup>I refer to Gregory’s text as Historia Francorum for the rest of this chapter, although the full and more accurate title is Historiae Francorum libri decem.

depiction of subject matter, and one of the most significant, in terms of this dissertation, concerns the way in which each author approaches conflict. The discretion that characterizes Bede's Historia is notably absent from Gregory's text, particularly with regard to the events—often contentious—that occurred during the authors' lifetimes. As Campbell aptly points out, “the contrast [between Bede and Gregory] is striking. Gregory devotes six of the ten books of his history to the period of his own greatness, c. 573-591. The more he knew the more he wrote. It seems with Bede the more he knew the less he wrote”.<sup>229</sup> Along these same lines, Henry Mayr-Harting contends that in terms of the Historia Ecclesiastica, “Bede conveys an impression almost of idyllic times, even though he was writing of a period of turbulence and violent deaths. All this is quite unlike [Gregory's History of the Franks] which was written in the 590s and known to Bede”.<sup>230</sup> Gregory does not shy away from straightforwardly describing various atrocities that took place in sixth century Gaul, and reticence appears to mean little to him as a narrative technique. And while the textual differences with regard to a “rhetoric of reticence” between Gregory and Bede could fill another dissertation, in the meantime a cursory examination of differences with regard to depicting ethnic divisiveness in the Historia Ecclesiastica and Historia Francorum will suffice.

In terms of his depiction of various ethnic groups, as with his approach to depicting general conflict, Gregory of Tours differs substantially from Bede. Contrary to Bede's generally objective attitude towards the various tribes inhabiting the British Isles, except when they play a specific role in his Christian/non-Christian narrative binary, Gregory's text portrays ethnic groups that are simply brutal, and whose

---

<sup>229</sup>James Campbell, “Bede I”, in Essays in Anglo-Saxon History, 1-28, originally published 1966 (London: Hambledon, 1986), 15.

<sup>230</sup>Henry Mayr-Harting, The Coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1972), 41.

beliefs—whether they are pagan or Christian—can at times seem incidental in light of their violent tendencies. Conflict between them constitutes the majority of their interactions, and Gregory does not attempt to minimize or elide these altercations, whether they involve Christians or not. For example, when describing an incident between two pagan tribes, the Vandals and the Alamanni, Gregory writes as follows: “Posthaec Vandali a loco suo digressi, cum Gunderico rege in Gallias ruunt. Quibus valde vastatis, Hispanias appetunt. Hos secuti Suevi, id est, Alamanni, Galliciam apprehendunt. Nec multo post scandalum inter utrumque oritur populum, quoniam propinqui sibi erant”,<sup>231</sup> or “[after this] the Vandals left their homeland and invaded Gaul with Gunderic [their] king. [After they had greatly] ravaged Gaul, they attacked Spain. The Suebi, [that is] the Alamanni, followed the Vandals, and seized Galicia. Not long afterwards a [argument or act of offense] arose between these two peoples, for their territories were adjacent”. Gregory notes that the “scandalum” or “act of offense” is settled by a “single-combat” duel, in which “pars Vandalorum victa succubuit”,<sup>232</sup> or “the Vandals’ man was beaten and killed”. Likewise, Gregory’s description of the pagan Hunnish invasion of Christian Gaul is no different; his language and authorial perspective, in other words, do not change just because he relates pagans ravaging Christians rather than ravaging other pagans. He writes, “Igitur Chuni a Pannoniis egressi, ut quidam ferunt, in ipsa sancti Paschae vigilia, ad Mettensem urbem [...] perveniunt, tradentes urbem incendio, et populum in ore gladii trucidantes, ipsosque sacerdotes Domini ante sacrosancta altaria perimentes”,<sup>233</sup> or “The Huns migrated from Pannonia and laid waste to the countryside as they advanced. They came to the town of Metz, so people say, on Easter Eve. They

---

<sup>231</sup>Gregorius Turonensis, *Historiae Francorum libri decem*, in *Opera Omnia*, Migne ed., Patrologiae Latinae 71 (Paris: 1879), lib. 2, cap. 2, col. 191.

<sup>232</sup>Gregorius Turonensis, *Historiae Francorum libri decem*, lib. 2, cap. 2, col. 191.

<sup>233</sup>Gregorius Turonensis, *Historiae Francorum libri decem*, lib. 2, cap. 6, col. 198.

burned the town to the ground, slaughtered the populace with the sharp edge of their swords and killed the priests of the Lord in front of their holy altars”.<sup>234</sup> His use of vocabulary like “priests of the Lord” and “holy altars” emphasizes the faith of the Huns’ victims, but does not shift the way in which this incident of violence is depicted. And in a moment that almost seems humorous, Gregory notes, “igitur Alaricus rex Gotthorum, cum viderit Chlodovechum regem gentes assidue debellare”, or “[therefore] Alaric II, the King of the Goths, [when he saw] that King Clovis was beating one [*gens*] of people after another”, decides to make peace with the king “Deo propitio”,<sup>235</sup> or “with God’s approval”.<sup>236</sup> Gregory employs both the terminology of ethnicity—he notes Clovis’s defeat of “one race of people after another”, and that Alaric is “King of the Goths”—and invokes a modicum of Christian identity, through noting Alaric’s desire for “God’s approval”. Yet the foremost characteristic of this event is Alaric’s temporal world concern not to be defeated; “God’s approval” reads like an authorial afterthought.

Gregory often emphasizes ethnic separation when discussing pagan versus pagan violence, Christian versus pagan violence, and Christian versus Christian violence, and the result is that ethnic distinctions are foremost in his narrative. This ongoing articulation of ethnic identity is not necessarily divisive, but it does invoke difference, or separation, between the narrative actors, particularly Christians, and even heretical Christians. For example, Clovis says, “valde moleste fero, quod hi Ariani partem teneant Galliarum”,<sup>237</sup> or “I find it [very troubling] that these Arians [hold] a part of Gaul”,<sup>238</sup> and while no one forgets that they are heretics, the most salient point to Gregory’s narrative—and the most vexing issue to Clovis—seems to be that they are

---

<sup>234</sup>Gregory of Tours, 115.

<sup>235</sup>Gregorius Turonensis, *Historiae Francorum libri decem*, lib. 2, cap. 35, col. 252.

<sup>236</sup>Gregory of Tours, 150.

<sup>237</sup>Gregorius Turonensis, *Historiae Francorum libri decem*, lib. 2, cap. 37, col. 233.

<sup>238</sup>Gregory of Tours, 151.

“Arians” occupying a “non-Arian” territory. Similarly, when Gregory describes Lothar’s suppression of the Saxons, the episode contains only ethnic terminology, and no vocabulary concerning religious belief. He writes, “Chlothacharius rex, commoto contra eos exercitu, maximam eorum partem delevit, pervagans totam Thoringiam ac devastans, pro eo quod Saxonibus solatium praebuissent”<sup>239</sup>, or “King Lothar mobilized an army against [the Saxons], and wiped out a great number of them. He invaded Thuringia and ravaged the whole province, for the Thuringians had [given comfort] to the Saxons”.<sup>240</sup> The same lack of religious attention, combined with an emphasis on ethnic division and conflict, occurs in an earlier vignette, which concerns the Saxons, Romans, Franks, and Alamanni: “inter Saxones atque Romanos bellum gestum est: sed Saxones terga vertentes, multos de suis, Romanis insequentibus, gladio reliquerunt; insulae eorum cum multo populo interempto, a Francis captae atque subversae sunt [...] Adouacrius cum Childerico foedus iniit, Alamannosque, qui partem Italiae pervaserant, subiugarunt”,<sup>241</sup> or “a war was waged between the Saxons and the Romans: [but the Saxons fled, and many of them whom the Romans followed were cut down by the sword]; Their [nations] were captured [and overthrown, and many people were killed] by the Franks [...] Odovacar made a treaty with Childeric and together they subdued the Alamanni, who had invaded a part of Italy”.<sup>242</sup> Bede, on the other hand, maximizes opportunities to promote Christian unity between members of various ethnic groups in the British Isles, often with the end-result that their ethnic identity is incidental to their Christian one. Alban’s insistence that his family and race were of no consequence since he identifies as a Christian is a primary example of this promotion of Christian unity and identification.

---

<sup>239</sup>Gregorius Turonensis, *Historiae Francorum libri decem*, lib. 4, cap. 10, col. 275.

<sup>240</sup>Gregory of Tours, 203.

<sup>241</sup>Gregorius Turonensis, *Historiae Francorum libri decem*, lib. 2, cap. 19, col. 216.

<sup>242</sup>Gregory of Tours, 132.

Instead of melting Christian and ethnic identity together or emphasizing ethnic divisiveness, Bede establishes a general tension between the familiar and the unknown in his text that transcends specific ethnic and religious identification, and that is different from other Anglo-Saxon texts that explore a similar anxiety of otherness.<sup>243</sup> Furthermore, identifying the ways in which Bede develops this tension will set the stage for the Christian/non-Christian narrative binary in the next chapter. Bede's allegory of the sparrow centralizes this tension in the *Historia*; it highlights the anxiety of what is outside, other, and unknown, and how it might be mitigated by Christian belief, or what is inside, familiar, and shared. As a tale of conversion, the allegory is a touchstone of the text, and the point from which an ecclesiastical history may spring forth. He relates the metaphoric story through one of King Edwin's advisors, who states as follows:

Mihi videtur, rex, vita hominum praesens in terries, ad conparationem eius, quod nobis incertum est, temporis, quale cum te residente ad caenam cum ducibus ac ministries tuis tempore brumali, accenso quidem foco in medio, et calido effecto caenaculo, furentibus autem foris per omnia turbinibus hiemalium pluviarum vel nivium, adveniens unus passerum domum citissime pervolaverit; qui cum per unum ostium ingrediens, mox per aliud exierit. Ipso quidem tempore, quo intus est, hiemis tempestate non tangitur, sed tamen parvissimo spatio serenitatis ad momentum excurso, mox de hieme in hiemem regrediens, tuis oculis elabitur. Ita haec vita hominum ad modicum apparet; quid autem sequatur, quidue praecesserit, prorsus ignoramus. Unde si haec nova doctrina certius aliquid attulit, merito esse sequenda videtur.<sup>244</sup>

[It seems to me, King, that if the present human life on earth compared to that time of which is unknown to us, it is as when in winter you are seated at supper with your commanders and advisors, and a fire brightens the hearth in the center, and makes the Hall warm to the rafters, while outside all is raging through whirling, wintry rain or snow, and one sparrow flies swiftly into the Hall; it enters through one door, and soon leaves through another. In that time, when it is inside, the winter storm cannot touch it,

---

<sup>243</sup>See Appendices One and Two for parallels.

<sup>244</sup>Plummer, Bk. II, Ch. 13, 112.

yet nevertheless in the smallest time to a moment it leaves, and soon returns from winter into winter, it slips away from our eyes. Thus to this shortest time does human life appear; but what follows, or what precedes it, in short we know nothing. Thus if this new doctrine brings some certainty, it seems it deserves to be followed.]<sup>245</sup>

The language that Bede uses to describe the otherness of the unknown—words including “incertum”, or “unknown” or “uncertain”, and “ignoramus”, or “we know nothing”—is definite in its unfamiliarity, but nebulous in its constitution. In other words, the unknown is faceless, nameless, and identity-less. It is also less threatening than one might expect—no fierce pagan Penda waits outside the Hall, challenging the warm fires within. Instead, snowy dark winter surrounds them, and hypothermic death with its numbing, sleep-like embrace is decidedly less frightening than the Mercian actually clambering at the Northumbrian border. Bede’s framework, as a result, is clear: the tension between known and unknown is strangely benign, and the passage from unfamiliar to familiar is the simple acceptance of the faith. It is not a death-struggle between God and Satan, two opposites threatening to pull apart the universe, but a commitment to tending a warm fire. And Bede emphasizes that Edwin’s conversion, after his own private reflection, the advisor’s speech, and Coifi’s destruction of the pagan idols, was bloodless—he was convinced by a metaphor.

One interesting example of Bede’s attention to the non-specific familiar versus unfamiliar tension in his *Historia*, as opposed to the more definitive friend versus foe tension that exists in different Anglo-Saxon texts,<sup>246</sup> involves the initial Saxon invasion of the British Isles. When first describing this event, Bede uses terminology that shifts the discourse to a black and white plane that is both non-religious and non-ethnic. Even though the Britons are Christian and the Saxons are pagan, Bede does not play upon this division until his later analysis of the invasion; instead, he

---

<sup>245</sup>My own translation.

<sup>246</sup>See Appendix One.

immediately identifies the Saxons as alien and the British as native. “Non mora ergo”, he writes, “confluentibus certatim in insulam [...] grandescere populus coepit advenarum [...] qui eos advocaverant, indigenis essent terrori”,<sup>247</sup> or “therefore there was no delay in the troop flocking eagerly to the island [...] and as the newcomers began to increase in number, then those who had invited them, the natives, were in terror”.<sup>248</sup> Later, Bede explains that the invasion was God’s punishment on the Britons for failing in their faith: “accensus manibus paganorum ignis, iustas de sceleribus populi Dei ultiones expetiit [...] qui quondam a chaldaeis succensus, Hierosolymorum moenia, immo aedificia cuncta consumsit”,<sup>249</sup> or “the fires kindled by the hands of the pagans, happened to be the just vengeance of God on a wicked a people [...] similar to those lit by the Chaldeans, consuming all the walls and even all the buildings of Jerusalem”.<sup>250</sup> But in the moment that the reader encounters the invasion, it is a battle between two faceless entities, whose identities have been reduced to the elemental “newcomer” and “native”. In this light, the invasion evokes the allegory of the sparrow; the unknown is not battle-hungry Penda circling the Hall, it is simply “advena”. Likewise, what is known is not the comforting rule of King Edwin, who eventually will die, but what is simply “indigena”, nameless yet familiar.

That Bede emphasizes a narrative tension between entities that are known and unknown, and that can seem relatively benign, helps show that the *Historia*, instead of emphasizing conflict, instead acknowledges a divide and offers a choice. When Alban asks of his interrogator, “quid ad te pertinet, qua sim stirpe genitus?”, he is, in effect, voicing one of Bede’s major narrative objectives. Why is it significant who my family or what my race is, he asks, when I have made a choice, and all that matters is that I

---

<sup>247</sup>Plummer, Bk. I, Ch. 6, 32.

<sup>248</sup>My own translation.

<sup>249</sup>Plummer, Bk. I, Ch. 6, 32.

<sup>250</sup>My own translation.

am Christian? Identifying oneself as Christian first creates a strong stand against the dark, nebulous unknown that lies outside the Hall, and it casts ethnic strife and difference into narrative relief. As Patrick Wormald writes, “from Theodore’s arrival at the latest, all Anglo-Saxons were exposed to a view of themselves as a single people before God—a people who, though they lived in ‘Brittania’ or ‘Saxonia’ and though they called themselves Saxons as well as Angles, were known in heaven as the ‘gens Anglorum’”.<sup>251</sup> Instead, true divisiveness takes the shape of Christian versus non-Christian, and this emphasis causes Bede ultimately to minimize schismatic feeling within the Christian community in his *Historia* as well by placing a narrative premium on Christian unity. In the next chapter, I will examine why Bede’s de-emphasis of ethnic divisiveness (us Anglo-Saxons versus them Irish/Picts/Britons) allows him to establish a Christian/non-Christian narrative binary (us Christians versus them non-Christians), and how this binary enables Bede to play down conflict within the Christian community. As long as we are resolute in our faith, he seems to say, then the Hall will remain brightly lit, whatever our disagreements.

---

<sup>251</sup>Wormald, “Bede, the *Bretwaldas*”, 125.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Christian and Non-Christian Conflict in the Historia Ecclesiastica

Bede largely minimizes ethnic and other divisiveness in his Historia in favor of establishing a less divisive tension between what is known and what is unknown. Furthermore, it is within this more benign framework that Bede develops a dual Christian/non-Christian narrative, and this duality allows Bede to undertake two approaches that enable him to minimize overall conflict within the Historia. First, he sets Christians in opposition to non-Christians, and second, he downplays conflict between Christians, often by emphasizing any possible strife as disagreements with solutions. The first narrative approach can be recognized in the Historia on the occasions in which Bede *highlights* violence or conflict, such as the defeat of apostate English leaders, or of pagan defeat at the hands of Christian commanders. In contrast, the second narrative approach can be seen when Bede *minimizes* moments of conflict between Christians, either through employing metaphorical discord or casting them as mere disagreements, that in all probability were more intense than Bede depicts, as in his account of the Council at Whitby. Comparative examinations of metaphorical discord, for example when Bede depicts the monk Fursey confronting supernatural foes, elucidate this particular method of minimization. In both approaches the reader sees Bede's interpretation of God's will—in other words, that the defeat of pagans and apostates, along with the inevitable resolution of Christian disagreement, are evidence of God's intentions for the Anglo-Saxons in action. By providing a coherent view of God's will, as he sees it, Bede legitimizes his own interpretation of Christian unity.

In the Historia, Bede privileges Christians in moments of Christian versus non-Christian conflict by emphasizing their attention to the true faith as fundamental to their victories. Often the narrative indicates that these incidents are violent,

particularly when they concern disputes involving territory or property, and although Bede acknowledges a measure of violence in these events, he rarely elaborates on them. Instead, he emphasizes Christian victory, thus establishing a definitive division between Christian and non-Christian, or winner and loser, but without the ruminations and reflections on violent action and its consequences often attendant to early medieval battle narratives. It is as though Bede assumes Christian victory is (or should be) the default setting for Anglo-Saxon society, and demands little comment. For example, when the Britons finally win a battle against the Angles, Bede writes, “Hoc ergo duce *uires* capessunt Brettones, et *uictores* prouocantes ad proelium, uictoriam ipsi *Deo* fauente suscipiunt. *Et* ex eo tempore nunc ciues, nunc hostes uincebant, usque ad annum obsessionis Badonici montis, quando *non* minimas eisdem hostibus *strages* dabant”,<sup>252</sup> or “Under [the leadership of Ambrosius Aurelianus] the Britons gained strength, provoked the conquerors to battle, and by the help of God gained the victory. From that time onwards, the natives sometimes prevailed and sometimes their enemies, until the year of the siege of Mount Badon, when they inflicted [by no means the smallest] losses on the enemy”.<sup>253</sup> Although the term “strages”, which could be glossed as “slaughter” or “massacre” as opposed to Campbell’s “losses”, evokes more than mere violence, as a whole this passage depicts the fight between the Britons and the Angles as uneventful: there were some battles, God helped out, and the Christian Britons won.

---

<sup>252</sup>Bede, *Historiam Ecclesiasticam Gentis Anglorum Historiam Abbatum Epistolam ad Ecgbertum, una cum Historia Abbatum Auctore Anonymo*, ed. Charles Plummer, Vol. I (Oxford: Clarendon, 1896), Bk. I, Ch. 16, 33.. All quotations from this text are cited as “Plummer” with the corresponding Book, Chapter, and page numbers. Any quotations from Vol. II of Plummer’s edition are cited as such.

<sup>253</sup>Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People and Other Selections*, ed. James Campbell (New York: Washington Square Press, 1968), 28. All Modern English translations of Bede’s *Historia* are from Campbell’s edition unless otherwise noted.

When Bede relates the British defeat of the Saxons and the Picts, on the other hand, he depicts the events with greater narrative relish, and with even more attention to God's hand in the process. The British commanders call on the Gaulish bishops Germanus and Lupus for assistance in preparing their army, and as a result, "Christus militabat in castris",<sup>254</sup> or "Christ fought in that army".<sup>255</sup> The pagan Saxons and Picts predict a quick victory, but they have underestimated the British spiritual armament. As Bede explains, while the enemies marched forward, "alleluiam tertio repetitam sacerdotes exclamabant. Sequitur una uox omnium, et elatum clamorem repercusso aere montium conclusa multiplicant",<sup>256</sup> or "the priests shouted out 'Alleluia!' three times", [and the one voice of all [the army and priests] followed]", so that "the valleys echoed [with the battle-cry carried by] the reverberating air [of the mountains]",<sup>257</sup> as a result, "hostile agmen terrore prosternitur, et super se non solum rupes circumdatas, sed etiam ipsam caeli machinam contremescunt, trepidationique iniectae uix sufficere pedum [...] credebatur",<sup>258</sup> or "the enemy army was cast down in [terror, and they feared that not only the surrounding rocks above but also the machine itself of heaven had been hurled [at them], and it was believed that in [their] fear they could hardly stand on [their] feet".<sup>259</sup> Bede explains this victory as follows: "spolia colliguntur exposita, et caelestis palmae gaudia miles religiosus amplectitur. Triumphant pontifices hostibus fuis sine sanguine; triumphant uictoria fide obtenta, non uiribus",<sup>260</sup> or "the spoil, which lay unprotected, was gathered up, and the devout soldier welcomed the joys of a heaven-sent victory. The bishops triumphed that the enemy were routed without bloodshed; they triumphed in a victory gained by faith and

---

<sup>254</sup>Plummer, Bk. I, Ch. 20, 38.

<sup>255</sup>My own translation.

<sup>256</sup>Plummer, Bk. I, Ch. 20, 39.

<sup>257</sup>Campbell, 34.

<sup>258</sup>Plummer, Bk. I, Ch. 20, 39.

<sup>259</sup>Campbell, 34.

<sup>260</sup>Plummer, Bk. I, Ch. 20, 39.

not by human force”.<sup>261</sup> This vignette is a particularly interesting, pacifist spin on military victory. Christianity truly triumphs in the form of “uictoria fide” or “victory by faith”, and the combined force of the faithful—the British army with the Gaulish bishops—transcends national boundaries and ethnic identity. An elision or minimization of conflict is not even necessary, as no real conflict, spiritual or military, actually occurs. The Britons’ Christian victory over the Picts and the Saxons, who have not yet become the *gens Anglorum*, is one of the fullest expressions of Christian community and Christian triumph in the entire *Historia*. Indeed, so focused is he on the greater narrative of Christian triumph, Bede makes provides little additional commentary about the most remarkable characteristic of this battle; the Britons won by *shouting*! At no other point in the *Historia* does such an extraordinary victory occur, yet Bede seems less interested in the mechanics of this strikingly successful battle tactic than the overall lesson of “uictoria fide”.

With the future King Edwin of Northumbria, Bede provides another illustration of Christian versus non-Christian conflict, and it involves violent incidents whose strife he acknowledges but belies in the interest of cementing a narrative strand of Christian victory. Not unlike the two previously mentioned examples of British Christian triumph, Bede interprets Edwin and his victories as evidence of God’s assistance to the faithful, and even to those who will be faithful. When Edwin, though still a pagan, appropriates all English and British territories, Bede explains the enlargement of his kingdom as follows: “in auspiciū suscipiendae fidei et regni caelestis potestas etiam terreni creuerat imperii; ita ut, quod nemo Anglorum ante eum, omnes Britanniā fines, quā uel ipsorum uel Brettonum prouinciāe habitabant, sub ditione acciperet”,<sup>262</sup> or “[in accordance with his [future] faith and [later his entrance

---

<sup>261</sup>Campbell, 34.

<sup>262</sup>Plummer, Bk. II, Ch. 9, 97.

into] the kingdom of heaven being undertaken, the power of his earthly authority also grew]; so that, [as no man of the English had done before him], he brought under his [domain] all the lands of Britain which were inhabited either by English or by British peoples”.<sup>263</sup> Fortunately for Bede and his textual objectives Edwin *does* attain “the faith”, and later presumably eternal life,<sup>264</sup> and it is interesting to compare his narrative embrace of the Northumbrian king’s territorial ambitions with those of someone like the wicked King Cadwalla of the Britons. The latter also later accumulates a large amount of territory, but Bede explains that this “impia”,<sup>265</sup> or “impious” one is a ruthless tyrant, equally resolute in his savagery and his irreverent beliefs. It is very likely that Edwin was equally ruthless and tyrannical in his pursuit of additional land, but because he is neither pagan nor an apostate like Cadwalla, this possibility is negligible to Bede. Instead, he interprets the king’s actions as follows: God assists Edwin in his territorial ambitions because he knows that the Northumbrian will be a good Christian king.

Similarly, Edwin’s “sign” of impending Christianity anticipates the heavenly assistance that both King Oswald and Bishop Aidan receive when they face pagan foes. Again, any attention to violence or conflict—beyond mere acknowledgement—is sublimated in favor of depicting the successes of God’s faithful. Bede notes that the pious Oswald, about to fight Cadwalla’s forces, planted a wooden cross, summoned

---

<sup>263</sup>Campbell, 82.

<sup>264</sup>With regard to Bede’s presumption that Edwin does earn entrance into the “regnum caelestis”, Thomas D. Hill writes, “strictly speaking, the Church did not purport to know about the fate of specific souls—with, of course, the important exception of the souls of saints whose sanctity was proved by the miracles which occurred after their death [...] from a strict dogmatic point of view it might seem presumptuous for Bede to assume that the hundreds of religious men and women whose death he records are now all saved, and yet to question the sanctity of the leaders of the English Church—or even to defer the issue until the Last Judgment—would be to question implicitly the spiritual authority of the Church in England”. Thomas D. Hill, “The ‘Variegated Obit’ as an Historiographical Motif in Old English Poetry and Anglo-latin Historical Literature” (*Traditio* 44 (1988): 101-124), 112.

<sup>265</sup>Plummer, Bk. III, Ch. 1, 128. In the text, “impia” modifies “manu”, which is a feminine noun, i.e. “by [Cadwalla’s] impious hand”.

his army, and shouted, “Flectamus omnes genua, et Deum omnipotentem, uiuum, ac uerum in commune deprecemur, ut nos ab hoste superbo ac feroce sua miseratione defendat; scit enim ipse, quia iusta pro salute gentis nostrae bella suscepimus”,<sup>266</sup> or “Let us all kneel and together beseech the almighty, living, and true God in His mercy to defend us from a proud and fierce enemy; for He knows that we have undertaken a just war for the safety of our nation”.<sup>267</sup> As a result of this demonstration of devotion, Oswald and his army “meritum suae fidei uictoria potiti sunt”,<sup>268</sup> or “gained the victory [deserved by their faith]”,<sup>269</sup> and Bede further explains that the field where the cross stood had previously been named “*Hefenfeld*”, or “the heavenly field”, which “significans nimirum, quod ibidem caeleste erigendum tropaeum, caelestis inchoanda uictoria, caelestia usque hodie forent miracula celebranda”,<sup>270</sup> or “indicated beyond doubt that there a heavenly trophy was to be erected, a heavenly victory to be begun, and heavenly miracles to be wrought to this day”.<sup>271</sup> Bishop Aidan, while not a commander like Oswald, also manipulated a sign to call on God’s assistance, in his case with regard to the pagan Penda’s siege of Bamburgh. Bede writes, “Qui cum uentis ferentibus globos ignis ac fumum supra muros urbis exaltari conspiceret, fertur eleuatis ad caelum oculis manibusque cum lacrimis dixisse: ‘Uide, Domine, quanta mala facit Penda’”,<sup>272</sup> or “when he saw the flames and smoke borne on high by the winds above the walls of the town, he is reported tearfully to have said, with eyes and hands lifted up to heaven, ‘Behold, Lord, how great is the ill which Penda works’”.<sup>273</sup> As Bede has depicted them, both Oswald and Aidan have demonstrated themselves as

---

<sup>266</sup>Plummer, Bk. III, Ch. 2, 129.

<sup>267</sup>Campbell, 112.

<sup>268</sup>Plummer, Bk. III, Ch. 2, 129.

<sup>269</sup>Campbell, 112.

<sup>270</sup>Plummer, Bk. III, Ch. 2, 129.

<sup>271</sup>Campbell, 112.

<sup>272</sup>Plummer, Bk. III, Ch. 16, 159.

<sup>273</sup>Campbell, 138.

true servants of God, and so when they call upon him, he answers. Bede writes, “Quo dicto statim mutati ab urbe uenti in eos, qui accenderant, flammaram incendia retorserunt, ita ut aliquot laesi, omnes territi, inpugnare ultra urbem cessarent, quam diuinitus iuuari cognouerant”,<sup>274</sup> or “As soon as he had said this, the wind veered from the town and drove the fire back on those who had kindled it. Thus, some being hurt and all frightened, they made no further attacks on the city which they perceived to have Divine help”.<sup>275</sup> In both of these stories, Bede elides any description of suffering or violence; instead he relates them almost as though he were recounting a simple timeline. Oswald planted a cross, prayed with his army, and won the victory his faith deserved. Aidan prayed to God and the wind shifted. Despite their emphasis on exemplary men, not unlike the miracle stories and saints’ lives that I discussed in Chapter One, Bede seems to view these tales as evidence of a simple truth: act as a good Christian and God will help you; everything else, suffering included, is incidental. In all of these examples, Bede emphasizes Christian victory in moments of Christian versus non-Christian conflict by noting their attention to the true faith as elemental to their successes.

In contrast to these vignettes of faithful Christians versus pagans, some of the *most* violent instances that Bede notes concern those between pagans and disobedient or lapsed Christians, and he interprets these events as evidence of God’s disapproval and retribution of their false faith. The lesson in these stories requires decidedly more commentary than those regarding God’s help to good Christians. Punishment for apostates, whether it is military defeat or otherwise, is high, and although Bede still often says little beyond stating that violent conflict occurred, his message is clear: by forsaking the Christian community, which manages and mitigates conflict among its

---

<sup>274</sup>Plummer, Bk. III, Ch. 16, 159.

<sup>275</sup>Campbell, 138-139.

own, apostates get the violence that they deserve. After the British successfully repel the invading Irish and Picts, and enjoy a brief period of agricultural bounty, Bede writes, “cum quibus et luxuria crescere, et hanc continuo omnium lues scelerum comitari adceleravit [...] ebrietati, animositati, litigio, contentioni, inuidiae, ceterisque huiusmodi facinoribus sua colla, abiecto leui iugo Christi, subdentes. Interea subito corruptae mentis homines acerba pestis corripuit, quae in breui tantam eius multitudinem strauit, ut ne sepeliendis quidem mortuis uiui sufficerent”,<sup>276</sup> or “rich living quickly grew up with plenty, and this was at once attended by a plague of every sort of crime [...] they bowed their necks down to drunkenness, arrogance, [quarrelsomeness], contentiousness, and other such crimes, and cast off the light yoke of Christ. Then a severe plague suddenly gripped these debased men and soon destroyed such numbers of them that the living were scarcely sufficient to bury the dead”.<sup>277</sup> Bede’s elaboration that the plague killed so many people that “ne sepeliendis quidem mortuis uiui sufficerent”, or “there were not enough left alive to see the dead buried”, underscores the severity of the disease, but as Bede explains, the worst is yet to come. The Britons decide to invite the Angles to Britain, and “quod Domini nutu dispositum esse constat, ut ueniret contra improbos malum, sicut euidentius rerum exitus probauit”,<sup>278</sup> or “it is certain that this was disposed by the will of God so that evil should come upon the wicked, as the event still more evidently showed”.<sup>279</sup> The Angles ultimately conquer the Britons, and Bede notes, “accensus manibus paganorum ignis, iustas de sceleribus populi Dei ultiones expetiit”,<sup>280</sup> or “the fire lit by the hands of the pagans proved the just vengeance of God on a wicked

---

<sup>276</sup>Plummer, Bk. I, Ch. 14, 29-30.

<sup>277</sup>Campbell, 25.

<sup>278</sup>Plummer, Bk. I, Ch. 14, 30.

<sup>279</sup>Campbell, 25.

<sup>280</sup>Plummer, Bk. I, Ch. 15, 32.

people”.<sup>281</sup> In a passage matched only by others concerning conflict between pagans and apostates, Bede relates the suffering endured by the falsely faithful Britons, and he does so in a way that expresses his interpretation of this suffering as ordained by God. It is a passage that stands out in its horrific detail, and it highlights the contrast between these consequences that Bede describes, and his reticence on other later violent acts that may have engendered similar results, but that do not concern apostate or falsely Christian actors. Bede writes as follows:

Sic enim et hic agente impio uictore, immo disponente iusto Iudice, proximas quasque ciuitates agrosque depopulans, ab orientali mari usque ad occidentale, nullo prohibente, suum continuauit incendium, totamque prope insulae pereuntis superficiem obtexit. Ruebant aedificia publica simul et priuata, passim sacerdotes inter altaria trucidabantur, praesules cum populis sine ullo respectu honoris, ferro pariter et flammis absumebantur; nec erat, qui crudeliter interemtis sepulturae traderet. Itaque nonnulli de miserandis reliquiis in montibus comprehensi, acruatim iugulabantur; alii fame confecti procedentes manus hostibus dabant, pro accipiendis alimentorum subsidiis aeternum subituri seruitium, si tamen non continuo trucidarentur; alii transmarinas regiones dolentes petebant; alii perstantes in patria trepidi pauperem uitam in montibus, siluis, uel rupibus arduis suspecta semper mente agebant.<sup>282</sup>

[So at this time, through the actions of the imperious victor, or rather by the disposition of the just Judge, the fire burned from the eastern to the western sea, depopulating the towns and countrysides it reached and, in the absence of resistance, covered nearly the whole face of the stricken island. Public and private buildings fell together. Priests were everywhere slain before the altars. Prelates and people were equally destroyed by fire and the sword, with no kind of respect to rank; nor was there anyone to bury those who had been thus cruelly slaughtered. Some of the wretched survivors were caught in the mountains and butchered in heaps. Others, spent with hunger, came out and submitted themselves to the enemy, to undergo eternal servitude in return for being given supplies of food—if indeed they were not put to death on the spot. Some went sorrowfully overseas. Others stayed in their own

---

<sup>281</sup>Campbell, 27.

<sup>282</sup>Plummer, Bk. I, Ch. 15, 32-33.

country and lived a frightened and wretched life among mountains, woods, and rocks, in constant anxiety.]<sup>283</sup>

Several terms in this passage stress the brutality that Bede argues the Britons suffered under the Anglo-Saxons. That the Anglo-Saxons cover “nearly the whole face of the stricken island” accentuates their elimination of British life; an emphasis on the destruction of “aedificia publica simul et priuata”, or “public and likewise private buildings”, “praesules cum populis”, or “prelates along with people” underscores the plan of the “iustum iudex” or “just judge” to wipe the British temporal world clean. Again, Bede illustrates that a state of true misery is one in which “nec erat, qui crudeliter interemtis sepulturae traderet” or “nor was there anyone to bury those who had been thus cruelly slaughtered”, and this anxiety about there being too few survivors is exacerbated by the promise of “eternal servitude”, instant death, and “a frightened and wretched life” marked by constant hunger and “anxiety”. All this, Bede seems to say, awaits that nation that chooses to revoke the true faith that it has accepted.

Because this passage regarding the suffering of British apostates occurs at the beginning of the Historia, other instances concerning false Christians can be seen in its light. In each case, Bede emphasizes that God stands behind their violent retribution, no matter when it comes. When the British bishops refuse to adopt the customs of the universal Church, Augustine of Canterbury warns, “si pacem cum fratribus accipere nollent, bellum ab hostibus forent accepturi et, si nationi Anglorum noluissent uiam uitae praedicare, per horum manus ultionem essent mortis passuri”,<sup>284</sup> or “If they did not wish to accept peace with the brothers, then they would be accepting war from their enemies, and if they did not wish to preach to the English people the way of life,

---

<sup>283</sup>Campbell, 27-28.

<sup>284</sup>Plummer, Bk, II, Ch. 2, 83.

then they would suffer the retribution of death at their hands”.<sup>285</sup> Bede adds, “quod ita per omnia, ut praedixerat, diuino agente iudicio patratum est”,<sup>286</sup> or “all these things were accomplished by the working of the judgment of God, as he had foretold”,<sup>287</sup> and he then continues with a description of the pagan King Ethelfrid’s total eradication of British forces at Legacestir. This battle occurred a while after Augustine’s prophecy, and Ethelfrid destroys not only the British soldiers, but also the assembled, weaponless monks who are praying nearby. The pagan king explains, “si aduersum nos ad Deum suum clamant [...] quamuis arma non ferant, contra nos pugnant”,<sup>288</sup> or “if they cry out to their God against us, then indeed they are fighting against us, even though they do not bear arms”,<sup>289</sup> and as Bede notes, “exstinctos in ea pugna ferunt de his, qui ad orandum uenerant, uiros circiter mille CCtos, et solum L fuga esse lapsos”,<sup>290</sup> or “it is said that about twelve hundred of those who came to pray were killed, and that only fifty escaped by flight”,<sup>291</sup> an explanation notable for its understatement of the death of “twelve hundred” defenseless monks. Yet this understatement, and the event as a whole, can be explained by Bede’s assertion, “Sicque completum est praesagium sancti pontificis Augustini, quamuis ipso iam multo ante tempore ad caelestia regna sublato, ut etiam temporalis interitus ultione sentirent perfidi, quod oblata sibi perpetuae salutis consilia spreuerant”,<sup>292</sup> or “thus was the prophecy of the holy Bishop Augustine fulfilled (though he himself had long before been taken up into the heavenly kingdom), so that impious men learned by the punishment of temporal death that they had spurned advice which offered them

---

<sup>285</sup>My own translation.

<sup>286</sup>Plummer, Bk. II, Ch. 2, 83.

<sup>287</sup>Campbell, 69.

<sup>288</sup>Plummer, Bk. II, Ch. 2, p. 84.

<sup>289</sup>Campbell, 70.

<sup>290</sup>Plummer, Bk. II, Ch. 2, 84.

<sup>291</sup>Campbell, 70.

<sup>292</sup>Plummer, Bk. II, Ch. 22, 84-85.

perpetual salvation”.<sup>293</sup>

Bede does provide an example of a purely pagan character suffering for his misdeeds, but given the overall aim of his narrative—casting the history and destiny of the British Isles in an ecclesiastical light—it is not too surprising that the violent conflict on which Bede *does* expand finds its truest expression in apostate elaborations on the Christian/non-Christian narrative binary. Even that example of the purely pagan character, the heathen King Eadbald, traces its significance to Eadbald’s deviation from his faithful Christian father, King Ethelbert. Eadbald “Siquidem non solum fidem Christi recipere noluerat, sed et fornicatione pollutus est tali, qualem nec inter gentes auditam apostolus [Paul] testatur, ita ut uxorem patris haberet”,<sup>294</sup> or “not only refused to embrace the faith of Christ, but was defiled by fornication of a kind which the Apostle [Paul] testifies to as being unheard of even among the Gentiles: he kept his father’s wife as his own”.<sup>295</sup> In other words, Eadbald is so deviant that not only is he a heathen, but he also practices what is “nec inter gentes auditam”, or “unheard of even among the Gentiles”, or heathens. God, it turns out, has a special punishment for so incredible a non-believer, and Bede is sure to note the retribution for Eadbald’s abhorrent behavior. He writes, “Nec supernae flagella districtiois perfido regi castigando et corrigendo defuere; nam crebra mentis uesania, et spiritus immundi inuasionem premebatur”,<sup>296</sup> or “the scourges of punishment from on high did not fail to chasten and correct the impious king. For he was troubled by frequent fits of madness and was possessed by an unclean spirit”.<sup>297</sup> Eadbald’s insistent faithlessness returns Bede’s attention to the conflict between apostates and pagans, as the Eadbald

---

<sup>293</sup>Campbell, 70.

<sup>294</sup>Plummer, Bk. II. Ch. 5, 90.

<sup>295</sup>Campbell, 75.

<sup>296</sup>Plummer, Bk. II, Ch. 5, 91. This passage also contains a biblical echo of Saul’s madness and possession by an evil spirit, s.v. 1 Samuel 18-20.

<sup>297</sup>Campbell, 75.

digression introduces other disobedient sons. The Christian King Sabert of the East Saxons had three sons, of whom Bede writes, “*coeperunt illi mox idolatriae, quam, uiuente eo, aliquantulum intermisisse uidebantur, palam seruire, subiectisque populis idola colendi liberam dare licentiam*”,<sup>298</sup> or “at once began openly to profess idolatry, which, in his lifetime, they seemd to have somewhat given up, and they freely gave permission to their subjects to worship idols”.<sup>299</sup> They chase out Mellitus, the bishop, and although God implicitly punishes Sabert’s sons—“*sed non multo tempore reges, qui praeconem a se ueritatis expulerant, daemonicis cultibus inpune seruiebant. Nam egressi contra gentem Geuissorum in proelium, omnes pariter cum sua militia corruerunt*”,<sup>300</sup> or “it was not long for the kings who had driven the herald of the truth away from them served idolatrous cults with impunity. They went out to do battle with the Gewisse [West Saxons] and were all killed, with their army”,<sup>301</sup>—the damage to the East Saxon people has been done. As Bede writes, “*nec, licet auctoribus perditis, excitatum ad scelera uulgus potuit recorgi, atque ad simplicitatem fidei et caritatis, quae est in Christo, reuocari*”,<sup>302</sup> or “the common people, once stirred up to do wrong, could not be set right again, nor be recalled to the simple faith and love which is in Christ, even though those who had led them astray had been destroyed”.<sup>303</sup>

The example of Sabert’s sons introduces another trend in the division between faithful Christians and apostate ones aligned with pagans: the punishment inflicted on falsely faith leaders induces their people to suffer as well. In the case of Sabert’s sons, the East Saxon people also adhere to pagan practice, and so widespread retribution does not strike the reader as unjust in the way that it does when it encompasses those

---

<sup>298</sup>Plummer, Bk. II, Ch. 5, 91.

<sup>299</sup>Campbell, 76.

<sup>300</sup>Plummer, Bk. II, Ch. 5, 92.

<sup>301</sup>Campbell, 76.

<sup>302</sup>Plummer, Bk. II, Ch. 5, 92.

<sup>303</sup>Campbell, 76-77.

people who do not undertake idolatrous belief. Yet Bede still identifies these instances as indicative of God's will, and his inclusion of these particular events adheres to the stated aim of his text, to record "bonis bona", or "good things of good men" and "mala pravis", or "evil of wicked men". These examples are instructive; Bede effectively exhorts the rulers, do not abdicate or misuse faith in such a way that will cause your people to suffer.

One example of this widespread retribution, which includes deviants and true believers, involves the sons of Ethelfrid (Ethelfrid was Edwin's predecessor in Northumbria). During Edwin's rule, Ethelfrid's sons lived with the Irish and the Picts, under whom they were baptized and educated. But after Edwin died and they assumed their northern kingdoms, the new kings "sacramenta regni caelestis, quibus initiatus erat, anathematizando prodidit, ac se priscis idolatriae sordibus polluumdum perdendumque restituit",<sup>304</sup> or "denounced and betrayed the sacraments of the heavenly kingdom, into which [they] had been initiated, and once more gave [themselves] up to the abominations of [their] former idolatry, to be defiled and damned".<sup>305</sup> Bede explains that due to this apostasy, "nec mora, utrumque rex Brettonum Ceadualla impia manu, sed iusta ultione peremit",<sup>306</sup> or "soon afterwards Cadwallon, king of the Britons, slew them both with an impious hand, but in rightful vengeance".<sup>307</sup> Even though the punishment of Ethelfrid's sons was "iusta", or "justified", in other words, it fit with God's plan, Bede notes that the "impious" Cadwalla's victory resulted in a punishment for the faithful as well. With regard to the year that Cadwalla ruled Northumbria, Bede explains, "Infaustus ille annus, et omnibus bonis exosus usque hodie permanet, tam propter apostasiam regum

---

<sup>304</sup>Plummer, Bk. III, Ch. 1, 127.

<sup>305</sup>Campbell, 110.

<sup>306</sup>Plummer, Bk. III, Ch.1, 127-128.

<sup>307</sup>Campbell, 110.

Anglorum, qua se fidei sacramentis exuerant, quam propter uesanam Brettonici regis tyrannidem”,<sup>308</sup> or “that year is looked upon as unhappy and hateful to all good men, as much because of the apostasy of the English kings who had laid aside the sacraments of the faith as because of the fierce tyranny of the British king”.<sup>309</sup> By forsaking the Christian community, Ethelfrid’s sons invited a fate worse than death on their people; Cadwalla’s reign was so “unhappy and hateful” that later kings expunge his rule from the record.<sup>310</sup> Bede does not elaborate on the conditions of being a subject to Cadwalla in the way that he does when describing British suffering at the hands of the Angles, but this lack of narrative illustration does not imply that it was any less horrible. Instead, Bede seems to recognize that the combined force of Ethelfrid’s sons and Cadwalla dragged Northumbria so far into the “non-Christian” side of the Christian/non-Christian narrative binary that erasing that episode from the written record of Northumbrian kings was the only viable solution to maintaining Christian supremacy in the written record of English history.

The other example of widespread retribution impacting the faithful as well as the false concerns the Northumbrian King Egfrid. Bede writes that despite the urgent advice of his ecclesiastical advisors, Egfrid unleashed a vicious invasion on the Irish, “ne ecclesiis quidem aut monasteriis manus parceret hostilis”,<sup>311</sup> or “the hand of the enemy did not spare even the churches and monasteries”,<sup>312</sup> and the Irish “inuocantes diuinae auxilium pietatis, caelitus se uindicari continuis diu inprecationibus postulabant”,<sup>313</sup> or “implored the assistance of the Divine mercy, praying with long, continued imprecations that they might be avenged from on high”.<sup>314</sup> Not long after this

---

<sup>308</sup>Plummer, Bk. III, Ch. 1, 128.

<sup>309</sup>Campbell, 111.

<sup>310</sup>Plummer, Bk. III, Ch. 1, 128.

<sup>311</sup>Plummer, Bk. IV, Ch. 24 (26), 266.

<sup>312</sup>Campbell, 234.

<sup>313</sup>Plummer, Bk. IV, Ch. 24 (26), 266.

<sup>314</sup>Campbell, 234.

invasion, Egfrid, again defying the pleading of his advisors, invaded Pictish territory; the Picts subsequently tricked the king and his forces, which resulted in Egfrid's death. Bede explains Egfrid's actions and consequent death as those of an obstinate Christian, whose rejection of advice from faithful friends results ultimately in not only his death, but also those of many of his people. Bede writes of the Irish prayers for vengeance, "et quamuis maledici regnum Dei possidere non possint, creditum est tamen, quod hi, qui merito impietatis suae maledicebantur, ocius Domino uindice poenas sui reatus luerent",<sup>315</sup> or "although such as curse cannot possess the kingdom of God, it is, however, believed that those who were justly cursed on account of their impiety soon suffered by the vengeance of God the penalty of their guilt",<sup>316</sup> and he adds that for Egfrid's defiance, "datum est illi ex poena peccati illius, ne nunc eos, qui ipsum ab interitu reuocare cupiebant, audiret",<sup>317</sup> or "it was laid upon him as a punishment for his sin that he would not now hear those who wished to call him back from his death".<sup>318</sup> Yet the punishment does not end there, with merely Egfrid's destruction. The Picts retaliate against the English people: "ubi inter plurimos gentis Anglorum, uel interemtis gladio, uel seruitio addictos, uel de terra Pictorum fuga lapsos",<sup>319</sup> or "many English [...] either fell by the sword, or were made slaves, or escaped by flight from the country of the Picts".<sup>320</sup> Neither Bede nor the Pictish oppressors distinguish between Christian and non-Christian English; they are all treated to the same future of death, enslavement, or exile as the result of Egfrid's choices. The Northumbrian king might not have been an outright apostate, but Bede implies that as a result of his stubborn refusal to *act* like a true Christian, he failed to

---

<sup>315</sup>Plummer, Bk. IV, Ch. 24 (26), 266.

<sup>316</sup>Campbell, 234.

<sup>317</sup>Plummer, Bk. IV, Ch. 24 (26), 267.

<sup>318</sup>Campbell, 234.

<sup>319</sup>Plummer, Bk. IV, Ch. 24 (26), 267.

<sup>320</sup>Campbell, 234-235.

*be* a true Christian. In all of these examples, Bede emphasizes the paramount importance of maintaining the tenets of Christianity, of keeping the Christian community united. He may strike the reader as largely reticent on the details of violent retribution, but within the *Historia* as a whole, Bede elaborates on conflict more frequently when it concerns apostates and pagans than in any other instance. And within the schema of Bede's narrative Christian/non-Christian narrative binary, apostates and pretenders—those who give lip service to Christianity for political gains—stand alongside Saracens and pagans.

At certain points in the text where one might expect violence, however, Bede instead depicts devout Christians equipped with foresight and a hearty dose of pragmatism circumventing pagans and thus possible conflict. For example, Bede restates the letter from Gregory the Great to Abbot Mellitus, in which the Pope, with regard to pagan temples in Britain, writes, “quia fana idolorum destrui in eadem gente minime debeant; sed ipsa, quae in eis sunt, idola destruantur; aqua benedicta fiat, in eisdem fanis aspergatur, altaria construantur, reliquiae ponantur<sup>321</sup> [...] ut dum eis aliqua exterius gaudia reseruantur, ad interiora gaudia consentire facilius ualeant”,<sup>322</sup> or “the temples of the idols of that nation ought by no means to be destroyed. Rather, let the idols which are in them be destroyed; let the water be blessed and sprinkled in those temples; let altars be erected and relics placed in them [...] they will thus be able more easily to accept interior [spiritual] joys because [some outward joys] have been kept for them”.<sup>323</sup> Gregory's attention to planting Christianity firmly in British soil by allowing some “outward joys” denotes a shrewd organizer, and not just a dutiful Christian. His instruction to maintain and internally re-shape these edifices suggests a political savvy that is particularly useful for missionaries keeping their eyes on the

---

<sup>321</sup>Plummer, Bk. I, Ch. 30, 65.

<sup>322</sup>Plummer, Bk. I, Ch. 30, 65.

<sup>323</sup>Campbell, 52-53.

greater prize: more converts. By making negligible yet significant concessions, Gregory recognizes, the “more easily” these potential Christians “interior” joys, or joys of the spirit. At the same time, these concessions mitigate the chances of potential rebellions: pagan structures, for example, can assuage the anxieties of the newly converted while still molding them into believers.

Similarly, Bede relates two other instances in which pragmatic concession results in bloodless Christian victory, and both concern the pagan South Saxons. In the first example, the Mercian Christian King Wulfhere helps persuade the South Saxon King Ethelwalh to accept the Christian faith, and at the latter’s baptism, Wulfhere becomes Ethelwalh’s godfather. As Bede notes, “in cuius signum adoptionis duas illi prouincias donauit, Uectam uidelicet insulam, et Meanuarorum prouinciam in gente Occidentalium Saxonum”,<sup>324</sup> or “as a sign of that adoption, Wulfhere gave him two provinces, that is to say, the Isle of Wight and the province of the Meanwara, among the people of the West Saxons”.<sup>325</sup> Wulfhere, not unlike Gregory, knows that an exchange—a gift of property for conversion—helps cement adherence to a new faith through “outward joys”, but even more importantly in Wulfhere’s case, by binding Ethelwalh with territory and Christianity, the Mercian king may be affirming a future peaceful, Christian relationship between the Mercians and the South Saxons. In the second example, no less pragmatic or political, the Bishop Wilfrid teaches the starving South Saxons how to fish. Although I discussed this vignette in Chapter One for its parable-like attributes, it is no less instructive in this context of bloodless Christian victory. By teaching the South Saxons how to feed themselves, Wilfrid “multum [...] cor omnium in suum conuertit amorem, et libentius eo praedicante caelestia sperare coeperunt, cuius ministerio temporalia bona

---

<sup>324</sup>Plummer, Bk. IV, Ch. 13, 230.

<sup>325</sup>Campbell, 203.

sumserunt”,<sup>326</sup> or “[won the heart of all and converted [many of them] in his love; and they began more readily to hope for heavenly goods when he preached to them, seeing that by his help they had received those goods which are temporal”.<sup>327</sup> Wilfrid binds the South Saxons to Christianity through the gift of “temporal” goods; at the same time, he subverts an implicit possible pagan rebellion against the Christian South Saxon aristocracy that failed to feed its people. The commoner and the thegn become united through a shared faith. In all of these instances—Gregory’s letter, Wulfhere’s gift, and Wilfrid’s teaching—Bede omits any mention of pagan leadership organizing, resisting, or countering Christian action with gifts and teaching of their own. Instead, it is as though Bede sees Christianity as endowing the believer with not only piety, but also a good head for political strategy, and the Christians win the people’s hearts and minds before the pagans even realize that battle is upon them.

A major result of Bede’s depiction of faithful Christians as both pious and pragmatic is that in contrast to conflict between Christians and non-Christians or Christian apostates, any possible conflict between faithful Christians is downplayed. Instead, Bede portrays possible strife as either metaphorical discord or mere disagreement, and the ability to resolve disagreement is as much a consequence of devotion as it is of shrewdness. In the context of Christian versus Christian altercations, metaphorical discord provides Bede with the figurative concealment he needs in order to avoid directly discussing or describing those conflicts (although at times in the Historia Bede also uses metaphorical discord when discussing Christian versus apostate incidents). Some examples of metaphorical discord in the Historia manifest themselves as brief yet powerful authorial asides on ideas that were established as heretical well before Bede’s time. Bede digresses on the Arian heresy

---

<sup>326</sup>Plummer, Bk. IV, Ch. 13, 232.

<sup>327</sup>Campbell, 204.

for only a few sentences in Book One, but the language that he uses is so condemnatory that the passage has no equivalent in the brief instances of *physical* conflict that Bede describes elsewhere. He explains that in fourth century Britain, the Christian church enjoyed “*pax usque ad tempora Arrianae uesaniae, quae, corrupto orbe toto, hanc etiam insulam extra orbem tam longe remotam, ueneno sui infecit erroris; et hac quasi uia pestilentiae trans oceanum patefacta, non mora, omnis se lues hereseos cuiusque, insulae noui semper aliquid audire gaudenti, et nil certi firmiter obtinenti infudit*”,<sup>328</sup> or “peace [...] until the time of the Arian madness, which corrupted the whole world and infected with the poison of its error even this island, so far removed from the rest of the world. When this had made a kind of road for pestilence across the sea, all the venom of every heresy immediately poured into the island, which is ever fond of hearing something new, and never holds firm to anything”.<sup>329</sup> The Arian heresy is an obvious example of a type of conflict between Christians and heretics (which ones are the *true* Christians?), and while Bede clearly censures it in this passage, he removes any human agency from his condemnation. Bede does not say who brought the heresy to Britain, how “the people” received it from the Church, nor from which ecclesiastical figures. Instead, he depicts it as an insidious disease, capable of moving without human assistance, and thus Bede absolves himself of naming specific actors. Likewise, Bede relates that the Pelagian heresy “*fidem Britanniarum feda peste commaculaueat*”,<sup>330</sup> or “contaminated the faith of Britain by its sickening foulness”,<sup>331</sup> and while in this case he does name a man responsible for its introduction to the British Isles, “*Agricolam [...] Seueriani episcopi Pelagiani filium*”,<sup>332</sup> or “Agricola, the son of Serverianus a Pelagian bishop”,<sup>333</sup> the

---

<sup>328</sup>Plummer, Bk. I, Ch. 8, 22.

<sup>329</sup>Campbell, 18.

<sup>330</sup>Plummer, Bk. I, Ch. 17, 33.

<sup>331</sup>Campbell, 29.

<sup>332</sup>Plummer, Bk. I, Ch. 17, 33.

disease-like depiction of Pelagianism reflects the trivial need of the Arian heresy for human agency; in other words, the heresies will infect regardless of human vehicle. When Pope John writes to the Irish about a Pelagian revival on the Emerald Isle, he warns with similar disease terminology, “quod omnino hortamur, ut a uestris mentibus huiusmodi uenenatum superstitionis facinus auferatur [...] quia non solum per istos CC annos abolita est, sed et cotidie a nobis perpetuo anathemate sepulta damnatur”,<sup>334</sup> or “we therefore exhort you that this venomous and superstitious wickedness be altogether put out of your minds [...] it has not only been done away with these last two hundred years, but it is daily buried by us and now [...] the weapons of their controversy have been burned”.<sup>335</sup> Were one not to know the context of John’s letter, one might assume that he were the head of some kind of disease control center, urging a rural outpost to force vaccines upon the local population, and encourage a daily dosage in order to affirm the ongoing dormancy of a fatal disease.

In contrast to the heresies, one particularly interesting representation of metaphorical discord between Christians in the *Historia* involves the Irish monk Fursey, who founded a monastery in the territory of the East Angles. This particular narrative depends upon seemingly supernatural forces, and in doing so, allows Bede to play with homiletic-like language and tone. Bede relates that once when Fursey fell ill, he had a powerful vision in which angels lifted him to such a height that he saw the four fires “qui mundum succendentes essent consumturi”,<sup>336</sup> or “which were to kindle and consume the world”, and which included the fires of “mendacium”, or “lying”; “cupiditas”, or “covetousness”; “dissensio”, or “discord”; and “impietas”,<sup>337</sup> or

---

<sup>333</sup>Campbell, 29.

<sup>334</sup>Plummer, Bk. II, Ch. 19, 123.

<sup>335</sup>Campbell, 106.

<sup>336</sup>Plummer, Bk. III, Ch. 19, 165.

<sup>337</sup>Plummer, Bk. III, Ch. 19, 165.

“iniquity”.<sup>338</sup> The fires merge into a massive one, and with his angel guides protecting him, Fursey witnesses a host of “daemons”, or “wicked spirits” accuse him of evil deeds, while “caelestium agminum [...] sed et virorum de sua natione sanctorum”, or “the heavenly host and [...] saintly men of his own nation” told him “multum salubria essent”,<sup>339</sup> or “many [things] which were very salutary”.<sup>340</sup> Bede describes the rest of the vision as follows:

Cumque praefato igni maximo adpropiarent, diuisit quidem angelus, sicut prius, ignem flammae. Sed uir Dei ubi ad patefactam usque inter flammam ianuam peruenit, arripientes inmundi spiritus unum de eis, quos in ignibus torrebant, iactauerunt in eum, et contingentes humerum maxillamque eius incenderunt; cognouitque hominem, et, quia uestimentum eius morientis acceperit, ad memoriam reduxit. Quem angelus sanctus statim adprehendens in ignem reiecit. Dicebatque hostis malignus: ‘Nolite repellere, quem ante suscepistis; nam sicut bona eius peccatoris suscepistis, ita et de poenis eius participes esse debetis.’ Contradicens angelus: ‘Non,’ inquit, ‘propter auaritiam, sed propter saluandam eius animam suscepit’; cessauitque ignis. Et conuersus ad eum angelus: ‘Quod incendisti,’ inquit, ‘hoc arsit in te. Si enim huius uiri in peccatis suis mortui pecuniam non accepisses, nec poena eius in te arderet.’ Et plura locutus, quid erga salutem eorum, qui ad mortem poeniterent, esset agendum, salubri sermone docuit. Qui postmodum in corpore restitutus, omni uitae suae tempore signum incendii, quod in anima pertulit, uisibile cunctis in humero maxillaque portauit; mirumque in modum, quid anima in occulto passa sit, caro palam praemonstrabat.<sup>341</sup>

[When [Fursey and the three angels] approached the aforesaid great fire, the angel indeed divided the flame of the fire as he had done before. But when the man of God came to the passage opened between the flames, the unclean spirits laid hold of one of those whom they tormented in the flames, and threw him at Fursey, and so touched and burned Fursey’s shoulder and jaw. He recognized the man, and recalled that he had received a garment from him at his death. The holy angel at once took hold of the man and threw him back in the fire. And the malignant enemy said, ‘Do not reject him whom you previously

---

<sup>338</sup>Campbell, 144.

<sup>339</sup>Plummer, Bk. II, Ch. 19, 166.

<sup>340</sup>Campbell, 145.

<sup>341</sup>Plummer, Bk. II, Ch. 19, 166-167.

received; for as you received the goods of the sinner, so must you partake of his sufferings.’ The angel contradicted him, saying, ‘He did not receive through avarice, but in order to save the man’s soul.’ The fire ceased, and the angel turned and said to him, ‘That which you kindled burns you. If you had not received the property of this man who died in his sins his punishment would not burn you.’ And he said much more and gave him wholesome advice on what ought to be done for the salvation of those who repent at death. Afterwards, when Fursey was restored to his body, he bore through the whole course of his life the mark of the fire which he had suffered in his soul, visible to all men on his shoulder and jaw; and in a marvelous way, the flesh showed in public what the soul had suffered in private.]<sup>342</sup>

In his depiction of Fursey’s vision, Bede articulates a conflict between two Christians—one who sinned, and one who received property from the sinner—that is played out by proxy with other actors. The sinner burns Fursey’s soul, but there is no confrontation or violent, temporal world altercation; instead, the sinner is almost portrayed as a not-quite Christian. The evil spirits torment him in the fire, and as a result, he has become their property, separate from the Christian community and God’s protection. From a narrative perspective, Fursey and the sinner not only have no direct conflict, but their relationship also becomes unequal; how could they have a Christian versus Christian encounter if the sinner is now decidedly Satan’s property? Jacques Le Goff argues that Bede may be depicting a purgatorial scene, in which “Fursey goes to the other world and brings back physical signs later used to prove that a Purgatory exists from which one can return”,<sup>343</sup> yet as Le Goff concedes, “the idea of purgatory in this story is vague”.<sup>344</sup> Indeed, if the sinner is Satan’s property, then why would he be in purgatory at all? By shifting the relationship into the eternal landscape of condemned Christians, and within the context of a vision, Bede avoids depicting *temporal* world conflict between Christians, and provides an escape hatch

---

<sup>342</sup>Campbell, 145-146.

<sup>343</sup>Jacques Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 97.

<sup>344</sup>Le Goff, 113.

for Fursey in the correct way of ensuring “salvation” for death-bed repenters to resolve future dispute.

But in terms of how he engages with the theme of conflict in this passage, Bede employs a certain type of language and invokes a certain set of images that are evocative of both the disease-like depictions of heresy in the *Historia*, and the battle-like depictions between good and evil, or known and unknown, in some Anglo-Saxon homiletic literature and heroic poetry.<sup>345</sup> Bede emphasizes that the unholy spirits are “unclean” and “malignant”, and the man whom Fursey had received on his death-bed is depicted as both the “tormented” and a “sinner”. His description of the fire and Fursey’s burn likewise conveys a richness absent from much of the *Historia*, such as when he plays upon the metaphor of flames by having the angel guide say, “that which you kindled burns you”, and in his description of the sinner being thrown at and striking Fursey. Bede’s short epitaph on this event—“the flesh showed in public what the soul had suffered in private”—may be intended to frighten the sinner who worries that his transgressions will physically manifest themselves, and indeed, if it could happen to Fursey, why not to someone less pious?

Given these metaphorical threats and conflicts, it is interesting to examine the ways in which Bede depicts Christian versus Christian disagreement in the *Historia*. *Actual* disagreement, as opposed to metaphorical discord or violent conflict, occurs in Bede’s text in those instances when equally devout Christians, usually ecclesiastical officers, find themselves at loggerheads. Some of the most prominent incidents that Bede describes are the Council of Whitby, Theodore’s Synod at Hertford, and Egbert’s persuasion of the Irish to observe a canonical Easter. In these instances, it is interesting to examine the ways in which Bede manipulates language and description, or elides it entirely, in order to present a picture of inevitably solvable disagreement.

---

<sup>345</sup>See Appendix One.

Given that the Irish waited centuries before observing a canonical Easter, and that Theodore felt compelled to hold a synod that warned against “contentionis scandalum”,<sup>346</sup> or “scandalous contention”,<sup>347</sup> it is doubtful that these incidents ever only represented mere disagreement, or that solutions seemed inevitable, much less possible.

The Council at Whitby occurred in 664 A.D., a little more than sixty-five years before Bede composed his Historia. Bede begins his description of the Council, which is induced by “quaestio facta est frequens et magna de obseruatione paschae”,<sup>348</sup> or “a great and frequently arising controversy concerning the observance of Easter”,<sup>349</sup> by outlining the various participants and their beliefs concerning the observance. On the side of a canonical observance there stood the continentally-educated but Irish-by-birth Ronan, “erat in his acerrimus ueri paschae defensor”,<sup>350</sup> or “a most vehement defender of the true Easter”,<sup>351</sup> the deacon James, “uerum et catholicum pascha cum omnibus, quos ad correctiorem uiam erudire poterat”,<sup>352</sup> or “[who] observed the true and Catholic Easter together with all those whom he educate in the better way”,<sup>353</sup> (or more accurately, “could draw onto the correct road”); Queen Eanfled, her court, and her Kentish priest Romanus; King Oswy’s son Alchfrid, who had originally offered a monastery to monks who observed the Irish practice, the latter of whom gave up the monastery in deference to their beliefs; the Bishop Wilfrid, “virum doctissimum”,<sup>354</sup> or “a very learned man” who had studied in Rome;<sup>355</sup> and Bishop Agilbert of the West Saxons, along with his accompanying priest Agatho. Standing in favor of Irish

---

<sup>346</sup>Plummer, Bk. IV, Ch. 5, 217.

<sup>347</sup>Campbell, 191.

<sup>348</sup>Plummer, Bk. III, Ch. 25, 181.

<sup>349</sup>Campbell, 158.

<sup>350</sup>Plummer, Bk. III, Ch. 25, 181.

<sup>351</sup>Campbell, 158.

<sup>352</sup>Plummer, Bk. III, Ch. 25, 181.

<sup>353</sup>Campbell, 158-159.

<sup>354</sup>Plummer, Bk. III, Ch. 25, 182.

<sup>355</sup>Campbell, 159.

observance included King Oswy, “quia nimirum [...] a Scottis edoctus ac baptizatus, illorum etiam lingua optime inbutus, nil melius, quam quod illi docuissent, autumabat”,<sup>356</sup> or “having been educated and baptized by the Irish and being very well skilled in their language, thought there was nothing better than what they taught”,<sup>357</sup> Bishop Finan, “quod esset homo ferocis animi, acerbiolem castigando et apertum ueritatis aduersarium reddit”,<sup>358</sup> or “a man of violent temper [who through reproof was made] more fierce and an open enemy of the truth”,<sup>359</sup> and who was deceased by the time of the Council; Bishop Colman; Abbess Hilda and her followers; and “uenerabilis episcopus” or “the venerable bishop” Cedd, “qui et interpre”<sup>360</sup> in eo concilio uigilantissimus utriusque parties exitit”,<sup>361</sup> or “who acted as a most attentive mediator for both sides in that council”.<sup>362</sup> Over all these believers hovered the spirit of Bishop Aidan, during whose lifetime, Bede notes, “Haec autem dissonantia paschalis obseruantiae uiuente Aidano patienter ab omnibus tolerabatur, qui patenter intellexerant, quia, etsi pascha contra morem eorum, qui ipsum miserant, facere non potuit, opera tamen fidei, pietatis, et dilectionis, iuxta morem omnibus sanctis consuetum, diligenter exsequi curauit. Unde ab omnibus, etiam his, qui de pascha aliter sentiebant, merito diligebatur”,<sup>363</sup> or “this discordance in the celebration of Easter was tolerated patiently by all men. For they had come to know quite certainly that, although he could not keep Easter contrary to the custom of those who had sent

---

<sup>356</sup>Plummer, Bk. III, Ch. 25, 182.

<sup>357</sup>Campbell, 159.

<sup>358</sup>Plummer, Bk. III, Ch. 25, 181.

<sup>359</sup>Campbell, 158.

<sup>360</sup>It is interesting that Bede chooses the term “interpre” for Cedd’s role in the Whitby council, since a definition of “interpreter” suggests possible misinterpretation and misunderstanding among the participants, even though they all would be able to speak Latin. However, I defer to Lewis and Short’s first listed definition for “interpre”—“broker” or “negotiator”, which ultimately makes more sense given the context of this passage. See A Latin Dictionary, based on Andrews’ edition of Freund’s Latin Dictionary. Rev. and ed. Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short (Oxford: Clarendon Press. 1879), s.v. “interpre”.

<sup>361</sup>Plummer, Bk. III, Ch. 25, 183.

<sup>362</sup>Campbell, 160.

<sup>363</sup>Plummer, Bk. III, Ch. 25, 183.

him, he nevertheless took diligent care to perform works of faith, piety, and love according to the accustomed manner of all holy men. Therefore, he was deservedly loved by all, even those who thought otherwise about Easter”.<sup>364</sup>

In describing these disputants, Bede employs the language of both ardency and negotiation: there is the “vehement” Ronan mitigated by James; the “fierce” Finan tempered by the “venerable” Cedd. Bede emphasizes that both sides possess learned adherents, and that it is one’s education, and not a weak faith that determines particular observance, an insight that he emphasizes by detailing the educations of Ronan, Wilfrid, and Oswy. Cedd, although he stands on the ultimately incorrect side of observance, demonstrates the sincerity of his belief and his interest in Christian unity by mediating so fairly that no one is poorly represented. And finally, Bede includes a description of Aidan’s legacy within the list of disputants, the effect of which is an emphasis on “faith”, “piety”, and “love” among the faithful gathering at the synod.

That Bede includes Aidan in his discussion of a council that took place after the bishop’s death speaks to Bede’s portrayal of the synod as one of reasoned disagreement, not an ecclesiastical breakdown, and it indicates the way in which he shapes this particular narrative. The participants speak in deference to one another throughout the proceedings, demonstrating their loyalty to the Christian faith as opposed to this singular observance, and they cite ecclesiastical precedent, in the form of Church figures and practice, in support of their beliefs. Only Wilfrid, who argues for the side that Bede himself advocates, stands out as dismissive towards his opponents when he argues that they “*contra totum orbem stulto labore pugnant*”,<sup>365</sup> or “stand against the whole world, struggling foolishly”,<sup>366</sup> in perpetuating their practice,

---

<sup>364</sup>Campbell, 159.

<sup>365</sup>Plummer, Bk. III, Ch. 25, 184.

<sup>366</sup>Campbell, 161.

and that by following their particular “patres”, or “Fathers”, do they really believe that “numquid uniuersali, quae per orbem est, ecclesiae Christi eorum est paucitas uno de angulo extremae insulae praeferenda?”<sup>367</sup> or “[even though your Fathers were holy, are they, being few in number] and in one corner of the last island in the world, to be preferred to the universal church of Christ which is throughout the world?”<sup>368</sup> But even in his depiction of Wilfrid, Bede is largely reticent—he lets the Bishop speak for himself. He infers any negative aspects of the Bishop’s conduct through the words and phrasing that the Bishop supposedly chooses, and omits any commentary of his own.

Bede limits any personal observations on the Council to the opening lists of participants, and a final statement, which is as follows: “Haec dicente rege, fauerunt adsidentes quique siue adstantes maiores una cum mediocribus, et abdicata minus perfecta institutione, ad ea, quae meliora cognouerant, sese transferre festinabant”,<sup>369</sup> or “When the king said this, those who were sitting or standing there, great men and lesser men, gave their assent and, renouncing the less perfect ordinance, hastened to change over to those things which they had learned to be better”.<sup>370</sup> All other action and description in the synod occurs in the dialogue of the disputants; the reader learns that the canonical observers win because Oswy decides that he will defer to Saint Peter’s authority—Peter being the one who opens “fores regni caelorum”,<sup>371</sup> or “the gates of the kingdom of heaven”—as opposed to that of the local Irish Saint Columba. And even though Bede notes that Colman and his “dissenters” return to Iona and continue their non-canonical observance, as well as their non-canonical tonsure, Bede’s sole specific commentary on that illicit practice is “nam et de hoc quaestio non

---

<sup>367</sup>Plummer, Bk. III, Ch. 25, 188.

<sup>368</sup>Campbell, 165.

<sup>369</sup>Plummer Bk. III, Ch. 25, 189.

<sup>370</sup>Campbell, 165.

<sup>371</sup>Plummer, Bk. III, Ch. 25, 189.

minima erat”,<sup>372</sup> or “there was much controversy about that also”.<sup>373</sup> It is difficult to imagine that to the participants of the Council, particularly those who followed Colman, simple resolution felt likely, no matter what shape “giving their assent” took.

Theodore’s synod at Hertford nine years later, in 673 A.D., indicates that easy resolution to this deeply felt disagreement did not occur, even though Bede is equally circuitous in his indications that the synod was less than purely ceremonial. Bede explains that Theodore charged his “concilium episcoporum, una cum eis, qui canonica patrum statuta et diligenter, et nossent, magistris ecclesiae pluribus. [...] quae unitati pacis ecclesiasticae congruerent”,<sup>374</sup> or “council of bishops, together with many other teachers of the church” with “[coming together in the unity of the peace of the church]”.<sup>375</sup> Bede then relates, much as he did with the events of the Council of Whitby, the proceedings of the Hertford synod; he notes, as a direct quotation from Theodore, “‘*Rogo, inquam, dilectissimi fratres, propter timorem et amorem Redemptoris nostri, ut in commune omnes pro nostra fide tractemus; ut, quaeque decreta ac definita sunt a sanctis ac probabilibus patribus, incorrupte ab omnibus nobis seruentur*’”,<sup>376</sup> or “I beseech you, dearest brothers, for the fear and love of our Redeemer, that we may all take counsel together for the sake of our faith, so that whatsoever has been decreed and defined by holy and trustworthy Fathers may be inviolably observed by us all”.<sup>377</sup> Theodore continues by stating that he has marked the ten canonical chapters “quia maxime nobis necessaria sciebam”,<sup>378</sup> or that “I knew [...] to be especially necessary for us”,<sup>379</sup> the first of which commands, “ut sanctum

---

<sup>372</sup>Plummer, Bk. III, Ch. 26, 189.

<sup>373</sup>Campbell, 166.

<sup>374</sup>Plummer, Bk. IV, Ch. 5, 214.

<sup>375</sup>Campbell, 188-189.

<sup>376</sup>Plummer, Bk. IV, Ch. 5, 215.

<sup>377</sup>Campbell, 189.

<sup>378</sup>Plummer, Bk. IV, Ch. 5, 215.

<sup>379</sup>Campbell, 190.

diem paschae in commune omnes seruemus dominica post XIII<sup>am</sup> lunam mensis primi”,<sup>380</sup> or that they “in common keep the holy day of Easter on the Sunday after the fourteenth day of the moon of the first month”.<sup>381</sup> The other ten chapters include bishopric humility, lawful marriage, and the maintenance of semi-annual synods, and the cumulative emphasis of these chapters is one of enforced piety and rigorous observance at all levels of the Church. Theodore, or Bede by proxy, then speaks, “his itaque capitulis in commune tractatis ac definitis”,<sup>382</sup> or “these chapters thus being treated of and defined by all” there should be “nullum deinceps ab aliquo nostrum oriatur contentionis scandalum”,<sup>383</sup> or “henceforward no scandalous contention that might arise between us”, and that “quisquis igitur contra hanc sententiam, iuxta decreta canonum, nostra etiam consensione ac subscriptione manus nostrae confirmatam, quoquo modo uenire, eamque infringere temptauerit, nouerit se ab omni officio sacerdotali et nostra societate separatum. Diuina nos gratia in unitate sanctae suae ecclesiae uiuentes custodiat incolumes”,<sup>384</sup> or “whosoever, therefore, shall attempt in any way to go against or infringe this ordinance, canonically confirmed by our consent and by the subscription of our hands, is to know that he is excluded from all priestly offices and from our society”.<sup>385</sup> The description of the synod then ends, and Bede, as the narrator, re-enters the text with zero commentary on its events; instead, he relates the year of the proceedings, and then some events that subsequently took place, none of which reflect the conclusions of the synod. In Bede’s own “chronological summary of the whole book”, which lies at the end of the text, he merely writes of this event, “synodus facta est ad Herutforda, praesente Ecgfrido rege,

---

<sup>380</sup>Plummer, Bk. IV, Ch. 5, 215-216.

<sup>381</sup>Campbell, 190.

<sup>382</sup>Plummer, Bk. IV, Ch. 5, 217.

<sup>383</sup>Plummer, Bk. IV, Ch. 5, 217.

<sup>384</sup>Plummer, Bk. IV, Ch. 5, 217.

<sup>385</sup>Campbell, 191.

praesidente archiepiscopo Theodoro, utillima, X capitulorum”,<sup>386</sup> or “a synod was held at Herford, in the presence of King Egfrith, Archbishop Theodore presiding; [it was] useful, [and there were made] ten chapters”.<sup>387</sup> Granted, Bede’s ruminations on other events in the chronology are nearly non-existence—it is a sparsely written timeline—but in the case of the Hertford synod, this summary serves to illuminate the author’s lack of personal annotation and explanation of the significance of the proceedings.

Bede does not emphasize that these synods are the result of God’s will in the way that he clearly identifies the retribution and assistance that God assigns to the apostate and to the faithful in moments of physical conflict, but there is the sense that these characters—Oswy, Colman, Theodore, etc.—are enacting God’s will for the Anglo-Saxon people. Both Whitby and Hertford indicate that a step is being taken in the direction of realizing an English Christendom; by observing the correct Easter, and by adhering to canonical chapters through common agreement, the ecclesiastical officials in England, according to Bede, are safeguarding and promoting the Christian faith. As a result, a minimization of conflict at these synods, from his perspective, serves to strengthen that depiction of safeguarding and promotion, and further emphasizes Christianity as a victorious entity when compared to paganism and apostasy.

Egbert’s ultimate persuasion of the remaining Irish to observe the canonical Easter serves a similar function, but Bede does attribute part of his success to God’s assistance. Bede writes that Egbert’s influence was due to “qui quoniam et doctor suauissimus, et eorum, quae agenda docebat, erat exsecutor deuotissimus”, or “[Egbert] being a most persuasive teacher and a most devout practicer of those things

---

<sup>386</sup>Plummer, Bk. V, Chronology, 355.

<sup>387</sup>My own translation.

which he taught should be done”,<sup>388</sup> and that “quod mira diuinae constat factum dispensatione pietatis”, or “by a wonderful dispensation of divine goodness”,<sup>389</sup> Egbert instructed the Irish “catholicoque illos atque apostolico more celebrationem [...] praecipuae sollemnitis”,<sup>390</sup> or “to keep the principal solemnity after the Catholic and apostolic manner”.<sup>391</sup> Yet nowhere in his portrayal of Egbert’s achievement does Bede discuss the mechanics of his persuasion, or the process by which the Irish decided to accept his teaching, or even the words of the Irish themselves. Surely their adoption of the canonical observance was not as dispute-free as “libenter auditis”, or “[Egbert being] willingly heard [by all]”, and “immutauit piis ac sedulis exhortationibus inueratam illam traditionem parentum eorum”,<sup>392</sup> or allowing him to “by his pious and frequent exhortations to [alter] that inveterate tradition of their predecessors”?<sup>393</sup> Instead of elaborating on any possible discussion, much less dispute, Bede packages the entire vignette as a celebration of Egbert himself: he is the teacher who “gratulabatur ille, quod eatenus in carne seruatus est, donec illum in pascha diem suos auditors, quem semper antea uitabant, suscipere ac secum agere uidere”,<sup>394</sup> or “[rejoiced and] was glad in his being so long continued in the flesh, until he saw his followers admit and celebrate with him that day as Easter day which before they had always avoided”.<sup>395</sup> In all three of these examples, Bede acts as a narrator piecing together an objective account, offering neither personal judgment nor elaboration on any of the events. And because the incidents all infer possible conflict between faithful Christians—for even the non-canonical adherents are still recognized

---

<sup>388</sup>Campbell, 303.

<sup>389</sup>Campbell, 304.

<sup>390</sup>Plummer, Bk. V, Ch. 22, 346-347.

<sup>391</sup>Campbell, 303.

<sup>392</sup>Plummer, Bk. V, Ch. 22, 346.

<sup>393</sup>Campbell, 303.

<sup>394</sup>Plummer, Bk. V, Ch. 22, 348.

<sup>395</sup>Campbell, 304-305.

as ultimately truly Christian—Bede diminishes their more threatening aspects, all in the interest of maintaining a depiction of Christianity as a unified bulwark against the non- or the falsely Christian.

In representing incidents of Christian versus non-Christian and Christian versus Christian dispute, Bede offers an interpretation of God's will that includes the triumph of canonical observance, faithful military commanders, and loyal bishops. God aids or punishes those individuals and people who act according to, or deviate from, sincere faith, and as Bede identifies the particular events in which God's assistance or retribution occurs, he builds his narrative of Anglo-Saxon England's Christian history. Recognizing this particular narrative strand, with its attendant peaks and valleys, will allow us to examine the ways in which Bede articulates the ultimate rewards of Christian unification.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### **“Order Our Days in Thy Peace”: Christian Unity and Reward in the Historia Ecclesiastica**

Bede’s depictions of conflict between Christians, pagans, and apostates allow him to identify victories and defeats according to his interpretation of God’s will. But the Northumbrian monk’s commentary, or lack thereof, on many of these straightforward examples of strife—whether they are physical, political, or spiritual—serves a greater purpose beyond that of emphasizing God’s aid to the faithful. Bede creates a master narrative in which he implicitly argues that if unity exists among Christians in the secular world, then their entrance to heaven may be assured in the eternal world. This mode of existence, or state of social order, in which Christian harmony is privileged may be referred to as “*pax dispositus*”, or “ordered peace”. I choose this phrase based on the words of Gregory the Great that Bede includes in the Historia. When relating Gregory’s brief biography, Bede writes that the Pope in revising some Masses, “in ipsa missarum celebratione tria uerba maximae perfectionis plena superadiecit: ‘Diesque nostros in tua pace disponas, atque ab aeterna damnatione nos eripi, et in electorum tuorum iubeas grege numerari’”,<sup>396</sup> or “[added moreover] in the celebration of [those] Masses three phrases full of the greatest perfection: ‘And dispose our days in thy peace; and that we be rescued from eternal damnation; and order that we be numbered in the flock of thy elect’”.<sup>397</sup> Because Bede identifies Gregory’s concept of ordering human days in God’s peace as being one of “*maxima perfectio*”, or “greatest perfection”, and that he couples this with preventing “*aeternus*

---

<sup>396</sup>Bede, Historiam Ecclesiasticam Gentis Anglorum Historiam Abbatum Epistolam ad Ecgbertum, una cum Historia Abbatum Auctore Anonymo, ed. Charles Plummer, Vol. I (Oxford: Clarendon, 1896), Bk. II, Ch. 1, 78. All quotations from this text are cited as “Plummer” with the corresponding Book, Chapter, and page numbers. Any quotations from Vol. II of Plummer’s edition are cited as such.

<sup>397</sup>My own translation.

damnatio”, or “eternal damnation”, “pax dispositus”, or “peace” that is “ordered”, “arranged”, or “disposed”, and what from now on I will refer to as “ordered peace”, is an effective term for Bede’s narrative emphasis on ordering and unification. “Ordered peace”, as demonstrated by Bede in the Historia, may ultimately be seen as an image of monastic life that looks ahead to how a Christian world should be organized. In other words, the state of Christian “perfectio” that should exist in that world would be predicated on Christians subordinating themselves willingly to the authority of God, and thus “ordered peace” would be the consequent state of social order. As a way of emphasizing “ordered peace”, Bede offers examples in the Historia of Christian unification and *disunification*, which are the products of lives lived in order or disorder. Furthermore, Bede indicates ordered peace as *the* way to live in this world through an emphasis on language and translation, through privileging the letters and statements of the Church Fathers and important figures in English ecclesiastical history, and through an ordered understanding of sin. By preventing “eternal damnation”, living in ordered peace helps ensure the eternal reward of citizenship in the kingdom of heaven.

Bede invokes ordered peace as a desired earthly state of being by interpreting past events and personae which demonstrate that lifestyle as specific evidence of Christian unification. As a means of further clarification, one other way of understanding “ordered peace” might be to consider what Augustine refers to as the “tranquility of order”. In Book Nineteen of De Civitate Dei Augustine writes, “pax omnium rerum tranquillitas ordinis. Ordo est parium dispariumque rerum sua cuique loca tribuens dispositio”,<sup>398</sup> or “the peace of all things [lies in] the tranquility of order;

---

<sup>398</sup> Augustinus Hipponensis, De Civitate Dei, ed. B. Dombart and A. Kalb, CCSL 48 (Turnholt: Brepols, 1955), lib. 19, cap. 13. A Justinian echo lies in this passage; in the first part of his Institutes, Justinian lays the foundation for Western legal thought with the line, “Iustitia est constans et perpetua voluntas ius suum cuique tribuens”, or “Justice is the constant and perpetual will to give every man his due”. A similar precept seems to lie behind Gregory’s “pax dispositus”; in other words, when one’s

and order is the disposition of equal and unequal things in such a way as [to give] each its [assigned] place”.<sup>399</sup> Bede was well acquainted with Augustine’s thought and texts, and it seems unlikely that he would not recognize and understand this concept, even if he chooses the verb “disponare” in his passage about Gregory rather than “ordinare”. The “tranquility of order”, or the “disposition of equal and unequal things” requires that all parts of a whole, whether limbs on a body or members of a society, work in harmony. Augustine elaborates as follows:

Pax itaque corporis est ordinata temperatura partium, pax animae irrationalis ordinata requies appetitionum, pax animae rationalis ordinata cognitionis actionisque consensio, pax corporis et animae ordinata uita et salus animantis, pax hominis mortalis et dei ordinata in fide sub aeterna lege oboedientia, pax hominum ordinata concordia, pax domus ordinata imperandi atque oboediendi concordia cohabitantium, pax civitatis ordinata imperandi atque oboediendi concordia civium, pax caelestis civitatis ordinatissima et concordissima societas fruendi deo et invicem in deo.<sup>400</sup>

[The peace of the body, therefore, [lies] in the [combined] ordering of its parts; the peace of the irrational soul [lies] in the [...] ordered [disposition] of the appetites; the peace of the rational soul [lies] in the [...] ordered relationship of cognition and action; the peace of body and soul [lies] in the [...] ordered life and health of a living creature; the peace [of] mortal man and God is an ordered obedience, in faith, under an eternal law; and peace [between] men is an ordered [harmony]. The peace of a household is an ordered concord, with respect to command and obedience, of those who dwell together; the peace of a city is an ordered concord, [with respect] to command and obedience, of the citizens; and the peace of the Heavenly City is [the most] ordered and harmonious fellowship in the enjoyment of God, and [in] one another in God.]<sup>401</sup>

---

days are ordered in God’s peace, each will receive his due. See *Corpus Iuris Civilis, II, Codex Justinianus*, ed. P. Krueger (Berlin: 1895), Liber Primus, “De Iustitia et Iure”.

<sup>399</sup> Augustine, *The City of God Against the Pagans*, ed. and trans. R.W. Dyson (Cambridge: CUP, 2005), Bk. 19, Ch. 13, 938. All Modern English translations from *The City of God* are from this edition unless otherwise cited.

<sup>400</sup> Augustinus Hipponensis, *De Civitate Dei*, lib. 19, cap. 13.

<sup>401</sup> Dyson, *The City of God*, Bk. 19, Ch. 13, 938.

Throughout this passage, Augustine builds the concept of the “tranquility of order” by layering other “orderings”: “ordered appetites”; “ordered cognition and action”; “ordered life and health”; “ordered obedience”; “ordered agreement”; “ordered concord”; and ultimately, “the most ordered and harmonious fellowship in the enjoyment of God, and in one another in God”. We may recognize this last “ordering” as the ultimate reward of living in ordered peace. In other words, this ordered fellowship that Augustine describes in earthly life evokes the fellowship with God that will be had in the eternal life, that permanent residence in “the Heavenly City”, which all Christians seek. Augustine’s articulation of this Christian reward affirms what he has stated in other texts as well; for example, in his commentary on The Sermon on the Mount, the North African Saint continuously emphasizes that the overreaching goal of all Christians should be attaining “unum [...] praemium, quod est regnum caelorum”,<sup>402</sup> or “the one reward” of “the kingdom of heaven”.<sup>403</sup> Bede, in a sense, continues this emphasis on ordered living and ultimate reward in the Historia. Gerald Bonner even argues that one cannot “properly talk of any specifically Bedan teaching on the Christian life” without recognizing that “much of his writing consists of the reproduction, often verbatim, of the works of his predecessors, notably of course the four great doctors of the Latin Church: Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine and Gregory”.<sup>404</sup> While Bede does not reproduce “verbatim” Augustine’s precept on the “tranquility of order” in the Historia, I do see a demonstration of Augustine’s teaching as mediated through Bede’s ecclesiastical history. As Alan Thacker elaborates, “Bede was never

---

<sup>402</sup>Augustinus Hipponensis, De Sermonibus Domini in Monte, ed. Almut Mutzenbecher, CCSL 35 (Turnholt: Brepols, 1967), lib. 1, par. 12.

<sup>403</sup>Augustine of Hippo, Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, According to Matthew (De Sermonibus Domini in Monte secundum Matthaeum), trans. William Findlay, in A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, ed. Philip Schaff, vol. vi (New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1888), 7. All Modern English translations from De Sermonibus Domini in Monte refer to this edition unless otherwise noted.

<sup>404</sup>Gerald Bonner, “The Christian Life in the Thought of the Venerable Bede” (Durham University Journal 63, no. 32 (1970): 39-55), 43.

primarily a speculative theologian. His originality lay rather in his ordering of knowledge and connecting it with God's purposed salvation of mankind".<sup>405</sup> Through his historical narrative, Bede provides examples of Christian unification and reward—i.e. the kingdom of heaven—by indicating and advocating ordered peace.

Some of the examples that Bede offers as proof of this Christian unification involve royal as well as ecclesiastical figures. When Bede relates the conversion of the Kentish King Ethelbert, he writes, "ut nullum tamen cogeret ad Christianismum; sed tantummodo credentes artiori dilectione, quasi concives sibi regni caelestis, amplecteretur. Didicerat enim a doctoribus auctoribusque suae salutis seruitium Christi uoluntarium, non coacticum esse debere",<sup>406</sup> or that Ethelbert "[did not force] anyone to become a Christian. He simply showed a closer affection to believers as being his fellow citizens in the heavenly kingdom. He had learned from those who had instructed him and led him to salvation that the service of Christ ought to be voluntary and not by compulsion".<sup>407</sup> Bede's brief description of Ethelbert's conversion and its political aftermath serves two purposes when examined from the perspective of Christian unification and "ordered peace". First, the fact that Ethelbert sees himself as aligned with a specific group of his subjects transcends social boundaries and establishes a new binary: not royal versus commoner, but Christian versus non-Christian. Similarly, this new narrative binary acquires political language in order to underscore the goal shared by this group: they pursue "regni caelestis", or "the heavenly kingdom" as "concives", or "fellow citizens". Bede reiterates this Kentish Christian unification in his posthumous description of Ethelbert, who he claims

---

<sup>405</sup>Alan Thacker, "Bede and the Ordering of Understanding", in Innovation and Tradition in the Writings of the Venerable Bede, ed. Scott DeGregorio, 37-63 (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia University Press, 2006), 52.

<sup>406</sup>Plummer, Bk. I, Ch. 26, 47.

<sup>407</sup>Bede, The Ecclesiastical History of the English People and Other Selections, ed. James Campbell (New York: Washington Square Press, 1968), 43. All Modern English translations of Bede's Historia are from Campbell's edition unless otherwise noted.

realized that pursuit, and “aeterna caelestis regni gaudia subiit”,<sup>408</sup> or “entered the eternal joys of the kingdom of heaven”. Bede writes, “qui tertius quidem in regibus gentis Anglorum cunctis australibus eorum prouinciis, quae Humbrae fluuio et contiguis ei terminis sequestrantur a borealibus, imperauit; sed primus omnium caeli regna conscendit”,<sup>409</sup> or “he was the third English king to have power over the kings and peoples of all the provinces of southern England, which are divided from those of the north by the river Humber and the adjoining marches”,<sup>410</sup> “but he was the first of all [the kings] to ascend to the kingdom of heaven”.<sup>411</sup> Through this portrayal Bede privileges an identification with Christian geography over mere Anglo-Saxon geography; in other words, it may be significant that Ethelbert ruled all the territory south of the Humber, but it is even more significant that he did so *and* managed to establish a heavenly residence in the next world. At the same time, Bede is positing that Ethelbert was not only a good Christian, but also that he died a saved man, which is an interesting ideological claim from someone who really has no way of knowing who is saved in the eternal world.

An alignment between the geography of the British Isles, and what might be termed an Anglo-Saxon Christian geography, continues with Bede’s descriptions of other kings in the *Historia*, and it often includes an emphasis on unification. For example, when depicting the pious King Oswald, Bede explains, “Huius igitur antistitis doctrina rex Osuald cum ea, cui praeerat, gente Anglorum institutus, non solum incognita progenitoribus suis regna caelorum sperare didicit; sed et regna terrarum plus quam ulli maiorum suorum, ab eodem uno Deo, qui fecit caelum et terram, consecutus est. Denique omnes nationes et prouincias Brittaniae, quae in IIII

---

<sup>408</sup>Plummer, Bk. II, Ch. 5, 89.

<sup>409</sup>Plummer, Bk. II, Ch. 5, 89.

<sup>410</sup>Campbell, 74.

<sup>411</sup>My own translation.

linguas, id est Brettonum, Pictorum, Scottorum, et Anglorum, diuisae sunt, in dicione accepit”,<sup>412</sup> or “[Oswald] learned not only to hope for heavenly kingdoms unknown to any of his forefathers, but also obtained of the same one God, Who made heaven and earth, earthly kingdoms greater than those of any of his ancestors. In short, he received under his dominion all the peoples and provinces of Britain, which is divided between four peoples speaking different languages—the Britons, the Picts, the Irish, and the English”.<sup>413</sup> Oswald’s ability to acquire and unify territories and their peoples comes from “eodem unus Deus”, that “same one God”, and Bede suggests that Oswald’s “regna terrarum”, or “earthly kingdoms” are temporal world reflections of the eternal one that Oswald hopes for in the next life. In other words, the “kingdom of heaven” will also bring the Christians of “omnes nationes et prouincias Brittaniae”, or “all the people and provinces of Britain” under one “dicio”, or “dominion”, that of God. King Oswy of Northumbria employs similar language when he tells the East Saxon King Sigbert that God, “qui caelum et terram et humanum genus creasset, regeret, et iudicaturus esset orbem in aequitate; cuius sedes aeterna non in uili et caduco metallo, sed in caelis esset credenda; meritoque intellegendum, quia omnes, qui uoluntatem eius, a quo creati sunt, discerent et facerent, aeterna ab illo praemia essent percepturi”,<sup>414</sup> or that God is “the creator of heaven and earth and of mankind, who rules over them and will judge the world in righteousness; whose eternal abode is to be believed to be not in vile and perishable matter, but in heaven. And it is to be justifiably understood that all men who learn and do the will of Him, by Whom they were created, are to receive eternal rewards from Him”.<sup>415</sup> When Sigbert converts to Christianity, Bede writes that the king has “aeterni regni iam ciuis effectus”,<sup>416</sup> or

---

<sup>412</sup>Plummer Bk. III, Ch. 6, 137-138.

<sup>413</sup>Campbell, 119.

<sup>414</sup>Plummer, Bk. III, Ch. 22, 172.

<sup>415</sup>Campbell, 150.

<sup>416</sup>Plummer, Bk. III, Ch. 22, 172.

“[has] been made a citizen of the kingdom of heaven”.<sup>417</sup> Oswy and Sigbert, now unified in Christianity, transcend their Northumbrian and East Saxon identities and inhabit the same Anglo-Saxon Christian landscape that Bede develops in his narrative. By re-affirming God as “qui caelum et terram [...] creasset”, or “the one who created heaven and earth”, Bede continues to bind those two worlds together—the temporal and the eternal—and to emphasize the “eternal reward” that awaits those Christians who conduct their lives in ordered peace, or “the tranquility of order”, on earth. Along these same lines, through a continued use of the language of citizenship, Bede evokes “the peace of a city”, in this case the “heavenly city”, that Augustine cites: it is “an ordered concord, with respect to command and obedience, of the citizens”.

One interesting expression in the *Historia* of “the disposition of equal and unequal things in such a way as to give each its [assigned] place” concerns two nameless princes from the Isle of Wight, who are executed immediately after baptism. Bede explains that when King Cadwalla of the Gewissae invaded the Isle of Wight in the late seventh century, the princes escaped “in proximam Iutorum prouinciam”,<sup>418</sup> or to “the neighboring province of the Jutes”,<sup>419</sup> where they were eventually captured and sentenced to death. A local priest, Cynibert, learned of their imminent execution, and he asked Cadwalla, “si necesse esset pueros interfici, prius eos liceret fidei Christianae sacramentis inbui”,<sup>420</sup> or “if it was necessary that the boys should be killed, it might be permitted that they should first be instructed in the mysteries of the faith”.<sup>421</sup> Cadwalla conceded to this request, and as a result, Cynibert baptized the princes “fonte Saluatoris ablutos, de ingressu regni aeterni certos reddidit. Moxque illi instante carnifice mortem laeti subiere temporalem, per quam se ad uitam animae

---

<sup>417</sup>Campbell, 150.

<sup>418</sup>Plummer, Bk. IV, Ch. 14 (16), 237.

<sup>419</sup>Campbell, 209.

<sup>420</sup>Plummer, Bk. IV, Ch. 14 (16), 238.

<sup>421</sup>Campbell, 209.

perpetuam non dubitabant esse transituros”,<sup>422</sup> or “cleansed them in the font of the Saviour, and made entrance into the kingdom of heaven sure for them. Then, the executioner being at hand, they joyfully underwent temporal death; and they did not doubt that through it they would pass to the everlasting life of the soul”.<sup>423</sup> Two aspects of this vignette resonate with Augustine’s definition of the “tranquility of order”, and thus with Bede’s ordered peace. First, Bede introduces the princes in such a way that emphasizes their disordered and *disunified* lives: they are nameless, they are heathen, and they are living in exile, outside of not only Anglo-Saxon Christian geographical domain, but also their native land. Through baptism, however, the princes achieve a modicum of ordered peace; they may remain nameless, but they join their “concives”, or “fellow citizens” Ethelbert, Oswy, and Sigbert in a state that defies temporal political boundaries, and though far from home, each prince now has his “proper place” in the overall schema of Christianity. In other words, they are unified in Christianity with these other historical Christian figures. Second, Bede reiterates his trope “regnus aeterni”, or “the eternal kingdom” as a guarantor for the eternal fate of these two princes, and as a result, he suggests that since they achieved a measure of ordered peace right at the end of their lives, there is little doubt that they will receive the eternal reward that all Christians seek.

At the same time that Bede constructs this cohesively ordered narrative, however, he also demonstrates a powerful and disturbing example of his “rhetoric of reticence”. Although the dead princes now belong to their proper places within the schema of Christianity, an important question remains: under what political order, particularly one ruled by a Christian, is it permissible to kill children, and imprisoned ones at that? Bede neatly ties up the loose ends of the princes’ baptismal quandary—

---

<sup>422</sup>Plummer, Bk. IV, Ch. 14 (16), 238.

<sup>423</sup>Campbell, 209-210.

will they or will they not be saved before they die?—but he remains chillingly quiet about their executions. Indeed, while his relatively personal introduction to the vignette, “ubi silentio praetereundum non esse reor”,<sup>424</sup> or “whereby I think [the princes’ story] should not be disregarded in silence”,<sup>425</sup> anticipates an authorial condemnation of their fate, it appears upon closer examination that it is their “laeti”, or “joyful”, attitude toward death that Bede actually finds worthy of commentary. If this is the case, then Bede’s *silentium* concerning their executions may be explained by his privileging of Christian unification in the secular world. In other words, perhaps the princes’ fate does not figure in a realm of cruelty because they are outside of the “order” with which Bede is concerned; it is only when they are Christians, and thus have a place in the *regni aeterna*, that Bede finds their experience salient.

In contrast to the unlucky princes, throughout the *Historia* Bede shows Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastical figures living in ordered peace, which leads to Christian unification in the secular world and the kingdom of heaven in the eternal one. In addition, they make evident that ordered peace may be societal as well as personal, a duality that Augustine also expresses as beneficial, though not essential, in the temporal world. In Augustine’s exegesis of the Beatitudes in his commentary on the *Sermon on the Mount*, he writes as follows regarding Matthew 5:9, “Beati pacifici, quoniam filii Dei vocabuntur”,<sup>426</sup> or “Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God”,<sup>427</sup>: “filii dei pacifici, quoniam nihil resistit deo et utique filii similitudinem patris habere debent. Pacifici autem in semet ipsis sunt, qui omnes animi sui motus componentes et subicientes rationi, id est menti et spiritui, carnalesque

---

<sup>424</sup>Plummer, Bk. IV, Ch. 14 (16), 237.

<sup>425</sup>My own translation.

<sup>426</sup>*Biblia Sacra: Iuxta Vulgatam Versionem*, altera emendata edition (Stuttgart: Wurttembergische Bibelanstalt, 1975), s.v. Matthew 5:9.

<sup>427</sup>*The Holy Bible: Douay Rheims Version*, ed. James Gibbons, trans. Richard Challoner (Rockford, IL: Tan Books, 1989), s.v. Matthew 5:9.

concupiscentias habentes edomitas fiunt regnum dei”,<sup>428</sup> or “the children of God are peacemakers, because nothing resists God, and surely children ought to have the likeness of their father. Now, they are peacemakers in themselves who, by bringing in order all the motions of their soul, and subjecting them to reason—i.e. to the mind and spirit—and by having their carnal lusts thoroughly subdued, become a kingdom of God”.<sup>429</sup> With this definition, Augustine prefigures the physical and spiritual ordering of “the tranquility of order” by emphasizing ordered hierarchies—e.g. those of family and “the motions of the soul”—and ultimate resolution in fellowship with God, by becoming “a kingdom of God”. Augustine seems to argue that no one can be a true peacemaker unless he or she has inner peace, “in themselves”, or in the context of the Historia, unless he or she lives in ordered peace. Along these same lines, Augustine advocates an individual balance of physicality and spirituality, a kind of inner peace that is more important than a societal peace (unless by default it results in a societal balance), which is underscored by Augustine’s continuous emphasis throughout this commentary on attaining “unum [...] praemium, quod est regnum caelorum”,<sup>430</sup> or “the one reward” of “the kingdom of heaven”.<sup>431</sup> In other words, societal peace may be a positive result of maintaining inner peace, but the good Christian should privilege reaching “the kingdom of heaven” over that temporal goal. Bede imparts this reasoning through two examples of ecclesiastical figures living in ordered peace who urge others to do the same. The first example does not result in a societal ordered peace, and the second one does. The cumulative effect of both, however, echoes Augustine’s reading: societal peace in the temporal world may be a positive derivative of living in “pax dispositus”, but it should not be a Christian’s foremost objective.

---

<sup>428</sup> Augustinus Hipponensis, De Sermone Domini in Monte, lib. 1, par. 9.

<sup>429</sup> Augustine, Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, 5.

<sup>430</sup> Augustinus Hipponensis, De Sermone Domini in Monte, lib. 1, par. 12.

<sup>431</sup> Augustine, Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, 7.

The first example concerns Augustine of Canterbury's exhortation to the British bishops "pace catholica secum habita communem euangelizandi gentibus pro Domino laborem susciperent",<sup>432</sup> or "to undertake in catholic peace with him, they should take the common labor [of] evangelizing to the people for the Lord",<sup>433</sup> and he does so because the Britons had been keeping a non-canonical Easter. As Bede explains, because the Britons fail to do so, just as "alia plurima unitati ecclesiasticae contraria faciebant",<sup>434</sup> or "they also did much else which was contrary to the unity of the Church",<sup>435</sup> and the Britons ultimately suffer violent retribution at the hands of the pagan King Ethelfrid. The British bishops, and by extension the British people who observe the Christian faith, embody disorder and Christian *disunification* in this passage. Their customs are "contraria", or "contrary" to those of "unitas ecclesiasticae", or "the unity of the Church", and due to this disjunction, they are estranged from their Christian brethren—they are almost non-Christian. Furthermore, Bede uses a man emblematic of ordered living in the Historia, Augustine of Canterbury, to instruct his disordered subordinates; these actors are in a sense representative of the familial hierarchy that Augustine of Hippo evokes in his Beatitudes exegesis and the City of God, "the peace of a household is an ordered concord". When the British bishops defy their fellow bishop—who, whether or not he is their superior, appears to be vested with more authority by Rome—as well as the practice of the unified, "universal" Christian community, they suffer the consequences of living in disorder. As Bede succinctly puts it, the Britons "oblata sibi perpetuae salutis consilia spreuerant",<sup>436</sup> or "spurned the advice which offered them perpetual

---

<sup>432</sup>Plummer, Bk. II, Ch. 2, 81.

<sup>433</sup>My own translation.

<sup>434</sup>Plummer, Bk. II, Ch. 2, 81.

<sup>435</sup>Campbell, 67.

<sup>436</sup>Plummer, Bk. II, Ch. 2, 85.

salvation”.<sup>437</sup> Augustine of Canterbury does his best to persuade the Britons, but in the end, the ordered peace of the British religious, much less the societal peace of the Britons, cannot be the result of his actions alone.

In contrast to Augustine of Canterbury and the British bishops, however, is the second example, which concerns Archbishop Theodore and the peace between the Christian Kings Egfrid and Ethelred. Bede relates that the Northumbrian King Egfrid fought the Mercian King Ethelred in a massive battle in the late eighth century, and due to a peace-weaving marriage with the Mercians, the death of Egfrid’s brother Elfwyn in that battle threatened to cause “cumque materies belli acrioris et inimicitiae longioris inter reges populosque feroces”,<sup>438</sup> or “a fiercer war and longer enmity between the enraged kings and peoples”.<sup>439</sup> Enter Theodore, who, “diuino functus auxilio, salutifera exhortatione coeptum tanti periculi funditus extinguit incendium”,<sup>440</sup> or “relying on God’s help, by his wholesome admonitions altogether extinguished the dangerous fire which was breaking out”.<sup>441</sup> Bede recounts the rest of the peace-making process as follows: “adeo ut, pacatis alterutrum regibus ac populis, nullius anima hominis pro interfecto regis fratre, sed debita solummodo multa pecuniae regi ultori daretur. Cuius foedera pacis multo exinde tempore inter eosdem reges eorumque regna durarunt”,<sup>442</sup> or “thus the kings and their people on both sides being appeased, no man was put to death for the slaying [of the king’s brother], but [just a fine of money [for] what was owed was given to the avenger king<sup>443</sup>]. This agreement for peace between those kings and their kingdoms endured for long afterwards”.<sup>444</sup> Egfrid

---

<sup>437</sup>Campbell, 70.

<sup>438</sup>Plummer, Bk. IV, Ch. 19 (21), 249.

<sup>439</sup>Campbell, 218.

<sup>440</sup>Plummer, Bk. IV, Ch. 19 (21), 249.

<sup>441</sup>Campbell, 218.

<sup>442</sup>Plummer, Bk. IV, Ch. 19 (21), 249.

<sup>443</sup>My own translation of this part of the quote is within these brackets.

<sup>444</sup>Campbell, 218.

and Ethelred, like the British Christians and the universal Church, are two entities who share the same faith, but whose relationship is in disorder. This vignette indicates that they once existed in Christian unity—Elfwin’s peace-weaving marriage to Osthryd being the prime example of this unity, in addition to the kings’ shared faith—but that their attempts at maintaining that unity had failed, and they now faced an even greater disintegration of peace. Theodore emerges as the perfect person to restore Christian unification between the two kings, and thus offer a firmer guarantee of that eternal reward in the next life for both of them. Not only does he have “divinus auxilium”, or “divine help”, but Theodore is also “Deo dilectus”,<sup>445</sup> or “the beloved of God”,<sup>446</sup> and through having lived his life exemplarily in ordered peace, he has brought, as Augustine of Hippo might say, “in order all the motions of the soul”. Indeed, Bede’s introduction of Theodore in the *Historia*, and his descriptions of him thereafter, emphasize an ordered balance inherent in the Archbishop. Bede notes, “uir et saeculari et diuina litteratura”,<sup>447</sup> or “[he was] a man [instructed] in worldly and divine literature”,<sup>448</sup> as well as in “metricae ars, astronomia, et arithmetica ecclesiasticae”,<sup>449</sup> or “the art of meter, of astronomy, and of ecclesiastical computation”,<sup>450</sup> he “ordinabat locis oportunis episcopos”,<sup>451</sup> or “ordained bishops in suitable places”,<sup>452</sup> which echoes Augustine of Hippo’s stipulation that when rightly ordered, each person is disposed to “its proper place”; he summoned the Synod of Hatfield, in which “cuius essent fidei singuli, sedulus inquirebat, omniumque unanimum in fide catholica repperit consensum”,<sup>453</sup> or “he diligently inquired into the faith of each of [his

---

<sup>445</sup>Plummer, Bk. IV, Ch. 19 (21), 249.

<sup>446</sup>Campbell, 218.

<sup>447</sup>Plummer, Bk. IV, Ch. 1, 202.

<sup>448</sup>Campbell, 178.

<sup>449</sup>Plummer, Bk. IV, Ch. 2, 204-205.

<sup>450</sup>Campbell, 180.

<sup>451</sup>Plummer, Bk. IV, Ch. 2, 205.

<sup>452</sup>Campbell, 180.

<sup>453</sup>Plummer, Bk. IV, Ch. 15 (17), 238-239.

bishops] and found that they all unanimously agreed in the Catholic faith”,<sup>454</sup> “trinitatem in unitate consubstantialem et unitatem in trinitate”,<sup>455</sup> or that “[the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are] a Trinity consubstantial in unity, and unity in Trinity”,<sup>456</sup> and regarding his death along with those of some of Theodore’s peers, Bede writes, “corpora ipsorum in pace sepulta sunt, et nomen eorum uiuet in generationes et generationes.””,<sup>457</sup> or “their bodies are buried in peace, and their names shall live from generation to generation””.<sup>458</sup> Bede’s epitaph for Theodore particularly underscores the favorable consequence of living in ordered peace—“nomen eorum uiuet in generationes et generationes”, or “their names will live from generation to generation” implies that Theodore now lives in the eternal world.<sup>459</sup> But much like Augustine of Canterbury can only urge his British bishops, Theodore can only offer “salutifera exhortatione”, or “salutary exhortations” to Egfrid and Ethelbert. It is up to them to acknowledge the wisdom of a life lived in ordered peace, and to choose the same for themselves. The Christian re-unification of the two kings, and the societal peace that it produces, are the by-products of Theodore’s own inner peace and tranquility of order.

Along similar lines as the Augustine of Canterbury and Theodore vignettes, Bede indicates that a life of ordered peace might be the means to Christian unity through particular examples of Christian *disunification*, either between Christians and non-Christians, or Christians and Christians. These examples are evidence of an advocacy of ordered peace, as opposed to mere proof of God’s aid or retribution,

---

<sup>454</sup>Campbell, 210.

<sup>455</sup>Plummer, Bk. IV, Ch. 15 (17), 239.

<sup>456</sup>Campbell, 211.

<sup>457</sup>Plummer, Bk. V, Ch. 8, 294-295.

<sup>458</sup>Campbell, 260.

<sup>459</sup>This line is also a biblical echo; in the Book of Exodus, God speaks the following to Moses: “hoc nomen mihi est in aeternum et hoc memoriale meum in generationem et generationem”, or “this is my name forever, and this is my memorial [for generation to generation]”. *Biblia Sacra*, s.v. Exodus 3:15; *The Holy Bible*, s.v. Exodus 3:15.

because they concern the specific attempt and failure to establish Christian unity, often through conversion or in the aftermath of pagan violence (in contrast to the violence/conflict itself). With regard to conversion, three illustrations are particularly salient to Christian *disunification*. The first involves the Irish hermit Wictbert, who tries to convert the Frisians in the late seventh century. Bede writes as follows:

[Wictbert] duobus annis continuis genti illi ac regi eius Rathbedo uerbum salutis praedicabat, neque aliquem tanti laboris fructum apud barbaros inuenit auditores. Tum reuersus ad dilectae locum peregrinationis, solito in silentio uacare Domino coepit; et quoniam externis prodesse ad fidem non poterat, suis amplius ex uirtutum exemplis prodesse curabat.<sup>460</sup>

[[He] preached the Word of salvation for two years together to that people and their king, Rathbod; but he found no fruit among his barbarian hearers for all his great labor. Returning to his beloved place of pilgrimage, he began to devote himself to God in his wonted quietness; and since he could not profit strangers by teaching them the faith, he took care to be the more useful to his own people by the example of his virtue].<sup>461</sup>

Wictbert's inability to convert the Frisians maintains the non-Christian, political geography that other conversions abolish, and his return to "his beloved place of pilgrimage" emphasizes the secular world boundaries that that geography enforces. Yet Wictbert's attempt may be seen as only a partial failure. True, he does not succeed in his endeavor to unite the Frisians with other Christians, and he is unable to overcome their skepticism at the thought of eternal citizenship gained through baptism. But at the same time, Wictbert accepts what might be his role in the greater "tranquility of order". By returning to Ireland and seeking "to be more useful to his own people by the example of his virtue", Wictbert assumes his position in "the

---

<sup>460</sup>Plummer, Bk. V, Ch. 9, 298.

<sup>461</sup>Campbell, 263.

disposition of equal and unequal things in such a way as to give each its proper place". He achieves a state of ordered peace in his own life.

Not long after Wictbert's narrative, Bede reports on two English priests, Hewald the Black and Hewald the White, who fail disastrously in their attempt to convert the Old Saxons. Bede notes that they, "qui in Hibernia multo tempore pro aeterna patria exulauerant", or "[who had] long [lived in exile] in Ireland for the sake of the eternal homeland",<sup>462</sup> and, "pietate religionis inbutus",<sup>463</sup> or "[were both] steeped in the piety of religion".<sup>464</sup> He relates their story as follows:

Qui cum cogniti essent a barbaris, quod essent alterius religionis [...] suspecti sunt habiti, quia, si peruenirent ad satrapam, et loquerentur cum illo, auerterent illum a diis suis, et ad nouam Christianae fidei religionem transferrent, sicque paulatim omnis eorum prouincia ueterem cogeretur noua mutare culturam. Itaque rapuerunt eos subito, et interemerunt; Album quidem Heuualdum ueloci occisione gladii, Nigellum autem longo suppliciorum cruciatu, et horrenda membrorum omnium disceptatione; quos interemtus in Rheno proiecerunt.<sup>465</sup>

[When the barbarians learned that the Hewalds were of another religion [...] they began to grow suspicious of them, lest they should come into the presence of the [local lord], converse with him, turn his heart from their gods, and convert him to the new religion of the Christian faith; and thus by degrees all their province should be forced to change its old worship for a new. And so they laid hold of them suddenly and put them to death, the White Hewald by the swift death of the sword, the Black by a long agony of tortures, rendering his limbs horribly. When they were dead they threw them into the Rhine".]<sup>466</sup>

The Old Saxons, the "barbari" or "the barbarians", are so divorced from reason, Augustine might say, that they fail to "bring in order all the motions of their souls", and instead of recognizing Christianity for what it is—"verbum salutis", or "the word

---

<sup>462</sup>Campbell, 264.

<sup>463</sup>Plummer, Bk. V, Ch. 10, 299.

<sup>464</sup>My own translation.

<sup>465</sup>Plummer, Bk. V, Ch. 10, 300.

<sup>466</sup>Campbell, 265.

of salvation”, as Bede describes it in the Wictbert digression—they slaughter its peaceful messengers. This passage contains a hallmark of *disunification*, “suspectio” or “suspicion”, and demonstrates the possible consequences of disordered living: ignorance, suspicion, and murder. In addition, while this excerpt relates the graphic homicide of the two Hewalds, it does not explain why they might be considered models of ordered peace. The subsequent excerpt, however, elaborates on the evidence that Bede initially provides of their ordered lives, their dedication to “the eternal kingdom” through exile and their religious devotion. Bede writes, “Nec martyrio eorum caelestia defuere miracula. Nam cum peremta eorum corpora amni, ut diximus, a paganis essent iniecta, contigit, ut haec contra impetum fluuii decurrentis, per XL fere milia passuum, ad ea usque loca, ubi illorum erant socii, transferrentur. Sed et radius lucis permaximus, atque ad caelum usque altus, omni nocte supra locum fulgebat illum, ubicumque ea peruenisse contingeret, et hoc etiam paganis, qui eos occiderant, intuentibus”,<sup>467</sup> or “their martyrdom [did not] lack heavenly miracles. For, when their dead bodies had been cast into the river by the pagans (as has been said), they were carried against the stream for almost forty miles, to the place where their companions were. Moreover, a tremendous ray of light, reaching as high as the sky, shone every night over whichever place they happened to have come to, and this in the sight of the very pagans who had killed them”.<sup>468</sup> It is difficult to imagine that Hewald the Black and Hewald the White would have been able to float upstream, or induce “radius lucis permaximus” or a “tremendous ray of light” were they not exemplars in their daily lives of the ordered peace that Gregory describes: “dispose our days in Thy peace; ordain that we be retrieved from eternal damnation, and that we be counted in the Flock of they elect”.

---

<sup>467</sup>Plummer, Bk. V, Ch. 10, 300-301.

<sup>468</sup>Campbell, 265-266.

The third example of attempted conversion as indicative of Christian *disunification* concerns the Northumbrian King Edwin and Queen Ethelberga. Unlike the stories of Wictbert and the two Hewalds, however, the conversion in this vignette eventually succeeds. Ethelberga was the daughter of the Kentish and Christian King Ethelbert, and when she married the then-pagan Northumbrian King Edwin, “promisit se nil omnimodis contrarium Christianae fidei, quam virgo colebat”,<sup>469</sup> or “he promised that he would in no way act in opposition to the Christian faith which the maiden professed”.<sup>470</sup> In the *Historia*, Edwin remains true to his word, but his tolerance does not signify that he will convert to Christianity himself, despite the manifold persuasions of powerful Christians, including Pope Boniface. The Pope writes to Edwin, and he invokes the concept of “ordering” in his reasoning, such as the following line: “quippe quos Deus omnipotens ex primi hominis, quem plasmauit, cognatione, deductis per saecula innumerabilibus propaginibus, pullulare constituit”,<sup>471</sup> or “Almighty God has appointed that [those spring forth], after many ages and through many generations, from the first man whom He formed”.<sup>472</sup> As a means of strengthening his argument to her husband, perhaps, Boniface writes to Ethelberga about Edwin’s conversion as well, and in that letter, Boniface plays upon the language of union and unity. Alluding to the unbreakable unity of the Trinity, he writes, “Qua ex re non modica nobis amaritudo congesta est, ab eo, quod pars corporis uestri ab agnitione summae et indiuiduae Trinitatis remansit extranea”,<sup>473</sup> or “[Edwin’s heathenism has] heaped no small grief upon us, because a part of your body [remains] alienated from the knowlege of the supreme and undivided Trinity”.<sup>474</sup> Boniface then

---

<sup>469</sup>Plummer, Bk. II, Ch. 9, 98.

<sup>470</sup>Campbell, 82.

<sup>471</sup>Plummer, Bk. II, Ch. 10, 103.

<sup>472</sup>Campbell, 87.

<sup>473</sup>Plummer, Bk. II, Ch. 11, 105.

<sup>474</sup>Campbell, 89.

continues, “Scriptum namque est: ‘Erunt duo in carne una.’ Quomodo ergo unitas uobis coniunctionis inesse dici poterit, si a uestrae fidei splendore, interpositis detestabilis erroris tenebris, ille remanserit alienus?”, or “For it is written: ‘They two shall be in one flesh.’ How can it be said that there is unity in your marriage if he remains alien to the brightness of your faith, separated by dark and detestable error?”<sup>475</sup> Edwin does eventually convert, but based on the dates in the *Historia*, he does not do so until two years after Boniface’s letters,<sup>476</sup> and only after many others have tried to persuade him. In the *Historia* narrative, of course, the sparrow allegory ultimately convinces Edwin to accept Christianity. Even if, as a pagan, Edwin did not hold particular esteem for Boniface, it is still interesting that the pope could not ultimately persuade Edwin to convert, largely because Bede portrays Edwin as favored by God and, in the end, an admirable Christian king. If Edwin were favored and admired in that way, why was Boniface unable to persuade him? Despite Bede’s obvious regard for Boniface, there is no denying that the Pope fails in his mission to convert the king and to thus establish Christian unity in Northumbria. In the end, it is the Bishop Paulinus and an unnamed councillor who succeed at that task.

But when considering Bede’s overall narrative objectives, one should not discount Boniface’s letters. By invoking the language of ordering and of unity, Boniface affirms the “tranquility of order” that Augustine articulates and the life of ordered peace that Bede suggests. In addition, he argues for the immutability of true Christian unification—“Erunt duo in carne una.”, or “the two shall become in one flesh”, he cites in a corporal metaphor. Just as destroying a part of the body does not necessarily destroy the whole body, neither can a true Christian union be destroyed. Furthermore, by aligning Edwin in the “many generations” descended from Adam,

---

<sup>475</sup>Campbell, 89.

<sup>476</sup>Bede notes that Edwin’s conversion council takes place in 627 A.D., and based on the dates in the *Historia*, he marries Ethelberga c. 625 A.D. Plummer, Bk. II, Ch. 9-13.

Boniface orders him in the same history of unified Christianity as Oswy, Sigbert, and Ethelbert. God may have granted him many territories, Boniface seems to argue, but through membership in this Christian world, Edwin could transcend political, tribal, national, and social boundaries and later share the kingdom of heaven with his fellow-citizens. Boniface may have failed in persuading Edwin, but his language attests to the ideal of Christian unification that Bede promotes.

Two examples of the aftermath of pagan violence demonstrate another type of Christian *disunification*. The first concerns the pagan Mercian Penda and his invasion of Northumbria after King Edwin dies. After Penda wreaks havoc, Bede writes, “turbatis itaque rebus Nordanhymbrorum huius articulo cladis, cum nil alicubi praesidii nisi in fuga esse uideretur”,<sup>477</sup> or “Because of this disaster therefore the affairs of the Northumbrians [were disordered] by this crisis, when no protection could be seen anywhere except through flight”.<sup>478</sup> Unmoored by this pagan commander, the Northumbrians survive through chaos; things are so “turbatus” or “disordered” that Bede suggests they are totally *disunified*. No semblance of ordered peace remains, and in order to achieve any modicum of ordered peace again, they must exile themselves. On a slightly different note, Bede relates that after the British successfully resisted foreign pagan invasions, they were able to maintain an ordered existence as long as they remembered the horrors of those attacks. Bede writes as follows: “Attamen recente adhuc *memoria* calamitatis et cladis inflictae seruabant utcumque reges, sacerdotes, priuati, et optimates *suum* quique ordinem. At illis decedentibus, cum successisset actas tempestatis illius nescia, et praesentis solum *serenitatis* statum experta, ita cuncta ueritatis ac iustitiae moderamina concussa ac subuersa sunt, ut earum non dicam uestigium, sed ne *memoria quidem*, praeter in

---

<sup>477</sup>Plummer, Bk. II, Ch. 20, 125.

<sup>478</sup>My own translation.

paucis et ualde paucis ulla *appareret*”,<sup>479</sup> or “While the memory of the calamities and slaughters they had suffered was still fresh, kings, priests, private individuals, and great men [each kept their proper order]. But when they died and another generation succeeded, who knew nothing of those times of trouble, and had experienced only the present peaceful state of things, then all principles of truth and justice were shattered and destroyed to such an extent that I will not say that no trace of them remained, but that not even any memory of them remained, except in a few—and they were very few”.<sup>480</sup> In this passage, Bede establishes the connection between “*memoria*” and order through emphasizing the maintenance of “*ordo*”, or “proper order”; or as Augustine said, “each its proper place”, and the existence of “peaceful order”—what Augustine would have called “the tranquility of order”. By remembering disaster, order may be held; in other words, true ordered peace in the temporal world cannot exist in a vacuum, much like light cannot exist without darkness, known without unknown, good without evil. Bede indicates a corollary between the Britons’ collective memory, which fails, and his own text, the *Historia*, which is a memory of his nation’s past, and which he hopes will be preserved. By remembering past “*calamitas*”, or what might be called a time of total Christian *disunification*, Bede seems to say, we can ensure present and future Christian unification. He is not arguing that the entire secular world can exist in peace, but he *is* arguing that Christians, unified with one another, can and should live in ordered peace through the mechanisms of remembering and modeling.

Each of these examples of Christian unification and *disunification* underscores the significance of Christian fellowship in this world and the next that Bede promotes throughout his *Historia*. Additional evidence of this promotion, and thus further

---

<sup>479</sup>Plummer, Bk. I, Ch. 22, 41-42.

<sup>480</sup>Campbell, 37.

evidence for an advocacy of ordered peace, is the narrative strand of language, fluency and translation in Bede's text. With regard to Christian *disunification*, the *Historia* offers two linguistic metaphors of disorder. In the first, a description near the beginning of the text, Bede identifies one Irish tribe as being "a quo uidelicet duce usque hodie Dalreudini uocantur, nam lingua eorum daal partem significat",<sup>481</sup> or "they are to this day called Dalreudini from the name of their leader, for in their language *daal* means "a part".<sup>482</sup> Bede does not say, in this passage, whether or not the Dalreudians are Christian, but because their identity is defined by virtue of their difference from other tribes, and because their territory exists separately from the Picts "uel amicitia uel ferro",<sup>483</sup> or "either by means of friendship or the weapon",<sup>484</sup> the Dalreudians live firmly in the world of temporal partition and *disunity*. On a different note, but still in the realm of linguistic disorder, Bede relates the tale of Gregory encountering the English slave boys. When the Pope asks the boys' about the nature of their origin, they say that they are from "Deira". As Bede writes, "At ille: 'Bene,' inquit, 'Deiri; de ira eruti, et ad misericordiam Christi uocati'".<sup>485</sup> In other words, Gregory, impressed, replies, "Rightly so [...] Deirans; withdrawn from ire and called to Christ's mercy".<sup>486</sup> This stress on division, "from ire or wrath", is further exacerbated by a linguistic metaphor of Christian unification that immediately follows Gregory's resolution to see the boys as called "ad misericordiam Christi", or "to Christ's mercy". He asks them the name of their ruler, and the boys answer, "Aelle". Bede writes, "At ille adludens ad nomen ait: 'Alleluia, laudem Dei Creatoris illis in partibus oportet cantari'".<sup>487</sup> "[Gregory] said, playing on the name, 'Alleluia! ought to

---

<sup>481</sup>Plummer, Bk. I, Ch. 1, 12.

<sup>482</sup>Campbell, 8.

<sup>483</sup>Plummer, Bk. I, Ch. 1, 12.

<sup>484</sup>My own translation.

<sup>485</sup>Plummer, Bk. II, Ch. 1, 80.

<sup>486</sup>Campbell, 66.

<sup>487</sup>Plummer, Bk. II, Ch. 1, 80.

be sung in those parts in praise of God the Creator”.<sup>488</sup> With a few sentences, Gregory appropriates England from a divisive, temporal world entity into the larger context of Christian geography and history. It will be a land in which “Alleluia” is sung “in praise of God the Creator”, and as a result, its subjects will earn Christian citizenship.

The theme of language as a force of separation in the *Historia* exists in forms other than linguistic metaphor. The issues of translation and understanding hover over all the ethnic groups of the British Isles, and Bede later underscores the resolution that mistranslation and misunderstanding find in the universal language of the Church, Latin. When the West Saxon King Coenwalh appoints a bishop, Agilbert from Gaul, he is at first pleased with Agilbert’s work. But time lessens Coenwalh’s satisfaction, which Bede explains as follows:

Tandem rex, qui Saxonum tantum linguam nouerat, pertaesus barbarae loquellae, subintroducxit in prouinciam alium suae linguae episcopum, uocabulo Uini, et ipsum in Gallia ordinatum; diuidensque in duas parrochias prouinciam, huic in ciuitate Uenta, quae a gente Saxonum Uintancæstir appellatur, sedem episcopatus tribuit; unde offensus grauitur Agilberctus, quod haec ipso inconsulto ageret rex, rediit Galliam, et accepto episcopatu Parisiacaе ciuitatis, ibidem senex ac plenus dierum obiit.<sup>489</sup>

[At length, the king, who understood only the Saxon language, grew weary of Agilberht’s barbarous speech and secretly brought into the kingdom another bishop, Wine, who spoke his own language. He also had been ordained in Gaul. The king divided the kingdom into two dioceses and gave Wine an Episcopal see in the city of Venta, which is called Winchester by the Saxon people. Agilberht was therefore greatly offended because the king had done this without consulting him. He returned to Gaul, accepted the bishopric of the city of Paris, and died there an old man, full of days.]<sup>490</sup>

---

<sup>488</sup>Campbell, 66.

<sup>489</sup>Plummer, Bk. III, Ch. 7, 140-141.

<sup>490</sup>Campbell, 122.

The fact that Coenwalh maintained Agilbert for so long indicates that he must have had some sense of what Agilbert was saying, as growing “weary” of “barbarous speech” is not the same as total incomprehension. But this idea of partial understanding, of a general but not an exact grasp of language, opposes the resolute precision that a strong, unshakable Christian faith requires. Coenwalh’s separation of the kingdom into two dioceses exacerbates a sense of incomplete fellowship in *this* fellowship, and Agilbert’s return to Paris further illuminates Coenwalh’s failure to overcome secular world divisions.<sup>491</sup> As a result, partial understanding of language, or incomplete translation, contributes to the sense of disordered living, and subsequent Christian *disunity*, in the *Historia*. When Bede relates the tale of Cædmon, and explains that he cannot reproduce the poet’s words verbatim, because “neque enim possunt carmina, quamuis optime composita, ex alia in aliam linguam ad uerbum sine detrimento sui decoris ac dignitatis transferri”,<sup>492</sup> or “for verses, though never so well composed, cannot be literally translated out of one language into another, without losing much of their beauty and loftiness”,<sup>493</sup> he may be read as speaking metaphorically about the inability of Christians to enjoy true, full fellowship without a commitment to transcending ethnic and linguistic identity.

In contrast, Bede provides an intriguing example of the acquisition of language through subsequent Christian fellowship in the vignette of the dumb youth and Bishop John. He writes as follows:

Erat autem in villa non longe posita quidam adulescens mutus, episcopo notus, nam saepius ante illum percipiendae elimosynae gratia venire consueuerat, qui ne unum quidem sermonem umquam profari poterat; sed et scabiem tantam ac furfures habebat in capite, ut nil umquam capillorum

---

<sup>491</sup>Bede passes over the question of whether or not it is even possible, much less permissible, for a king to divide a bishopric in half—once again, his silence alludes to different interpretations as to the legitimacy of Coenwahl’s division.

<sup>492</sup>Plummer, Bk. IV, Ch. 22 (24), 260.

<sup>493</sup>Campbell, 228.

ei in superiore parte capitis nasci valeret, tantum in circuitu horridi crines stare videbantur. Hunc ergo adduci praecipit episcopus, et ei in conseptis eiusdem mansionis paruum tugurium fieri, in quo manens cotidianam ab eis stipem acciperet. Cumque una quadragesimae esset impleta septimana, sequente dominica iussit ad se intrare pauperem, ingresso linguam proferre ex ore, ac sibi ostendere iussit; et adprehendens eum de mento, signum sanctae cruces linguae eius inpressit, quam signatam revocare in os, et loqui illum praecepit: ‘Dicito,’ inquit, ‘aliquod verbum, dicito gae,’ quod est lingua Anglorum verbum adfirmandi et consentiendi, id est, etiam. Dixit ille statim, soluto vinculo linguae, quod iussus erat. Addidit episcopus nomina litterarum: ‘Dicito A’; dixit ille A. ‘Dicito B’; dixit ille et hoc. Cumque singula litterarum nomina dicente episcopo responderet, addidit et syllabas ac verba dicenda illi proponere. Et cum in omnibus consequenter responderet, praecepit eum sententias longiores dicere, et fecit; neque ultra cessavit tota die illa et nocte sequente, quantum vigilare potuit, ut ferunt, qui praesentes fuere, loqui aliquid, et arcane suae cogitationis ac voluntatis, quod numquam antea potuit, aliis ostendere; in similitudinem illius diu claudi, qui curatus ab apostolis Petro et Iohanne, exiliens stetit, et ambulabat; et intravit cum illis in templum, ambulans, et exiliens, et laudans Dominum; gaudens nimirum uti officio pedum, quo tanto erat tempore destitutus. Cuius sanitati congaudens episcopus praecepit medico etiam sanandae scabredini capitis eius curam adhibere.

Fecit, ut iusserat, et iuvante benedictione ac precibus antistitis, nata est cum sanitate cutis venusta species capillorum, factusque est iuuenis limpidus uultu et loquella promptus, capillis pulcherrime crispis, qui ante fuerat deformis, pauper, et mutus. Sicque de percepta laetatus sospitate, offerente etiam ei episcopo, ut in sua familia manendi locum acciperet, magis domum reverses est.<sup>494</sup>

[There was in a village not far off a certain dumb youth, who was known to the bishop, for he was accustomed often to come into his presence to receive alms. He had never been able to speak so much as a single word. Besides, he had so much scab and scurf on his head that no hair could ever grow on the crown; all there was to be seen was a circle of bristly hairs sticking up. So the bishop caused him to be brought, and a little cottage to be made for him within the enclosure of the dwelling, in which he might live and receive a daily allowance from them. After one week of Lent, he ordered the poor man to come in to him the next Sunday; and when he came, he told him to put his tongue out of his mouth and show it to him. Then, taking hold of his chin, he made the sign of the holy cross on his tongue; and when he had done this, he told him to take it back into his mouth and to speak to him. ‘Say any word,’ he said; ‘say *gae*’ (which in English is the word of affirmation and consent, that is, ‘yes’). The youth’s tongue was immediately loosened, and he spoke as he was told. The

---

<sup>494</sup>Plummer, Bk. V, Ch. 2, 283-284.

bishop also said the names of the letters: ‘Say A’; he said A. ‘Say B;’ and he said that also. When he had named all the letters after the bishop, John went on to put syllables and words to him to say. And, when the youth replied properly to everything, he told him to say longer sentences, and he did. Those who were present say that all day and the following night, so long as the youth could keep awake, he did not stop talking and expressing his private thoughts and will to others, which he had never been able to do before. He was like that man who had long been crippled who, when he was healed by the Apostles Peter and John, leaped up and leaping and praising God, rejoicing greatly to have the use of his feet when he had been without it for such a long time. The bishop rejoiced at his cure and told a physician to take in hand the cure of his scabbed head.

The physician did as he had been told and, with the help of the bishop’s blessing and prayers, a beautiful kind of hair grew, and the skin became healthy. And so the youth became clear in countenance, ready in speech, and with a very beautiful head of curly hair, when before he was deformed, poor, and mute. He was happy that he had gained health, and the bishop also gave him the opportunity to accept a permanent place in his household, but he preferred to return home.]<sup>495</sup>

The “*adulescens mutus*”, or “dumb youth”, earns the ability to speak through obeying Bishop John’s authority—i.e. moving near the bishop, and speaking when instructed—and through having such a devout figure as his teacher. Indeed, Bede implies that it is John’s knowledge of and adherence to the Christian faith that allows the bishop to perform this miracle. Furthermore, the act of blessing the youth’s tongue almost serves as a sort of baptism by proxy; the bishop offers the sign of the cross, and the youth first answers “*gae*”, or “yes”, thus accepting the blessing and his initiation both into language and a more active Christian faith. Interestingly, whether or not the youth has ever actually been baptized is never addressed; likewise whether or not a “*medicus*” or “physician” has ever attempted to heal the youth’s head is not discussed. As a result, it is only once the youth can actively participate as a Christian through language, and thus enhance his spiritual condition, that a physician is either successful, or first permitted to be successful, in treating his physical condition.

---

<sup>495</sup>Campbell, 250-251.

In other words, rock-solid faith expresses itself through fluency in Latin, the language of the Church, and primary identification as a Christian, like Alban's answer to the interrogator. The Anglo-Saxon bishops, for example, in their attempt to persuade the Irish to abandon their non-canonical observation of Easter, can be seen to argue implicitly that language and ethnic identity are the ultimate harbingers of a full faith. As they tell the Irish bishops, "*omnem orbem, quacumque Christi ecclesia diffusa est, per diuersas nationes et linguas, uno ac non diuerso temporis ordine geri conperimus*,"<sup>496</sup> or "[throughout the whole world] the faith of Christ has been spread through various races and tongues; all make use of one single way of determining the date of Easter".<sup>497</sup> In this one line, the Anglo-Saxon bishops suggest that on the staircase of Christian practice, the step of canonical observation is lower than the step of forsaking national and linguistic identity in favor of purely Christian ones. In fact, Bede seems to say through these bishops, maintaining Latin fluency and a Christian, as opposed to an ethnic, identity, might not be possible—one can still be a good Christian, if not the best Christian, without those signifiers, but one must practice canonical observation. Considering that this text is intended for laymen, this position is particularly pragmatic, although Bede still allows himself to hold up individuals who have achieved this pinnacle of Christian identity and language. When writing about Abbott Albinas, Bede praises him because "*Latinam uero non minus quam Anglorum, quae sibi naturalis est, nouerit*,"<sup>498</sup> or "he in truth knew Latin no less [than any] of the English, whose native [tongue, English, it also was] to him".<sup>499</sup>

Much of the foundation for Bede's implicit advocacy of a life of ordered peace

---

<sup>496</sup>Plummer, Bk. III, Ch. 25, 184.

<sup>497</sup>Campbell, 161.

<sup>498</sup>Plummer, Bk. V, Ch. 20, 331. The syntax of this clause is a little misleading; "*Anglorum*" is the genitive plural of "*Angli*", or the Angles. In other words, Bede is saying that Albinas knows Latin no less than any of the Angles, as opposed to no less than the English language.

<sup>499</sup>My own translation.

and for Christian unity, whether through examples of successful historical acts of unification in Anglo-Saxon England or ones of linguistic *dis*unification, can be seen in his inclusion and depiction of Church Fathers like Gregory and important Church figures like Aidan. As A.T. Thacker writes, “it is to Gregory and his successors at Rome, more than to Canterbury, that Bede depicts the English Church as looking for guidance”,<sup>500</sup> and the articulation of peace as order in the *Historia* emerges, of course, in Bede’s excerpts of Gregory’s letters. Bede’s discussions of these figures, and the excerpted works that he chooses to include, tend to emphasize moderation, balance, and order for the greater goal of Christian triumph. In his missive to Augustine of Canterbury, for example, Gregory advises, “nam in ipsis rebus spiritalibus, ut sapienter et mature disponantur, exemplum trahere a rebus etiam carnalibus possumus”,<sup>501</sup> or “in spiritual things, we may take example by temporal things, so that they may be wisely and discreetly conducted”.<sup>502</sup> Gregory’s letter is an invitation to a cautiously orchestrated dance between secular and sacred, and his emphasis on careful and wise arrangement resonates throughout the piece. As he explains to Augustine of Canterbury, “sicut saepe irascendo culpas insequimur, et tranquillitatem in nobis animi perturbamus; et cum rectum sit, quod agitur, non est tamen adprobabile, quod in eo animus perturbatur”,<sup>503</sup> or “just as often we pursue faults by being angry, and thus disturb the peace in our own minds; and even though that which is done is proper, it is nevertheless not worthwhile, that the mind be troubled in that way”.<sup>504</sup> Gregory’s advice to Augustine echoes Augustine of Hippo’s rumination on the “tranquility of order”—“peace between men is an ordered agreement of mind with mind”—and the

---

<sup>500</sup>A.T. Thacker, “Bede and the Irish”, in *Beda Venerabilis: Historian, Monk & Northumbrian*, ed. L.A.J.R. Houwen and A.A. MacDonald, 31-59 (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1996), 35.

<sup>501</sup>Plummer, Bk. I, Ch. 27, 52.

<sup>502</sup>Campbell, 47.

<sup>503</sup>Plummer, Bk. I, Ch. 27, 58.

<sup>504</sup>My own translation.

Pope's letter counsels an interior ordering, to maintain "peace of mind", in order to effect an exterior ordering, "peace between men" through a mindful "ordered agreement".

Similarly, when detailing the life of Aidan, Bede is careful to note the significance of his ministry to pagans and to Christians. Bede writes, "*si infideles essent, inuitaret; uel si fideles, in ipsa eos fide confortaret, atque ad elimosynas operumque bonorum exsecutionem, et uerbis excitaret et factis*",<sup>505</sup> or "[he would] either invite them to embrace the mystery of the faith if they were infidels, or else, if they were believers, strengthen them in the faith and urge them by words and deeds to almsgiving and to perform good works".<sup>506</sup> Aidan is precise in his recommendations—the heathen requires on task, the Christian the next—and his ministry emerges like a staircase towards the kingdom of heaven, that eternal reward. Bede notes that Aidan also mandated that those "who walked with him, whether monks or lay-folk" participated in the daily order by which he lived his peaceful life. He assigned these followers some task, whether it was, "*meditari [...] legendis scripturis, aut psalmis discendis operam dare*",<sup>507</sup> or "to study [...] either in reading the Scriptures or in learning psalms".<sup>508</sup> Similarly, in his description of Abbess Hilda, Bede writes that when she arrived at Streanaeshalch monastery, she immediately "*quibus prius monasterium, etiam hoc disciplinis uitae regularis instituit*", or "put this monastery under the same regular discipline of life as she had done the other",<sup>509</sup> where "*regularis uitae institutioni multum intenta praeesset*",<sup>510</sup> or "[she had been] wholly intent upon establishing a regular life".<sup>511</sup> This reiteration of "regular" may be

---

<sup>505</sup>Plummer, Bk. III, Ch. 5, 136.

<sup>506</sup>Campbell, 118.

<sup>507</sup>Plummer, Bk. III Ch. 5, 136.

<sup>508</sup>Campbell, 118.

<sup>509</sup>Campbell, 222-223.

<sup>510</sup>Plummer, Bk. IV, Ch. 21 (23), 254.

<sup>511</sup>Campbell, 222.

seen as perhaps both indicative of living by the Rule and as a substitutive use of “order”; as Abbess, Hilda’s duties included overseeing and maintaining the ordered daily of those under her direction. Furthermore, by instituting and adhering to the order of her routine, Hilda “quidem multam ibi quoque iustitiae, pietatis, et castimoniae, ceterarumque uirtutum, sed maxime pacis et caritatis custodiam docuit”,<sup>512</sup> or “taught the strict observance of justice, piety, chastity, and the other virtues, and particularly those of peace and charity”.<sup>513</sup> Hilda’s instruction resulted in a Christian fellowship that can be called unification; as Bede notes, “tantae autem erat ipsa prudentiae, ut non solum mediocres quique in necessitatibus suis, sed etiam reges ac principes nonnumquam ab ea consilium quaerent, et inuenirent”,<sup>514</sup> or “her prudence was so great that not only people [of the middling rank] but even kings and princes sometimes asked and received her advice in their time of need”.<sup>515</sup> In other words, Hilda created a community of Christian followers that transcended social temporal world boundaries.

An emphasis on “peace and unity” emerges in the texts of these Church figures as well, often as an expression of the prospective state of Christianity in the present world. When the Archbishop Laurence tries to persuade the Irish bishops to observe the canonical Easter, he “scripsit cum coepiscopis suis exhortatoriam ad eos epistulam, obsecrans eos et contestans unitatem pacis et catholicae obseruationis cum ea, quae toto orbe diffusa est, ecclesia Christi tenere”,<sup>516</sup> or writes them a letter, “in which he begged and adjured them to stay united in peace and in Catholic observance with the Church of Christ, which is spread over the whole world”.<sup>517</sup> Laurence’s focus on the

---

<sup>512</sup>Plummer, Bk. IV, Ch. 21 (23), 254.

<sup>513</sup>Campbell, 223.

<sup>514</sup>Plummer, Bk. IV, Ch. 21 (23), 254.

<sup>515</sup>Campbell, 223.

<sup>516</sup>Plummer, Bk. II, Ch. 4, 87.

<sup>517</sup>Campbell, 72.

Church “*quae toto orbe diffusa est*”, or “spread over the whole world” suggests an attempt perhaps to mirror the “*unitatem pacis*”, or the “unity of peace” of the eternal world through the shared practice of “*catholicus observatio*”, or “catholic observance”. Similarly, after Adamnan manages to convince many of the Irish to adopt the canonical observation of Easter, Bede writes of the monk posthumously, “*Diuina utique gratia disponente, ut uir unitatis ac pacis studiosissimus*”,<sup>518</sup> or “the Divine Grace ordained it, as he was a [most zealous man of unity and peace]”.<sup>519</sup> Adamnan, through establishing the order of canonical practice, helps develop a temporal world reflection of the “*unitas ac pax*”, or “unity and peace” that all Christians should find in everlasting life. Indeed, recognizing Adamnan’s achievement in this way involves also recognizing that processes of ordered peace lead to Christian unification throughout the *Historia*.

A small point raised in one of Gregory’s letters and included in the *Historia* not only edifies the Pope’s impact on Bede’s text, but also alerts the reader to the role of sin in Christian unification and *disunification*. Gregory, in his missive to Augustine of Canterbury, details the difference between committing a sin knowingly versus committing one unknowingly. Gregory is writing about Christian men who marry their stepmothers or sisters-in-law, and he acknowledges that Christians who committed this sin while still pagan may be forgiven. However, he warns, “*omnes autem, qui ad fidem ueniunt, admonendi sunt, ne tale aliquid audeant perpetrare. Siqui autem perpetraverint, corporis et sanguinis Domini communione priuandi sunt; quia, sicut in his, qui per ignorantiam fecerunt, culpa aliquatenus toleranda est, ita in his fortiter insequenda, qui non metuunt sciendo peccare*”,<sup>520</sup> or “but all who come to the faith are to be admonished not to dare to do such things. And if any shall be guilty of

---

<sup>518</sup>Plummer, Bk. V, Ch. 15, 316.

<sup>519</sup>Campbell, 279.

<sup>520</sup>Plummer, Bk. I, Ch. 27, 51-52.

them, they are not to be excluded from the communion of the body and blood of Christ. First, as the offense is to be tolerated, in some measure, in those who committed it through ignorance, so it is strenuously to be prosecuted in those who did not fear to sin knowingly”.<sup>521</sup> In this passage, Gregory presents an ordered understanding of sin that details categories of both offence and consequence. If a heathen, in other words, commits the sin of incestuous marriage, but “ad fidem ueniunt”, or “comes to the Faith” and abides by his new knowledge, then he may remain in communion with other Christians. But, if any Christian *knowingly* commits this sin, then he or she is to be barred, *disunified*, from other Christians through the profound denial of receiving the communion sacrament. Likewise, Bede echoes Gregory’s teaching in his description of the East Anglian King Redwald, who had been less sinful as an unknowing pagan than when he later acted as an apostate. As Bede writes, “posteriora peiora prioribus”,<sup>522</sup> or “what [came next] was worse than [what came before]”.<sup>523</sup>

Both Gregory’s precept and Bede’s commentary evoke Augustine’s writings on sin in his Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, and his definition complements his “tranquility of order” as well as Bede’s ordered peace. In detailing the stages of complete sin, Augustine writes, “Nam tria sunt quibus impletur peccatum; suggestione delectatione consensione”,<sup>524</sup> or “there are three things which go to complete sin: the suggestion of [it], the taking pleasure in [it], and the consenting to [it]”.<sup>525</sup> Gregory and Bede each recognize that pagans, by not being able to recognize the “suggestion” of sin, much less the pleasure in and consent to it, remain relatively blameless when compared to the knowing Christian who has been educated in the minutiae of sinful

---

<sup>521</sup>Campbell, 47.

<sup>522</sup>Plummer, Bk. II, Ch. 15, 116.

<sup>523</sup>Campbell, 99.

<sup>524</sup> Augustinus Hipponensis, De Sermone Domini in Monte, lib. 1, par. 34.

<sup>525</sup> Augustine, Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, 15.

behavior. Instead, Augustine's definition, ordered in three steps, provides another guideline by which Bede may evaluate Christians of the Anglo-Saxon past. An interesting parallel to both this definition and the distinction between pagan and Christian knowledge is Bede's depiction of the Irish monastery at Iona. The monastery, as would be expected, followed a non-canonical observance of Easter, *but*, Bede emphatically writes, "uerum quia gratis caritatis feruere non omiserunt",<sup>526</sup> or "in truth they did not neglect to be fervent in the grace of charity",<sup>527</sup> and as a result, they do not suffer the consequences that other violators of God's laws receive. By emphasizing their choice to be "gratis caritatis feruere", or "fervent in the grace of charity", Bede aligns them, in a sense, with ignorant pagans who maintain fellowship with other Christians once they become knowing members of the faith. Indeed, because the Ionans are corrected in their inaccurate observance before the conclusion of the *Historia*, this parallel is further underscored. Perhaps an Augustinian interpretation of later knowledge and correction would elucidate Bede's treatment of the Ionans even more. In *Contra Faustum*, Augustine writes as follows:

Illa discussio consultaque illa aeterna lege reperio non debuisse hominem ab illo, qui nullam ordinatam potestatem gerebat, quamuis iniuriosum et inprobum occidi. Verumtamen animae virtutis capaces ac fertiles praemittunt saepe vitia, quibus hoc ipsum indicent, cui virtuti sint potissimum adcommodatae, si fuerint praeceptis excultae [...] resecandum hoc vitium vel eradicandum, sed tamen tam magnum cor tamquam terra frugibus, ita ferendis virtutibus excolendum.<sup>528</sup>

[In minds where great virtue is to come, there is often an early crop of vices, in which we may still discern a disposition for some particular virtue, which will come when the mind is duly cultivated [...] here was evil to be subdued or rooted out; but the heart with such capacities needed

---

<sup>526</sup>Plummer, Bk. III, Ch. 4, 135.

<sup>527</sup>Campbell, 127.

<sup>528</sup>Augustinus Hipponensis, *Contra Faustum*, ed. Joseph Zyca, CSEL 35 (Vienna: Tempsky, 1891), lib. 22, par. 70.

only, like good soil, to be cultivated to make it fruitful in virtue.]<sup>529</sup>

The center at Iona produced many of the figures whom Bede praises in the Historia, and Bede may have decided that a monastery “with such capacities needed only, like good soil, to be cultivated to make it fruitful in virtue”; in this case, “cultivated” by Roman-trained personnel who would make Iona “fruitful in virtue”, as opposed to “fruitful” in sin through knowing, willful non-canonical observance.

At no point in the Historia does Bede state directly that a life lived in ordered peace will lead to temporal world Christian unification, nor to the eternal kingdom in the world beyond. He does not articulate the steps necessary for ordered peace, nor does he argue straightforwardly that living in unity with other Christians guarantees citizenship in heaven. What Bede *does* do is develop narrative patterns, whose cumulative effect suggests these conclusions. Given Bede’s near-certain familiarity with the Augustinian concept of the “tranquility of order”, and given his adherence to some type of monastic *regula*, the argument that living in ordered peace leads to Christian unification and, ultimately, the kingdom of heaven, is not unreasonable. Historical vignettes, linguistic metaphors, an inclusion of the Church Fathers, and an ordered understanding of sin also edify this argument. Indeed, one of the more powerful maxims that Bede includes in the Historia may underscore this thesis as well. As the Northumbrian monk writes, under the rule of King Edwin, “tanta autem eo tempore pax in Brittaniam [...] fuisse perhibetur, ut, sicut usque hodie in proverbio dicitur, etiam si mulier una cum recens nato paruulo uellet totam perambulare insulam a mari ad mare, nullo se ledente ualeret”,<sup>530</sup> or there was “such peace [...] that, as is

---

<sup>529</sup>Augustine of Hippo, Reply to Faustus the Manichean (Contra Faustum Manichaeum), trans. Richard Stothert, in A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, ed. Philip Schaff, vol. iv (Buffalo, NY: The Christian Literature Company, 1887), 299. All Modern English translations of Contra Faustum refer to this edition unless otherwise noted.

<sup>530</sup>Plummer, Bk. II, Ch. 16, 118.

still said in a proverb today, if a woman with her newborn baby had wished to walk across the island from sea to sea she could have done so, and no one would have harmed her”.<sup>531</sup> The pious convert King Edwin so loved his faith and his people that Northumbria, in Bede’s Historia, was united in Christianity, and the land achieved a state of peace so ordered that it defied man-made laws designed to protect the powerless. In that statement, Edwin’s land is the heavenly city, the eternal reward, made earthly for a moment in Bede’s narrative. Through committed, shared belief, he seems to say, we can order our days in His peace.

---

<sup>531</sup>Campbell, 101.

## Conclusion

Throughout the Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum, Bede minimizes and elides conflict through a sustained “rhetoric of reticence”, which structures his underlying narrative objective: to promote Anglo-Saxon Christian unity in the secular, temporal world, so that salvation may be realized in the eternal one. Bede never expressly states that a commitment to faith and unification are vital to his Anglo-Saxon audience, but the *signa* that reveal this essential argument lie throughout his text in the form of parable-like vignettes, a minimization of ethnic divisiveness, muted depictions of Christian discord, and an emphasis on ordered living.

Bede’s monastic upbringing and adult life perhaps most impacted his relationship with conflict by allowing him to live close to a state of Christian *perfectio*; in other words, in a world predicated on subordinating oneself to the authority of God, complete with the rankings and regulations necessary to such a world. The need for hierarchies, about which Gregory somewhat anxiously spoke in his letter to the bishops of Gaul,<sup>532</sup> finds some resonance in Bede’s Historia, in which the unpredictability of events, personalities, languages, and beliefs often results in chaos. The *regula* that maintained order and mandated unification with one’s fellow monks at Jarrow had no counterpart in the secular world, and while the Historia does

---

<sup>532</sup>“[A]d hoc divinae dispensationis provisio gradus et diversos constituit ordines esse distinctos, ut, dum reverentiam minores potioribus exhiberent et potiores minoribus dilectionem impenderent, una concordiae fieret ex diversitate contextio et recte officiorum gereretur administratio singulorum. Neque enim universitas alia poterat ratione subsistere, nisi huiusmodi magnus eam differentiae ordo servaret”. Gregorius Magnus, S. Gregorii Magni Registrum epistularum libri, ed. D. Norberg, CCSL 140 (Turnholt: Brepols, 1982), lib.: 5, epist: 59, col. 785-786.

“The provision of the divine dispensation decided that there should be different grades and distinct orders for this reason, that while inferiors show reverence to the more powerful, and the more powerful bestow love on their inferiors, one harmonious concord may be created out of diversity, and the administration of individual offices may be properly carried out. For the universality of the Church could not survive unless a great system of different ranks preserved it”. Gregory the Great, The Letters of Gregory the Great, Vol. II, trans. John R.C. Martyn (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2004), Letter 5.59, pp. 394-395.

not attempt to propose a rule for that world, it does suggest “*pax dispositus*”, or “ordered peace”, as an alternative to secular world organization.

The crux of Bede’s implicit advocacy, of course, is “suggestion” itself—throughout his text Bede minimizes, elides, nudges, gestures, and alludes to entire events, outcomes, reactions, and emotions that are never realized in straightforward prose. Likewise, Bede often hints at important ideas and figures without clearly recognizing them; Augustine’s ghost seems to hover around Bede’s allusions to Christian history, the concealment of details (or truth), the importance of *signa* in a didactic text, and the “tranquility of order”. The development of these rhetorical techniques—reticence, elision, suggestion—throughout the Historia enhances the overall narrative objective of Christian unity, however it is the reader or listener who must sense those Augustinian allusions, ascertain the true significance of the Council at Whitby, and determine why Alban questions, “*Quid ad te pertinet, qua sim stirpe genitus?*” And in order to sense, ascertain, and determine, Bede’s audience must commit itself to interpreting these *signa*, at which, according to Bede, success is only really possible if one is committed to true Christian faith and the universal Church.

Bede’s emphasis on adhering to the true Christian faith, and the significance of Anglo-Saxon unity with the universal Church, has been repeatedly affirmed from various analytical standpoints throughout this dissertation. The Historia’s puzzling episodes and chapters provide Bede’s readers and listeners with interpretive challenges whose content often underscores the importance of Christian unity, and whose interpretive difficulty exercises the skills necessary for Anglo-Saxons to understand, choose, and act as good Christians in the secular world. At the same time, Bede minimizes ethnic divisiveness in his text so that the focus of the Historia lies on a Christian/non-Christian narrative binary. Yet even with this potentially polarizing emphasis, Bede remains notably discrete at moments of potential conflict; instead, he

only at times underscores violence that he sees as particular evidence of God's will, for example the defeat of apostate Anglo-Saxon leaders. Indeed, for the majority of his text, Bede maintains a conspicuous silence concerning incidents and personalities in Anglo-Saxon history that very well could have been contentious and violent. Yet Bede attempts instead to focus his readers and listeners on the types of choices and ways of living that might help realize Christian unity in the secular world, and thus possibly ensure entrance to heaven in the eternal one.

That Bede fulfills the *Historia*'s didactic intent by providing "bonis bona", and on the rare occasion "mala pravis",<sup>533</sup> is clear—he depicts historical events throughout Anglo-Saxon England as the results of clear choices whose ramifications are easily visible to his audience. Yet the ways in which Bede shades and presents these events, along with the characters that participate in them, require additional examination. Assessing his "rhetoric of reticence" is one such method, but future approaches to this text might include analyzing whether or not he maintains a similar rhetoric in his other texts, to what extent Augustine or Gregory maintain such a rhetoric in their texts (and whether or not this may have influenced Bede), and if the *litotes* often prevalent early Germanic poetry, some of which may be contemporaneous to the *Historia*, finds a resonance in Bede's textual corpus. Further studies of Bede's exposure to secular Anglo-Saxon texts in general would make for interesting scholarship, some of which might illuminate his rhetorical methods as well.

---

<sup>533</sup>“Siue enim historia de bonis bona referat, ad imitandum bonum auditor sollicitus instigatur; seu mala commemoret de prauis, nihilominus religiosus ac pius auditor siue lector deuotando quod noxium est ac peruersum, ipse sollertius ad exsequenda ea, quae bona ac Deo digna esse cognouerit, accenditur”. Bede, *Historiam Ecclesiasticam Gentis Anglorum Historiam Abbatum Epistolam ad Ecgbertum, una cum Historia Abbatum Auctore Anonymo*, ed. Charles Plummer, Vol. I (Oxford: Clarendon, 1896), Praefatio, 5.

“For if history relates good things of good men then the [concerned listener] is incited to imitate that which is good. If it records evil things of wicked men, nevertheless, the religious and pious hearer or reader in shunning that which is hurtful or perverse is fired more earnestly to perform those things which he has learned to be good and worthy of God”. Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People and Other Selections*, ed. James Campbell (New York: Washington Square Press, 1968), 3.

It is my belief, however, at the end of this study, that Bede ultimately offers his Historia as a response to that passage in John 16, in which Jesus says to his disciples, “haec in proverbii locutus sum vobis venit hora cum iam non in proverbii loquar vobis sed palam de Patre adnuntiabo vobis”,<sup>534</sup> or “these things I have spoken to you in proverbs. The hour cometh, when I will no more speak to you in proverbs, but will show you plainly of the Father”.<sup>535</sup> Neither Bede nor his audience had yet the privilege of Jesus’ “plain” speaking, but in anticipation of that time, Bede seems to have delighted in the rhetorical and interpretive possibilities that *proverbi* allow. As a result, the Historia is likewise an invitation by Bede to narrative unraveling, to enjoy the delight of possibilities, until “venit hora”, or “the hour comes”.

---

<sup>534</sup>Biblia Sacra: Iuxta Vulgatam Versionem, altera emendata edition (Stuttgart: Wurttembergische Bibelanstalt, 1975), s.v. John 16:25.

<sup>535</sup>The Holy Bible: Douay Rheims Version, ed. James Gibbons, trans. Richard Challoner (Rockford, IL: Tan Books, 1989), s.v. John 16:25.

## APPENDIX ONE

### Anglo-Saxon and Old Norse Parallels

In exploring the presence of non-violence in Bede's Historia Ecclesiastica, I have been fascinated by parallels to this presence in Old English and Old Norse texts. A formal comparison between these texts, however, seemed inappropriate for a couple of important reasons. First, the Old English textual corpus is a small one to compare to Bede, and issues such as authorship and date of composition further complicate a potential formal comparison. Likewise, the Old Norse textual corpus, while larger, was mostly composed in the thirteenth century, and this significant gap thus weakens the legitimacy of a formal comparison as well. Second, it would be difficult to focus such an analysis given that both the Old English and Old Norse secular texts are largely about war, while Bede's Historia is not. However, a judicious comparison of the parallels between these texts seems reasonable, and as a result, I have chosen to undertake one in two broadly focused appendices.

The material in this first appendix underscores some of the striking differences between Bede's "rhetoric of reticence" when describing conflict in his Historia, and the straightforward narratives concerning conflict in a few roughly contemporaneous Anglo-Saxon and Old Norse texts. It includes stylistic parallels, organized thematically by dissertation chapter, found in Anglo-Saxon heroic poetry and homilies, and in an Old Norse Eddic poem. Much of this work arose in tandem with my examination of the Historia—a particular event or scene in Bede's text would spark a connection to a similar narrative trope or depiction in a particular poem or homily. I have chosen the term "parallels" to describe those sparked connections because the differences in language and context between these texts precludes a term like "corollary", which suggests a possibly deliberate intersection between the texts as

opposed to a more independent similarity. These “parallels” concern rhetorical forms, particular terminology, and Germanic literary representations of narrative violence, which reflect the fact that these texts were created in the same general time period and geographical location, and share at least broadly a common cultural tradition.

The context for each of the following examinations is the chapter by which it is organized; for example, the parallels for Chapter One, narrative understatement and the “rhetoric of reticence” in Beowulf, may be understood in light of my argument concerning Bede’s parable-like narrative. This appendix is by no means comprehensive; as I have noted, it does not attempt to provide a survey of all Anglo-Saxon and Old Norse literature as it pertains to Bede. Instead, the appendix is meant to demonstrate some of the parallels that I found in these texts as I attempted to prove a thesis concerning treatments of conflict in Bede’s Historia.

## I

### Chapter One Parallels

Beowulf is an Anglo-Saxon epic poem which, whether or not it was composed around the time of Bede’s eighth century Historia, nonetheless reflects at least broadly the vernacular literary tradition to which Bede may have been exposed. The poem is nearly 3200 lines long, and it primarily concerns the Geatish hero Beowulf, who as a young man saves King Hrothgar and his Danes from two monsters, Grendel and Grendel’s mother, and who as an older man and Geatish leader dies saving his people from a dragon. Many books have been and will continue to be written about this remarkable poem, but in the first part of this appendix, I will just examine how Beowulfian idiom seems similar to Bede’s “rhetoric of reticence”. Just as Bede employs parable-like elements in the Historia, and thus places the onus of

interpretation on his readers and listeners in specific vignettes, the Beowulf poet also utilizes a similar “rhetoric of reticence” that assumes three forms: a “rhetoric of minimization”, a “rhetoric of absence”, and a “rhetoric of negativity”, the latter of which is usually coupled with the first two. Each of these requires the reader to pause and parse the exact meaning of what the poet is writing. Furthermore, these Beowulfian forms of the “rhetoric of reticence” often occur in depictions of gift-giving and receiving, praise, violence, and suffering.

From a more conventionally literary historical standpoint, the specific “rhetoric of reticence” inherent to Beowulf may accurately be identified as *litotes*, or the classical term for rhetorical understatement. In the context of this poem, as A. Leslie Harris explains in his comprehensive article on the scholarship of *litotes* in Beowulf, *litotes* is “all methods of achieving understatement”.<sup>536</sup> Harris continues as follows: “In Beowulf, as in most Old English poetry, the most common and most explicit *litotes* is by clear negation, the ‘denial of opposite’”.<sup>537</sup> The “denial of opposite” phrase which Harris cites comes from Frederick Bracher’s 1937 article on understatement in Old English poetry, in which he contends, “the common type of understatement in Old English is achieved by the use of a negation”.<sup>538</sup> R. Baird Shuman and H. Charles Hutchings also define *litotes* as understatement in their piece,<sup>539</sup> but they expand upon this definition in order to include a particular kind of Anglo-Saxon irony; as they write, “some authors have found a notable lack of irony in Anglo-Saxon literature. It would seem that they have overlooked the uses of negation. Understatement is characteristic of early literatures, and through it irony is

---

<sup>536</sup>A. Leslie Harris, “Litotes and Superlative in Beowulf” (English Studies 69, no. 1 (1988): 1-11), 2.

<sup>537</sup>Harris, “Litotes”, 2.

<sup>538</sup>Frederick Bracher, “Understatement in Old English Poetry” (PMLA 52, no. 4 (1937): 915-934), 915.

<sup>539</sup>R. Baird Shuman and H. Charles Hutchings, II, “The Un-Prefix: A Means of Germanic Irony in Beowulf” (Modern Philology 57, no. 4 (1960): 217-222), 217.

achieved”.<sup>540</sup> The “denial of opposite” demonstrated by much of the “negation” in Beowulf, and the almost formulaic alliterative and repetitive types of understatement that the epic poem likewise uses, are rarely found in Bede’s Historia, nor is a sense of irony, even as understood in this Anglo-Saxon poetic sense, ever really apparent. But the larger rhetorical patterns of minimization, absence, and negation exist in both texts, even if the means by which they are expressed are different.

Although it is improbable, perhaps a more general, shared emphasis on understatement exists in both Beowulf and the Historia because they are each ultimately the products of Anglo-Saxon culture (given that a case could also be made for the Historia being the product of a Latinate one instead). Two early scholars who posit the common origins of “Germanic” understatement might provide evidence for this possibility; one of them, Bracher, asserts, “since understatement is found in the early poetry of all the Germanic peoples, there is reason to assume that it was characteristic of that common Germanic poetry from which, presumably, the alliterative verse we know has descended”.<sup>541</sup> Could Bede, perhaps, be writing a text whose reticence might be “characteristic” of the vernacular literature of his *gens*? This explanation for his discretion seems unlikely, particularly because the Historia does not use *litotes* nearly as often as Beowulf. Lee Hollander, however, offers a broader, and thus more malleable interpretation of “Germanic litotes” in his article, “Litotes in Old Norse”; as he writes, “The ‘Germanic’ type of litotes [...] has been regarded by scholars as the concomitant of restraint and caution in the speaker”.<sup>542</sup> The Historia certainly demonstrates “the concomitant of restraint and caution”, yet this definition could fit other rhetorical terms than *litotes*, and does not express its essential meaning, that of understatement. As a result, while *litotes* provides an accurate

---

<sup>540</sup>Shuman and Hutchings, 222.

<sup>541</sup>Bracher, 934.

<sup>542</sup>Lee. M. Hollander, “Litotes in Old Norse” (PMLA 53, no. 1 (1938): 1-33), 1-2.

method by which understatement in Beowulf may be categorized, in comparison to Bede's Historia, the broader rhetorical forms of minimization, absence, and negation are ultimately more instructive.

The primary means by which the Beowulf poet maintains a “rhetoric of reticence” involves negative terminology, or the “denial of opposite”; in other words, usage of the term “no”, either adverbially, adjectively, or as part of a verbal compound. For example, at one point the poet emphasizes Grendel's inability to know and practice human custom and by using “negative” constructions. When Grendel is fighting Beowulf, Beowulf says, “nat he þara goda, þæt he me ongear slea”,<sup>543</sup> or “[Grendel] knows not of these [war] arts, to strike back at me [i.e. Beowulf]”.<sup>544</sup> While the “not” is inherent to the verb “nat”,<sup>545</sup> in this line, if one is not paying attention, then it is easy to skim through the second half without immediately recognizing that the “does not know” also applies to Grendel's inability to strike back. In other words, the negative circumlocution of this line impedes a more immediate, straightforward understanding of Grendel and his knowledge of fighting.

Scenes of gift-giving and receiving provide more fruitful examples of the first two forms of the “rhetoric of reticence” in combination with the “rhetoric of negativity”: the poet's “rhetoric of minimization” and the “rhetoric of absence”. At the beginning of the poem, when describing the funerary vessel for Scyld Scefing, the poet writes, “Nalæs hi hine læssan lacum teodan”,<sup>546</sup> or “they furnished him with no [less] gifts”,<sup>547</sup> and this rhetorically minimizes what must have been a considerable

---

<sup>543</sup>Frederick Klaeber, Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., ed. R.D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork, and John D. Niles, based on the 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), l. 681.

<sup>544</sup>Clark Hall, Beowulf, l. 681.

<sup>545</sup>“nat” is literally translated as “knows not”, from the verb “nytan”, which is formed by combining “ne” and “witan”. As Shuman and Hutchings explain, “negation in Beowulf is [often] achieved by the use of the participle *ne* in combination with a verb, contracted or uncontracted, to give such forms as *ne wæs* or *naes*, or with other parts of speech to give such contracted forms as *naefre* or *nefne*”, 218.

<sup>546</sup>Klaeber, l. 43.

<sup>547</sup>Clark Hall, Beowulf, l. 43.

amount of material tribute. This small narrative puzzle demands two things of the reader; first, that he or she wrestle with both “no” and a negative adjective, “less”, and second, that he or she figure out fairly quickly that “no less” means “a lot more” before the poet moves on to discussing Beowulf Scylding. Furthermore, in this instance the motivation for using “no less” instead of a word like “many” is not as clear—there *is* an alliterative need for both “nalæs” and “læssan” in this line that does not exist in all the incidents of rhetorical minimization. As a result, did the poet choose to maintain a rhetorical pattern of minimization? The gifts for Beowulf’s funeral pyre receive a similar rhetorical treatment, this time with the “rhetoric of absence” coupled with the “rhetoric of negativity”. In this instance, Wiglaf commands the Geats, “Ne scel anes hwæt / meltan mid þam modigan”,<sup>548</sup> or “Not one part [of the treasure hoard] only shall be consumed with the bold warrior”,<sup>549</sup> and the “ne” in that line further contrasted by the use of the term “unrime” or “countless” (a non “no word”) in the next. In a similar way, moments of non-funerary gift-giving adhere to a narrative pattern of the “rhetoric of absence” coupled with the “rhetoric of negativity”. After Beowulf successfully fights Grendel, Hrothgar offers him many gifts along with the words, “Ne bið þe [n]ænigre gad / worolde wilna þe ic geweald hæbbe”,<sup>550</sup> or “[You shall] lack no earthly objects of desire of which I have control”.<sup>551</sup> Later, as Beowulf is receiving those goods, the poet writes, “no he þære feohgyfte / for sc[e]oten[d]um scamigan ðorfte”,<sup>552</sup> or “no need had [Beowulf] to be ashamed of the costly gifts before the warriors”.<sup>553</sup> In these instances, the poet contrasts what Beowulf actually will possess and feel by emphasizing what Beowulf does *not* have or does *not* feel, but

---

<sup>548</sup>Klaeber, l. 3010-3011.

<sup>549</sup>Clark Hall, Beowulf, l. 3010-3011.

<sup>550</sup>Klaeber, l. 949-950. I am accepting Klaeber’s bracketed “[n]” emendation.

<sup>551</sup>Clark Hall, Beowulf, l. 949-950.

<sup>552</sup>Klaeber, l. 1025-1026.

<sup>553</sup>Clark Hall, Beowulf, l. 1025-1026.

depending upon how the line is structured, particularly the one in the latter example, it can be difficult from the listener's point of view to notice the crucial "no" if one is not paying attention.

Arguably some of the most powerful scenes in Beowulf concern violence and its effects, and because the poet does not refrain from employing at least one of the three "rhetoric of reticence" forms in these moments as well, it is all the more important to examine those instances of violence and suffering. Furthermore, the scenes which often engender and follow that violence and suffering involve discussions of praise, fame, and boasting, and these rhetorics arise in those scenes also. For example, when boasting before his fight with Grendel, Beowulf makes the following potentially ambiguous, rhetorically negative statement: "No ic me an herewæsum hnagran talige, / guþgeweorca, þonne Grendel hine",<sup>554</sup> or "I count myself no less in fighting-power, in battle-deeds, than Grendel does himself".<sup>555</sup> The reader must pause for a moment and consider what this statement actually means; "no less in fighting-power" could mean "strong", but were it not known that Grendel is fearsomely powerful, then that expression could remain ambiguous. There seems to be a deliberate riddling in that speech; Beowulf does not discuss his strength in the most direct way by saying, "I am as strong as Grendel". As a result, even though his meaning is actually incontestable—no one needs to hear Beowulf's boast to know that he is strong—the negative circumlocution through which he delivers that meaning may impede an immediate, straightforward understanding (at the very least, for the modern reader!). In a different yet still rhetorically negative way, when the Danes celebrate Beowulf's violent victory over Grendel, the poet writes that it was often said, "ofer eormengrund oþer nænig / under swegles begong selra nære / rondhæbbendra rices

---

<sup>554</sup>Klaeber, l. 677-678.

<sup>555</sup>Clark Hall, Beowulf, l. 677-678.

wyrðra”,<sup>556</sup> or “no other man [...] was more excellent among shield-bearers under the expanse of heaven, or worthier of [rule]”.<sup>557</sup> In other words, if there were “no other man” than Beowulf, then Beowulf was simply “the best”, but that superlative does not fit within a pattern of rhetorical negativity in the same way. Hrothgar’s *scop* uses similar phrasing a few lines later in his description of the Volsungian Sigemund’s exploits; of that warrior the *scop* says, “Sigemunde gesprong / æfter deaðdæge dom unlytel”,<sup>558</sup> or “no un-little fame arose after Sigmund’s death-day”.<sup>559</sup> Pause and think: “no un-little fame”, given Sigemund’s renown, surely means “great fame”, but “unlytel” still provides a tiny loophole for possibilities like “greater fame”, or even the “greatest fame”. As a result, this “rhetoric of minimization” coupled with the “rhetoric of negativity” in Beowulf can at times even morph into a “rhetoric of ambiguity”, for much like Bede, the poet’s diction in these cases is open to more interpretation than it at first seems.

Other notable praise scenes that employ a “rhetoric of minimization” occur at the end of the poem, in Beowulf’s ruminations as he approaches death, and in Wiglaf’s eulogizing of his dead king. With regard to the former, Beowulf, as he is dying, reflects on his life and deeds, and as he contemplates his childhood, Beowulf says of his foster-father, “næs ic him to life lāðra owihte, / [...] þonne his bearna hwylc”,<sup>560</sup> or “[I was no] less liked by [Hrethel while he lived] than [any] of his sons”.<sup>561</sup> It is interesting that instead of saying that Hrethel loved him, Beowulf states more ambiguously that Hrethel liked him “no less” than he liked his three sons, because this phrase tells us little about Hrethel’s actual feelings. From a purely

---

<sup>556</sup>Klaeber, l. 859-861.

<sup>557</sup>Clark Hall, Beowulf, l. 859-861.

<sup>558</sup>Klaeber, l. 884-885.

<sup>559</sup>My own translation.

<sup>560</sup>Klaeber, l. 2432-2433.

<sup>561</sup>Clark Hall, Beowulf, l. 2432-2433.

grammatical point of view the ambiguity cannot be denied, even though due to additional context in the poem we know that Hrethel did love, and did not dislike or simply disregard Beowulf. Likewise, as Beowulf is assessing his life's work, he relates, "ne sohte searoniðas, ne me swor fela / ða on unriht",<sup>562</sup> or "I did not [seek] treacherous quarrels, nor have I sworn [many] oaths unjustly".<sup>563</sup> "I did not seek quarrels" at first appears fairly straightforward, but upon reflection, that statement does not unequivocally state whether or not Beowulf actually engaged in any "searoniðas". Likewise, "nor have I sworn many oaths unjustly" is also problematic. While "ne fela" nearly always means "none", "none" is not what Beowulf says—could "many" instead signify three or three thousand? Ultimately, the meaning of each of these statements is not ambiguous—what is important is that Beowulf did *not* seek "searoniðas", he swore no false or wrongful oaths, and Hrethel did love Beowulf. Yet again, it is the way in which those meanings are conveyed, through riddle-like phrases, that requires a double-take.

One of the Beowulf poet's descriptions of Wiglaf presents a similar interpretative dilemma that involves both the rhetorical forms of minimization and absence, and that particular instance is also a moment of praise. After Wiglaf completes his sad and fearful assessment of the Geats' future to his fellow-warriors, the poet relates, "he ne leag fela / wyrda ne worda",<sup>564</sup> or "nor did [Wiglaf] lie very much regarding fates nor words".<sup>565</sup> Again, "nor did he lie very much" seems elastic—is the poet suggesting that Wiglaf lies or rarely omits information by Geatish standards, or does he never lie at all? The degree of relativity introduced by the terms "very much" points to a significant absence of clarification, and thus further

---

<sup>562</sup>Klaeber, l. 2738-2739.

<sup>563</sup>Clark Hall, Beowulf, l. 2738-2739.

<sup>564</sup>Klaeber, l. 3029-3030.

<sup>565</sup>My own translation.

emphasizes a “rhetoric of absence” in the poet’s text. Wiglaf himself speaks in the two rhetorical spheres of minimization and absence in one of his eulogies of Beowulf, but in this case he does so in a way that allows those two rhetorics to play off of one another, and his argument is actually unmistakably clear. “Nealles folccynning fyrdgesteallum / gylpan þorfte”,<sup>566</sup> or “No reason had the king to boast about his comrades”,<sup>567</sup> he sternly chastises the Geatish warriors who abandoned both him and Beowulf. In that particular statement and context, the “no” actually manages to emphasize the warriors’ failure through understatement in a way that seems less ambiguous than other instances of minimization and absence. No interpretative pause is needed, because there is no doubt as to what Wiglaf thinks of their conduct.

As stated previously, violence and suffering characterize two of the other types of scenes in which these three rhetorical forms occur. The instances of violence are particularly interesting, and like earlier examples, often hinge upon the “rhetoric of negativity”. When Grendel slays Hrothgar’s thanes, for example, it is because “sibbe ne wolde”,<sup>568</sup> or “he did not wish [for] peace”.<sup>569</sup> The poet uses identical phrasing when recounting what Ohthere and Onela did to Hrethel’s descendants: “freode ne woldon”,<sup>570</sup> or “they did not want friendship”.<sup>571</sup> Similarly, in his description of Unferth, the poet writes, “þæt he hæfde mod micel, þeah þe he his magum nære / arfæst æt ecga gelacum”,<sup>572</sup> or “[he had not] been [gracious] with his [kinsmen in sword-play]”,<sup>573</sup> and Grendel’s assaults on Heorot have been “torn unlytel”,<sup>574</sup> or “no unlittle misery”,<sup>575</sup> to the Danes. In these scenes, the poet uses negative diction that, in part,

---

<sup>566</sup>Klaeber, l. 2873-2874.

<sup>567</sup>Clark Hall, *Beowulf*, l. 2873.

<sup>568</sup>Klaeber, l. 154.

<sup>569</sup>My own translation.

<sup>570</sup>Klaeber, l. 2476.

<sup>571</sup>My own translation.

<sup>572</sup>Klaeber, l. 1167-1168.

<sup>573</sup>Clark Hall, *Beowulf*, l. 1167-1168.

<sup>574</sup>Klaeber, l. 833.

<sup>575</sup>My own translation.

characterizes Beowulf—it is not that Grendel “wanted conflict” in Heorot, it is that he “did not want peace”. Unferth was not “vicious” to his kinsmen, he was just “not upright”. Beowulf himself employs this negative diction to a different effect in his castigating speech to Unferth earlier, in which he says, “þæt he þa fæhðe ne þearf, / atole ecgþræce eower leode / swiðe onsittan, Sige-Scyldinga”,<sup>576</sup> or “[Grendel] has found out that he need not [dread much] the [feud], the terrible sword-storm of your people, the victorious Scyldings”.<sup>577</sup> In this instance, Beowulf’s list of things Grendel need not fear is condemnatory, and emphasizes the *lack* of feuds and swords that Grendel has faced.

This particular negative terminology coupled with the “rhetoric of absence” reaches its peak in the poem’s scenes of suffering, in which often the evocation of dead kinsmen or companions heightens the sense of loss that pervades all of Beowulf. Some of the more notable examples of suffering and absence include those found in the Finnsburh fragment and the experiences of the hanged man’s father,<sup>578</sup> the digression of the sole survivor, and the comments of Wiglaf’s messenger. In the sole survivor’s digression, for example, the survivor explains his desolate existences as follows: “Næs hearpan wyn, / gomen gleobeames, ne god hafoc / geond sæl swingeð, ne se swifta meach / burhstede beateð”,<sup>579</sup> or “There is no [harp-joy], no pastime with the gladdening lute; no good hawk sweeps through the hall, nor does the swift steed [stamp] the courtyard”.<sup>580</sup> The survivor’s life is marked by absence; it is what is “not” there, and no longer in existence, that determines how he lives. Furthermore, he could have expressed this sentiment in terms that are not predicated on “no”—perhaps by

---

<sup>576</sup>Klaeber, l. 595-597.

<sup>577</sup>Clark Hall, Beowulf, l. 595-597.

<sup>578</sup>I discuss both of these digressions, including the emphasis on what is absent or missing, in the Chapter Two parallels of this appendix.

<sup>579</sup>Klaeber, l. 2262-2265.

<sup>580</sup>Clark Hall, Beowulf, l. 2262-2265.

using words such as “silence” and “emptiness”—but by reiterating negative terminology, the significance of these absences is all the more striking. Similarly, when Wiglaf’s messenger tells the Geatish men how they should prepare for Beowulf’s funeral pyre, and more broadly that they should prepare for future trouble in war, he states, “nalles eorl wegan / maððum to gemyndum, ne mægð scyne / habban on healse hringweorðunge”,<sup>581</sup> or “no [warrior] shall wear an ornament in his memory, nor shall [a] fair maiden have a [ring-ornament] around her neck”.<sup>582</sup> Again, by choosing not to say “warriors and maidens should dress plainly”, Wiglaf evokes what *could* be, i.e. warriors and maidens lavishly dressed, by ordering a scenario that is not possible.

Although the scenes of violence and suffering in Beowulf are usually the most powerful, some of the other poignant narrative instances are not as easily characterized. Often, however, they too involve something that is “absent”, and the negative terminology inherent to the poet’s rhetorical forms of reticence occurs as well. For example, the poet uses the expression “dreamum bedæled”,<sup>583</sup> or “deprived of joys”,<sup>584</sup> to describe Grendel’s general countenance, and “ne gefeah”,<sup>585</sup> or “he had no joy”,<sup>586</sup> to describe Cain and the feud between him and Abel. Neither Grendel nor Cain, from the Anglo-Saxons’ perspective, deserves much sympathy, but the idea that they lack joy seems oddly empathetic. In a different way, one particular depiction of Beowulf that emphasizes rhetorical negativity seems strangely poignant as well. When Beowulf fights Grendel’s mother in the mere, the poet writes of the Geatish hero, “Swa sceal man don / þonne he æt guðe gegan þenceð / longsumme lof, na ymb

---

<sup>581</sup>Klaeber, l. 3015-3017.

<sup>582</sup>Clark Hall, Beowulf, l. 3015-3017.

<sup>583</sup>Klaeber, l. 721.

<sup>584</sup>My own translation.

<sup>585</sup>Klaeber, l. 109.

<sup>586</sup>Clark Hall, Beowulf, l. 109.

his lif cearað”,<sup>587</sup> or “So must a man [fight] when he thinks to win enduring fame in war—he will have no care about his life”.<sup>588</sup> The idea that in the midst of fighting the hero must adopt a mindset that allows him to disregard his life is arresting, but it is the poet’s phrasing that makes this suggestion poignant. Either he has “no care” or “he does not care” carry a greater narrative punch than a line like “he fights to the death”, and the Beowulf poet effectively maximizes this expression’s rhetorical negativity.

Throughout Beowulf, beyond the specific usage of “litotes”, or understatement, the rhetoric of reticence emerges in patterns, similar to the parable-like elements in Bede’s Historia. While in Bede’s text there are episodes and chapters that readers and scholars have found very difficult to interpret, in Beowulf there are different types of phrases and expressions that require a second look and closer attention in order to ascertain their exact meaning. The cumulative effect of the rhetorical forms of minimization, absence, and negativity help demonstrates the readers’ and listeners’ responsibilities to careful interpretation, and creates a subtle ambiance of ambiguity in the text. By litotically stressing what does *not* exist or occur in various narrative moments, the Beowulf poet, much like Bede in his moments of silence, often manages to underscore through understatement. And while the texts are inarguably the products of two different environments, a small five-line passage in Beowulf may be one point where they actually seem to intersect, in both content and delivery. In that passage, Hrothgar speaks to Beowulf about a renowned warrior, whose will God has allowed to be realized; he states as follows: “wunað he on wiste; no hine with dweleð / adl ne ylðo, ne him inwitsorh / on sefa (n) sweorceð, ne gesacu ohwær / ecghete eoweð, ac him eal worold / wendeð on willan”,<sup>589</sup> or “he lives in plenty; nothing—sickness nor old age—stands in his way. No trouble caused by

---

<sup>587</sup>Klaeber, l. 1534-1536.

<sup>588</sup>Clark Hall, Beowulf, l. 1534-1536.

<sup>589</sup>Klaeber, l. 1735-1739.

malice clouds his thoughts, nor does strife bring about deadly warfare anywhere, but all the world moves to his will”.<sup>590</sup> Were it not for the next paragraph, Bede could not have written those lines, which describe the fruit of God’s love for mankind, any better himself.

## II

### Chapter Two Parallels

That Bede emphasizes a narrative tension in the Historia between entities that are known and unknown, and that can seem relatively benign, stands in contrast to additional Anglo-Saxon texts that explore “otherness” and its attendant anxieties. Often the tension of “otherness” is expressed forcefully through the universal dialectic of friend versus foe, particularly in the heroic poetry and eschatological homilies, and in these cases the dialectic clearly heightens conflict. But in some instances “others” or “unknowns” can be just as nondescript as Bede’s dark winter, and as nameless as the “advena”, or “foreigner” invaders. The difference, however, is that they evoke more of the terror that accompanies the alien attacks in the Historia than the quiet unknown in the sparrow allegory that grounds the Historia. These Anglo-Saxon texts include the homilies of the Vercelli Book, and the poems the “Battle of Brunanburh”, the “Battle of Maldon”, Judith, Beowulf, “The Dream of the Rood”, and “The Seafarer”.

Several of these texts use the same or similar terms when expressing a sense of the “other”, and one of the most prominent is “eltheodig”, which can mean “strange, foreign, or enemy”.<sup>591</sup> The Vercelli Book, the manuscript of which can be dated to the

---

<sup>590</sup>Clark Hall, Beowulf, l. 1735-1739.

<sup>591</sup>J.R. Clark Hall, A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), s.v. “eltheodige”. This term is also discussed with regard to Chapter Two corollaries in Appendix Two, which concerns the Anglo-Saxon kings’ law-codes.

late tenth century but whose homilies and poems may have been composed earlier, possesses several homilies that employ the term “eltheodig”, sometimes in a way that establishes a threatening sense of “otherness”; the latter is not surprising given the homilies’ narrative perspective of the Israelites, to whom the Romans are foreigners, and often hostile ones. In Homily I, which concerns the Passion of Christ, the homilist identifies Pontius Pilate and his “þegnas” as “elþeodige men, Romaniscas / cynnes”,<sup>592</sup> or “foreign men of the Roman race”. Given that line ninety-nine is the only line in a twenty-seven line passage that is not derived from the Homily’s Latin source,<sup>593</sup> it is interesting that the homilist re-worked Pilate and his men into the Anglo-Saxon framework of kinship by denying them membership. They are decidedly “elþeodig”, and because of the way they treat the Savior of Mankind, “elþeodig” holds a particularly negative connotation. At the same time, Pilate and his cohorts possess a “fixed” social identity by virtue of being named of “Romaniscas cynnes”, or “the Roman kind”. As a result, in this instance “elþeodig” possesses a more exact definition, and sinisterly so, than it does in the Kentish law-codes that are examined in Appendix Two. In contrast, Homily IV establishes a more positive sense of “elþeodig” while still emphasizing its distinction as unknown. The homilist, in his eschatological piece, includes a long passage in which a good soul and a damned soul plead their cases before Christ. Of the damned soul, he writes, “Næs he ælmesgeorn ne bliðheort þam earman, ne arfæst þam elþeodigum”,<sup>594</sup> or “he was neither happy nor charitable to the poor, nor merciful to the stranger”. In this example, the homily maintains a tension between familiar and unfamiliar, but there exists an obligation to breach the divide and make the unknown known, or the unfixed fixed.

---

<sup>592</sup>D.G. Scragg, ed., The Vercelli Homilies and Related Texts (Oxford: EETS, 1992), I, l. 99. The Roman numeral in all Scragg Vercelli citations refers to the Homily number.

<sup>593</sup>Scragg cites the sources as John 18: 28-32, and then John 18: 33-36; see Vercelli Homilies, 24.

<sup>594</sup>Scragg, IV, l. 239-240.

The Vercelli Book also provides some salient examples of the thematically universal friend versus foe dialectic that emerges in much of the Anglo-Saxon heroic poetry. Homily XXI is a Rogationtide piece, the first part of which is translated from the Latin St. Père de Chartres manuscript.<sup>595</sup> Interestingly, the term “elþeodige” may be found in this initial section, while in the following half, which derives from Anglo-Saxon sources,<sup>596</sup> one finds the term “feond”. Both are in a long passage that concerns Judgment Day, and “elþeodig” occurs at the end of a catalogue detailing what one must do to assure entrance to heaven: “gif we þa elþeodigan onfoð þonne hie ure beðurfen”,<sup>597</sup> or “if we received strangers when they were in need of us”. Just like in Homily IV, Homily XXI draws a distinction between familiar and unfamiliar in an exhortative light, and it is difficult to imagine that the homilist would welcome Pilate under the “elþeodig” definition in this instance. Instead, anyone to whom the “elþeodig” epitaph might apply in a more negative sense would probably be assigned the term “feond”, or “enemy”. In contrast to the sometimes benign, sometimes merely unknown “elþeodig”, “feond” connotes an entity that is *known* as threatening. In Homily XXI, the “feond” is the “modig feond”, or “the bold enemy”, Satan himself, whom God “awearp of ðam setle”,<sup>598</sup> or “casts down from his throne”. Homily XIV, another exhortative homily to those anticipating heaven, also identifies “feond” as Satan, and provides another example of “elþeodig”. The homilist warns, “se wiðerwearda feond þæt is dioful” or “the hostile enemy that is the devil” is all around us; in other words, the tension between what is good and evil always exists. He then provides an interesting paraphrase of Saint Paul, in which he argues that as long as we live in this mortal life, “we bioð elðeodige fram ussum dryhtne”, or “we will remain

---

<sup>595</sup>Scragg cites the earliest MS of this homiliary as Pembroke 25; see Scragg, 310.

<sup>596</sup>Scragg, 347.

<sup>597</sup>Scragg, XXI, l. 124-125.

<sup>598</sup>Scragg, XXI, l. 146.

alienated from our lord”. In this case, it is us, as travelers in the temporal world, who must make ourselves recognized if we quit the road, for we must demonstrate to “ussum dryhtne” that we are good Christians—we must “fix” our own identities as such.

In contrast to this homiletic literature, several Anglo-Saxon poems evoke the spirit of “otherness” through words and phrases that evoke a rhetoric of war, and as a result the vocabulary for foes is expanded in these texts. Three poems whose narrative axes spin on conflict, the “Battle of Brunanburh”, the “Battle of Maldon”, and Judith demonstrate this shift. In the first, the poet refers to the pagan adversaries as “hettend”,<sup>599</sup> or “enemy”, and as “laþra”,<sup>600</sup> or “hostile ones”. These terms evoke the “feond” usage of the Vercelli Book, and they also play upon the divisiveness between friend and foe that makes heroic poetry so attractive. Likewise, “The Battle of Maldon” offers a litany of terms for “enemy”, including “ða fynd”,<sup>601</sup> or “the enemies”, “þa laðe gystas”,<sup>602</sup> or “the hateful guests”, “grama”,<sup>603</sup> either “angry/hostile [ones]” or “enemies”,<sup>604</sup> and “feonda”,<sup>605</sup> or “enemies”. In both of these two battle poems, otherness is used as a means to incite the characters, and to engage the reader or listener in the struggle between two opposing forces, neither one of which is about to surrender to a mediating force like Christianity. Likewise, Judith expands the divisive vocabulary of these heroic poems even further, and at the same time offers another usage of “elþeodig”. As Judith expounds upon her assassination of Holofernes to her fellow Hebrews, she urges them to fight their “sceaðena”,<sup>606</sup> or “adversaries”,

---

<sup>599</sup>Richard Hamer, A Choice of Anglo-Saxon Verse (London: Faber and Faber, 1970), 42, l. 10.

<sup>600</sup>Hamer, 42, l. 9.

<sup>601</sup>Hamer, 54, l. 82.

<sup>602</sup>Hamer, 54, l. 86.

<sup>603</sup>Hamer, 56, l. 100.

<sup>604</sup>Clark Hall, s.v. “gram”.

<sup>605</sup>Hamer, 56, l. 103.

<sup>606</sup>Hamer, 148, l. 193.

and assures them that the “fynd”,<sup>607</sup> or “enemies”, will fall. As the Hebrews attack the Assyrians, the poet writes that they faced the “laðra cynna”,<sup>608</sup> or “hostile race”, their “ealdgeniðla”,<sup>609</sup> or “old enemies”. The Hebrews chase down the “elðeoda”,<sup>610</sup> or “foreigners” and ultimately destroy “ða laðesta”,<sup>611</sup> or “the most hated ones”, their “ealdfeonda”,<sup>612</sup> or “old foes”.

The narrative posture of battle poetry is strikingly different from Bede’s Historia, in that the events concerned in them are strongly influenced by traditional, rhetorical poetic diction. Yet they resonate with Bede’s text by underscoring a tension between the familiar and the unfamiliar. The Scottish enemies in “Brunaburh” threaten the known, native way of life practiced by the West Saxons; likewise, the Viking troop in “Maldon” demand tribute. Judith offers an additional spin on the unfamiliar; the Hebrews, in this poem, assert themselves against “ealdfeonda”, or an otherness that has oppressed them for a very long time. And while the tension between friend and foe in these poems promotes a sense of visceral terror that Bede’s sparrow allegory lacks, the poems ultimately offer yet another Anglo-Saxon twist on the division between known and unknown. In addition, they are similar to the homiletic literature that also casts its narratives in terms of battle between absolute and diametrically opposed powers, and thus uses absolute terms like “feond”. What is particularly interesting is that the homilies and the Anglo-Saxon law-codes, for example, share a common purpose in that each serves as a behavioral guide to an audience making choices about its actions as it hears or reads these texts, but the difference in their language is striking. The law-codes, in spite of occasions in which

---

<sup>607</sup>Hamer, 148, l. 195.

<sup>608</sup>Hamer, 150, l. 226.

<sup>609</sup>Hamer, 150, l. 228.

<sup>610</sup>Hamer, 150, l. 237.

<sup>611</sup>Hamer, 154, l. 315.

<sup>612</sup>Hamer, 154, l. 316.

they emphasize forcefully adherence to a king or to God, maintain the measured tone that one would expect in a text that functions as a set of straightforward lists. The homiletic literature, in contrast, often promotes a tone of such ferocity that the potential eternal punishments they relate can sound much more frightening than the gruesome yet unelaborated penalties listed in the law-codes. As a result, while both serve as guides, their methods differ just like their usage of terms like “*elþeodig*”. The heroic battle poetry, on the other hand, while perhaps serving as inspirational literature on what to do in a battle, functions less as a guide and more as entertainment. Bede’s *Historia* falls between them—it is a text that both acts implicitly as a guide and as an opportunity to immerse oneself in the stories of the secular world past. Yet despite serving as a middle ground between these various texts, it does not engage in the same polemic language anywhere near to the same extent.

Some other examples of Old English heroic poetry, in contrast, bring us back closer to the tension that Bede suggests; namely, *Beowulf*, “The Dream of the Rood”, and “The Seafarer”. *Beowulf*, while it too concerns violent conflict among pre-Christian Germanic peoples does offer an opposite take on the lit, snow-surrounded Hall in Bede’s allegory of the sparrow. In the epic poem, a “*feond*”,<sup>613</sup> Grendel, actively threatens the peace of the comfortable Hall; in fact, he invades and defiles it night after night. Grendel is the supernatural Penda that Bede does *not* evoke in his conversion metaphor, and he is a monster who also stalks the “*mearc*”<sup>614</sup> that the Kentish Hlothhere and Eadric warily use in their law-code to define “others”—“*oðerne þe sio ofer mearce cumin*”,<sup>615</sup> or “[an] other one who has come over the

---

<sup>613</sup>Frederick Klaeber, *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., ed. R.D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork, and John D. Niles, based on the 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), l. 101, l. 143, l. 164, l. 279.

<sup>614</sup>Klaeber, l. 103.

<sup>615</sup>F.L. Attenborough, ed. and trans., *The Laws of the Earliest English Kings* (Cambridge: Llanerch, 2000), 20.

border”. And while Grendel does become, in a sense, known—he is an identifiable enemy, if often an elusive one—his origins are murky enough to heighten the warriors’ fear of him. Grendel is certainly hated, but he remains an enemy “elþeodige”; in other words, he is unfixed by virtue of being supernatural and outside of the possible social identities and ranks that the law-codes, for example, delineate.

“The Dream of the Rood” and “The Seafarer” also describe nebulous entities, and these are even more in line with Bede’s non-descript “otherness” tension because the entities are both presumably human and less obviously hostile. For example, when the Rood describes the events that occurred to it, the Rood states, “strange feondas”,<sup>616</sup> or “strong foes”, other “feondas”,<sup>617</sup> and even more “feondas”<sup>618</sup> shaped it into a cross. We know nothing about these enemies other than their malicious intent—they have no names or other identifying signifiers. In that sense, they evoke both the unknown “otherness” of Bede and the unfixed “oðerne” of the law-codes. Similarly, in “The Seafarer”, the narrator relates visiting “elþeodigra eard”<sup>619</sup> or the “land of foreigners”, which alludes to the imprecise “advena” versus “indigena” description that Bede establishes regarding the Saxon invasion, and suggests that this land could be either friendly or hostile. As the body of these texts has demonstrated however, when something is “advena”, it must be assumed to be negatively “elþeodiglic”. And, along these same lines, the poet of “The Seafarer” exhorts his listeners to contest the impact of non-defined “feondas”,<sup>620</sup> or “enemies”, so that they can ensure their own entrance to Heaven.

---

<sup>616</sup>Hamer, 162, l. 30.

<sup>617</sup>Hamer, 162, l. 33.

<sup>618</sup>Hamer, 162, l. 38.

<sup>619</sup>George Philip Krapp and Elliot Van Kirk Dobbie, eds., The Exeter Book (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1936), 144, l. 38.

<sup>620</sup>Krapp and Dobbie, 145, l. 75.

### III

#### Chapter Three Parallels

One way to imagine what Bede could have stated about violent acts or individuals, but which he chooses not to do as he develops his Christian/non-Christian dual narrative, is to examine possibly contemporaneous texts that *do* offer ruminations on or elaborations of conflict. Two Germanic poems exhibit paradigmatic examples of violence that may be useful for comparison to the *Historia*: the Old English epic poem *Beowulf*, and the Old Norse eddic poem *Hamðismál*. *Beowulf*, whether or not it was composed around the time of Bede's eighth century *Historia*, is similar to other Anglo-Saxon texts in terms of style, image, and content, and many of the fears that arise in the *Historia* surface in *Beowulf* as well, including the fears of vulnerability to one's enemies, the total destruction of one's family, and the death of one's leader. In addition, several of its passages may be seen as paradigmatic examples of violence, but the two that I analyze here are known as the "Finnsburh fragment", and that of the old man whose son has been hung on gallows. The "Finnsburh fragment" concerns the Frisian queen Hildeburh, who was born a Dane but married the Frisian King Finn as a peace-weaving bride. While her brother, the Dane prince Hnæf, is visiting Hildeburh, enemies attack; both Hnæf and Hildeburh's son are killed, and her husband Finn dies in a later skirmish between the survivors in his own Hall. Hildeburh is then returned to the Danes. Excerpts from the digression are as follows:

Ne huru Hildeburh herian þorfte /  
Eotena treow; unsynnum wearð /  
beloren leofum æt þam lindplegan /  
bearnum ond broðrum; hie on gebyrd hruron /  
gare wunde; þæt wæs geomuru ides! /  
Nalles holinga Hoces dohtor /  
Meotodsceaft bemearn, syððan morgen com, /

ðā heo under swegle geseon meahte /  
morþorbealo maga, þær he[o] ær mæste heold /  
worolde wyne. /<sup>621</sup>

[...]

Æt þām ade wæs eþgesyne /  
swatfah syrce, swyn ealgylde, /  
eofer irenheard, æþeling manig /  
wundum awyrde; sume on wæle crungon! /  
Het ðā Hildeburh æt Hnæfes ade /  
hire selfre sunu sweoloðe befæstan, /  
banfatu bærnan, ond on bæl don /  
eame on eaxe. Ides gnornode, /  
geomrode giddum. Guðrinc astah. /  
Want to wolcnum wælfyra mæst, /  
hlynode for hlawe; hafelan multon, /  
bengeato burston, ðonne blod ætspranc, /  
lædbite lices. Lig ealle forswalg, /  
gæste gifrost, þara ðe þær guð fornam /  
bega folces; wæs hira blæd scacen. /<sup>622</sup>

[...]

ðā wæs heal roden /  
feonda feorum, swilce Fin slægen, /  
cýning on corþre, ond seo cwen numen. /  
Sceotend Scyldinga to scypon feredon /  
eal ingesteald eorðcýninges, /  
swylce hie æt Finnes ham findan meahton /  
sigla searogimma. Hie on sælade /  
drihtlice wif to Denum feredon,  
læddon to leodum.<sup>623</sup>

[Hildeburh, truly, had no cause to praise the good faith of the Jutes;  
without offence she was deprived of her dear ones at the shield-play,  
her son and brother; wounded by the spear, they fell as was fated; a sad  
[lady] was she! Not by any means did the daughter of Hoc mourn  
without reason over the decree of fate, when morning came—when she

---

<sup>621</sup>Frederick Klaeber, *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., ed. R.D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork, and John D. Niles, based on the 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), l. 1071-1080.

<sup>622</sup>Klaeber, l. 1110-1124.

<sup>623</sup>Klaeber, l. 1151-1158.

could see in the light of day the slaughter of her [kinsmen] where she once possessed the highest earthly [joys].<sup>624</sup>

[...]

At the pyre the blood-stained corslet, the swine-image all-golden, the boar hard as iron, and many a noble killed by wounds, were visible to all. Mighty men had fallen in the carnage. Then Hildeburh ordered her own son to be given over to the flames at Hnæf's funeral pile—his body to be burned and put upon the pyre at his uncle's side. The unhappy woman mourned, and lamented in dirges. The war-hero ascended the pyre. The greatest of funeral fires curled upwards to the clouds, roared before the grave-mound; heads were consumed, gashes gaped open: then the blood sprang forth from the body, where the foe had wounded it. The fire, greediest of spirits, had consumed all of those whom war had carried off, of either people—their glory had passed away.<sup>625</sup>

[...]

Then was the hall reddened with corpses of the foes; Finn, the king, likewise was slain among his guard, and the queen taken. The warriors of the Scyldings bore to the ship all the possessions of the country's king,—whatsoever they could find at Finn's homestead of necklaces and curious gems. They brought the noble lady over the sea-path to the Danes, and led her to her people.]<sup>626</sup>

This passage expresses many of the impressions of and reflections on violence that events in Bede's *Historia* instigate as well. The poet's recognition that Hildeburh is "unsynnig", or "guiltless", and "beloren leofum æt þam lindplegan / bearnum ond broðrum; hie on gebyrd hruron / gare wunde; þæt wæs geomuru ides! ", or "deprived of her dear ones at the shield-play, her son and brother; wounded by the spear, they fell as was fated; a sad [lady] was she!", offers an additional narrative perspective and rumination on the conflict that Bede's text often lacks. Interestingly, however, the poet manages to combine the understatement prevalent in the *Historia* with the powerful images of violence and destruction for which *Beowulf* is known, and the effect is compelling. For example, when describing Hildeburh's reactions to the

---

<sup>624</sup>Clark Hall, J.R., ed. and trans., *Beowulf and the Finnesburg Fragment*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed., rev. C.L. Wrenn (London: Allen and Unwin, 1963), l. 1071-1080.

<sup>625</sup>Clark Hall, *Beowulf*, l. 1110-1124.

<sup>626</sup>Clark Hall, *Beowulf*, l. 1151-1158.

massacre, the poet notes, “Ne huru Hildeburh herian þorfte / Eotena treow “, or “[she] had no cause to praise the good faith of the Jutes”, and, “Nalles holinga [...] meotodscaft bemearn “ or “not without reason did she mourn the decree of fate”. Both of these observations evoke a diplomatic economy of expression that the situation might not seem to warrant. Like Bede and his descriptions of certain horrific events, what emotions could the poet instead have invoked when describing Hildeburh’s feelings about the Jutes, or the root of her mourning? Yet those moments of descriptive understatement, in contrast to the Historia, are juxtaposed with such rich metaphorical language that the force of Hildeburh’s experience is felt. When describing the bodies on the funeral pyre, the poet describes “laðbite lices”, or “deadly bites of the body” bursting open and spurting blood, and we see and smell the corpse of Hildeburh’s son, which is “banfatu bærnan”, or “to burn the bone-vessel”. These lines offer a visceral dimension to the violence that leaves the Historia seeming oddly bland. Most significantly, however, there is a sense of poignancy to this entire digression, primarily expressed through Hildeburh’s utter isolation after the death of her husband, brother, and son, which is consistently absent in the Historia. As the poet writes, “ða heo under swegle geseon meahte / morþorbealo maga, þær he[o] ær mæste heold / worolde wyne”, or “she could see in the light of day the slaughter of her [kinsmen] where she once possessed the highest earthly [joys]”, and these lines employ a salient and sad “comparatio” between Hildeburh’s “highest joys” and her deepest sorrow, both of which had been witnessed by the same morning light. It is as though the Beowulf poet, through moments like these, shares in Hildeburh’s grief, while Bede has made a conscious decision to remain separate from his narrative subjects.

Another example of this shared grief occurs in the digression of the old man whose son has been hung on the gallows. The Beowulf poet relates this vignette as follows:

Swa bið geomorlic gomelum ceorle /  
to gebidanne, þæt his byre ride /  
going on galgan; þonne he gyd wrece, /  
sarigne sang, þonne his sunu hangað /  
hrefne to hroðre, ond he him helpe ne mæg /  
eald ond infrod ænige gefremman. /  
Symble bið gemyndgad morna gehwylce /  
eaforan ellorsið; oðres ne gymeð /  
to gebidanne burgum in innan /  
yrfewardas, þonne se an hafað /  
þurh deaðes nyd dæda gefondad. /  
Gesyhð sorhcearig on his suna bure /  
winsele westne, windge reste /  
reote berofene,— ridend swefað /  
hæleð in hoðman; nis þær hearpan sweg, /  
gomen in geardum, swylce ðær iu wæron.<sup>627</sup>

[So it is painful to an old man to suffer that his son should swing upon the gallows in his youth; he may utter then a dirge, a doleful song, when his son hangs as a sport for the raven, and he, old, stricken in years, can [offer] no help for him. Unceasingly, at every [morning], he is reminded of the passing of his son; he cares not to wait for another son and heir within his stronghold, when one has had his fill of deeds in the shape of a violent death. With sorrow and care he sees in his son's dwelling the festive hall abandoned, the windswept resting-place bereft of joy: the riders sleep, the champions, in the grave; there is no sound of harp, no merry-making in the courts, as there once was.]<sup>628</sup>

In this example, much of the violence is implicit, including the hanging itself and the event that caused it. However, the poet fully explores the conflict that surrounds this event. The father's feelings of grief are expressed literally and metaphorically; the

---

<sup>627</sup>Klaeber, l. 2444-2459.

<sup>628</sup>Clark Hall, Beowulf, l. 2444-2459.

poet takes time examining this lamentation line after line. “Morgen gehwylc”, or “every morning” the father is reminded of his son’s death; “gesyðð sorhcearig”, or “he sees with sorrow” his son’s former home; his grief is equivalent to a “winsele weste”, or “abandoned hall”, a “windge reste”, or “windswept home”, the absence of “hearpe sweg”, or “harp-music” and “gomen”, or “joy”. Again, just as with Hildeburh’s digression, the poet has moments of descriptive understatement evocative of Bede—for example, the line “swa bið geomorlic”, or “so it [will be] painful” cannot even begin to describe the mourning of this old man. But through cataloguing several powerful metaphors, each of which contrast’s the father’s loss with the rich, full life he could be leading, the poet makes the man’s grief felt. Furthermore, the protracted examination of this grief allows the reader to comprehend the magnitude of this son’s death and the manner in which it happened—the old man is now known as both the father of an executed son, and as a man without heirs or even compensation. As a result, even his grief is compounded by his powerlessness; he can neither “helpe ne mæg [...] ænige gefremman”, or “offer any help [to his dead son]”, nor can he rectify his own heirless and compensation-less situation. In contrast, Bede omits narrative commentary on even non-violent conflict, much less creates the spaces necessary for readers to understand the practical and emotional effects of that conflict. A passage such as this one cannot be found in the Historia.

The Old Norse Hamðismál differs from Beowulf in its length and subject matter, but it, too, ruminates on acts and consequences of violence. Hamðismál is neither immediately contemporaneous with the Historia, nor is it an Anglo-Saxon text, much less a piece of prose. However, it is the product of a similar culture and time, and as a result, like Beowulf it may offer some insights into the ways that violence is expressed as compared to Bede. The poem is short, and it concerns the two brothers

Hamðir and Sörli,<sup>629</sup> who seek vengeance for their dead sister Svanhildr. Hamðir's and Sörli's mother, Guðrún, has incited them to this act of revenge; Svanhildr was trampled by horses at the order of her husband, the Gothic king Iörmunrekkr. Along the way to Iörmunrekkr's Hall, Hamðir and Sörli encounter their half-brother Erpr, who offers to help. The two brothers immediately slay him, and then return to their task. Hamðir and Sörli kill Iörmunrekkr, but are slain themselves in the process. Hamðismál is an incredibly violent text rich in metaphoric expression and reflection on the nature of brutality.

The dialogue of the doomed characters develops the sense of premonition in the poem. For example, Guðrún, after recounting Svanhildr's death by horses in order to incite her sons, laments her own fate in the following stanza: "Einstæð em ek orðin / sem ösp í holti, / fallin at frændom / sem fura at kvisti, / vaðin at vilia / sem viðr at laufi, / þá er in kvistskæða / kómur um dag varman", or "I am left standing alone / like the aspen in woodland, / shorn of kinsmen / as pine-tree of branch, / stripped of joy / as wood of leaf / when the girl, branch-robbing, / comes on a hot day".<sup>630</sup> Her language reflects both incitement and future reaction; the expression "fallin at frændom" or "[I am] shorn of kinsmen" denotes current grief for the death of her daughter, Svanhildr, plus imminent lamentation for her sons, Hamðir and Sörli. As such, she recognizes the fatal significance of urging Hamðir and Sörli to avenge Svanhildr; in doing so they too will die, and Guðrún will be truly "fallin at frændom". But at the same time, Guðrún leaves no other choice for her sons—violence is the only acceptable salve for her grief.

---

<sup>629</sup> I have amended the ON vowel the tailed "o" with "ö". This emendation includes proper names (e.g. Sörli, Iörmunrekkr, Högni) and quotations.

<sup>630</sup> Ursula Dronke, ed. and trans., The Poetic Edda: Vol. I, Heroic Poems (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969), strophe 5. All further references to Hamðismál are from this edition, and the Modern English translations are Dronke's.

Hamðir and Sörli also acknowledge this portentous certainty, and with some bitterness. The former taunts his mother about her lamentation for their dead kinsmen: “Svà skyldi hverr öðrom”, he says, “veria til aldraga / sverði sárbeito / at sér né stríddit”, or “One should encompass / another’s death / with wound-cutting sword / without hurting oneself”.<sup>631</sup> This weary summation of the inter-familial killings that have already occurred—for example, the murder of Guðrún’s husband, Sigurðr, at the hands of her brothers Gunnarr and Högni—fails, however, to save Hamðir from a similar fate. Sörli concedes this by stating “Vilka ek við móður / málom skipta” or “I will not argue / with my mother”, but warns Guðrún that “Okkr skaltu ok, Guðrún, / gráta báða, / er hér sitiom feigir á / mörom. / Fiarri munom deya” or “For both of us also, Guðrún, / you will weep, / doomed men even now, as we sit on / our horses. / We shall die far from here”.<sup>632</sup> In an interesting twist on Augustinian linear history, both Hamðir and Sörli recognize that their fates are fixed, but they assume the position of knowing exactly how those fates will play out.

When Hamðir and Sörli encounter Erpr, their scorn and resignation to violence deepens. Erpr, the poet notes, uses the term “frændom” or “kinsmen”<sup>633</sup> when he offers to accompany his brothers on their errand, but they rebuff him and label their half-brother a “hornungr”, or “bastard”.<sup>634</sup> Seconds later, Hamðir and Sörli kill him:

Drógo þeir ór skíði /  
 skíðiíárn, /  
 mækis eggjar, /  
 at mun flagði: /  
 þverðo þeir þrótt sinn /  
 at þriðungi, /  
 léto mög ungan /  
 til moldar hníga.

---

<sup>631</sup>Hamðismál, strophe 8.

<sup>632</sup>Hamðismál, strophe 10.

<sup>633</sup>Hamðismál, strophe 13.

<sup>634</sup>Hamðismál, strophe 14.

[They drew from the sheath /  
the sheathed iron, /  
the sword's edges, /  
to the delight of the ogress. /  
They cut their strength /  
by a third, /  
made the young boy /  
sink to the ground.]<sup>635</sup>

“Mögr” or “the young boy” distances both the reader and Hamðir and Sörli from recognizing this killing as not just a gratuitous murder, but also an act of fratricide—an even more disturbing deed in Germanic cultures that depend on familial ties for strength and sustenance. However, the poet has not finished with this episode, and he returns to it at the end of Hamðismál, allowing both the reader and the characters to absorb the full significance of Erpr’s death. When Hamðir and Sörli finally confront and battle Iörmunrekkr, they realize the folly of cutting “þeir þrótt sinn / at þriðjungi”, or “their strength / by a third”. They hack at the Gothic king’s limbs, yet, by leaving his head, they allow Iörmunrekkr to gurgle their death order. As they are overcome, Hamðir tells Sörli, “Af væri nú höfuð / ef Erpr lifði, / bróðir okkarr inn/ böðfrækni, / er vit á braut vágom, / verr inn vígfrækni”, or “Off would be the head now, / if Erpr were living, / our battle-brave brother, / whom we killed on the road, / a man brave in fighting”.<sup>636</sup> Suddenly, with his brothers facing their own demise, Erpr becomes the “böðfrækn bróðir” or “battle-brave brother”, the “vígfrækn verr” or “man brave in fighting”. Gone are the humiliating terms of kinship; now Erpr symbolizes elusive salvation. By killing their brother and dooming themselves to death, Hamðir and Sörli have completely destroyed their family, and they have done so in a particularly gruesome way.

---

<sup>635</sup>Hamðismál, strophe 15.

<sup>636</sup>Hamðismál, strophe 28.

The Historia contains no explicit parallels to Hamðismál; although Bede does relate instances of lethal betrayal and total destruction, the language that he uses is warm in comparison. However, the anxieties about familial and/or community weaknesses to which Hamðismál alludes are ones that Bede's contemporaneous readers might have shared. Familial networks as both violent backup and general support would still have existed in seventh and eighth century England, regardless of local rulers' and ecclesiastical officials' attempts to curb them. The annihilation of one's family helps render that individual identity-less—that is, unless he or she joins a monastery. That option does not exist within the world of Hamðismál, however, and as Bede demonstrates, it does not necessarily exist within the world of the Historia either. At a time when the fires of paganism remained lit in the corners of Anglo-Saxon England—and when the heathen Penda's campaigns lingered in relatively recent memory—envisioning the Church as a form of physical, secular safety would have been impractical, if not impossible.

#### IV

##### **Chapter Three Parallels:**

Because Bede grapples with conflict directly through “supernatural” forces in the Fursey passage, whereas in most of the Historia he refrains from such narrative engagement and excitement, it might be instructive to examine another text in which a protagonist battles with an otherworldly foe while remaining more reserved with his human cohorts. In Beowulf, the hero of the same name notably fights two supernatural enemies, Grendel the monster and a treasure-guarding dragon, but even more significantly, he distinguishes himself by killing *men* only when necessary and/or on the battlefield. As the poet approvingly notes of Beowulf's character,

“bealdode [...] guma guðum cuð, godum dædum, / dreah æfter dome; nealles druncne slog / heorðgeneates; næs him hreoh sefa, / ac he mancynnes mæste cræfte / ginfæstan gife, þe him God sealde, / heold hildedeor”,<sup>637</sup> or “[Beowulf] showed himself [worthy] in brave deeds. He bore himself honorably, never struck down his [companions] at drinking; his was no brutal mind, but he, the brave in battle, guarded with the greatest human art the liberal gifts which God had granted him.”<sup>638</sup> Similarly, the poet relates that Beowulf always acted “swa sceal mæg don, / nealles inwitnet oðrum bregdon / dyrnum cræfte, deað ren(ian) / hondgesteallan”,<sup>639</sup> or “[as] a kinsman [should], and never weave a cunning snare for another, or contrive death for his [close comrade] by secret craft”.<sup>640</sup> As these passages demonstrate, the Beowulf poet possesses a remarkable dexterity for evoking the hero’s quiet, respectful treatment of his companions while juxtaposing them with tantalizing metaphors of how he *could* have treated them. By conjuring the knitted “net of malice” by which Beowulf might have ensnared potential rivals, for example, the poet emphasizes more forcefully the protagonist’s just character. In comparison, Bede metaphorically depicts the “venenum” or “poison”, and “pestilentia” or “pestilence”, of Pelagianism in order to convey the degenerate faith, and perhaps by extension, characters, of Christian heretics. But the ways in which both authors employ metaphors in these instances is instructive, because for each of them these passages are the exception and not the rule. For Bede, as this thesis attempts to prove, metaphoric richness throughout his narrative is an anomaly, while for the Beowulf poet, it is the depictions of the hero’s

---

<sup>637</sup>Frederick Klaeber, Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., ed. R.D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork, and John D. Niles, based on the 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), l. 2177-2183.

<sup>638</sup>Clark Hall, J.R., ed. and trans., Beowulf and the Finnesburg Fragment, 6<sup>th</sup> ed., rev. C.L. Wrenn (London: Allen and Unwin, 1963), l. 2177-2183.

<sup>639</sup>Klaeber, l. 2166-2169.

<sup>640</sup>Clark Hall, Beowulf, l. 2166-2169.

battles with the two monsters that linger in the reader's mind, not this understated praise.

The poet does bridge the gap between more discreet metaphoric admiration of Beowulf and the harrowing fight scenes in the account of Beowulf's verbal duel with Unferth, when the Geats first arrive at Hrothgar's court. Unferth, jealous in his certainty that he is as great a warrior as Beowulf, insults the Geat's reputation by craftily asserting that although the Beowulf has proclaimed an impending victory against Grendel, he once lost a swimming contest to man named Breca, who "he þe æt sunde oferflat, / hæfde mare mægen",<sup>641</sup> or "overcame [Beowulf] at swimming: he had greater strength".<sup>642</sup> Unferth then adds, with a challenge, "beot eal wið þe [...] soðe gelæste. / ðonne wene ic to þe wyrsan geþingea, / ðeah þu heaðoræsa gewhær dohte, / grimre guðe, gif þu Grendles dearest / nihtlongne fyrst nean bidan",<sup>643</sup> or "[he] performed faithfully [...] all that he had pledged himself to. So I expect from [you] a worse issue,—though [you have] everywhere prevailed in rush of battle, stern war,—if [you dare] await Grendel at close quarters for the space of a night".<sup>644</sup> Such an affront to Beowulf's honor practically demands a physical response, and Unferth seems to relish the thought, particularly because it seems like a safe bet—what young warrior would reject the opportunity to assert his honor? Yet Beowulf does exactly that; instead of unsheathing his weapons, he cleverly unleashes a torrent of reasoned words, and this response reveals the almost political savvy with which Beowulf manages human networks. "Soð ic talige", he responds, "þæt ic merestrenge maran ahte, / earfeþo on yþum, ðonne ænig oþer man [...] No he wiht fram me / flodyþum feor fleotan meahte, / hraþor on holme, no ic fram him wolde",<sup>645</sup> or "I claim it to be true

---

<sup>641</sup>Klaeber, l. 517-518.

<sup>642</sup>Clark Hall, *Beowulf*, l. 517-518.

<sup>643</sup>Klaeber, l. 523-528.

<sup>644</sup>Clark Hall, *Beowulf*, l. 523-528.

<sup>645</sup>Klaeber, l. 532-534, l. 541-543.

that I had more strength in swimming, more hard struggle in the waves, than any other man [...] not by any means [could he] swim far from me in the surging waves, swifter in the sea than I;—I did not wish to go from him”.<sup>646</sup> In fact, Beowulf, continues, in addition to not abandoning his friend on the waves, he fought off several “feondscaðas”, or “enemy” sea-monsters, which he “þenode / deoran sweorde, swa hit gedefe wæs. / Næs hie ðære fylle gefean hæfdon, / manfordædlan, þæt hie me þegon”,<sup>647</sup> or “served [...] as was fitting. The base destroyers did not have the joy of that feast—that they might eat me”,<sup>648</sup> and in the end, he killed nine of them.

Beowulf seems to channel the energy with which he would have fought Unferth into his striking narrative of this swimming contest, and in doing so he not only persuades his challenger and the Hall of his prowess, but also discreetly underscores his more magnanimous treatment of other men. For although he does clearly state his superior strength and his refusal to abandon Breca, those statements constitute a total of five lines, while his depiction of the battle with the sea-monsters takes up nearly thirty-five. Furthermore, he manages to stress both his conduct towards Breca and his physical prowess by describing bloody fights with *otherworldly* forces, not human ones, which allows him to prove himself without needing to confront the nasty entanglements that human conflicts can engender. Beowulf’s treatment of Unferth is likewise politically shrewd and seemingly generous, because while he does skewer Unferth’s honor—he makes sure to remind everyone that Unferth is a fratricide who killed his own brothers<sup>649</sup>—the Hall is not a battle-field, and Beowulf does not spill another man’s blood on Hrothgar’s hearth. Indeed, his analysis of Unferth’s crime evokes a temptingly Bedan depiction; Beowulf tells

---

<sup>646</sup>Clark Hall, *Beowulf*, l. 532-534, l. 541-543.

<sup>647</sup>Klaeber, l. 560-563.

<sup>648</sup>Clark Hall, *Beowulf* l. 560-563.

<sup>649</sup>Klaeber, l. 587-588.

Unferth, “þæs þu in helle scealt / werhðo dreogan”,<sup>650</sup> or “for that [you shall] suffer damnation in hell”.<sup>651</sup> While the term “helle” is not clearly legible in the original manuscript—leading some scholars to think that the term might actually be “healle”, or “hall”—if one is to assume that Beowulf does in fact prophesize Unferth suffering in hell, then Beowulf’s choice to prophesy rather than to punish Unferth in the temporal world is reminiscent of Bede’s eternal world predictions in the *Historia*. Beowulf, like Bede, avoids ensnaring himself in human strife (for example, if Beowulf attacked Unferth, his rival’s comrades or family would probably return the favor); instead, Beowulf resolutely tries to keep his conflicts black and white—human versus non-human, just as Bede maintains his Christian versus non-Christian distinction.

In contrast, the ways in which Beowulf challenges supernatural foes brim with taunting insults and confident conviction. When he pledges to Hrothgar his intent to destroy Grendel, Beowulf says, “wið Grendel seal, / wið þam aglæcan ana gehegan / ðing wið þyrse [...] ic mid grape seal / fon wið feonde ond ymb feorh sacan, / læð wið laþum”,<sup>652</sup> or “I will decide the matter alone against the monster, the giant, Grendel [...] with the enemy I will close with the grip of [my] hand, and [we will] contend for our lives, foe against foe”.<sup>653</sup> It is clear that the “ðing” or “matter” with which Beowulf will confront Grendel will differ markedly from the one he discussed with Unferth, and the protagonist announces clearly how he will battle with this monster. What is even more interesting is how Beowulf lists his qualifications for this task; in order to prove his capabilities as a warrior, Beowulf recites a short resume in which he says the Geats have seen him “fah from feondum, þær ic fife geband, / yðde eotena cyn, ond on yðum slog / niceras nightes”,<sup>654</sup> or “blood-stained from battles, I returned from

---

<sup>650</sup>Klaeber, l. 588-589.

<sup>651</sup>Clark Hall, *Beowulf*, l. 588-589.

<sup>652</sup>Klaeber, l. 424-426, l. 438-440.

<sup>653</sup>Clark Hall, *Beowulf*, l. 424-426, l. 438-440.

<sup>654</sup>Klaeber, l. 419-422.

the fights, where I bound five, laid low a brood of giants, and slew by night sea-monsters on the waves”.<sup>655</sup> Note that each of these examples is one of him fighting with *otherworldly* challengers, and that in the one example which might concern ambiguously human adversaries, the poet states that Beowulf “geband”, or “captured” them—the killing is implicit, but not emphasized. On the one hand, providing instances such as these, in which he has demonstrated his prowess against other monsters, makes sense, but on the other hand, it seems strange that Beowulf not establish his strength as a warrior in all capacities—fighting against enemy monsters *and* humans. Yet by emphasizing his successful battles with supernatural foes, and possibly eliding past conflicts with other men, Beowulf is able to minimize potential human enemies (by virtue of extended human networks in a blood feud society), and garner support among Hrothgar’s thanes (after all, everyone hates monsters).

In the same way, when Beowulf proclaims his intention to fight the hoard-guarding dragon, he co-opts the language that would be used to challenge a human foe, but the otherworldly nature of his adversary allows him to do so without the threat of future human retaliation. As Beowulf announces to his comrades, “Ic geneoðde fela / guða on geogoðe; gyt ic wylle, / frod folces weard fæhðe secan, / mærdou fremman, gif me sec mansceaða / or eorðsele ut geseceð”,<sup>656</sup> or “I ventured on many battles in my younger days; once more will I, the aged guardian of the people, seek [hostility/enmity] and get renown, if the evil ravager will meet me outside his earthly vault”.<sup>657</sup> Based on these lines alone, it is not immediately clear that Beowulf’s foe is not human; in fact, not much is clear at all, except that the foe is definitely evil and Beowulf is definitely good. What were the “fela guða” or “many battles” or his youth, and what is this “fæhð” or “hostility” or “enmity” of which he speaks? In the context

---

<sup>655</sup>Clark Hall, *Beowulf*, l. 419-422.

<sup>656</sup>Klaeber, l. 2511-2515.

<sup>657</sup>Clark Hall, *Beowulf*, l. 2511-2515.

of the poem these ambiguities are clear, but on their own, these defiant words express perfectly the black and white, good and evil, human and non-human dialectic that Beowulf seems to espouse. Furthermore, this little speech rightly endears itself to all good humans, just as Bede's depictions of Christian versus non-Christian conflict often endear themselves to all good (or trying to be good) Christians, because the adversary is straightforwardly bad. The dragon threatens all of the Geats, and even in contrast to Grendel and his mother, it lacks a dragon familial network that can articulate a wrong that should or would be redressed. As an example of supernatural versus human conflict, Beowulf's fight with the dragon expresses perfectly the types of metaphoric discord in which Bede can freely engage in the Historia—namely, those of disease-like heresies and Fursey's vision. It is in those instances that Bede can play with more contentious, figurative language and description, because the risk of alienating any readers is low.

## APPENDIX TWO

### Anglo-Saxon Kings' Law-Codes Parallels

The material in this appendix is an assessment of the Anglo-Saxon kings' law-codes and the ways in which they prescribe behavior in light of Bede's Historia. This objective is particularly relevant to Bede's text because the law-codes also often emphasize Christian unity and faith while outlining consequences for bad actions. Thus, an examination of these texts serves as a counterpoint to Bede's implicit, as opposed to straightforwardly prescribed, endorsement of behavior in the Historia. Likewise, in this appendix I compare these codes' identification and classification of subjects—such as “ceorl” and “frigman”—and the types of punishment accorded to each with the simple classification that Bede considers throughout his text: Christian and non-Christian. In tandem with this comparative assessment, I examine the terminology of known versus unknown, or the thematically universal friend versus foe, that exists in the law-codes, and the discrepancies and similarities between this terminology and that of both the Historia and the Anglo-Saxon non-legal texts.

Just like Appendix One, this appendix is organized thematically by dissertation chapter, and much of this work also arose in tandem with my examination of the Historia in a similarly evocative way; the term “parallels” serves to describe the resonant connections that I found between the texts. Likewise, Appendix Two is by no means a comprehensive survey of the kings' law-codes; instead, it attempts to show some of the parallels that I found while examining treatments of conflict in Bede's Historia.

# I

## Introduction Parallels

One way to examine further the impact of possible *regulae* on the totality of Anglo-Saxon monastic life and culture, and specifically with regard to its probable denial of one's non-monk identity, is to envision the Rule of Benedict as a law-code, and thus compare it to the law-codes of the Anglo-Saxon kings. In the latter, victims and perpetrators of various acts are always identified by their sex and their social rank, whereas in the Rule this identification is ultimately irrelevant and thus often absent. Any distinctions between abbots and monks, and between monks and nuns, exist for the purpose of preserving the Church through "magnus [...] differentiae ordo" or "a great order of different [ranks]", as stated by Gregory the Great.<sup>658</sup> But those ranks themselves differ from non-religious social ranks for one significant reason: monks can move between the ranks, whereas non-religious Anglo-Saxons can rarely change their social status. Ironically, social status is fixed in the non-religious world in a way that allows ecclesiastical rankings to appear *unfixed*, yet movement between rankings does not induce anxiety in the way that losing one's identity as a monk might in that

---

<sup>658</sup> "[A]d hoc divinae dispensationis provisio gradus et diversos constituit ordines esse distinctos, ut, dum reverentiam minores potioribus exhiberent et potiores minoribus dilectionem impenderent, una concordiae fieret ex diversitate contextio et recte officiorum gereretur administratio singulorum. Neque enim universitas alia poterat ratione subsistere, nisi huiusmodi magnus eam differentiae ordo servaret". Gregorius Magnus, S. Gregorii Magni Registrum epistularum libri, ed. D. Norberg, CCSL 140 (Turnholt: Brepols, 1982), lib.: 5, epist: 59, col. 785-786.

"The provision of the divine dispensation decided that there should be different grades and distinct orders for this reason, that while inferiors show reverence to the more powerful, and the more powerful bestow love on their inferiors, one harmonious concord may be created out of diversity, and the administration of individual offices may be properly carried out. For the universality of the Church could not survive unless a great system of different ranks preserved it". Gregory the Great, The Letters of Gregory the Great, Vol. II, trans. John R.C. Martyn (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2004), Letter 5.59, pp. 394-395.

world. In contrast, rising from a slave to a king is improbable in the non-religious Anglo-Saxon world,<sup>659</sup> and social rank and identity are often one and the same.

The kings' law-codes further cement the equivalence between non-religious social rank and identity, and by revealing the plethora of social markers one might possess, they demonstrate the various types of conflict that might arise between them. In the Kentish King Æthelberht's law-codes alone, which were composed around the beginning of the seventh century,<sup>660</sup> the laws refer to the "cyning", or "king"; a "frigman", or "freeman"; a non-descript "man"; a "cyninges ambihtsmið", or "king's court-smith"; "laadrincmanna" or type of "escort"; "cyninges mægdenmann", or "king's maiden woman"; "grindende þeow" or "[female] grinding-slave"; an "eorl" or "nobleman"; an "eorles birele", or "earl's [female] servant"; a "ceorl", or "common-man"; a "ceorles birele", or "common-man's [female] servant"; and "ceorlæs hlafæta", or "common-man's dependant".<sup>661</sup> Even more significantly, each of these social distinctions are recognized in the context of specific penalties for particular deeds, and the cost of punishment rises alongside the social rank. For example, "Gif man wið cyninges mægdenman geligeþ", or "If a man lies with a king's maiden woman", then the compensation cost is 50 shillings, but if that woman is only "grindende þeow", or a "griding-slave", then that compensation is reduced to 25 shillings.<sup>662</sup> Similarly, "Gif in cyninges tune man mannan ofslea, L scill' gebete",<sup>663</sup> or "If a man slays another

---

<sup>659</sup>Interestingly, however, as Thomas Hill cites J. L. Nelson's paper, "Queens as Jezebels: Brunhild and Balthild in Merovingian History", in his article on the name of Wealhtheow (Hrothgar's wife in *Beowulf*), kings in Frankish Merovingia would at times marry attractive slave-girls to demonstrate that they were of such high rank they did not need to marry queens. Nelson's thesis, by way of Hill, helps elucidate the mystery of "wealhtheow", which means "female slave" and is an unexpected name for the wife of such a well-regarded king. See Thomas D. Hill, "'Wealhtheow' as a Foreign Slave" (*Philology Quarterly* 69, no. 1 (1990): 106-112).

<sup>660</sup>N.B. The exact definition of some of these terms is not known, and are instead approximations based on context.

<sup>661</sup>F.L. Attenborough, ed. and trans., *The Laws of the Earliest English Kings* (Cambridge: Llanerch, 2000), 4 and 6. All of these citations come from these two pages; the Modern English translations are my own.

<sup>662</sup>Attenborough, 4.

<sup>663</sup>Attenborough, 4.

man at the king's residence, he must pay fifty shillings", but if a man slays another "on eorles tune",<sup>664</sup> or "at a nobleman's residence", then the penalty is only twelve shillings.

These law-codes could perhaps have the same "save souls" objective that A.W. Richard Sipe contends that the Rule possesses,<sup>665</sup> but because of the precise attention that is paid to social rank and its correlative compensation price, the laws enhance, rather than diminish, personal identification with social status. Conflict between these various groups seems inevitable, for if one can afford it, what deterrence is there for slaying a man at a nobleman's house or raping a grinding-slave? The laws allow these "souls" to be perceived hierarchically by virtue of perceiving social identities, whereas the Rule, despite its proliferation in an institution defined by extensive hierarchy, removes those various markers and thus, hopefully, potential conflict. Interestingly, many of the law-codes do identify the "ranks" that the religious possess, but it is almost always as victims and not as perpetrators. For example, Æthelberht notes distinctions between compensating robbed property for a "biscop", or "bishop"; "preost", or "priest"; "diacon", or "deacon"; and "cleroc", or "clerk".<sup>666</sup> The non-religious world may therefore recognize the *ordo* of its religious counterpart, but the latter is free to ignore the *ordo* that includes a "frigman", "eorl", and "cyninges ambihtsmið".

Bede surely recognized the potential fluidity of one's ranking in the monastic world, but it seems unlikely that he saw himself as a "ceorl", "leod", or whatever other marker would have defined him had he not been a monk. As a result, reading the Historia in light of the parallel religious world in which he lived is important, because

---

<sup>664</sup> Attenborough, 6.

<sup>665</sup> A.W. Richard Sipe, "The Psychological Dimensions of the *Rule* of St. Benedict" (American Benedictine Review 34, no. 4 (1983): 424-435), 427.

<sup>666</sup> Attenborough, 4.

in that world, it is one's faith and obedience that are integral to one's identity. Thus, the emphasis on Christian versus non-Christian, and strong faith versus weak faith, that prevail in the Historia may be better understood as crucial to Bede's implicit advocacy for Christian unity in the secular, temporal world.

## II

### Chapter One Parallels

As an additional contrast to the parable-like sections of the Historia, an illuminating comparison to Bede's *suggested* message might be the *explicit* message regarding Christian salvation and unity in the Anglo-Saxon kings' codes and treaties. Similar to parts of the Historia, the law-codes and treaties were written for and about people who were the direct recipients of their prescribed or implied actions. From Ine through Canute, most of the Anglo-Saxon kings privileged unified adherence to one God, and a commitment to the promotion of Christianity in their legal codes. Why these kings emphasized common Christian goals as opposed to proto-national ones—for example, they do not emphasize a unified adherence to a strong Anglo-Saxon England—may be explained partly by what seem to be fractured identities. Christianity emerges as one of the few society-wide identities in Anglo-Saxon England that could be invoked by these kings in order to maintain power and security (as well as potentially allow them to claim Christians from neighboring territories as subjects). In contrast, other identities that might be conjured either by rulers or peoples could be too divisive, as they are defined by potentially explosive markers such as where someone lives, what language he or she speaks, and, notorious in the land of the blood-feud, who his or her family is. But Christianity as an all-encompassing identity helps, in theory, to soothe many of those fractures, and as a result, Anglo-Saxon rulers could invoke it for various objectives.

Of course, this phenomenon is not particular to the British Isles; as Carolina Nero notes of the late Roman Empire, “from the fourth century, in different ways, religious creed and civil law will be used together to build a new identity for Christian citizens in a Christian kingdom”.<sup>667</sup> This new religious-political identity concerns behavior as well; each law-code and treaty prescribes specific punishments for “Christian citizens” who act outside of clearly defined parameters, and the explicit message of these texts is that by behaving as a good Christian, consequences can be avoided. For example, the West Saxon King Ine opens his law-code with a preface that asks for “ðære hælo urra sawla [ond] ðam staþole ures rices”, or “the salvation of our souls and the [foundation] of our realm”.<sup>668</sup> This statement not only privileges the goal of “salvation” within the code, but it also ties “salvation” directly to cooperative behavior on the part of those souls by advocating “the [foundation] of our realm”. Similarly, in the treaty between the West Saxon King Alfred and the Dane King Guthrum, the kings in the preface articulate their shared anxiety “Godes miltse” or “for God’s favor”,<sup>669</sup> and that favor is evoked throughout the treaty in clauses that delineate the consequences of homicide and unlawful interaction.

Later law codes and treaties echo these same sentiments: for example, the treaty between Edward and Guthrum proclaims that they have “to friþe [ond] to freondscipe fullice fengon” or “[have taken hold of] relations of peace and friendship”, and share the love of “ænne God” or “one God”,<sup>670</sup> the first code of King Edmund relates that the laws contained within it considered “sawla” or “souls” under

---

<sup>667</sup>Carolina Lo Nero, “*Christiana Dignitas*: New Christian Criteria for Citizenship in the Late Roman Empire” (*Medieval Encounters: Jewish, Christian and Muslim Culture* 7, no. 2-3 (2001): 146-164), 159.

<sup>668</sup>F.L. Attenborough, ed. and trans., *The Laws of the Earliest English Kings* (Cambridge: Llanerch, 2000), 36 and 37. In this chapter, all Old English citations and Modern English translations of these codes come from the Attenborough and Robertson texts unless otherwise noted.

<sup>669</sup>Attenborough, 98 and 99.

<sup>670</sup>Attenborough, 102 and 103.

Edmund's care,<sup>671</sup> and in the second Edmund states that he has considered how he "mæhte Cristendomes mest aræran" or "could best [raise up] Christianity";<sup>672</sup> likewise, King Edgar explains that his ordinance exists "Gode to lofe [ond] him sylfe to cynescype [ond] [eallum his leodscype] to þearfe" or "for the glory of God, and his own royal dignity, and the good of all his people".<sup>673</sup> King Æthelred, prior to his fatal confrontation with the Dane Canute, writes in his fifth law-code that his citizens must "ealle ænne God lufian [ond] wurðian [ond] ænne Cristendom georne healdan" or "all love and honour one God, and zealously observe one Christian faith",<sup>674</sup> and then reiterates this rule in his sixth,<sup>675</sup> seventh,<sup>676</sup> and ninth<sup>677</sup> codes. In his tenth, Æthelred evokes Edmund's code by explaining that he has been "hu ic Cristendom æfre mihte [ond] rihtne cynedom fyrrest aræran" or "considering first of all how I could best promote Christianity",<sup>678</sup> and subsequently, (now) King Canute echoes Ine in his first law code, in which he writes that his subjects will "ænne God æfre woldan lufian [ond] wurþian", or "love and honour one God", and that the churches must be maintained "saulum to hæle" or "for the salvation [or "health"] of our souls".<sup>679</sup> In that same code, Canute later adds that "ælc Cristen men" or "all Christian men" ought to "God lufian [ond] rihtne Cristendom geornlice healdan" or "love God and zealously uphold the true Christian faith".<sup>680</sup>

Unlike Bede's Historia, these codes and treaties offer direct and immediate castigation for those who attempt to harm "ðære hælo urra sawla [ond] ðam staþole

---

<sup>671</sup>A.J. Robertson, ed. and trans., The Laws of the Kings of England from Edmund to Henry I: Part One: Edmund to Canute (Cambridge: CUP, 1925), 6 and 7.

<sup>672</sup>Robertson, I, 8 and 9.

<sup>673</sup>Robertson, I, 20 and 21.

<sup>674</sup>Robertson, I, 78 and 79.

<sup>675</sup>Robertson, I, 90.

<sup>676</sup>Robertson, I, 108.

<sup>677</sup>Robertson, I, 130.

<sup>678</sup>Robertson, I, 130 and 131.

<sup>679</sup>Robertson, I, 154.

<sup>680</sup>Robertson, I, 170.

ures rices”, or “the salvation of our souls and the [foundation] of our realm”, but they also must appeal to the most common denominator that holds these people together: Christianity. It is in no king’s interest to have the *cives* consistently violating the peace, even if he can successfully punish those who do so every time. If his worldly kingdom, and by extension, his hold on power, is to be truly secure, then he must appeal to the religious precepts that convince the people that good deeds in *this* life help ensure the good kingdom for them in the *eternal* life. As a result, one way of interpreting these codes and treaties would be to see them as evidence of the “mala pravis” that Bede discusses at the beginning of the Historia, and which is noted in Chapter One. “Seu mala commemoret de pravis,” he writes, “nihilominus religious ac pius auditor sive lector devitando quod noxium est ac perversum, ipse sollertius ad exsequenda ea, quae bona ac Deo digna esse cognoverit, accenditur”,<sup>681</sup> or “if it records evil things of wicked me, nevertheless, the religious and pious hearer or reader in shunning that which is hurtful or perverse is fired more earnestly to perform those things which he has learned to be good and worthy of God”.<sup>682</sup> By detailing the painful dismemberments or death that a robbery or homicide can incur, for example, the law codes *do* inspire the “pius auditor sive lector” to “sollertius”, or “more cleverly”, perform good deeds and to avoid those bad ones.

In addition to assuaging the concerns of temporal world rulers, these texts and their emphasis on worshipping “one God” and “promoting Christianity” could also suggest ecclesiastical authorship, a political strategy aimed at discrediting pagans, or a desire to align oneself with preceding kings, but from a purely narrative standpoint, these expressions of faith, peace, belief, salvation, and security imply an objective

---

<sup>681</sup>Bede, Historiam Ecclesiasticam Gentis Anglorum Historiam Abbatum Epistolam ad Ecgbertum, una cum Historia Abbatum Auctore Anonymo, ed. Charles Plummer, Vol. I (Oxford: Clarendon, 1896), Prae, 5.

<sup>682</sup>Bede, The Ecclesiastical History of the English People and Other Selections, ed. James Campbell (New York: Washington Square Press, 1968), 3.

identical to Bede's: Christian unification in the temporal world ensures reward in the eternal one.

But whereas Bede embeds this message among the saints' lives, miracle stories, and parable-like vignettes of his *Historia*, the law-codes and treaties often explicitly state either this objective or its close variation. The rhetorical differences between these texts when working with this objective, particularly the differences between the parable-like vignettes of the *Historia* and some of the prefaces to the law-codes, speak ultimately to the authority of their authors and the means by which they can be enforced. For example, in King Æthelstan's codes, there is an "Ordinance Relating to Charities" that could be seen as a minor corollary to the parable-like narrative of Wilfrid and the South Saxons. In the latter, Wilfrid has the South Saxons divide their fish so that some can be given to the poor; similarly, in this ordinance Æthelstan declares that some destitute Englishmen should always be given food. He writes as follows:

Ic Æþelstane cyning, eallum minum gerefum binnon mine rice gecyþe, mid geþeahhte Wulfhelmes mines ærcebisceopes [ond] ealre mina oþra bisceopa [ond] Godes ðeowa, for mina sinna forgyfenesse, þæt ic wille, þæt ge fedaþ ealle wæge an earm Engliscmon, gif ge him habbaþ, oþþe oþerne gefindaþ.

1. Fram twam minra feorma agyfe mon hine elce monaþ ane ambra meles [ond] án sconc spices oþþe án ráw weorþe IIII peningas [ond] scrud for twelf monþa ælc gear. [ond] þæt ge alysaþ an witeðeowne. [ond] ðæs ealle sie gedón for Drihtenesse mildheortnesse [ond] mine lufu under þæs bisceopes gewitnesse on ðæs rice it sie.
2. [ond] gif se gereafa ðis oferheald, gebete XXX scill., [ond] sie þæt feoh gedæled ðæm ðearfum ðe on ða tun synd, ðe ðis ungefremed wunie, on ðæs bisceopes gewitnesse.<sup>683</sup>

[I, King Æthelstan, with the advice of Wulfhelm, my archbishop, and of all my other bishops and ecclesiastics, for the forgiveness of

---

<sup>683</sup> Attenborough, 126.

my sins, make known to all my reeves within my kingdom, that it is my wish that you shall always provide a destitute Englishman with food, if you have such an one [in your district], or if you find one [elsewhere].

1. From two of my rents he shall be supplied with an amber of meal, a shank of bacon or a ram worth four pence every month, and clothes for twelve months annually. [And I desire you] to make free annually one man who has been reduced to penal slavery. And all this shall be done for the loving kindness of God, and for the love you bear me, with the cognizance of the bishop in whose diocese the gift is made.

2. And if the reeve neglects [to do] this, he shall pay 30 shillings compensation, and the money shall be divided, with the cognizance of the bishop, among the poor who are on the estate where [this] remains unfulfilled.]<sup>684</sup>

In the passage on Wilfrid and the South Saxons, Bede limits his analysis of the narrative to one sentence, in which he says, “*Quo beneficio multum antistes cor omnium in suum conuertit amorem, et libentius eo praedicante caelestia sperare coeperunt, cuius ministerio temporalia bona sumserunt*”, or “By this benefit, the bishop gained the affections of all; and they began more readily to hope for heavenly goods when he preached to them, seeing that by his help they had received those goods which are temporal”. Bede is able to praise Wilfrid’s actions by casting them as a victory for Christianity—the bishop teaches them a skill that results in the South Saxons both receiving “temporalia bona”, or “those goods which are temporal” and hoping for “caelestia”, or “heavenly [goods]”. By emphasizing this tactic, which has been propagated successfully by missionaries and politicians throughout world history, Bede recuses himself from making a direct statement about Wilfrid (and thus inviting engagement with the bishop’s detractors), from explaining in further detail what happened to the South Saxons after Wilfrid left (did they remain Christian? Did the poor reject the gift of fish?), and from entertaining the possibilities of what might have happened had Wilfrid failed in his conversion attempt. Bede’s narrative

---

<sup>684</sup>Attenborough, 127.

authority relies on conveying his central message about Christian unity in such a way that minimizes alienating readers by emphasizing the highlights of Anglo-Saxon Christian history, and this method is one that parable-like expression suits because those people and events do not always fit his objective so neatly. At the same time, however, he lacks a certain authority—what happens if a reader does not work towards Christian unity?—because as a monk, the force with which he can back up his thesis consists of ideas, analysis, and ecclesiastical reasoning.

In contrast, the preface to Æthelstan's ordinance demonstrates clearly the consequences of not adhering to his message. The king effectively requires his reeves to share in his goal of Christian unity—in order to ensure the “mina synna forgyfenesse”, or “forgiveness of [his] sins”, his officials are to clothe, feed, and even liberate a destitute “Engliscmon” according to a set of strict criteria. The language that Æthelstan employs underscores the gravity of his wishes; instead of speaking obliquely about hoping and receiving temporal and eternal goods, the king explains straightforwardly that these tasks are to be done “for Drihtenesse mildheortnesse [ond] mine lufu”, or “for the loving kindness of God and for the love of me”, and he outlines precisely what the poor “Engliscmon” shall receive. Punishment for failing to uphold these tasks are likewise detailed with precision, and involve financially penalizing the reeve and dividing that money among “ðæm ðearfum”, or “the destitute”. The authority with which Æthelstan writes is striking in comparison to Bede's; there are no humble entreaties to the reader to forgive him for errors, nor are his orders ever in doubt. Granted, the king recognizes that he is not the authority on earning heavenly rewards—as he notes, he has made this ordinance “mid geþeahte Wulfhelmes mines ærcebisceopes [ond] ealre mina oþra bisceopa [ond] Godes ðeowa”, or “with the counsel of Wulfhelm my archbishop, and all my other bishops and servants of God”. Yet despite this, he chooses to delegate this task for ensuring the forgiveness of his own

sins to others, and furthermore, he is able to proclaim with confidence that they will be punished should they fail to do so. In addition, Æthelstan can convey his order without needing to rely on *conparatio*, that requisite of the *parabola*. There are no *mysteria* in want of explanatory *signa* in this ordinance—his objectives are clear, and while the goal of achieving Christian unity is a by-product of his decree, there is no need to cajole his “pius auditor sive lector” into fulfilling this purpose. If they act according to this law, which declares that their actions must be done for love of God and of the king, then the objective will be achieved.

Bede’s text, when discussing one’s failure to act as a good Christian, evokes possible condemnation in the eternal world, whereas the law-codes can suggest both that possibility as well as the threat of immediate suffering in the temporal one. Indeed, perhaps one reason why Bede could be seen as making a negative statement about Augustine of Canterbury in the passage on the British bishops is because he knows intimately that as a monk or a bishop, the arrows in one’s quiver are those of language, persuasion, and instruction, and that to fail in deploying these weapons successfully is to be like the king who fails to capture and punish a thief. Yet the law-codes, by obvious virtue of their need to outline and explain the minutiae of punishment for various transgressions, lack the breadth and perspective of the Historia, and as a result, Bede’s message is more persuasive. True, fulfilling a king’s order to act “for the love of God” is easy when the alternative is to pay a fine (or worse), but acting in response to the law-codes does not necessarily indicate one’s actual faith or beliefs. With the Historia, Bede’s task is to win that battle of faith, and his narrative weapons must be that much stronger.

### III

#### Chapter Two Parallels

That Bede emphasizes a narrative tension between entities that are known and unknown, and that can seem relatively benign, stands in contrast to additional Anglo-Saxon texts that explore “otherness” and its attendant anxieties. Often the tension of “otherness” is expressed forcefully through the thematically universal dialectic of friend versus foe, particularly in the heroic poetry and eschatological homilies. But in some instances others or unknowns can be just as nondescript as Bede’s dark winter, as nameless as the “advena”, or “foreign invaders”. The difference, however, is that they evoke more of the terror that accompanies the alien attack than the quiet unknown in the sparrow allegory that grounds Bede’s text. Excerpts from the Kentish law codes of Hlothhere and Eadric, and of Wihtred, demonstrate this terror-infused otherness—they allude to a similar tension between familiar and unfamiliar, but because they are laws, the texts articulate ramifications for these unknowns. In addition, since they were composed in 673-690 A.D. and 695 A.D. respectively, they offer a contemporaneous juxtaposition to Bede’s *Historia*, even though they come from a different part of the British Isles.

Chapter Fifteen of Hlothhere’s and Eadric’s code concerns what to do if a trader or unknown one harms a host who has been hospitable to him. The text refers to this unknown person as a “cepeman oþþe oðerne þe sio ofer mearce cuman”,<sup>685</sup> or a “trader or other one who has come over the border”. The non-descript sense of “oðer”, or “other one” and the delineation of “mearc” or “border” suggest both a wariness of and an uncertainty with this particular legal subject. What “other one” would come over a border except for a trader? As demonstrated in the examination of social rank and

---

<sup>685</sup>F.L. Attenborough, ed. and trans., *The Laws of the Earliest English Kings* (Cambridge: Llanerch, 2000), 20. The Modern English translations of these law excerpts are my own.

identity in the law-codes, a monk or emissary of the Church in this text would probably be identified as such, as would someone like a foreign slave. The possible fluidity of “oðer” is unnerving in a text dependent upon identities in order to assess compensation and punishment. The uncertainty suggests that this “oðer” might be someone like an exile—an unpredictable person who lacks the support of his *familia* or *gens*, and thus might possibly harm a hospitable host. Not only is that individual unknown within the context of various societal identities—familial, geographical, possibly linguistic or ethnic—but also within the context of that common denominator, Christianity, to which the law-codes appeal for security and salvation.

Similarly, Chapter Four of Wihtréd’s code regards the non-marital sexual unions of “eltheodig menn”,<sup>686</sup> or “strange, foreign, or enemy men”,<sup>687</sup> in contrast to Chapter Three, which concerns just “men”. The fact that “eltheodig” can mean foreign in either an ambivalent or a profoundly negative sense (“enemy”) evokes the wariness and uncertainty of the authors of Hlothré’s and Eadric’s code, and points to the possibility of this person being an exile, or other non-defined and non-identifiable entity. Indeed, who lacks an identity more truly than a man whose *familia* and whose *gens* have utterly revoked him?

Interestingly, however, these “eltheodig menn” do have some recourse—if they “rihtan”, or “set right” their sexual unions through matrimony, then they alleviate their “synna”, or “sins”, and presumably earn a fixed social identity at the same time. For in order for them to marry, they must become Christian, and if they are baptized then they share in the Christian identity that binds them to the Anglo-Saxons even if their other identities are different. Likewise, in that same chapter, the law-code asserts that “swæse mæn in leodum”, or “men [of] our country”, *lose* that Christian identity by

---

<sup>686</sup>Attenborough, 24.

<sup>687</sup>J.R. Clark Hall, *A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), s.v. “æltheodige”.

being denied communion if they engage in non-marital sexual unions and do not “rihtan” them. As a result, while acknowledging fixed and unfixed “otherness” in terms of familial, geographical, or possibly ethnic and linguistic identities, the law-code also recognizes and permits movement within the Christian identity that overcomes many of those social markers.

Another example of individuals with unfixed or nebulous identities occurs in the last chapter of Wihtred’s code, which concerns a man who “feorran cumen [...] oþþe fræmde”,<sup>688</sup> or “comes from far away [...] or is [an alien]”, and leaves the road without giving notice. A man whose familiarity cannot be seen because of distance—in other words, a man who cannot be *known*—generates the same anxiety as a man who is a “fremde”, or “strange”, no matter the distance. As a result, unless a man physically demonstrates, through shouting or horn-blowing, that he is not coming in secret, then the law-code “fixes” an identity for him—he is assumed to be, and identified in the text as, a “ðeof”, or “thief or criminal”, and the price of inducing that uncertainty can be either holding the “ðeof” for ransom or killing him. The law-code thus relieves a potential slayer or ransom-holder of some possible nasty outcomes. First, it diminishes the possibility of a blood feud as the “ðeof’s” familial network is denied compensation, corporal or otherwise, because of the “ðeof’s” “transgression”. Second, the law-code strips the “ðeof” of a social rank, signifying that a “wergeld” cannot be assessed, and thus the slayer is released from that possible payment as well. Third, by being assigned an identity that depends on a transgression, the “ðeof” automatically becomes a sinner if he is a Christian. Therefore, if he is slain by another Christian, it is possible that the slayer does ruin his chance of eternal salvation in acting as though the “fremde” man were a “ðeof”. This final possibility would most certainly be contested, but the point is that because the law-code assumes

---

<sup>688</sup>Attenborough, 30.

responsibility for assigning the “fremde” man his identity if he fails to, it allows its adherents to operate within a sphere in which as many identities as possible are “fixed”, and thus it allows them to act accordingly. The Kentish law-codes strike a middle ground between Bede’s articulation of indefinable otherness and other Anglo-Saxon texts’ tensions between friend and foe.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Allen, Verity. "Bede: Educating the Educators of Barbarians". Quaestio: Selected Proceedings of the Cambridge Colloquium in Anglo-Saxon Norse and Celtic 3 (2002): 28-44.
- Attenborough, F.L., ed. and trans. The Laws of the Earliest English Kings. Cambridge: Llanerch, 2000.
- Augustinus Hipponensis. Contra Faustum. Ed. Joseph Zyca. CSEL 35. Vienna: F. Tempsky, 1891.
- . Contra Mendacium. Ed. Joeseeph Zyca. CSEL 41. Vienna: F. Tempsky, 1900.
- . De Civitate Dei. Ed. B. Dombart and A. Kalb. CCSL 47 and 48. Turnholt: Brepols, 1955.
- . De Mendacio. Liber Unus. In Opera Omnia. Maurist Edition. Reprinted in Patrologia Latinae Cursus Completus, 40. Turnholt: Brepols, 1970.
- . De Sermone Domini in Monte. Ed. Almut Mutzenbecher. CCSL 35. Turnholt: Brepols, 1967.
- . In Iohannis euangelium tractatus. Ed. R. Willems. CCSL 36. Turnholt: Brepols, 1954.
- Augustine of Hippo. The City of God Against the Pagans. Ed. and trans. R.W. Dyson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- . Lectures or Tractates on the Gospel According to St. John. Trans. John Gibb and James Innes. In A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church. Ed. Philip Schaff. Vol. VII. New York: Christian Literature Company, 1886.
- . On Lying. Trans. H. Browne. In A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church. Ed. Philip Schaff. Vol. III. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1887.
- . Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, According to Matthew. Trans. William Findlay. In A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church. Ed. Philip Schaff. Vol. IV. New York: Christian Literature Company, 1888.

- . Reply to Faustus the Manichean. Trans. Richard Stothert. In A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church. Ed. Philip Schaff. Vol. IV. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1887.
- . To Consentius: Against Lying. Trans. H. Browne. In A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers. Ed. Philip Schaff. Vol. III. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1887.
- L.W. Barnard. “Bede and Eusebius as Church Historians”. In Famulus Christi: Essays in Commemoration of the Thirteenth Century of the Birth of the Venerable Bede. Ed. Gerald Bonner. 106-124. London: SPCK, 1976.
- Beda Venerabilis. Historiam Ecclesiasticam Gentis Anglorum Historiam Abbatum Epistolam ad Ecgbertum, una cum Historia Abbatum Auctore Anonymo. Ed. Charles Plummer. Vol. I and II. Oxford: Clarendon, 1896.
- . In Librum Beati Patris Tobiae. In Opera Omnia. Migne ed. Patrologiae Latinae 91. Paris: 1862.
- . In Marci Evangelium Expositio. In Opera Omnia. Migne Edition. Patrologiae Latinae 92. Paris: 1862.
- Bede. Bede: A Biblical Miscellany. Trans. W. Trent Foley and Arthur G. Holder. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999.
- . The Ecclesiastical History of the English People and Other Selections. Ed. James Campbell. New York: Washington Square Press, 1968.
- Biblia Sacra: Iuxta Vulgatam Versionem. Altera emendata edition. Stuttgart: Wurttembergische Bibelanstalt, 1975.
- Bonner, Gerald. “The Christian Life in the Thought of the Venerable Bede”. Durham University Journal 63, no. 32 (1970): 39-55.
- Bracher, Frederick. “Understatement in Old English Poetry”. PMLA 52, no. 4 (1937): 915-934.
- Brown, George Hardin. Bede the Venerable. Boston: Twayne, 1987.
- Campbell, James. “Bede”. In Latin Historians. Ed. T.A. Dorey. 159-190. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966.
- . “Bede I”. In Essays in Anglo-Saxon History. 1-28. Originally published 1966. London: Hambledon, 1986.

- . “Bede II”. In Essays in Anglo-Saxon History. 29-48. Originally published 1968. London: Hambledon, 1986.
- . “The First Century of Christianity in England”. In Essays in Anglo-Saxon History. 49-67. Originally published 1971. London: Hambledon, 1986.
- Chadwick, H.M. The Origins of the English Nation. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1907.
- Clark Hall, J.R., ed. and trans. Beowulf and the Finnesburg Fragment. 6<sup>th</sup> ed. Rev. C.L. Wrenn. London: Allen and Unwin, 1963.
- . A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000.
- Cranz, F. Edward. “*De Civitate Dei*, XV, 2, and Augustine’s Idea of the Christian Society”. Speculum 25, no. 2 (1950): 215-225.
- Cross, J.E. “Bede’s Influence at Home and Abroad: An Introduction”. In Beda Venerabilis: Historian, Monk & Northumbrian. Ed. L.A.J.R. Houwen and A.A. MacDonald. 17-30. Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1996.
- Daly, Lowrie J. Benedictine Monasticism: Its Formation and Development Through the 12<sup>th</sup> Century. New York: Sheed and Ward, 1965.
- Davidse, Jan. “On Bede as Christian Historian”. In Beda Venerabilis: Historian, Monk & Northumbrian. Ed. L.A.J.R. Houwen and A.A. MacDonald. 1-15. Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1996.
- Davis, Ruby. “Bede’s Early Reading”. Speculum 8, no. 2 (1933): 179-195.
- de Vogüé, Adalbert. La Communauté et L’Abbé dans La Règle de Saint Benoît. Paris: Desclé de Brouwer, 1961.
- . Community and Abbot in the Rule of St. Benedict. Trans. Charles Philippi. Vol. I. Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian, 1979.
- . Community and Abbot in the Rule of St. Benedict. Trans. Charles Philippi and Ethel Rae Perkins. Vol. II. Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian, 1988.
- Diem, Albrecht. “The Emergence of Monastic Schools: The Role of Alcuin”. In Alcuin of York: Scholar at the Carolingian Court. Ed. L.A.J.R. Houwen and A.A. MacDonald. 27-44. Germania Latina III. Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1995.

- Duncan, Archibald A. M. "Bede, Iona, and the Picts". In The Writing of History in the Middle Ages: Essays Presented to Richard William Southern. Ed. R.H.C. Davis and J.M. Wallace-Hadrill. 1-42. Oxford: Clarendon, 1981.
- Eckenrode, T.R. "The Venerable Bede and the Pastoral Affirmation of the Christian Message in Anglo-Saxon England". Downside Review 99, no. 337 (1981): 258-278.
- Evison, Vera I. The 5<sup>th</sup> Century Invasions South of the Thames. London: Athlone, 1965.
- Foot, Sarah. Monastic Life in Anglo-Saxon England, c. 600-900. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- Girard, René. "Violence in Biblical Narrative". Philosophy and Literature 23, no. 2 (1999): 387-392.
- Goffart, Walter. "Bede's History in a Harsher Climate". In Innovation and Tradition in the Writings of the Venerable Bede. Ed. Scott DeGregorio. 203-226. Morgantown, WV: West Virginia University Press, 2006.
- . "Bede's *vera lex historiae* Explained". Anglo-Saxon England 34 (2005): 111-116.
- . The Narrators of Barbarian History (A.D. 550-800): Jordanes, Gregory of Tours, Bede, and Paul the Deacon. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988.
- Gregorius Magnus. Dialogi Libri IV. Ed. Umberto Moricca. Vol. I. Rome: Tipografia del Senato, 1924.
- . Homiliae in Evangelia. Ed. Raymond Etaix. CCSL 141. Turnholt: Brepols, 1999.
- . S. Gregorii Magni Registrum epistularum libri. Ed. D. Norberg. CCSL 140-140A. Turnholt: Brepols, 1982.
- Gregory the Great. Dialogues, Book II: Saint Benedict. Trans. Myra L. Uhlfelder. New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1967.
- . Forty Gospel Homilies. Ed. and trans. Dom David Hurst. Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian, 1990.
- . The Letters of Gregory the Great. Vol. II. Trans. John R.C. Martyn. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2004.
- . Pastoral Care (Regula Pastoralis). Ed. and trans. Henry Davis. Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1950.

- Gregorius Turonensis. Historiae Francorum libri decem. In Opera Omnia. Migne ed. Patrologiae Latinae 71. Paris: 1879.
- Gregory of Tours. The History of the Franks. Trans. Lewis Thorpe. London: Penguin, 1974.
- Hamer, Richard. A Choice of Anglo-Saxon Verse. London: Faber and Faber, 1970.
- Harris, A. Leslie. "Litotes and Superlative in Beowulf". English Studies 69, no. 1 (1988): 1-11.
- Harris, Stephen J. "The Alfredian *World History* and Anglo-Saxon Identity". JPEG 100, no. 4 (2001): 482-510.
- . "Bede, Social Practice, and the Problem with Foreigners". Essays in Medieval Studies 13 (1996): 97-107.
- Harrison, Kenneth. "Easter Cycles and the Equinox in the British Isles". Anglo-Saxon England 7 (1978): 1-8.
- Higham, N. J. The Convert Kings: Power and Religious Affiliation in Early Anglo-Saxon England. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1997.
- . An English Empire: Bede and the Early Anglo-Saxon Kings. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1995.
- . (Re-) Reading Bede: The Ecclesiastical History in Context. London: Routledge, 2006.
- Hill, Joyce. Bede and the Benedictine Reform. Jarrow Lecture, 1998.
- Hill, Thomas D. "The 'Variegated Obit' as an Historiographical Motif in Old English Poetry and Anglo-Latin Historical Literature". Traditio 44 (1988): 101-124.
- . "'Wealhtheow' as a Foreign Slave". Philology Quarterly 69, no. 1 (1990): 106-112.
- Hilpisch, Stephanus. Benedictinism Through Changing Centuries. Trans. Leonard J. Doyle. Collegeville, MN: St. John's Abbey Press, 1958.
- Hollander, Lee M. "Litotes in Old Norse". PMLA 53, no. 1 (1938): 1-33.

- The Holy Bible: Douay Rheims Version. Ed. James Gibbons. Trans. Richard Challoner. Rockford, IL: Tan Books, 1989.
- Holzherr, George. The Rule of Benedict: A Guide to Christian Living. Trans. the Monks of Glenstal Abbey. Dublin: Four Courts, 1994.
- Howe, Nicholas. "Rome: Capital of Anglo-Saxon England". The Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies 34, no. 1 (2004): 147-172.
- Hunter Blair, Peter. Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation and its Importance Today. Jarrow Lecture, 1959.
- . Northumbria in the Days of Bede. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1976.
- . Roman Britain and Early England: 55 B.C.-A.D. 871. London: Cardinal, 1975.
- . The World of Bede. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1970.
- Isidorus Hispalensis. Etymologiarum sive Originum Libri XX. Ed. W.M. Lindsay. Vol. I. Oxford: Clarendon, 1910.
- Isidore of Seville. The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville. Ed. and trans. Stephen A. Barney, W.J. Lewis, J.A. Beach, Oliver Berghof, with the collaboration of Muriel Hall. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- Kaczynski, Bernice M. "Bede's Commentaries on Luke and Mark and the Formation of a Patristic Canon". In Anglo-Latin and its Heritage: Essays in Honour of A.G. Rigg on his 64<sup>th</sup> Birthday. Ed. Siân Echard and Gernot R. Wieland. 17-26. Toronto: Brepolis, 2001.
- Keyes, G.L. Christian Faith and the Interpretation of History: A Study of St. Augustine's Philosophy of History. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1966.
- Kirby, D.P. "Bede, Eddius Stephanus, and the 'Life of Wilfrid'". The English Historical Review 98, no. 386 (1983): 101-114.
- Klaeber, Fredrick, ed. Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Ed. R.D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork, and John D. Niles. Based on the 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008.
- Krapp, George Philip and Elliott Vank Kirk Dobbie, eds. The Exeter Book. London: George Routledge & Sons, 1936.

- A Latin Dictionary. Based on Andrews' ed. of Freund's Latin Dictionary. Rev. and Ed. Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short. Oxford: Clarendon, 1879).
- Le Goff, Jacques. The Birth of Purgatory. Trans. Arthur Goldhammer. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981.
- Lerer, Seth. Boethius and Dialogue: Literary Method in *The Consolation of Philosophy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985.
- Levison, Wilhelm. England and the Continent in the Eighth Century. Oxford: Clarendon, 1946.
- Lutterkort, Karl. "Bede Hagiographicus: Meaning and Function of Miracle Stories in the *Vita Cuthberti* and the *Historia ecclesiastica*". In Beda Venerabilis: Historian, Monk & Northumbrian. Ed. L.A.J.R. Houwen and A.A. MacDonald. 81-106. Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1996.
- Mayr-Harting, Henry. "Bede's Patristic Thinking as an Historian". In Historiographie im frühen Mittelalter. Ed. Anton Scharer and Georg Scheibelreiter. 367-374. München: R. Oldenbourg, 1994.
- . The Coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1972.
- Mehan, Uppinder and David Townsend. "'Nation' and the Gaze of the Other in Eighth-Century Northumbria". Comparative Literature 53, no. 1 (2001): 1-26.
- Meyvaert, Paul. Bede and Gregory the Great. Jarrow Lecture, 1964.
- . "Gregory the Great and the Theme of Authority". Spode House Review 3 (1966): 3-12.
- Nero, Carolina Lo. "*Christiana Dignitas*: New Christian Criteria for Citizenship in the Late Roman Empire". Medieval Encounters: Jewish, Christian and Muslim Culture 7, no. 2-3 (2001): 146-164.
- Nicholl, Donald. "St. Bede". In Pre-Reformation English Spirituality. Ed. James Walsh, S.J. 1-14. Bronx, NY: Fordham University Press, 1966.
- Ó Cróinín, Dáibí. "'New Heresy for Old': Pelagianism in Ireland and the Papal Letter of 640". Speculum 60, no. 3 (1985): 505-516.
- The Oxford English Dictionary. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, 1989. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Page, R.I. "Anglo-Saxon Paganism: The Evidence of Bede". In Pagans and Christians:

- The Interplay Between Christian Latin and Traditional Germanic Cultures in Early Medieval Europe. Ed. T. Hofstra, L.A.J.R. Houwen and A.A. MacDonald. 99-130. Germania Latina II. Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1995.
- Rabin, Andrew. "Historical Re-Collections: Rewriting the World Chronicle in Bede's *De Temporum Ratione*". Viator: Medieval and Renaissance Studies 36 (2005): 23-29.
- Ray, Roger. "Bede, the Exegete, as Historian". In Famulus Christi: Essays in Commemoration of the Thirteenth Centenary of the Birth of the Venerable Bede. Ed. Gerald Bonner. 125-140. London: SPCK, 1976.
- . Bede, Rhetoric, and the Creation of Christian Latin Culture. Jarrow Lecture, 1997.
- . "Bede's Vera Lex Historiae". Speculum 55, no. 1 (1980): 1-21.
- Renna, Thomas. "Bernard and Bede". American Benedictine Review 44, no. 3 (1993) 223-235.
- Reynolds, Susan. "What do we mean by 'Anglo-Saxon' and 'Anglo-Saxons'?" Journal of British Studies 24, no. 4 (1985): 395-414.
- Robertson, A.J. Ed. and trans. The Laws of the Kings of England from Edmund to Henry I: Part One: Edmund to Canute. Cambridge: Llanerch, 1925.
- . The Laws of the Kings of England from Edmund to Henry I: Part Two: William I to Henry I. Cambridge: Llanerch, 1925.
- Rowley, Sharon M. "Reassessing Exegetical Interpretations of Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*". Literature and Theology 17, no. 3 (2003): 227-243.
- Schreiber, Carolin. King Alfred's Old English Translation of Pope Gregory the Great's *Regula Pastoralis* and its Cultural Context. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2003.
- Scragg, D.G., ed. The Vercelli Homilies and Related Texts. Oxford: EETS, 1992.
- Shuman, R. Baird and H. Charles Hutchings, II. "The Un-Prefix: A Means of Germanic Irony in *Beowulf*". Modern Philology 57, no. 4 (1960): 217-222.
- Sipe, A.W. Richard. "The Psychological Dimensions of the *Rule* of St. Benedict". American Benedictine Review 34, no. 4 (1983): 424-435.

- Stacpoole, Alberic. "St. Bede". In Benedict's Disciples. Ed. D.H. Farmer. 86-104. Leominster, Herefordshire: Gracewing, 1995.
- Thacker, A.T. "Bede and the Irish". In Beda Venerabilis: Historian, Monk & Northumbrian. Ed. L.A.J.R. Houwen and A.A. MacDonald. 31-59. Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1996.
- Thacker, Alan. "Bede and the Ordering of Understanding". In Innovation and Tradition in the Writings of The Venerable Bede. Ed. Scott DeGregorio. 37-63. Morgantown, WV: West Virginia University Press, 2006.
- Vessey, Mark. "From *Cursus* to *Ductus*: Figures of Writing in Western Late Antiquity". In European Literary Careers: The Author from Antiquity to the Renaissance. Ed. Patrick Cheney and Frederick A. de Armas. 47-103. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002.
- Von Rad, Gerhard. Old Testament Theology: The Theology of Israel's Historical Traditions. Trans. D.M.G. Stalker. Vol. I. Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1962.
- . Old Testament Theology: The Theology of Israel's Prophetic Traditions. Trans. D.M.G. Stalker. Vol. II. Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1965.
- . Wisdom in Israel. Trans. James D. Martin. Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1972.
- Wailles, Stephen L. Medieval Allegories of Jesus' Parables. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987.
- . "Why did Jesus use Parables? The Medieval Discussion". Medievalia et Humanistica: Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Culture 13 (1985): 43-64.
- Wallace-Hadrill, J.M. Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People: A Historical Commentary. Oxford: Clarendon, 1988.
- . Bede's Europe. Jarrow Lecture, 1962.
- . Early Medieval History. Oxford: Blackwell, 1975.
- Whitelock, Dorothy. "After Bede". In From Bede to Alfred: Studies in Early Anglo-Saxon Literature and History. no. 5, 3-16. London: Variorum, 1980.
- . "Bede and his Teachers and Friends". In Famulus Christi: Essays in Commemoration of the Thirteenth Centenary of the Birth of the Venerable Bede. Ed. Gerald Bonner. 19-39. London: SPCK, 1976.

- Williams, Mark. The Making of Christian Communities in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages. London: Anthem, 2005.
- Wood, Ian. "Bede's Jarrow". In A Place to Believe in: Locating Medieval Landscapes. Ed. Clare A. Lees and Gillian R. Overing. 67-84. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006.
- Wormald, Patrick. "Bede and Benedict Biscop". In Famulus Christi: Essays in Commemoration of the Thirteenth Centenary of the Birth of the Venerable Bede. Ed. Gerald Bonner. 141-169. London: SPCK, 1976.
- . "Bede, the *Bretwaldas* and the Origins of the *Gens Anglorum*". In Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society: Studies Presented to J.M. Wallace-Hadrill. Ed. Patrick Wormald, Donald Bullough and Roger Collins. 99-129. Oxford: Blackwell, 1983.