

Spring 2010

## Ælfric and the Orient

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.34870/1343391>

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ÆLFRIC AND THE ORIENT

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
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**Doctor of Philosophy Degree in English**  
**Department of English**  
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**May 2010**

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## THE GRADUATE COLLEGE

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**Jacqueline Geaney Elkouz**

entitled

***Ælfric and the Orient***

be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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## ABSTRACT

### **Ælfric and the Orient**

by

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This dissertation examines why Ælfric's choice of texts included in his *Lives of Saints* differs so radically from contemporaneous lists of saints venerated by Anglo-Saxons. Writing between 992 and 1002, while England faced a second wave of invasions from the North, Ælfric selected saints predominantly from the Orient.

A close analysis of several of these lives reveals four major agents of persecution: Paganism, Judaism, Heresy, and Satan. Faced with such trials, most of the saints included in Ælfric's *Lives* commonly suffer a violent death and always stand firm in their faith in the face of persecution. For Ælfric, the orthodox teacher, their example of heroic behavior could only serve to bolster his own audience confronted with many of the same dangers.

Ælfric's decision to offer such models of virtue and steadfastness to the English laity in this threatening time of physical violence and spiritual trial ultimately expresses a profound knowledge of his Church's Eastern roots and his unwavering belief in its unity and universality.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It gives me great pleasure to thank the many persons who have supported me during the writing of this dissertation. My first debt of gratitude must really go to Ælfric himself. Although this monk still remains largely unknown to me, his extensive knowledge and his unaffected language have kept him a most appealing and absorbing subject of study over the years. Moreover, the unswerving assurance and hopefulness expressed in his writings made my frequently arduous task of writing this dissertation much easier.

I would like to thank Professor Richard Harp and Professor Jacimaria Batista, members of my committee, who were always supportive of my project. Special thanks go to Professor John Unrue, my committee chair, and to Professor Joseph McCullough, both of whom agreed to join my committee very late in the process, after I encountered several external and unforeseen impediments to the completion of this dissertation. Their kindness and willingness to help enabled me to finish this project in a timely manner. In a matter of weeks, and despite his other pre-existing obligations, Professor Unrue thoroughly read and commented on the entire draft, providing me with the guidance and insights necessary to complete this dissertation.

I would also like to thank Professor P. Jane Hafen for her good advice and direction in difficult times, and Dr. Patrice Hollrah, Director of the Writing Center, for her unfailing words of encouragement throughout the past five years during which I have had the pleasure of working with her.

I also owe great thanks to my adult children, Sandra, Natalie, and Mark, who have always gladdened my heart and made me proud. Over the last few years, they have had less of my time and attention, but have consistently given me their support and understanding.

No one, however, has understood me better than my husband. Nearly twenty-five years after obtaining my Master's degree, when I decided to go back to school for my Ph.D., Elie understood. He changed his life to make it possible, and for that and countless other reasons, I dedicate this dissertation to him.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Chapter One of the Gospel according to John speaks of Jesus as “the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness: and the darkness did not comprehend it.”<sup>1</sup> The symbolism of light continues in the fourth-century Nicene Creed, referring to Jesus Christ as “light of light,”<sup>2</sup> and, as the sun rises from the East, early Christians turned to the West to renounce Satan, oriented themselves and their churches to pray to God and profess their faith, and had their feet pointed East in the grave. For a while, some Roman basilicas kept their high altar on the western end of the structure,<sup>3</sup> but by the eighth century, all Christian churches, including Anglo-Saxon ones,<sup>4</sup> faced East towards the rising sun, the symbol of Jesus, the light in their darkness. It is the purpose of this study of Ælfric’s *Lives of Saints* to determine and examine the author’s decision to look

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<sup>1</sup> John 1:4-5. All Bible verses in this study come from the Douay-Rheims translation (reprint, Fitzwilliam, NH: Loreto, 2002).

<sup>2</sup> In the words of Umberto Eco in *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), “The image of God as light had an ancient pedigree, from the Baal of Semitic paganism, from the Egyptian Ra, from the Persian Mazda – all personifications of the sun or of the sun’s beneficent action – to the Platonic ‘Sun’ of the Ideal, the Good” (47).

<sup>3</sup> Prior to the Edict of Milan of AD 313, granting Christians and all others the freedom to observe the religion of their choice, there existed no particular style for Christian churches, “their design tending to confirm the view that before 313 Christian architecture was essentially utilitarian and discreet” (20). Roger Stalley’s *Early Medieval Architecture* (Oxford: OUP, 1999) covers this period in detail. Basilicas, which served as general meeting halls in Roman cities before Christians adopted their design for their official places of worship, generally faced the East. An exception to this rule appears in the plans of Rome’s Old St Peter’s that, Stalley notes, “lay outside the walls of Rome and was not initially designed as a regular place of worship. It corresponds to the site of a Christian cemetery, where the apostle Peter had been buried after his execution.... St Peter’s was also a cemetery church where Christians could bury their dead and celebrate their anniversaries” (25).

<sup>4</sup> According to Stalley, despite the close contacts between England and Rome, “most of the stone churches of seventh-century England were simple, aisleless buildings.... To the Anglo-Saxons, whose natural building material was timber, the very use of stone was regarded as a ‘Roman custom’” (34).

predominantly to the Orient<sup>5</sup> in his selection of saints, presented as models of virtue and steadfastness to the English laity facing a second wave of invasions from the North.

The most complete extant manuscript, *BL, Cotton Julius E. vii*, used by Walter Skeat for his edition of *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, provides an imperfect but valuable indication of Ælfric's intentions.<sup>6</sup> It includes two Prefaces by Ælfric, the first in Latin and the other, addressed to "Æðelweard ealdorman," in Old English.<sup>7</sup> Ælfric generally uses Latin to address a reader from the ecclesiastical world, and Old English for the laity. Although both prefaces provide similar information about their author, namely that he writes in response to a request and that this book only consists of lives of saints honored by monks, the differences between the Latin and the Old English prefaces reveal some of Ælfric's guidelines and reasons for composing the *Lives*. In The Old English preface, he claims no originality since he writes

nan þincg niwes on þissere gesetnysse  
forþan ðe hit stod gefyrn awriten  
on ledenbocum þeah þe þa læwedan men þæt nyston.<sup>8</sup>

[nothing new in this narrative because it was written long ago in Latin books,  
although unlearned men knew it not.]

In the Latin Preface, however, Ælfric indicates that he has "abbreviated the longer passions" and has deliberately not included anything from the *Vitas Patrum*<sup>9</sup> "in which many subtleties are found which are not suitable to be shown to the laity and which we

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<sup>5</sup> In most tenth-century T-O manuscript maps, the Orient occupies half the world, and stands for all the known lands in the East. At that time, these included Asia Minor, Syria, Palestine, Egypt, Arabia, Mesopotamia, Persia, and even India, mostly known in connection with the apostle Thomas, as in *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, trans. and ed., Michael Swanton (New York: Routledge, 1998), 79.

<sup>6</sup> *Ælfric's Lives of Saints, Being a Set of Sermons on Saints' Days formerly observed by the English Church*, ed. Walter W. Skeat (London: N. Trübner for the Early English Text Society, 1891-1900). Skeat's edition remains the only complete edition of *BL, Cotton Julius E. vii*, provenance Bury St Edmunds.

<sup>7</sup> These two Prefaces can be found in *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, Vol. I, 2-7.

<sup>8</sup> In this dissertation, the only passages in Old English are from Ælfric, and their translations are mine.

<sup>9</sup> The collection of lives and sayings of the Desert Fathers.

ourselves are not able to fulfill.”<sup>10</sup> This selectivity also informs Ælfric’s approach to translation, whereby he chooses “to translate diligently according to the sense, as we find it in Holy Scripture” rather than “word for word.” He does not share this approach to translation with his readers of the Old English Preface. In the Latin Preface, he also claims he will no longer carry out such translations, that he “may not be judged superfluous.”<sup>11</sup> Typically, the Latin Preface reveals more about the process than about the contents of the manuscript. Indeed, the Old English Preface, the one his widest audience would read or listen to, speaks mostly about the saints and their relationship with God and with His creatures, and with Ælfric in particular:

we woldon gesettan be sumum þas bōc .  
mannum to getrymminge . and to munde us sylfum .  
þæt hī us þingion to þam ælmihtigan gode .  
swa swa we on worulde heora wundra cyðað

[we wish to write this book about some of them, as exhortation for men, and protection for ourselves, that they may intercede for us with Almighty God, just as we in the world make known their miracles.]

Unlike the Latin one, the Old English Preface ends with a salutation in Latin, “Vale in Domino,” following a warning to future scribes to remain faithful to his text “and þær namare betwux ne sette þonne we awendon” (and interpose there no more than we translated).<sup>12</sup>

Since future scribes did not respect his wish and *Cotton Julius E. vii* contains several seemingly extraneous passages, “it is hard to know whether any of these was

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<sup>10</sup> Jonathan Wilcox, ed. *Ælfric’s Prefaces* (Durham: Durham Medieval Texts 9, 1996), 131.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

<sup>12</sup> Future scribes do not seem to have respected Ælfric’s request, because the only surviving manuscript with both prefaces (*BL, Cotton Julius E. vii*) “clearly contradicts Ælfric’s intentions: it includes four anonymous lives.... It also includes works which are by Ælfric but which are not appropriate to the rationale outlined in the preface, that is not lives of saints celebrated by monks only: i, xii, xiii, and xvii are homilies for special occasions, xvi is a homily for any occasion, and xviii and xxv are condensed translations of biblical books.” In Wilcox, *Ælfric’s Prefaces*, 45.

intended by Ælfric for inclusion in this series.” This best manuscript available, used by Skeat and serving as the main source for this study, dates from the very beginning of the eleventh century. Ælfric finished the *Lives of Saints* ca. AD 998, having made it clear that this text should only include very specific lives of saints. In the short time between the original composition and the presumed date of the present manuscript, changes apparently took place that now might make less evident Ælfric’s original choice and his intended purpose for the collection.<sup>13</sup> However, such scribal changes frequently occur, particularly in hagiographic manuscripts, which often “were created in a wide variety of ways that suggest a spectrum of uses and purposes as well as modes of production.”<sup>14</sup> In this case,

if we want to understand values reflected in the hagiography of a period, texts must be seen in relation to the other texts with which they were associated, read, or gathered, not in relationship either to timeless views of Christian perfection or simply to other contemporary hagiographical texts.

Among Ælfric’s *Lives of Saints*, four anonymous lives (three of them from the East) recount events associated with the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus, Mary of Egypt, Eustace and his companions, and Eufrasia (or Euphrosyne) of Alexandria. Five other entries, which Skeat entitled “The Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ,” “Ash-Wednesday,” “The Prayer of Moses,” “Memory of the Saints” and “On Auguries,” represent homiletic additions. Finally, “From the Book of Kings” and “The Maccabees” stand out as translations from Old Testament books.<sup>15</sup> Out of the thirty-eight<sup>16</sup> chapters listed by

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<sup>13</sup> According to Wilcox, “unlike the case with the *Catholic Homilies*, no manuscript survives which was copied in Ælfric’s scriptorium or which closely reflects such a text.”

<sup>14</sup> Patrick Geary, “Saints, Scholars, and Society: The Elusive Goal,” *Saints: Studies in Hagiography*, ed. Sandro Sticca (Binghamton, NY: SUNY, 1996), 12-13.

<sup>15</sup> The translation from the Old Testament books of the Maccabees would have counted as a saint’s life because the Anglo-Saxon church celebrated their feast-day on the same level as any other Christian saint.

Skeat<sup>17</sup> that include four non-Ælfrician lives, only seven entries do not strictly qualify as lives of saints. The remaining twenty-six chapters, the bulk of the manuscript, consist of thirteen lives of saints from the Orient,<sup>18</sup> five English lives,<sup>19</sup> four from Italy,<sup>20</sup> two from Sicily,<sup>21</sup> and one each from Hungary and Spain.<sup>22</sup> This best manuscript might still arguably represent a close fulfillment of Ælfric's request, not lessened when "seen in relation to the other texts with which they were associated, read, or gathered,"<sup>23</sup> because a hagiographic text does not stand alone, "it stands at a three-fold intersection of genre, total textual production, and historical circumstance."<sup>24</sup>

The shift to religious writing in the vernacular as a genre generally reflects the needs of a society in transition between languages. When the Alexandrian Jews in the last two centuries before Christ no longer spoke Hebrew well enough to understand their Law, a Greek translation of the Hebrew Pentateuch, the *Septuagint*, became necessary. At the end of the third century after Christ, when Christians in Rome no longer spoke Greek (the first official language of the Church) well enough, there arose a need for versions in Latin (the language of the people) of all religious texts. This need culminated in AD 382

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<sup>16</sup> Chapter XXIII for July 27, on the Seven Sleepers (not by Ælfric) immediately precedes another non-Ælfrician life of Mary of Egypt, for April 2, and listed as chapter XXIII B. This last life does not match the order, the chronology, or the style of the adjacent chapters.

<sup>17</sup> In his Preface to Volume II, Skeat mentions three more chapters not included in his edition but "probably written by Ælfric" and originally part of *Cotton Julius E. vii*: "The Questions of Sigewulf," "Of False Gods" (incomplete in the manuscript) and "Of the Twelve Abuses" (lost from the manuscript).

<sup>18</sup> These consist of: chapters II, III, and IV (Eugenia, Basilus, Julian and Basilissa), chapters X, XII, XIV and XV (Peter, The Forty Soldiers, George and Mark), chapters XXII and XXIV (Apollinaris, Abdon and Sennes), chapters XXVII, XXVIII, and XXIX (The Exaltation of the Holy Cross, Maurice and his companions, Denis and his companions), and chapters XXXV and XXXVI (Chrysanthus and Daria, and Thomas).

<sup>19</sup> Found in chapters XIX, XX, XXI, XXVI, and XXXII (Alban, Æthelthryth, Swithun, Oswald and Edmund).

<sup>20</sup> Chapters V, VI, VII, and XXXIV (Sebastian, Maur, Agnes, and Cecilia).

<sup>21</sup> Chapters VIII and IX (Agatha and Lucy).

<sup>22</sup> Chapters XXXI and XXXVII (Martin and Vincent).

<sup>23</sup> Geary, "Saints, Scholars, and Society: The Elusive Goal," 13.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

when Pope Damasus I commissioned Jerome to revise the existing translations of the Bible. The resulting *Vulgate* then spread throughout the West, including England,<sup>25</sup> while translations into other languages, such as Coptic, Syriac, Armenian, Georgian, and Gothic, circulated among churches in other parts of the world. In England, although Latin became the language of the educated and scholarship in Latin reached a peak in eighth-century Northumbria with Bede, this language never extended to the general population. Still, translations into Old English took centuries to emerge, but, towards the end of his life, Bede must have already felt the need to bridge this language gap when he started to translate the Gospel of John.<sup>26</sup> However, it took over a century for King Ælfred to start a limited,<sup>27</sup> but systematic program of translations of Latin works “most necessary for all men to know.”<sup>28</sup> King Ælfred

recalled how the Law was first composed in the Hebrew language, and thereafter, when the Greeks learned it, they translated it all into their own language, and all other books as well. And so too the Romans, after they had mastered them, translated them all through learned interpreters into their own language. Similarly all the other Christian peoples turned some part of them into their own language.

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<sup>25</sup> Most interestingly, a late seventh-century copy of the *Vulgate* made in the monastery of Monkwearmouth/Jarrow, the *Codex Amiatinus* (Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana MS Amiatinus I) was later taken to Rome as a gift from Abbot Ceolfrid to Pope Gregory II. This manuscript, originally from the North of England, displays a Mediterranean style of decoration.

<sup>26</sup> Bede’s disciple Cuthbert refers to this possibility in “Cuthbert’s Letter on the Death of Bede” in Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. Judith McClure, trans. Bertram Colgrave (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 301. He writes that before dying, “there were two pieces of work worthy of record, besides the lessons which he gave us every day and his chanting of the Psalter, which he desired to finish: the gospel of St John, which he was turning into our mother tongue to the great profit of the Church, from the beginning as far as the words ‘But what are they among so many?’ and a selection from Bishop Isidore’s book *On the Wonders of Nature*; for he said: ‘I cannot have my children learning what is not true, and losing their labour on this after I am gone’.”

<sup>27</sup> The works of translation traditionally attributed to Ælfred himself consist of Gregory’s *Pastoral Care*, Boethius’s *Consolation of Philosophy*, Augustine’s *Soliloquies*, and the first fifty *Psalms*. Other translations into Old English also came out during that time: Orosius’s *Histories against the Pagans*, Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History*, and Bishop Werferth’s translation of Gregory’s *Dialogues*, the second book of which relates in detail the life and miracles of Saint Benedict of Nursia (AD 480-547). Another contemporaneous hagiographical text, *The Old English Martyrology*, dates from either AD 850 (slightly before Ælfred’s reign), or no later than AD 900.

<sup>28</sup> On page 126 of “From the Translation of Gregory’s *Pastoral Care*,” in *Alfred the Great: Asser’s ‘Life of King Alfred’ and other Contemporary Sources*, trans. Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge (London: Penguin Books, 1988).

This program of translations went along with Ælfred's insistence on learning among his subjects. According to Asser,

as a result nearly all the ealdormen and reeves and thegns (who were illiterate from childhood) applied themselves in an amazing way to learning how to read, preferring rather to learn this unfamiliar discipline (no matter how laboriously) than to relinquish their offices of power. But if one of them – either because of his age or because of the unresponsive nature of his unpractised intelligence – was unable to make progress in learning to read, the king commanded the man's son (if he had one) or some relative of his, or even (if he had no one else) a man of his own – whether freeman or slave – whom he had caused to be taught to read long before, to read out books in English to him by day and night, or whenever he had the opportunity.<sup>29</sup>

Before Ælfric wrote his *Lives of Saints*, translations into the vernacular belonged to an established tradition and hagiographical texts in Old English, although far fewer than homiletic texts, already circulated in tenth-century England.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, "once Ælfric's *Lives* set became available, an English reader had a very wide choice of hagiographical material, and the evidence for the addition of further pieces is slight."<sup>31</sup>

Considering Ælfric's total textual production of lives of saints, one can but agree with Michael Lapidge's statement: "Ælfric's work of compilation was a process of judgment and selection."<sup>32</sup> Indeed, in his Old English Preface to the *Lives of Saints*, Ælfric speaks of the saints as "ungeryme swa swa hit gerisð gode" (countless as befits God) and of his book as "be sumum" (about some of them).<sup>33</sup> By necessity, out of a

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<sup>29</sup> *Alfred the Great: Asser's 'Life of King Alfred' and other Contemporary Sources*, 110.

<sup>30</sup> Donald G. Scragg, "The Corpus of Anonymous Lives and their Manuscript Context," in *Holy Men and Holy Women: Old English Prose Saints' Lives and their Contexts*, ed. Paul E. Szarmach (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1996), 209-230. Scragg offers a survey of all extant pre-Ælfrician anonymous hagiography and concludes, "However he [Ælfric] may be shown to have transmuted it, the genre was already well established in English."

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 224.

<sup>32</sup> Michael Lapidge, "Ælfric's *Sanctorale*," in *Holy Men and Holy Women: Old English Prose Saints' Lives and their Contexts*, ed. P. E. Szarmach (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1996), 115.

<sup>33</sup> *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, Vol. I, 6.

multitude, Ælfric chose to include only a total of fifty-four feasts for the *Sanctorale*.<sup>34</sup> In his study of Ælfric's hagiography, based on the hypothesis that "Ælfric was attempting above all to make the Christian devotions of the liturgical year comprehensible to a lay audience,"<sup>35</sup> Lapidge compares Ælfric's calendar with "those that have survived from late Anglo-Saxon England (including those from Winchester where Ælfric was trained)."<sup>36</sup> He finds that "such comparison serves to highlight many unexpected and eccentric features of Ælfric's liturgical practice." Lapidge determines that "various omissions from Ælfric's *sanctorale* require comment and cannot be accounted for by reference to the *temporale*."<sup>37</sup> Ælfric leaves out many feasts of universal observance, Frankish and Flemish saints widely venerated in late Anglo-Saxon England,<sup>38</sup> English saints (most noticeably Augustine and Guthlac), and saints with cults specifically at Winchester. These "unexpected and eccentric features" lead Lapidge to suggest that liturgical considerations, rather than "source, style or lexis"<sup>39</sup> should guide any modern study of Ælfric's lives of saints and homilies. However, if homilies traditionally belong to the

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<sup>34</sup> The *Sanctorale* or *Proper of the Saints* lists the fixed dates and rankings of the feasts of Mary and of various saints, both local and of the universal church. The date normally chosen to celebrate a saint's life corresponds to the day of his or her death. The *Temporale* or *Proper of the Time* lists the moveable feasts associated with Sundays and events in the life of Jesus.

<sup>35</sup> Michael Lapidge. "Ælfric's *Sanctorale*," 115.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

<sup>38</sup> These omissions speak against the claim made by Mechtild Gretsch, on page 6 of *Ælfric and the Cult of Saints in Late Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), that "the so-called Cotton-Corpus legendary has been identified as one such shaping force of paramount importance, especially for the *Lives of Saints*." Unlike the saints in Ælfric's *Lives*, most of those in the *Cotton-Corpus Legendary* come from France and Flanders. In her edition of *Ælfric's Life of Saint Basil the Great* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2006), 2-3, Gabriella Corona provides the background to this theory, "first postulated by Patrick Zettel in his doctoral work, ... and further explored by Gordon Whatley, Michael Lapidge and Peter Jackson." Corona also notes Whatley and Lapidge's reservations about considering the *Cotton-Corpus Legendary* as Ælfric's source for the *Lives*. Furthermore, in "Ælfric's *Sanctorale*," 123, Lapidge recognizes that "Ælfric's use of the Cotton-Corpus legendary will not account for all the eccentric commemorations in Ælfric's *sanctorale*,"

<sup>39</sup> M. Lapidge. "Ælfric's *Sanctorale*," 124.



liturgy, saints' lives do not,<sup>40</sup> particularly in the case of Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*. Their length warrants their definition as "narrative pieces intended not for reading as part of the liturgy, but for pious reading at any time."<sup>41</sup> Moreover, Anglo-Saxons already knew the fundamental elements of the liturgical year, essentially defined by events in the lives of Jesus and Mary, and not by individual saints' feast days that tended to vary according to the locality. For these reasons, considerations other than Lapidge's liturgical ones might account for Ælfric's "unexpected and eccentric features."<sup>42</sup> Lapidge's list of these features includes the accounts of the Forty Soldiers of Sebaste in Armenia, absent from Winchester calendars, and of Julian and Basilissa, "rarely commemorated in Anglo-Saxon calendars."<sup>43</sup> Interestingly, both these accounts describe saints from the Orient. When Ælfric commemorates Basil on January 1, whereas many Anglo-Saxon calendars do so on June 14, he follows the Byzantine calendar. Unusually, Ælfric dedicates December 25 to both "The Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ" and to Eugenia, whose feast day normally fell on March or May 16 in Anglo-Saxon calendars. Today, the Orthodox

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<sup>40</sup> The liturgy, particularly on a saint's feast day, could incorporate readings qualifying as "saints' lives." However, they would remain short, as in the entries of *An Old English Martyrology*, ed. George Herzfeld (Woodbridge, U. K: Boydell & Brewer, 1997).

<sup>41</sup> Peter A. M. Clemoes. "The Chronology of Ælfric's Works," in *The Anglo-Saxons: Studies in Some Aspects of their History and Culture presented to Bruce Dickins*, ed. P. Clemoes (London, 1959), 221 and quoted in Malcolm R. Godden. "Experiments in Genre: The Saints' Lives in Ælfric's *Catholic Homilies*," *Holy Men and Holy Women: Old English Prose Saints' Lives and their Contexts*, ed. P. E. Szarmach (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1996), 261.

<sup>42</sup> Although the liturgy of the church, through the *Temporale* and the *Sanctorale*, regulated daily Anglo-Saxon life and even provided the laity with more non-working days than in modern times (in the form of Sundays and observed saints' feast days), this study cannot restrict the reading or hearing of saints' lives to a solely liturgical purpose. Saints apparently regulated the cycle of the years. King Ælfred's laws give a sense of how many non-working days England observed, not counting local saints' days. One of his laws requires that "These days are to be given to all free men, but not to slaves or unfree labourers: 12 days at Christmas, and the day on which Christ overcame the devil [15 February], and the anniversary of St. Gregory [12 March], and seven days at Easter and seven days after, and one day at the feast of St. Peter and St. Paul [29 June], and in harvest-time the whole week before the feast of St. Mary [15 August or 8 September], and one day at the feast of All Saints [1 November]. And the four Wednesdays in the four Ember weeks are to be given to all slaves, to sell to whomsoever they choose anything of what anyone has given them in God's name, or which they can earn in any of their leisure moments." From Dorothy Whitelock, ed. *English Historical Documents c.500 – 1042* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1955), 380.

<sup>43</sup> M. Lapidge. "Ælfric's *Sanctorale*," 123.

Church celebrates Eugenia's feast day on December 24. Seemingly, whenever Ælfric "departs radically from Winchester use," he adopts dates and saints from the Orient.

Considering *Cotton Julius E. vii* as an hagiographic text that does not stand alone, but rather "stands at a three-fold intersection of genre, total textual production, and historical circumstance,"<sup>44</sup> there now remains to establish the historical circumstance of this manuscript. In the Latin Preface to the Second Series of his *Catholic Homilies*, Ælfric writes to Archbishop Sigeric about his state of mind during its composition:

And although we were being shaken by the great injuries of hostile pirates after we sent to your sanctity the little book mentioned before [the First Series of *Catholic Homilies*], yet, being unwilling to be found making false promises, with a grieving mind we have completed this work.<sup>45</sup>

Ælfric wrote both series of homilies between AD 990 and 995, and the *Lives of Saints* soon after. The period after AD 980 corresponds to the return of Viking attacks on England, after a lull of twenty-five years. These sporadic but repeated attacks on England lasted until the Norman Conquest in AD 1066. Such troubled times often cause believers to question their faiths and waver under these threats to their lives. Ælfric, a priest and teacher, realizes this and turns to the same tools Augustine of Canterbury used in his mission to convert England, "very many manuscripts"<sup>46</sup> or, in the words of Ælfric himself, "Gregorius asende eác Augustine háligu lac on mæssereáfum and on bocum, and þæra apostola and martira reliquias samod" (Gregory also sent to Augustine ecclesiastical gifts of mass-vestments and books, together with relics of the apostles and martyrs).<sup>47</sup>

Klipstein, in his edition of the *Homily on the Birthday of St. Gregory*, notes that, among

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<sup>44</sup> Geary, "Saints, Scholars, and Society: The Elusive Goal," 16.

<sup>45</sup> Jonathan Wilcox, ed. *Ælfric's Prefaces*, 128.

<sup>46</sup> Bede. *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. J. McClure (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 55.

<sup>47</sup> *Ælfric's Anglo-Saxon Homily on the Birthday of St. Gregory*, ed. Louis F. Klipstein (New York: Putnam, 1849), 14-15.

the books, Gregory sent “a volume containing legends on the sufferings of the Apostles, with a picture of our Savior in silver, in a posture of blessing.” He also included “another volume on the martyrs, which had on the outside a glory, silver-gilt, set round with crystals and beryls.”<sup>48</sup> Legends of sufferings and a volume on martyrs would seem to a modern mind the very worst choices in this effort to convert a people to Christianity. Nevertheless, such lives or *passiones* somehow always prevailed in times of turmoil and of trial.<sup>49</sup> Out of the twenty-six strictly hagiographical chapters in the *Lives of Saints*, Ælfric devotes twenty-one to describing suffering and martyrdom. Again, “Ælfric’s work of compilation was a process of judgment and selection,”<sup>50</sup> and not only did he believe that

Nu sceole we hogian mid mycelne gymene .  
 þæt ure life beo swa gelógod .  
 þæt ure geendige on gód .  
 þanon þe ús þæt angin com<sup>51</sup>

[Now we should strive with much care that our life be so ordered that our end ends in God from whom our beginning came]

but he also considered himself and his audience facing a time of trial and in need of the spiritual encouragement provided by hagiography.

Scholars, from the Reformation to the present time, have frequently adopted a denigrating attitude towards hagiography, hagiographers, and their audience. They have

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<sup>48</sup> This note, on page 50 of Klipstein’s edition of *Ælfric’s Anglo-Saxon Homily on the Birthday of St. Gregory* quotes Sharon Turner, *History of the Anglo-Saxons*, Vol. I, B. III, C. VI, Note I, 203.

<sup>49</sup> P. Jackson and M. Lapidge imply this in “The Contents of the Cotton-Corpus Legendary.” *Holy Men and Holy Women: Old English Prose Saints’ Lives and their Contexts*, ed. P. E. Szarmach (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1996), 131. They write, “such lives were especially common during the early centuries of Christianity (second to fourth centuries)... On the other hand, once Christianity became established as the state religion, martyrdoms (and hence *passiones*) became less common.”

<sup>50</sup> M. Lapidge. “Ælfric’s *Sanctorale*,” 115.

<sup>51</sup> *Ælfric’s Lives of Saints*, Vol. I, 336, lines 5-8.

sometimes categorized the genre as “pious fiction” rather than biography. They have viewed hagiographers as either

half-barbarian clerks [who] lacked the first qualification needed for the exercise of the most elementary degree of critical faculty: they were guileless, and never suspected that a piece of written evidence could be false, that a plausible tale is not necessarily true,<sup>52</sup>

or as members of the clerical elite, writing *passiones* to promote their individual shrines.

For these “writers at shrines... there was more to this than validating by a standard literary device propaganda that put a strain on the reader’s credulity.”<sup>53</sup> The performance of these *passiones* “was a recognized moment in a ritual of power.” On the feast day of the saint,

the reading of the *passio* gave a vivid, momentary face to the invisible *praesentia* of the saint... the saint was “really” there: a sweet scent filled the basilica, the blind, the crippled, and the possessed began to shout that they now felt his power in healing, and those who had offended him in the past had good reason to tremble... Without a *passio* the *praesentia* of the saint lacked weight.

For such critics, only the certainty that the audience’s intellectual level corresponded to “that of a child”<sup>54</sup> can explain any belief in such legends. These critics suggest that the

mass mind, then, is narrow, unable to deal with several ideas at once, or even with a single idea if it be at all complex, unable too to follow any chain of reasoning that is close or subtle; but all ready, on the other hand, to receive impressions through the senses.

As a result, it then becomes quite simple for the educated clergy to use hagiography in their alleged purpose to dominate the uneducated masses. Such thoughts no doubt fueled the actions of Cromwell’s men who saw, “in such widespread evidence of the integration of the monastic shrines into the fabric of popular religion... nothing more than evidence

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<sup>52</sup> Hippolyte Delehaye, *The Legends of the Saints*, trans. D. Attwater (New York: Fordham University Press, 1962), 52-3.

<sup>53</sup> Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), 82.

<sup>54</sup> H. Delehaye, *The Legends of the Saints*, 28.

of large-scale exploitation of simple believers.”<sup>55</sup> Consequently, during the Dissolution of the Monasteries, between AD 1536 and 1541, hagiography, as the religious literature of the Catholic Church, became one of the main targets of the reformers:

They who got the religious houses at the dissolution of them took the libraries as part of the bargain and booty, reserving of those library books, some to scour their candlesticks, and some to rub their boots. Some they sold to the grocers and soap sellers, and some they sent over the seas to the bookbinders, not in small numbers, but in times whole shipfuls, to the wondering of foreign nations.<sup>56</sup>

However, in spite of this “iconoclastic ravage of the reformers”<sup>57</sup> and the small fraction of lives of saints remaining, Heffernan does infer that “we can get some idea of the extraordinary currency of the genre in its own time,” and even “assume that virtually everyone in the Middle Ages was exposed to the lives of saints in one form or another.” For critics who project the Anglo-Saxon laity as gullible and churchmen as clever propagandists, this information would only confirm their theories.

In fact, as an experienced teacher, Ælfric consistently aims to educate his audience rather than take advantage of its ignorance, and by choosing saints from the Orient, he does not endorse local cults. When Ælfric writes his *Lives of Saints*, he cannot rank as a “writer at shrine” because he does not predominantly select local saints to promote his own monastery, or even other centers of pilgrimage in England.<sup>58</sup> Neither does he choose the saints most popular with the laity, but rather from among those

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<sup>55</sup> Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 385.

<sup>56</sup> Thomas J. Heffernan here quotes John Bale, once a Carmelite monk, who later became an outspoken critic of monasticism and of the invocation of saints in particular. This reference comes from page 13 of T. J. Heffernan, *Sacred Biography: Saints and their Biographers in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

<sup>57</sup> Hagiography did not die with the reformers. In fact, the Protestants soon produced their own lives of saints and martyrs. One of the most popular collections remained John Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs* (1563).

<sup>58</sup> Apart from Swithun, connected to Winchester where Ælfric studied and trained as a monk, the other four English saints did not “belong” to places of pilgrimage in or near Dorset: Alban belonged to Hertfordshire, Æthelthryth and Edmund to East Anglia, and Oswald to Northumbria.

honored by monks. These, soon after the Benedictine Reform, could no longer qualify as “half-barbarian.” Following the *Rule* of Benedict and later, Ælfric’s own instructions,<sup>59</sup> “[From] the Kalends of October, excluding Sundays and feast days, Prime should be sung at first light, together with the seven psalms and the litanies. Then they [*scil.* the monks] shall retire to their reading until the bell for Terce rings.”<sup>60</sup> They particularly read or heard lives of saints: “on all feasts of the saints, throughout the entire year, we read lives or passions of the saints themselves.”<sup>61</sup> All these references to reading express a concern for a close observance of the *Rule* of Benedict, which promotes reading in a monk’s life, particularly during meals: “When the brethren are taking their meals there should always be reading.”<sup>62</sup> Besides Sacred Scripture and the *Rule* itself, “the Acts and Passions of the saints and martyrs were also read there.” This monastic rule practiced across the boundaries of individual nations and peoples provided its followers with a collection of widely recognized and documented saints’ lives. In the absence of any official standards for the canonization of saints,<sup>63</sup> Ælfric, ever orthodox in his teaching, mostly chooses

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<sup>59</sup> Ælfric became abbot of Eynsham (Oxfordshire) around AD 1005. As one of the great representatives of the so-called Benedictine Reform, and aided by the then-recent (AD 940s or 950s) translation of the *Rule* of Benedict into Old English by Æthelwold, bishop of Winchester, Ælfric would have made sure his monks read, at least in their native tongue.

<sup>60</sup> From *Ælfric’s Letter to the Monks of Eynsham*, ed. Christopher Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 111.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

<sup>62</sup> From Chapter XXXVIII of the *Rule*, as quoted in *A Commentary on the Holy Rule of St. Benedict*, eds. Dom Paul Delatte and Dom Justin McCann (London: Burns Oates, 1950), 265.

<sup>63</sup> Local bishops in the early centuries of the Church could traditionally declare a person, martyred or having led an ascetic life, as worthy of veneration. Eusebius, on page 174 of *The History of the Church from Christ to Constantine*, trans. G.A. Williamson (New York: Dorset Press, 1984) refers to a letter sent by the church of Smyrna after the martyrdom of their bishop, Polycarp, a disciple of the apostle John, in 155. After he died on the pyre, “we took up his bones, more precious than stones of great price, more splendid than gold, and laid them where it seemed right. When, if it proves possible, we assemble there, the Lord will allow us to celebrate with joy and gladness the birthday of his martyrdom, both to the memory of those who have contended in the past, and for the training and preparation of those whose time is yet to come.” Only at the end of the twelfth century did the process of canonization become a papal privilege in the Western Church, when Alexander III reprimanded bishops for allowing the veneration of an unfit person, the Emperor Charlemagne. The Holy Roman Emperor never made it to the list of saints of the universal Church.

saints that survived the passage of time and gained acceptance by Benedictine monasticism. Furthermore, if the initial audience of these saints' lives, the monks, had the capacity of understanding such readings, the intended recipients of the collection, ealdorman Æthelweard and his son Æthelmær,<sup>64</sup> certainly had, at the very least, the capacity to read them. Although "what was once thought to be the low percentage of the population for whom literacy was deemed necessary or even desirable" and "the admittedly high price of codices"<sup>65</sup> have long stood as the main impediments to the recognition of any significant degree of literacy in Anglo-Saxon lay society, scholars, led by Rosamond McKitterick, "have been revising literacy figures upwards." Compared to the "more learned and literate" regions of the known world, "under Arab and Byzantine influence,"<sup>66</sup> England "tended to lag behind, even with respect to Ireland,"<sup>67</sup> particularly in Latin. Yet, the existence of law-codes,<sup>68</sup> royal decrees, treaties, charters, and wills in the vernacular, as well as of works of literature and of religious writing, indicate a degree of literacy not apparently limited to the clergy and the nobility. Studies on the education of medieval children find that texts written for children existed,<sup>69</sup> and "some children did

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<sup>64</sup> Æthelweard (d. ca. AD 998), great-great-grandson of King Æthelred I, authored a Latin translation of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. Æthelmær later became ealdorman in the south-west and refounded Eynsham Abbey as a Benedictine abbey in 1005, with Ælfric as founding abbot.

<sup>65</sup> Gillian Adams, "Medieval Children's Literature: Its Possibility and Actuality," in *Children's Literature* 26, ed. Elizabeth Lennox Keyser (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 7-8.

<sup>66</sup> Gillian Adams states, "Once most of Spain came under Muslim domination, high culture flourished."

<sup>67</sup> On the subject of Ireland, Charles Patrick Wormald, in "The Uses of Literacy in Anglo-Saxon England and its Neighbours," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 27 (London: Royal Historical Society, 1977): 95- 114, makes "two important modifications to any impression that the clergy alone were literate. The first is that the sons of kings and nobles were apparently entrusted to monastic schools, as they had once been to the fosterage of the Druids, even when designated for a secular life. Secondly, and more important, Ireland already had wholly secular learned professions, guardians of its legal, historical and poetic lore. This is undoubtedly why the writing of the native language developed so precociously [7<sup>th</sup> century] alongside Latin."

<sup>68</sup> Bede in *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, 78, speaks of the code of laws of Æthelberht, King of Kent (560–616), "written in English" and "still kept and observed by the people."

<sup>69</sup> Gillian Adams, "Medieval Children's Literature: Its Possibility and Actuality," p. 8. Nicholas Orme, in *Medieval Children* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 241, dates the first English "schools such as

learn how to read, whether taught in schools run by monks and nuns or by the secular clergy, at home by parents, or at court by tutors.” Ælfric, himself a teacher,<sup>70</sup> wrote mostly in the vernacular, and addressed more of his works to the laity than to the clergy. Of course, all of this does not necessarily imply that the laity could read. However, “it splits hairs to insist that they could not: they still wished to own his books.”<sup>71</sup> One book in the vernacular owned by ealdorman Æthelweard and his son Æthelmær could then reach many when read aloud to a group. Although Ælfric believed foremost in providing the clergy with a greater knowledge of Latin, he also knew that the vernacular remained the best way to teach the laity.<sup>72</sup>

Studies of the linguistic patterns of late Anglo-Saxon royal decrees and homiletic discourse characterize them as “admonishments and exhortations,”<sup>73</sup> and suggest that the English laity most likely consisted then of “resistant auditors, slow to submit, let alone to join in faithful allegiance.” Studies of late Anglo-Saxon poetry reveal a concurrent “national apprehension... a consequence of people betrayed, plundered, molested and killed”<sup>74</sup> in the face of recurrent Viking attacks. Ælfric grasps both this resistance and this apprehension when he addresses his audience. Chapter 2 of this dissertation, “Ælfric and the Northmen,” describes the situation in Anglo-Saxon England at the end of the tenth century, when after the unifying reign of Edgar and the effective implementation of the

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we have today – free-standing public institutions taught by professional schoolmasters” to the late 11<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>70</sup> Ælfric wrote the first text teaching Latin to speakers of Old English, a *Grammar and Glossary*, and his *Colloquy* represents his dedication to teaching Latin as a Second Language.

<sup>71</sup> P. Wormald. “Anglo-Saxon Society and its Literature.” *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*, ed. M. Godden and M. Lapidge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 18.

<sup>72</sup> J. Wilcox in “Ælfric in Dorset and the Landscape of Pastoral Care.” *Pastoral Care in Late Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. F. Tinti (Woodbridge, U.K: Boydell Press, 2005), 53, note three, states, “Ælfric wrote some 14.65% of the surviving corpus of Old English.”

<sup>73</sup> Eugene Green. *Anglo-Saxon Audiences* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 2-3.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.



Benedictine reform of the monasteries, a second wave of Viking invasions threatened to break apart the kingdom and bring back pagan ways. If King Æthelred could not keep the Northmen out of England, when his people still spoke of the death and devastation brought on by the First Viking Age, the Anglo-Saxon Church, and Ælfric in particular, feared apostasy and submission to the pagan religion of the invaders. In the absence of any royal leadership comparable to that of the holy Anglo-Saxon kings Oswald of Northumbria and Edmund of East Anglia, and with the existing political and military systems in disarray, the religious order as exemplified by Ælfric saw the urgent need to remind the people that losing one's life did not compare to losing one's soul. For the Anglo-Saxons, long accustomed to hearing accounts of Germanic heroes fighting monsters and creatures of darkness and evil, the time had come to hear and emulate the lives of Christian saints, equally heroic in their stand against persecution. Ælfric strengthens his faithful by reminding them that England already has its own Christian heroes, noble successors of the martyrs of the Orient who faced persecution first.

Chapter 3, "Ælfric and Paganism," studies those *Lives* describing the sufferings of saints at the hands of pagans and heathens. The selection discussed in this chapter includes martyrs from the *Old Testament*, such as the Maccabees, as well as Christians persecuted throughout the eastern Roman Empire in the early centuries of the Church. These examples of resistance unto death and rejection of pagan ways make up the majority of the collection, undoubtedly in large part because of the Church's concern that nearly 400 years after Augustine's arrival in England, heathen customs still existed in Anglo-Saxon society and defied complete eradication. Ælfric shows great awareness of this fact throughout his writings, and, with the repeated attacks of the Northmen, fears

that many in his audience might revert to pagan beliefs. Again, the time had come to hear and emulate the lives of earlier and well-established Christian saints from the East proclaiming their faith under the worst kind of torture and suffering.

Chapter 4, “Ælfric and Judaism,” first discusses the theory that Ælfric, as an Anglo-Saxon, knew nothing about Judaism because no Jews lived in England before the Norman Conquest, and that “the understanding of Jews and Judaism in Anglo-Saxon England is therefore solely a textual phenomenon, a matter of stereotypes embedded in longstanding Christian cultural traditions.”<sup>75</sup> This chapter then studies the historical relationship between Judaism and early Christianity in Palestine before and during the first few centuries after the death of Jesus. Next, it examines the “knowledge and awareness of the Hebrew language in the Anglo-Saxon period,”<sup>76</sup> making it clear that the Anglo-Saxons’ perception of Judaism did not stem from ignorance but from real contacts between the two faiths. These contacts originated in the Orient, where both religions co-existed for centuries and where Christians and Jews formed lasting impressions of each other. While Ælfric expresses respect for all virtuous Jews of the Old Testament, he has none for Jews who rejected and persecuted Jesus. To further encourage his audience in this time of anxiety, Ælfric presents, in his *Lives of Saints*, the suffering of Jesus at the hand of the Jews as the ultimate example of Christian suffering, but he still allows for the possibility of forgiveness for all Jews or sinners that repent and convert. A brief study of the major early heresies, usually starting in the East, forms the Introduction to Chapter 5, “Ælfric and Heresy.” Mostly expressed in his *Life of Basil*, Ælfric’s position towards

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<sup>75</sup> A. P. Scheil. “Anti-Judaism in Ælfric’s *Lives of Saints*.” *Anglo-Saxon England* 28, ed. M. Lapidge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 65.

<sup>76</sup> Fleming, Damian Joseph. “*The Most Exalted Language*”: *Anglo-Saxon Perceptions of Hebrew*. (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2006).

Christian heresy and false teachings of any kind remains the focus of this chapter. If the previous invasions by pagan Vikings started a weakening of the faith and a slide into heresy, the same could happen again. Although Anglo-Saxons had knowledge of Basil of Caesarea through the writings of St. Benedict, Theodore of Tarsus, and Bede, Ælfric shows the most interest in this Father of eastern monasticism, presenting him to his mixed audience of clergy and laity as a model of orthodoxy in defense of his faith. Just as Basil stood fast while heretic Christians persecuted him, the English, after what happened to the Church in many parts of Europe, now need the same fortitude. Fear of the Northmen could lead to a forced assimilation of their customs, an alteration of Christian beliefs, and subsequent heresy. A similar fear of death and destruction had previously caused a widespread submission to Islam throughout the Orient, North Africa and parts of Southern Europe, and although Ælfric himself writes very little about Islam, many Anglo-Saxons, including Bede, considered them as dangerous heretics.

Chapter 6, “Ælfric and Satan,” analyzes the many appearances of the devil, the ultimate adversary of humanity, in Ælfric’s *Lives of Saints*. Most medieval hagiography counts the devil as a major character, and so does this collection. The belief that all the evil in the world comes from Satan, the Father of Lies and the Prince of Darkness, explains why medieval lives of saints frequently include encounters with him or with various demons. The Anglo-Saxons, already familiar with literary descriptions of the Orient as the dwelling-place of demons and devil-worshippers, could easily relate to narratives of saints battling Satan under his many shapes and personifications. They, and Ælfric, also firmly believed that persecutions by Vikings, pagans, other religions, or heretics, were but expressions of humanity’s inevitable struggle against Satan. In his

*Lives of Saints*, Ælfric illustrates this struggle and acknowledges Satan's power, but he also reminds his audience that this power is limited by God.

Long before Augustine of Canterbury arrived in Kent to convert the Anglo-Saxons, Christians in the Orient had suffered persecution or violent death for their faith. By retelling their stories in the vernacular, Ælfric gives role models to his audience, now facing similar historical circumstances. He also deepens the knowledge of the East that Theodore of Tarsus and monasticism had brought to England. This study concludes with a reaffirmation that in his *Lives of Saints*, as in all things, Ælfric looked to the Orient from whence his faith had come.

## CHAPTER 2

### ÆLFRIC AND THE NORTHMEN

By AD 995, when Ælfric started to write his *Lives of Saints* at the monastery of Cernel<sup>77</sup> in Dorset, the renewed invasions from the North had already deeply affected that region. According to the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, in AD 980,

Southampton was ravaged by a raiding ship-army and most of the town-dwellers killed or taken prisoner. And the same year the land of Thanet was raided; and the same year Cheshire was raided by a northern raiding ship-army.

981. Here in this year Padstow was raided; and the same year great harm was done everywhere along the sea-coast, both in Devon and in Cornwall.

982. Here in this year 3 ships of Vikings came up in Dorset and raided in Portland. The same year London town burned.<sup>78</sup>

For several years after that, all entries in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* concerning that region of England speak of war, destruction, pillage, and payment of tribute. Eventually, during failed military attempts against the invaders,

[in 1001] there was gathered an immense army from the Devon people and Somerseters, and then they came together at Pinhoe; and then as soon as they joined battle, the English army gave way, and they made great slaughter there, and then rode over the countryside – and each succeeding occasion was worse than the last; and they brought much war-booty with them to the ships, and turned

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<sup>77</sup> Cernel, presently Cerne Abbas, lies 47.2 miles from Southampton and 16.6 miles from Portland. Although some refer to the monastery as Cerne, Ælfric uses the name Cernel in his Old English Preface to the First Series of *Catholic Homilies*. He writes: “Ic Ælfric munuc and mæssepreost, swa þeah waccre þonne swilcum hadum gebyrige, wearð asend on Æþelredes dæge cyninges fram Ælfeage biscope, Aðelwoldes æftergengan, to sumum mynster þe is Cernel gehaten, þurh Æðelmæres bene ðæs þegenes, his gebyrd and goodnys sind gehwær cuþe” (I Ælfric, monk and mass-priest, although more insignificant than is suitable for such a state, was sent in the days of king Æþelred by bishop Ælfeah, Aðelwold’s successor, to a certain monastery called Cernel, at the request of Æðelmær the thane, whose birth and goodness are known everywhere). From *The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church: the first part, containing the Sermones Catholici, or Homilies of Ælfric*, ed. Benjamin Thorpe (New York: Johnson Reprint Co., 1971), 2. Ælfric’s words indicate that he wrote the First Series of *Catholic Homilies* while at Cernel. There is no written evidence that he was still there when he wrote the *Lives*, but there is also no evidence to the contrary. Helmut Gneuss, in *Ælfric of Eynsham: his Life, Times, and Writings* (Kalamazoo, Medieval Institute Publications, 2009), 6, surmises that “his writings imply not only wide reading but the use of a sizeable and accessible library. Library visits to Winchester, and the loan of books from Winchester, could have provided some help, but there is no evidence whatsoever for these.”

<sup>78</sup> *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, Michael J. Swanton, trans. & ed. (New York: Routledge, 1998), 124.

from there into the Isle of Wight, and there travelled about just as they themselves wanted, and nothing withstood them. No raiding-ship army nor land-army dared approach them, however far inland they went. In every way it was a heavy time, because they never left off their evil.<sup>79</sup>

His writings imply that Ælfric was aware of the events taking place outside the walls of his monastery. His friendship with Æthelweard, ealdorman of the Western provinces, at whose request he wrote the *Lives of Saints*, even suggest that Ælfric probably had inside information about military actions, since Æthelweard had the responsibility of defending Dorset against the Viking invasions. In fact, it is the purpose of this chapter to discern in the *Lives of Saints* Ælfric's thoughts about the contemporaneous political situation in England, which directly inspired his choice of saints to write about, and guided his admonitory emphasis in recounting the lives of Edmund of East Anglia, Oswald of Northumbria and the Old Testament Maccabees.

Scholars have long debated the value of medieval texts, sometimes treating them as biased reflections of a limited world-view, the religious one, and at other times, exalting them as true witnesses to history. Whatever the outcome of this debate, these texts remain our only primary sources. In the 1960s, a movement to rehabilitate the Vikings re-examined this evidence and sought to revisit the most common assumptions made about them.<sup>80</sup> An examination of the written sources and chronicles found them generally hostile to the invaders and concluded that this proved “not surprising... [since]

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<sup>79</sup> *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 133.

<sup>80</sup> This movement, as represented in Peter H. Sawyer's *The Age of the Vikings* (London: Edward Arnold, 1963), questioned the cruelty of these attacks and generally downplayed the effects of the invasions. It proposed to study the evidence of the numbers and to determine objectively the extent of the destruction caused by the Northmen. This analysis concluded that the majority of raids involved small fleets and the inflated numbers given by chroniclers therefore represented their attempt to justify the failure of the English to defeat the invaders. Moreover, this movement claimed that “some men welcomed the Vikings and that relations between the kings of Wessex and the Scandinavians were not always hostile, or even potentially so,” 24-5. The argument was made that, in this society accustomed to violence and repeated waves of invasions (a few centuries earlier, the Anglo-Saxons themselves had taken over England from the

they were mostly written by ecclesiastics who were mainly concerned to record and complain about the activities of these heathen men who regarded the holy places of Christendom simply as treasure houses fit to be plundered. The bias is often obvious and the exaggerations blatant.<sup>81</sup>

In order to rehabilitate the Vikings, these scholars set out to determine whether Viking violence stood out as unparalleled in its time, and evaluate the extent of the destruction caused, both the immediate damage and the long-term consequences of the raids. None could deny that destruction took place, because “churches were undoubtedly plundered, damaged and destroyed, towns were looted, and many men were killed.”<sup>82</sup> They also recognized that “the raiders were undoubtedly feared and it was not without cause that some men may have prayed, ‘From the fury of the Northmen, O Lord deliver us.’”

Determining the violent character of the invasions thus proved an easy task, and comparing these to wars between Christians indicated that coreligionists seemed no less violent than the Northmen. As for the long-term consequences of the raids in England, most commonly the disappearance of monasteries and the dismal state of learning in the early tenth century, these scholars concluded that because there remains, “in many cases, no evidence to prove that these assumed consequences were the sole responsibility of the Vikings, this kind of argument is hazardous and often circular.”<sup>83</sup>

This movement of rehabilitation of the Northmen, considered by writers on the other side of the issue as “a devastating assault on beliefs concerning the size of the

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Britons), the Vikings soon settled in England and converted to Christianity. Once baptized, they no longer represented a threat to the church or to society. Sawyer concluded, “The Viking period has been fabricated. It began when the men of the West first became aware of the strangers of the North who came in search of land, wealth and glory. It ended when they were no longer strangers,” 206.

<sup>81</sup> P. H. Sawyer. *The Age of the Vikings*, 9.

<sup>82</sup> *The Age of the Vikings*, 136.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

Viking armies and the density of the Danish settlement,<sup>84</sup> has nevertheless inspired research contributing to the perpetuation of this controversy.<sup>85</sup> As a result, many scholars still find themselves in disagreement with P. H. Sawyer and his group.<sup>86</sup> Rather than downplay the written evidence by invoking the religious bias of their authors, this more recent trend of scholarship finds that by considering the invaded regions as a whole and comparing the various literary sources, “common themes and issues can be assessed across the entire study-area.”<sup>87</sup> Stating that the ninth century and the early tenth century represent “at best a very hard time for Christianity,” David Dumville, as recently as 2002, directly addresses the controversy by adding,

this model will enable us to say, for example, that – in spite of our lack of sources telling us of attacks on English churches after 835 – in England vikings were the cause of the monastic (and, in some places, general ecclesiastical) collapse visible by 890. We shall not then be able to be seduced by Peter Sawyer’s assertion that monasteries disappeared in a mere half-century because the English lost interest in monasticism.<sup>88</sup>

Following this more recent trend in scholarship, the present chapter’s description of the situation in England after the invasions will rely on the evidence supplied in Ælfric’s

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<sup>84</sup> See Gillian F. Jensen. “The Vikings in England: a review.” *Anglo-Saxon England* 4 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975): 181- 206.

<sup>85</sup> Further assessment of written sources, archaeological findings in Scandinavia and the British Isles, numismatic evidence, and the study of the pattern of distribution of Scandinavian names and place-names express this renewed interest in the field.

<sup>86</sup> They observe that, “in the last generation... there has been a vigorous attempt to write Viking Age history in the teeth of the contemporary written sources,” 211. In David N. Dumville, “Vikings in the British Isles: a Question of Sources.” *The Scandinavians from the Vendel Period to the Tenth Century: an Ethnographic Perspective*, ed. Judith Jesch (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2002): 209 – 250.

<sup>87</sup> “Vikings in the British Isles: a Question of Sources,” 212, suggests that many questions must remain unanswered and both sides of this controversy must avoid generalizations. At best, a “composite picture of viking activity across the British Isles might be created by aggregating the experiences of the various parts of the Insular world,” 222. This “comprehensive model,” open to further discussion and change, would indicate that, among other characteristics and for the purpose of this paper, “the softest targets were smallish coastal towns and island-sites, especially monasteries. Hit-and-run operations were easiest and the element of surprise was very much present.” What ostensibly started as raiding and plundering soon developed into taking control, by bringing political change with “the collapse or near-collapse of kingdoms,” 225-27, and effecting “cultural hybridization,” with “some natives deeming it to be in their interest to join the invaders, whether temporarily or on a more permanent basis.”

<sup>88</sup> David N. Dumville, “Vikings in the British Isles: a Question of Sources,” 227.



*Lives of Saints*, because considering history “in the teeth of” Ælfric’s writings would merely result in replacing an allegedly religious bias by another set of prejudices, more secular certainly, but no less tendentious.

As a background to the composition of the *Lives of Saints*, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* relates events taking place in Ælfric’s Dorset of AD 998, when

the raiding-army turned eastward again, into the mouth of the Frome, and went up as widely as they wanted into Dorset. And an army was often gathered against them, but then as soon as they should have come together something always started a retreat, and they always had the victory in the end.<sup>89</sup>

It is obvious that the English fared poorly. After their defeat at Maldon in AD 991, and all hopes of prevailing against the invaders abandoned, they adopted a new approach:

in the same year it was first decided that tax be paid to the Danish men because of the enormities which they wrought along the sea coast. That was at first ten thousand pounds. Archbishop Sigeric decided on the decision.<sup>90</sup>

The attacks continued. In AD 994, after London nearly fell to Olaf and Swein, the invaders

travelled from there and wrought the greatest harm which any raiding-army could ever do, in burning and raiding and slaughter of men, both along the sea coast and in Essex and in the land of Kent and in Sussex and in Hampshire. And finally they took themselves horses, and rode widely as they wanted, and were wreaking indescribable harm. Then the king and his councillors decided to send to them, and offer tax and provisions if they would leave off their raiding, and they undertook [to do] that, and all the raiding-army came to Southampton, and there took up winter-quarters, and there they were fed from throughout all the kingdom of Wessex; and they were paid 16 thousand pounds.<sup>91</sup>

Ten thousand pounds of silver in AD 991 soon became 48,000 in AD 1012, and 72,000 plus 10,500 in AD 1016-18, leading some to question the wisdom of Sigeric’s advice. In spite of the ever-increasing tribute paid by the English to stop the depredations of the

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<sup>89</sup> *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 131.

<sup>90</sup> *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 126.

<sup>91</sup> *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 129.

Northmen, and even after such promising episodes as Olaf Tryggvason's confirmation in AD 994, when

King Ethelred stood sponsor to him at confirmation, and bestowed gifts on him royally. And ... Olaf promised – as also he performed – that he would never come back to England in hostility,<sup>92</sup>

other groups of Northmen still kept up the attacks on England. This is why Ælfric could write,

Efne nu þæs middan-eard is for micclum geswenct.  
and mid manegum earforðnyssum yfele gepreatod.”

[Indeed, at this time, the earth is greatly troubled and threatened with many evil misfortunes.]<sup>93</sup>

Whereas Ælfric, in several of his *Lives*, frequently expresses nostalgia for the days of King Edgar, when a holy king could keep his people in a state of peace and holiness, he also knows that even holy kings and just causes do not always prevail in this world. This leads him to warn his audience, by showing examples from the past, that all Christians must inevitably become responsible for their own struggle against evil, and seek eternal salvation before all else. In his life of St. Swithun (AD 800-862), Ælfric considers the qualities of the king as the reasons why the years of Edgar's reign were “gesælig and wynsum,”

444 and we secgað to soðan, þæt se tima wæs gesælig  
and wynsum on angel-cynne, þaða eadgar cynincg  
þone christen-dom ge-fyrðrode .and fela munuclifa arærde;  
and his cynerice wæs wunigende on sibbe,  
448 swa þæt man ne gehyrde gif ænig scyp-here wære  
buton agenre leode þe ðis land heoldon.  
and ealle ða cyningas þe on þysum iglande wæron

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<sup>92</sup> *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 129.

<sup>93</sup> *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat Vol. II, 168 (lines 165- 66). In this life of St. Maurice and his Companions, Ælfric considers the earth as worse off in his own time than in the days of the persecutions by the Roman emperor Maximian (A.D. 250-310).

cumera, and scotta, common to eadgare;  
 452 hwilon anes dāges eahta cyningas  
 and hi ealle gebugon to eadgares wissunge.  
 Ðær-to-eacan wæron swilce wundra gefremode  
 þurh þone halgan swyðun swa swa we sædon ær  
 456 and swa lange swa we leofodon þær wurdon gelome wundra.  
 On ðam timan wæron eac wurð-fulle bisceopas,  
 dunstan se anræda æt ðam erce-stole,  
 and ælhwold se arwurða and oðre gehwylce;  
 460 ac dunstan and ælhwold wæron drihtne gecorene  
 and hi swyðost manodon menn to godes willan  
 and ælc god arærdon gode to cwemednysse,  
 þæt geswuteljað þa wundra þe god wyrceð purh hi.<sup>94</sup>

[And we say in truth, that the time was happy and pleasant for the English people, when King Edgar furthered Christianity and raised many monasteries; and his nation was abiding in peace, so that men were not subjected to any fleet, except of their own people who owned this land. And all the kings who were on this island, Cumbrians, and Scots, came to Edgar; at one time eight kings on one day, all submitted to Edgar's rule. In addition to that, such wonders were accomplished through the saintly Swithun, just as we said before, and as long as we have lived there happened frequent miracles. In that time were also worthy bishops, Dunstan of one mind in the archbishop's see, and Æthelwold the honorable and many others; but Dunstan and Æthelwold were chosen by the Lord, and they especially exhorted men to the will of God and exalted all that is good in obedience to God, as miracles reveal God who works through them.]

What Edgar does for his people qualifies him as a good king: he unifies the nation, shows enough military force to discourage invaders, builds monasteries, and supports the monastic reformers. Apparently, even Edgar's failures<sup>95</sup> become insignificant compared to those of the current Æthelred II, his son, who became king in AD 978, after the murder of his half-brother, Edward the Martyr.<sup>96</sup>

<sup>94</sup> *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat Vol. I, 468- 470 (lines 444- 463).

<sup>95</sup> Ælfric shows no concern with Edgar's private life, and whether or not he married the mother of their daughter, the future St. Edith. Ælfric also does not echo the ambivalence expressed in *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle's* comment that Edgar "one ill-deed, however, he did too much, in that he loved bad, foreign habits, and brought heathen customs too fast into this land and attracted the alien here, and introduced a damaging people to this country. But God grant him that his good deeds may be greater than his ill deeds, to shield his soul on the longsome journey." From the year 959 in *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 115.

<sup>96</sup> When Edgar died, his two young sons, Edward and Æthelred, born of different mothers, survived him. According to Simon Keynes, *The Diplomas of King Æthelred 'The Unready' 978- 1016* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), "the eldest son of a king did not automatically succeed to the kingdom

At the time, Ælfric was living at Winchester under Æthelwold, and following the Benedictine form of monasticism established at Glastonbury by Dunstan. These two are the “worthy bishops” of King Edgar’s reign, with Dunstan consecrating Æthelwold bishop of Winchester in AD 963. Still, Ælfric did not take sides in this debate on the succession. Dunstan, always highly critical of Æthelred,<sup>97</sup> died in AD 988; but Æthelwold still held sway over the king until his own death in AD 984. In fact, the death of Æthelwold ushered in a period of wrongdoing<sup>98</sup>, which by AD 993 the king had come to regret. Unlike Edgar, Æthelred failed for nearly a decade several of the duties of a good king as described by Ælfric, to “further Christianity and raise monasteries.” As a result, the abbeys of Abingdon, Winchester, and Glastonbury, as well as the diocese of Rochester, suffered a loss of land and possessions, and “it seems likely that laymen would have been primarily responsible for leading the king astray, since they appear to have been the principal beneficiaries of his indiscretions.”<sup>99</sup> In AD 995, with Æthelred barely out of this stage of “youthful indiscretions”<sup>100</sup> and although his grant of privileges to Abingdon Abbey in AD 993 did signify a change, the church remained subject to royal whims. At the same time, large parts of England fell again at the mercy of the Vikings.

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on his father’s death, but rather the succession belonged to that member of the royal family who was considered the most ‘throne-worthy’ by those left in effective control,” 163. As a result, two factions formed, one led by Archbishop Dunstan and supporting his own student Edward (eleven) and the other, promoting Æthelred (nine), with his mother and Æthelwold, bishop of Winchester, as advocates. Edward prevailed but, in the ominous words of the chronicler for the year 975, “And then immediately in harvest-time in that same year, the star *comet* appeared, and then in the following year came a very great famine and very manifold disturbances throughout the English race” (*The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 121).

<sup>97</sup> Keynes, in *The Diplomas of King Æthelred ‘The Unready’* 978- 1016, speaks of Dunstan’s open criticism of the king after Æthelred “laid waste the diocese of Rochester” (in the words of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 81) and of Dunstan’s subsequent prophecy that what Æthelred had conquered would not fail to bring him burning fire and shedding of blood, “quoad vixeris non deerit tibi combustio ignis et effusio sanguinis,” 178.

<sup>98</sup> The wrongdoings involved the maltreatment of certain churches, the reduction of their privileges and the appropriation of their property, as expressed in *The Diplomas of King Æthelred ‘The Unready’*, 177.

<sup>99</sup> Simon Keynes. *The Diplomas of King Æthelred ‘The Unready’*, 182.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid*, 176.

For Ælfric, this situation cannot be coincidental, but rather denotes another dereliction on the part of Æthelred, who failed again to emulate Edgar, whose “cynerice wæs wunigende on sibbe / swa þæt man ne gehyrde gif ænig scyp-here wære” (nation was abiding in peace, so that men were not subjected to any fleet).<sup>101</sup> However, Ælfric, whose audience certainly included members of the nobility, neither directly names nor blames Æthelred. Instead, he uses several other examples provided by hagiography to make it clear that even holy kings can sometimes lose their worldly battles.

In his life of Edmund, King of East Anglia,<sup>102</sup> Ælfric retells the events surrounding the death of a virtuous Anglo-Saxon king at the hands of invading Northmen:

Hit ge-lamp ða æt nextan þæt þa deniscan leode  
 ferdon mid scip-here, hergiende and sleande  
 28 wide geond land swa swa heora gewuna is.  
 On þam flotan wæron þa fyrmestan heafod-men  
 hinguar and hubba, geanlæhte þurh deofol,  
 and hī on norð-hymbra-lande gelendon mid æscum,  
 32 and aweston þæt land, and þa leoda ofslogon.  
 Ða ge-wende hinguar east mid his scipum,  
 and hubba belaf on norð-hymbra-lande,  
 gewunnenum sige mid wælhreownysse.  
 36 Hinguar þa becom to east-englum rowende,  
 on þam geare þe ælfred æðelincg an and twentig geare wæs,  
 se þe west-sexena cynincg sibban wearð mære.  
 And se fore-sæda hinguar færlice, swa swa wulf,  
 40 on lande bestalcode and þa leode sloh  
 weras and wīf and þa ungewittigan cild,  
 and to bysmore tucode þa bilewitan cristenan.<sup>103</sup>

<sup>101</sup> Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat Vol. I, 468 (lines 447- 8).

<sup>102</sup> Edmund of East Anglia, one of only five English saints included in Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*.

<sup>103</sup> Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat Vol. II, p. 316 (lines 26-42). Ælfric's immediate source for these events, Abbo of Fleury's Latin *Passio S. Eadmundi*, dates from between AD 985 and 987, during Abbo's stay in England. After the AD 900-20 translation of Edmund's relics, Bury St Edmunds in East Anglia became a major center of devotion and pilgrimage. In Ælfric's lifetime, this center remained under the control of the secular clergy. Ironically, it took another invader from the North, Cnut, to grant in AD 1020 the existing church and minster to the Benedictine order.

[Then it happened next that the Danish men set forth with a fleet, ravaging and killing far and wide throughout the land as is their custom. In that fleet were the most prominent leaders Hinguar and Hubba, united in the devil, and they arrived in Northumbria with spears, and laid waste to the land, and killed the people. Then Hinguar went east with his ships, and Hubba remained in Northumbria, achieving victory by means of cruelty. Hinguar then reached the East-Angles by sea in the year that Alfred the atheling was twenty-one, he who afterwards became the great king of the West-Saxons. And the aforesaid Hinguar suddenly, just like a wolf, stole upon the land and killed the people, men and women and the unwitting child, and shamefully ill-treated the innocent Christians.]

This particular episode takes place in AD 869, well into the first wave of Viking invasions of ca. AD 780 to 900, and although Ælfric writes his *Lives of Saints* between AD 995 and 1002, he still uses the present tense when qualifying the Danish “ravaging and killing” with “as is their custom.” Ælfric later depicts the cruel way they torture King Edmund of East Anglia, insulting him, beating him with clubs and whips, hurling spears at him, and finally beheading him. Some writers claim that “Ælfric’s representation of Edmund’s death pales beside the actual truth.”<sup>104</sup> According to these,

Edmund died sacrificed to Odin, in the *blóðorn* or “blood-eagle” ritual, in which the victim is laid out face-down, his ribs hacked through along both sides of the backbone, his back opened up like a pair of wings, and his lungs pulled out (or something like that; accounts vary).<sup>105</sup>

Still other critics prefer to attribute these gory descriptions to

medieval men of letters... [who] could sometimes be over-eager to recover the colourful rites and leafy folk beliefs of their pagan ancestors.<sup>106</sup>

Ælfric’s text makes no mention of the *blóðorn* ritual, while his direct source for

Edmund’s death, Abbo of Fleury, writes that the heathen Danes,

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<sup>104</sup> J. W. Earl. “Violence and Non-Violence in Anglo-Saxon England: Ælfric’s ‘Passion of St. Edmund.’” *Philological Quarterly* (1999): 125- 149.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 129. Earl indicates here that the description of this ritual appears in Abbo of Fleury’s account of Edmund’s death but not in Ælfric’s version.

<sup>106</sup> Roberta Frank, in “Viking Atrocity and Skaldic Verse: The Rite of the Blood-Eagle.” *The English Historical Review* 99 (1984): 332-343, comments on the curious turn taken by scholarship after the rehabilitation of the Vikings begun by Peter Sawyer. Referring to the opposite side of the debate, she writes, “New studies of the Scandinavian invaders of England seem determined to stress their demonic side, to expose the dark virulence and fanaticism of Norse paganism,” 332.

as if practicing at a target, pierced his whole body with arrow-spikes, augmenting the severity of his torment by frequent discharges of their weapons, and inflicting wound upon wound, while one javelin made room for another. And thus, all haggled over by the sharp points of their darts, and scarce able to draw breath, he actually bristled with them, like a prickly hedgehog or a thistle fretted with spines, resembling in his agony the illustrious martyr Sebastian.<sup>107</sup>

Ælfric merely comments: “Hi scuton þa mid gafelucum swilce him to gamenes to. / oð þæt he eall wæs besæt mid heora scotungum / swilce igles byrsta . swa swa sebastianus wæs”<sup>108</sup> (They then hurled spears at him as if to amuse themselves, until he was all covered with their missiles like the bristles of a porcupine, just as Sebastian was). That Ælfric should choose to differ from his source and use moderation in his references to the Vikings appears significant: they had already reached Portland, less than twenty miles from his monastery. After all, Ælfric’s intention in writing the *Lives* remains to strengthen his audience, and not exacerbate its fear of the invaders.

A second English life by Ælfric describes how the first Anglo-Saxon king and saint, Oswald of Northumbria (AD 605-642), defended his kingdom against pagans and died, like Edmund, beheaded and mutilated: “Ða het se hæðena cynincg his heafod of-aslean . / and his swiðran earm . and settan hi to myrcelse”<sup>109</sup> (Then the heathen king ordered his head to be cut off and his right arm, and set up as trophies). Both English kings died proclaiming their faith.<sup>110</sup> While the invaders scourged Edmund,

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<sup>107</sup> This translation from the Latin comes from Ian McDougall, “Serious Entertainments: an examination of a peculiar type of Viking atrocity.” *Anglo-Saxon England* 22 (1993): 202.

<sup>108</sup> *Ælfric’s Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat Vol. II, 322 (lines 116-18). In his own account of St. Sebastian’s martyrdom, in *Ælfric’s Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat Vol. I, 144 (lines 425- 29), Ælfric uses the same image “Þa læddan þa cempaþ þone cristes þegn / and setton hine to myrcelse . swa swa se manfulla het / and heora flan him on afæstnodon . foran . and hindan / swa picce on ælce healfe hwylce iles byrsta / and for-leton hine swa licgan for deaden” (Then the soldiers took away the thane of Christ, and set him up as a target, just as the evil one commanded. And they placed their arrows firmly into him in the front and in the back, as thickly on each side as the bristles of a porcupine, and they left him lying as dead).

<sup>109</sup> *Ælfric’s Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat Vol. II, 136 (lines 162-3).

<sup>110</sup> Martyrdom, or dying a violent death because of one’s faith, counts as the ultimate sacrifice and forgives a multitude of sins. Considered great kings, Alfred and Edgar may have brought victory or peace

he symble clypode  
 betwux þam swinglum mid soðan geleafan  
 to hælende criste and þa hæþenan þa  
 for his geleafan wurdon woodlice yrre  
 115 for-þan-þe he clypode crist him to fultume.<sup>111</sup>

[between lashes, he endlessly called out with true faith to Christ the Savior;  
and the heathens then, because of his belief, were insanely angered, because he  
called on Christ to help him.]

When Oswald died at the hand of Penda, the pagan king of the Mercians,

Ða geseah he genealecan his lifes geendunge,  
 and gebæd for his folc þe þær feallende sweolt,  
 160 and betæhte heora sawla and hine sylfne gode,  
 and þus clypode on his fylle . God gemiltsa urum sawlum.<sup>112</sup>

[Then he saw draw near his life's end, and he prayed for his army that perished  
failing, and entrusted their souls and his own to God, and thus called out in his  
fall: God have mercy on our souls.]

Yet, Oswald also represents the ideal king in the eyes of Ælfric: like Edgar, he unified the  
nation and with the help of a holy bishop (in this case, the Irish monk Aidan), he built  
monasteries and propagated the Christian faith:

104 Oswoldes cynerice wearð gerymde þa swyðe,  
 swa þæt feower þeoda hine underfengon to hlaforde:  
 peohtas and bryttas, Scottas and angle,  
 swa swa se ælmihtiga god hi geanlæhte to ðam,  
 108 for oswoldes gearnungum, þe hine æfre wurðode.  
 He fulworhte on eferwic þæt ænlice mynster  
 þe his mæg eadwine ær begunnon hæfde,  
 and he swanc for heofonan rice mid singalum gebedum,  
 112 swiþor þonne he hogode hu he geheolde on worulde  
 þa hwilwendlican geþincðu þe he hwonlice lufode.  
 He wolde æfter uhtsange oftost hine gebiddan,  
 and on cyrcan standan on syndrigum gebedum  
 116 of sunnan upgange mid swyðlicre onbryrdnysse.  
 And swa hwær he wæs, he wurðode æfre god,  
 up-awendum handbredum wiþ þæs heofones weard.<sup>113</sup>

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to their people but, unlike Edmund of East Anglia and Oswald of Northumbria, they never became martyrs  
or saints.

<sup>111</sup> *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat Vol. II, 322 (lines 111-5).

<sup>112</sup> *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat Vol. II, 134-36 (lines 158-61).



[Oswald's kingdom was then very much enlarged, so that four peoples accepted him as ruler: Picts and Britons, Scots and Angles, just as the almighty God united them to that end, as a reward to Oswald, who always praised him. He completed in York the splendid monastery that his kin Edwin had started earlier and he labored for the kingdom of heaven with daily prayers, rather than care about how he possessed in the world the transitory dignities that he little loved. He would often pray after matins, and in the church stand in private prayer at sunrise with intense ardor. And wherever he was, he always praised God, the palms of his hands turned upwards towards the heavens.]

According to the Venerable Bede, whom Ælfric acknowledges as the source for this life of Oswald, “not only did the fame of this renowned king spread through all parts of Britain but the beams of his healing light also spread across the ocean and reached the realms of Germany and Ireland.”<sup>114</sup> With the examples of Edmund and Oswald, Ælfric reminds his audience that holy kings worthy of praise and recognition cannot always secure peace and victory for their people. He does not suggest, however, that societies should not fight wars against their enemies, even if these adversaries sometimes prove more powerful.

In fact, at the end of the entry for August 1, the feast-day of the Maccabees,<sup>115</sup> the ever-meticulous Ælfric defines the different categories of war facing humanity:

Secgað swa-þeah lareowas þæt synd feower cynna gefeoht:  
*Iustum*, þæt is rihtlic; *iniustum*, unrihtlic;  
*Ciuile*, betwux ceaster-gewarum; *Plusquam ciuile*, betwux siblingum.  
708 *Iustum bellum* is rihtlic gefeoht wið ða reðan flot-menn  
oppe wið oðre þeoda þe eard willað fordon.  
Unrihtlic gefeoht is þe of yrre cymð.  
Ðæt þridde gefeoht þe of geflite cymð  
712 betwux ceaster-gewarum is swyðe pleolic;  
and þæt feorðe gefeoht þe betwux freondum bið,

<sup>113</sup> Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat Vol. II, 132 (lines 104-18).

<sup>114</sup> Bede. *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. Judith McClure, trans. Bertram Colgrave (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 130.

<sup>115</sup> The Anglo-Saxon church considered the seven brothers and their mother (originally mentioned in the second book of Maccabees in the *Hebrew Bible* or *Septuagint*) as saints and martyrs. The Catholic Church's liturgical calendar still sets down August 1 as their feast-day. The original Jewish feast came in December, during Hanukkah.

is swiðe earmlic and endeleas sorh.<sup>116</sup>

[However, teachers say that there are four kinds of war: *Justum*, that is just; *Injustum*, unjust; *Civile*, between citizens; *Plusquam civile*, between kinsmen. *Justum bellum* is a just war against the cruel pirates or against other nations that want to ruin the land. Unjust war is that which is born of anger. The third war that comes from quarrel between citizens is very harmful; and the fourth war, which is between relatives, is very pitiable, and endless grief.]

Ælfric cannot make it plainer that he considers war against the invading Vikings to be a just war.<sup>117</sup> Since wars require fighting elements in a society, he also reminds his audience of the three estates, the *Oratores, Laboratores and Bellatores*.<sup>118</sup>

- 812 Is swa-ðeah to witenne þæt on þysre worulde  
synd þreo endebyrdnysse on annysse gesette,  
þæt synd *laboratores, oratores, bellatores*.  
*Laboratores* synd þa þe urne begleafan beswincað;  
816 *oratores* synd þa ðe us to gode geðingiað;  
*bellatores* synd þa ðe ure burga healdað  
and urne eard be-weriað wið onwinnendne here.  
Nu swincð se yrðlincg embe urne bigleofan,  
820 and se woruld-cempa sceall winnan wið ure fynd,  
and se godes þeowa sceall symle for us gebiddan.<sup>119</sup>

[It is however to be known that in this world there are three orders, instituted in unity, that are *laboratores, oratores, bellatores*. *Laboratores* are they who toil for our sustenance; *Oratores* are they who pray to God for us; *Bellatores* are they who defend our dwellings and protect our land from attacking troops. Now the farmer toils for our sustenance, and the earthly soldier must fight our foe, and the servant of God must continuously pray for us.]

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<sup>116</sup> *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat Vol. II, 112-14 (lines 705- 14).

<sup>117</sup> Ælfric refers to his sources on the doctrine of war as anonymous "lareowas" or "teachers." At the time, Augustine of Hippo, rather than Cicero, generally got credit for the theory of "just war" as expressed in *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans*. Augustine writes, "But the wise man, they say, will wage just wars. Surely, if he remembers that he is a human being, he will rather lament the fact that he is faced with the necessity of waging just wars; for if they were not just, he would not have to engage in them, and consequently there would be no wars for a just man. For it is the injustice of the opposing side that lays on the wise man the duty of waging wars." Henry Bettenson, trans. *City of God* (London: Penguin Classics, 1984), 861-2. The "lareow" Isidore of Seville classified war into four types.

<sup>118</sup> King Alfred in his translation of Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy* first uses these terms in Anglo-Saxon: "In the case of the king, the resources and tools with which to rule are that he have his land fully-manned: he must have praying men, fighting men and working men." As quoted in S. Keynes and M. Lapidge, trans. *Alfred the Great: Asser's Life of King Alfred and other contemporary sources* (London: Penguin Books, 1988), 132.

<sup>119</sup> *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat Vol. II, 120-22 (lines 812- 21).

Clearly, in this world view, *bellatores* have the duty and privilege to fight just wars.

*Oratores* however, can only fight spiritual warfare.<sup>120</sup> Never, even in the eventuality of an attack, does Ælfric believe that monks should fight in wars or use force against another person, because

Godes þeowas sceolon unscæððignysse healdan,  
swa swa crist astealde þurh hine sylfne þa bysne  
848 þa þa he het petrum behydan his swurd,  
and gehælde þurh his mihte þæs mannes eare  
þe petrus of asloh, and geswutelode his godnysse.  
Nu se munuc þe bihð to benedictes regole  
852 and forlæt ealle woruld-ðinge, hwi wile he eft gecyrran  
to woruldlicum wæpnum. and awurpan his gewinn  
wið þa ungesewenlican fynd his scyppende to teonan?  
Se godes þeowa ne mæg mid woruld-mannum feohtan  
856 gif he on þam gastlican gefeohte forð-gang habban sceall.  
Næs nan halig godes þeowa æfter þæs hælendes þrowunga  
þe æfre on gefeohte his handa wolde afylan,  
ac hi for-bæron ehtnysse arleasra cwellera  
860 and heora lif sealdon mid unscæppignysse  
for godes geleafan, and hi mid gode nu lybbað  
forðan hi furþon noldon ænne fugel acwellan.<sup>121</sup>

[God's servants must practice meekness,<sup>122</sup> just as Christ gave the example himself when He bid Peter put away his sword, and healed by His might the man's ear that Peter struck off, and revealed his goodness. Now the monk who submits to Benedict's rule and relinquishes all worldly affairs, why does he wish to turn again to worldly weapons and cast aside his war with the invisible fiends, as an insult to his Maker? The servant of God may not fight with human beings if he must advance in the spiritual battle. There was no holy servant of God after the Savior's martyrdom that ever in a battle would stain his hands, but they endured the persecutions of wicked executioners and gave up their lives with meekness for God's faith. and they now live with God because they would not even kill a bird.]

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<sup>120</sup> J. E. Cross's "Vernacular Sermons in Old English" in *The Sermon*, ed. B. M. Kienzle (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), presents this argument on page 583.

<sup>121</sup> Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat Vol. II, 124 (lines 846- 62).

<sup>122</sup> W.W. Skeat translates the term "unscæððignysse" as "harmlessness," indicating not being able or likely to cause harm. The word "meek" (quiet, gentle, and submissive) used by Jesus (in most Bible translations) to describe himself expresses a more internalized quality, closer to the Benedictine ideal of the monk who must always seek and pursue peace. Ælfric's use of the term "unscæððignysse" in relation to a monk's way of life represents the more general command Jesus gives to all his followers: "Take up my yoke upon you, and learn of me, because I am meek, and humble of heart: and you shall find rest to your souls" (Matthew 11:29).

Ælfric states quite unambiguously that some men in society must fight and bear arms.

Apparently, his audience must have included at least some *bellatores*;<sup>123</sup> and for a definitive and widely recognized example of a people's struggle against all odds for their beliefs, Ælfric turns to the *Old Testament*.

The story of the Maccabees cannot result from a random choice on Ælfric's part: the situation in England when he composed his *Lives of Saints* resembled in many ways that of the Jewish people from 175 to 135 B.C.<sup>124</sup> Ælfric describes what happened then:

Eft æfter sumum fyrste asende se cyning  
16 on ærend-gewritum þæt ealle menn gebugon  
to his hæðen-scipe and to his gesetnyssum.  
And asende to hierusalem, iudeiscre byrig  
on þære wæs ða gewurðod se eall-wealdende god  
20 æfter ðære ealdan æ, þe hi ana þa heoldon,  
and het hi gebugan fram gode and fram his biggengum,  
and arærde þæt deofol-gild upon [drihtnes] weofode  
and het hi ealle offrian to ðære anlicnysse  
24 and ælcne acwellan þe wið-cwæde his hæsum.  
Wearð þa mycel angsumnyss on eallum þam folce  
þe on god gelyfdon, for ðam gramlicum dædum,  
and manega gebugon to ðam manfullan hæðengilde  
28 and eac fela wið-cwædon þæs cyninges hæsum  
and woldon heora lif forlætan ærþan ðe heora ge-leafan,  
and noldon hi fylan mid þam fulan hæðenscipe .  
ne godes æ to-brecaþ þe hi on bocum ræddon.<sup>125</sup>

[Thereupon after a certain time the king sent forth in a written message that all men should submit to his idolatry and to his decrees. And he sent it to Jerusalem, the Jewish town where was then honored the all-powerful God according to the old covenant, which they alone then observed; and he ordered them to turn away from God and from his worship, and erected the image of the devil upon the altar

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<sup>123</sup> "The Penitential of Theodore," in J. McNeill and H. Gamer's *Medieval Handbooks of Penance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 187, makes it clear to Anglo-Saxon warriors that killing, even in times of war, demanded penance: "One who slays a man by command of his lord shall keep away from the church for forty days; and one who slays a man in public war shall do penance for forty days."

<sup>124</sup> Conquered by the Seleucid dynasty of Macedonian successors to Alexander the Great, the populations of Babylonia, Syria, Phoenicia, and Palestine widely adopted Greek culture and ideas. The Jews, however, continued to live according to their faith until 175 B.C., when Antiochus IV Epiphanus became ruler and forced Greek paganism upon all his subjects.

<sup>125</sup> *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat Vol. II, 66-8 (lines 15-31).

of the Lord and ordered all to sacrifice to that image and to kill anyone who resisted his bidding. There was then much affliction among all the people who had faith in God, because of the cruel deeds, and many submitted to the cruel idolater and also many resisted the king's bidding and would surrender their lives rather than their faith, and would not pollute themselves with foul paganism nor break God's covenant that they possessed in books.]

This passage mirrors what happened in England between ca. AD 780 and 900, during and after the first viking invasions, and here again, Ælfric warns his audience of what could easily take place again, now that the Northmen had returned. For the feast-day of the Maccabees, whereas *An Old English Martyrology*<sup>126</sup> and several homilies of the Eastern Church Fathers<sup>127</sup> emphasize the martyrdom of the seven brothers and their mother, Ælfric, following the Bible text more closely, writes extensively on the military aspect of the story and on the leaders who rose up to defend the Jewish people:

Hwæt ða iudas machabeus mighlice arás  
 on his fæder stede and wiðstod his freondum,  
 276 and his feower gebroðra him fylston anrædlice,  
 and ealle ða þe wæron wunigende mid his fæder,  
 and fuhton ða mid blisse and afligdon þa hæþenan.  
 Iudas ða hine gescrydde mid his scinendan byrnan,  
 280 swa swa ormæte ent, and hine ealne gewæpnode  
 and his fyrde bewerode wið fynd mid his swurde.  
 He wearð þa leon gelic on his gewinnum and dædum  
 and todræfde þa arleasan and his eðel gerymde.  
 284 His fynd þa flugon afyrhte for him,  
 and ealle ða yfel-wyrcendan wurdon gedræfde  
 and seo hæl wearð gasped on iudan handum ða.<sup>128</sup>

[Wherefore Judas Machabeus then mightily arose in his father's stead and resisted his enemies, and his four brothers helped him unanimously, and all who were standing with his father; and they fought with gladness and put to flight the heathens. Judas then clothed himself with his shining coat of mail, just as a huge giant, and armed himself completely and defended his camp against the enemy

<sup>126</sup> The original composition of *An Old English Martyrology*, ed. G. Herzfeld (Woodbridge, U.K.: Boydell & Brewer, 1997) dates from AD 850-900.

<sup>127</sup> This information on "the first surviving homily on the topic," by Gregory of Nazianzus (AD 325-389), soon followed by two homilies by John Chrysostom (347-407) comes from St John Chrysostom's *The Cult of the Saints*, trans. and ed. W. Mayer (Crestwood, N.Y: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2006), 135.

<sup>128</sup> Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat Vol. II, 84 (lines 274-86).

with his sword. He was then like a lion in his battles and actions, and drove out the wicked and cleared his country. His adversaries then fled terrified of him, and all the evildoers were expelled and salvation prospered at the hands of Judas.]

Ælfric's text hardly differs from its biblical source:

Then his son Judas, called Machabeus, rose up in his stead. And all his brethren helped him, and all they that had joined themselves to his father: and they fought with cheerfulness the battle of Israel. And he got his people great honour and put on a breastplate as a giant and girt his warlike armour about him in battles and protected the camp with his sword. In his acts he was like a lion and like a lion's whelp roaring for his prey. And he pursued the wicked and sought them out, and them that troubled his people he burnt with fire. And his enemies were driven away for fear of him, and all the workers of iniquity were troubled; and salvation prospered in his hand.<sup>129</sup>

Victory lasted but little and soon Judas died in battle, and "all the people of Israel bewailed him with great lamentation; and they mourned for him many days. And said: How is the mighty man fallen that saved the people of Israel!"<sup>130</sup> Oswald of Northumbria and Edmund of East Anglia, just like Judas Machabeus, fought and died confronting the heathen invaders. Ælfric chose to give these accounts of three virtuous leaders fighting just wars against paganism and still losing their earthly battles. From chronicles and personal accounts of events having taken place in what became the Danelaw,<sup>131</sup> his audience already knew the material and spiritual consequences of such lost battles and recognized the possibility of it all happening again in another part of England.

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<sup>129</sup> I Machabees 3: 1-6.

<sup>130</sup> I Machabees 9: 20-21.

<sup>131</sup> Dawn M. Hadley. *The Northern Danelaw: Its Social Structure, c. 800-1100* (London: Leicester University Press, 2000), 2, explains that "the term 'Danelaw' is first used in a law-code of AD 1008, and is more commonly used in the twelfth century to define those areas of northern and eastern England where Danish law, as opposed to Mercian or West Saxon law, was thought to prevail." The Danelaw included the kingdoms of Northumbria and East Anglia and the Five Boroughs of Leicester, Nottingham, Derby, Stamford and Lincoln.

Edmund of East Anglia and Oswald of Northumbria came from the Danelaw, extending originally North and East of Watling Street.<sup>132</sup> In their first wave of invasions, the Vikings ransacked and looted churches in those parts and “three bishoprics disappeared entirely from the historical record during this period.”<sup>133</sup> Other dioceses had to move to safer areas.<sup>134</sup> In his letter to Ethelred, king of Northumbria, Alcuin<sup>135</sup> does not hide his horror at the attacks:

Lo, it is nearly 350 years that we and our fathers have inhabited this most lovely land, and never before has such terror appeared in Britain as we have now suffered from a pagan race, nor was it thought that such an inroad from the sea could be made. Behold, the church of St. Cuthbert spattered with the blood of the priests of God, despoiled of all its ornaments; a place more venerable than all in Britain is given as a prey to pagan peoples.<sup>136</sup>

Alcuin’s words echo those of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* for AD 793: “the raiding of the heathen miserably destroyed God’s church in Lindisfarne island by looting and slaughter.”<sup>137</sup> To escape the Vikings, monks took Oswald of Northumbria’s head, placed in Cuthbert’s coffin in AD 875, and wandered for seven years with the saint’s body

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<sup>132</sup> Watling Street is the name given to the Roman road running from Dover to Wroxeter (Wales), via London and St Albans. It was first recognized ca. AD 880-90 as a boundary between Danish and English lands in the treaty between King Alfred and Guthrum. This legal document defined the limits of the area still under the control of the English: “up the Thames, and then up the Lea, and along the Lea to its source, then in a straight line to Bedford, then up the Ouse to Watling Street.” The translated document comes from S. Keynes and M. Lapidge, trans. and eds. *Alfred the Great* (London: Penguin, 1988), 171. Watling Street did not remain a boundary for very long, “no more than seven years at the very most,” according to Ralph H.C. Davis “Alfred and Guthrum’s Frontier.” *The English Historical Review* (1982): 806.

<sup>133</sup> Both of the East Anglian sees and that at Hexham. Sarah Foot. “Remembering, Forgetting and Inventing: Attitudes to the Past in England at the End of the First Viking Age.” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* (1999): 185-200.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid. The dioceses of Leicester and Lindisfarne transferred their sees to new locations; Lindsey’s see remained vacant from c. AD 875 to 953, and Lichfield’s bishop “may well have been able to exercise authority solely over those parts of his diocese which fell under West Saxon control.”

<sup>135</sup> Alcuin of York (c. AD 735 – 804) lived at the court of Charlemagne when he wrote this letter in AD 793.

<sup>136</sup> Dorothy Whitelock, ed. *English Historical Documents c.500 – 1042* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1955), 776.

<sup>137</sup> *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 56.

before finding safety.<sup>138</sup> In AD 920, the faithful took Edmund of East Anglia's intact body to London, for fear of desecration by the Vikings. After Lindisfarne, several monastic communities disappeared, and "Abingdon, Barking, Chertsey, Crowland, Ely, Evesham, Leominster, St Neots, St Benet of Holme, Stamford, Thorney and Whitby are but a few examples" of this situation.<sup>139</sup> On this subject, Sarah Foot, in the article "Remembering, Forgetting and Inventing: Attitudes to the Past in England at the End of the First Viking Age" notes that, as discussed earlier in this chapter,

political correctness has so overtaken viking studies in the last thirty years or so [this article dating from 1999] that it is no longer thought appropriate to attribute the political upheavals of ninth-century England or the misfortunes suffered by English churches and monasteries in the period to the ravages of marauding bands of heathen Danes. The vikings' incontrovertibly bad press should rather be attributed to prejudicial reporting by reactionary ecclesiastics responsible for the recording of behaviour to which they were particularly (but temporarily) victim than to the extraordinary or excessive violence of Scandinavian raiders.<sup>140</sup>

The evidence of historical records provides proof of what became of the property previously owned by the church: "The pattern of ecclesiastical landholdings preserved in Domesday Book T.R.E (1066) suggests that the lands of defunct monasteries did not long lie fallow or lordless, but that many were permanently alienated from the Church during the Viking Age."<sup>141</sup> Interestingly enough, the records also show that "[w]ithout a doubt one of the greatest beneficiaries of this loss was the West Saxon royal house."<sup>142</sup> In the article "Monastic Lands and England's Defence in the Viking Age," Robin Fleming

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<sup>138</sup> The community of Cuthbert left Lindisfarne in the 870s and, after establishing a temporary home at Chester-le-Street, finally settled in Durham in AD 998. Ælfric did not include the life of St Cuthbert in his *Lives of Saints*, but Cuthbert belongs to the small group of only six English saints' biographies written by Ælfric.

<sup>139</sup> Robin Fleming. "Monastic Lands and England's Defence in the Viking Age." *The English Historical Review* (1985): 248.

<sup>140</sup> Sarah Foot. "Remembering, Forgetting and Inventing: Attitudes to the Past in England at the End of the First Viking Age." *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* (1999): 188.

<sup>141</sup> Robin Fleming. "Monastic Lands and England's Defence in the Viking Age." 249.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 250. This source mentions King Alfred himself and his heirs as having "profited from ill-gotten monastic lands."



proves that after the destruction and/or abandonment of the monasteries resulting from the Danish invasions, the Anglo-Saxon kings took over the monastic lands.<sup>143</sup> It took Bishop Æthelwold, Ælfric's teacher, to re-found Ely in AD 963 as a Benedictine monastery for men.<sup>144</sup>

Then afterwards he came to the king Edgar [and] asked him that he would give him all the monasteries the heathen men had broken up earlier, because he wanted to restore it; and the king happily granted it. And the bishop then came first to Ely, where St Æthelthryth lies, and had the monastery made, then gave it to one of his monks who was called Byrthnoth, then consecrated him abbot and set monks to serve God there, where formerly there were nuns; then he bought many estates from the king and made it very rich.<sup>145</sup>

When Ælfric composed his *Lives of Saints*, the greatly reduced area of England still under Danish law no longer caused any serious military threat to Æthelred II, and Olaf Tryggvason no longer conducted raids on England.<sup>146</sup> However, Olaf represented only one group of Vikings, enormous sums of money had gone to Olaf and to various other Danish and Norwegian invaders, and the treaty of AD 991 with Richard of Normandy had apparently failed.<sup>147</sup> These facts provided reasons enough for a loss of morale on the

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<sup>143</sup> The majority of them, deemed of strategic importance along the border established by Alfred and Guthrum, the kings kept or gifted to royal officials: they seldom returned these lands to their previous owners. Kings sold other lands back to the monasteries or granted some back when communities of monks returned for refoundation. Edgar, perceived by Ælfric as a good king, may have had the reputation of granting lands and raising monasteries, but he was not above exacting payment from the monks for lands they had previously lost to the Vikings.

<sup>144</sup> The large double monastery in Ely (Suffolk), founded in AD 673 by Æthelthryth, disappeared from the records after the Vikings conquered East Anglia in AD 869-70, to emerge again in the 940s as a shrine to St Æthelthryth, "ðære halgan sancte æðeldryðe þam engliscan mædene" ("the holy saint Æthelthryth the english maiden"), the only English female saint in Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*. See *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat Vol. I, 432. Her father, King Anna of East Anglia, died like King Oswald, battling the pagan Penda of Mercia.

<sup>145</sup> M. J. Swanton, trans. and ed., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 115. This newer translation includes more details from the various manuscripts, particularly in reference to events taking place in East Anglia.

<sup>146</sup> Æthelred's peace treaty of AD 994 with Olaf Tryggvason held: Olaf no longer attacked the English and, as a newly confirmed Christian, "he converted not only Norway but the Orkney Islands, Iceland, and Greenland as well." T. M. Andersson. "The Viking Policy of Ethelred the Unready." *Scandinavian Studies* (1987): 285.

<sup>147</sup> Since Richard, Duke of the French Danelaw, tolerated "the use of his ports as Viking bases" to attack England, and there was obvious discord between Normandy and England, Pope John XV had brokered a

English side, as witnessed by Ælfric. On August 10, 991, the Battle of Maldon had taken place and, whether “the Vikings successfully deceived Byrhtnoth” whose *ofermod*<sup>148</sup> brought about the English defeat, or “an undeceived Byrhtnoth allowed his enemies to cross the Pante for his own reasons,”<sup>149</sup> the outcome remained one of national shame, leading to King Æthelred’s treaty of AD 991 with the viking army:

6.1 Concerning all the slaughter and all the harrying and all the injuries which were committed before the truce was established, all of them are to be dismissed, and no one is to avenge it or ask for compensation...  
 7.2 Twenty-two thousand pounds in gold and silver were paid from England to the army for this truce.<sup>150</sup>

These measures stopped neither the attacks nor the payment of tribute, *gafol*, to the attackers. Many more times, Byrhtnoth’s final scene, reminiscent of the deaths of Edmund of East Anglia and Oswald of Northumbria, must have repeated itself:

Ne mihte þa on fotum leng fæste gestandan;  
 he to heofenum wlat:  
 ‘Gefance þe, ðeoda Waldend,  
 ealra þæra wynta þe Ic on worulde gebad.  
 175 Nu Ic ah, milde Metod, mæste þearfe  
 þæt þu minum gaste godes geunne,  
 þæt min sawul to ðe siððian mote  
 on þin geweald, Deoden engla,  
 mid friþe ferian. Ic eom frymde to þe  
 180 þæt hi helsceaðan hynan ne moton.’<sup>151</sup>

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peace treaty on March 1, 991 between the two. Eric John. “War and Society in the Tenth Century: The Maldon Campaign.” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* (1977): 189. In this passage, Eric John comments: “No doubt the Pope reminded him [Duke Richard] that if he wanted to be accepted as part of Christendom ... he could not be the ally of pagans against Christians.”

<sup>148</sup> The line of the poem, “ða se eorl ongan for his ofermode alyfan landes to fela laþere ðeode,” (“then the earl in his overmastering pride actually yielded ground to the enemy, as he should not have done”) as understood by J. R. R. Tolkien “gave *Maldon* criticism its subsequent focus and direction.” For an evaluation of these different views, see G. Clark. “The Hero of Maldon: Vir Pius et Strenuus.” *Speculum* (1979): 257-282.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid, 269.

<sup>150</sup> In D. Whitelock, ed. *English Historical Documents c.500 – 1042*, 402.

<sup>151</sup> Elaine Treharne, ed. “The Battle of Maldon.” *Old and Middle English: An Anthology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 148, with the above translation by the author. The word *helsceaða* also translates as “hell-foe” or “devil,” and would have reminded an Anglo-Saxon audience of the devils lying in wait for the soul on its way to heaven.

[He could not stand fast on his feet any longer; he looked up to heaven: ‘I thank you, Lord of nations, for all the joys that I have experienced in this world. Now I have, merciful God, most need that you grant a benefit to my spirit, that my soul might journey to you into your power, Lord of angels, to travel in peace. I beg you that thieves from hell will not be permitted to injure it.’]

Throughout all his accounts of past events, Ælfric teaches that death and defeat should matter little, as long as the Christian can still pray to God, “þæt min sawul to ðe siðian mote.” Since the holiness of kings and the justice of a war could not always avert failure and death, Ælfric’s mission in this dangerous time of uncertainty consists in entreating his flock to stay faithful, refuse to compromise, and choose eternal life over the life of this world. Besides the loss of human lives and church property, the example of what had happened to the faith in Viking-occupied areas warned Ælfric’s audience of the dangers of compromise.

While England lived “wunigende on sibbe,”<sup>152</sup> the northern Danelaw, much diminished in size from the days of the First Viking Age, remained largely unaffected by the Benedictine movement of reform, and “[i]t is clear that monastic revival was unsuccessful in this area, in contrast with other parts of the country.”<sup>153</sup> A “proliferation” of parochial and manorial churches might indicate “the capacity of the church to be effective under viking overlordship,”<sup>154</sup> but if the Christian faith survived the onslaught, it did so in a form greatly diminished from that of the golden age of Bede and Cuthbert. In fact, Dawn M. Hadley, in *The Northern Danelaw*, comments, “it would not be controversial to state that the Anglo-Saxon church and the Scandinavian settlers eventually adapted themselves to each other.”<sup>155</sup> The reason given for this adaptation lies

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<sup>152</sup> “abiding in peace.”

<sup>153</sup> Dawn M. Hadley, *The Northern Danelaw: Its Social Structure, c. 800-1100*, 285.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 289.

<sup>155</sup> D. M. Hadley, *The Northern Danelaw: Its Social Structure, c. 800-1100*, 292.

in the equivocal statement that “we may have been too hasty to draw a clear distinction between paganism and Christianity.” However, the thought of paganism and Christianity adapting to each other because of a lack of clear distinction between the two world views would be unacceptable to Ælfric. No dramatic baptism of a pagan leader would convince him that Christianization had permanently transformed the behavior of the entire group. Had not Rædwald of East Anglia (ca. AD 620) raised in the same temple, “one altar for the Christian sacrifice and another small altar on which to offer victims to devils”?<sup>156</sup> Had not the East Saxons, during the plague of AD 664, “deserted the sacraments of the Christian faith and apostatized”?<sup>157</sup> In AD 880, had not “East Anglian bishoprics c[o]me to an end in a kingdom that had a Christian Danish king (Guthrum/Æthelstan)”<sup>158</sup>? Repeatedly, Ælfric warns his audience of the dangers of imitating the Danes, both outwardly and inwardly. In his *Letter to Brother Edward*,<sup>159</sup> he “condemns Englishmen who have adopted Danish customs and fashions”:

Ic secge eac ðe, broðor Eadweard, nu ðu me þyses bæde, þæt ge doð unrihtlice  
 þæt ge ða Engliscan þeawas forlætað þe eowre fæderas heoldon and hæðenra  
 manna þeawas lufiað, þe eow ðæs lifes ne unnon, and mid ðam geswuteljað þæt  
 ge forseoð eower cynn and eowre ylðran mid þam unþeawum þonne ge him on  
 teonan tysliað eow on Denisc, ableredum hneccan and ablendum eagum. Ne secge  
 ic na mare embe ða sceandlican tyslunge buton þæt us secgað bec þæt se beo  
 amansumod þe hæðenra manna þeawas hylt on his life and his agen cynn  
 unwurpað mid þam.<sup>160</sup>

[I also say to you, Brother Edward, now that you asked me this, that they do wrong who abandon English customs that your fathers held and love the customs of the heathen men, they who would not even grant you life, and with that they reveal that they forsake your people and your parents for evil vices when they insultingly dress in the Danish manner, with bared necks and blinded eyes. I say

<sup>156</sup> Bede. *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, 98.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 167.

<sup>158</sup> N. P. Brooks. “England in the Ninth Century: The Crucible of Defeat.” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* (1979): 13.

<sup>159</sup> M. Clayton. “Letter to Brother Edward.” *Old English Newsletter* (2007): 31- 46. This letter dates from “the end of the 990s or the first decade of the ... millennium.”

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 42.

no more about the disgraceful dress except that books tell us that cursed is he who keeps the customs of the heathen men in his life and his own people dishonored on that account.]

In his “Homily for the Sixth Sunday after Pentecost,” Ælfric speaks of the graver moral dangers of following the Danes:

Swa fela manna gebugað mid ðam gecorenum  
to Cristes geleafan on his Gelaðunge,  
130 þæt hy sume yfele eft ut abrecað,  
and hy on gedwyldum adreogað heora lif,  
swa swa þa Engliscan men doð þe to ðam Deniscum gebugað,  
and mearciað hy deofle to his mannrædene,  
and his weorc wyrcað, hym sylfum to forwyrde,  
135 and heora agene leode be(læwað) to deaðe.<sup>161</sup>

[So many men convert with the chosen ones to the faith of Christ in his Church that some evil ones break away again and live their lives in error, just like the Englishmen do who follow the Danes, and mark themselves for the devil and his service, and do his work for their own destruction, and their own people they betray to death.]

For Ælfric, the survival of the true faith requires that paganism and Christianity remain distinct and irreconcilable and that the English become aware of the dangers of assimilating pagan customs. He stands intransigent when he brings in the ultimate argument and writes that Englishmen who follow the Danes “mark themselves for the devil.” Ælfric worries that, by not reminding his audience that Christians must sometimes suffer persecution rather than abandon their faith, a choice repeatedly made throughout history by Christians from the Orient, the situation of the Church in the Danelaw could extend to the Anglo-Saxon Church in the rest of England.

In his *Lives of Saints*, Ælfric teaches the Anglo-Saxon faithful that the gravest danger they will ever face comes from abandoning their faith. Christians must not

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<sup>161</sup> John Pope. *Homilies of Ælfric. A Supplementary Collection*. Vol. II (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 521.

apostatize and accept pagan beliefs and customs in the hope of surviving the Viking attacks. To this end, a clear distinction must forever exist between Christianity and Paganism, between the worship of God and the service of the devil. In a society where the names of the Norse gods had already transferred to the days of the week, Ælfric emphasizes the connection between the devil, the Roman gods and the Norse gods in this passage from the life of “St. Martin, Bishop and Confessor” (d. AD 397),

Mid þusend searo-cræftum wolde se swicola deofol  
 þone halgan were on sume wisan beswican;  
 712 and hine ge-sewen-licne on manegum scin-hiwum  
 þam halgan æteowde on þæra hæþenra goda hiwe,  
 hwilon on ioues hiwe, þe is ge-haten þór;  
 hwilon on mercuries, þe men hatað oþon;  
 716 hwilon on ueneris þære fulan gyden  
 þe men hatað fricg; and on manegum oþrum hiwum  
 hine bræd se deofol on þæs bisceopes gesihþe.<sup>162</sup>

[With a thousand wiles would the guileful devil in some way deceive the holy man; and he became visible in many illusions and went to the saint in the appearance of the heathen gods, sometimes in Jove’s form, who is called Thor; sometimes in Mercury’s, whom men call Odin; sometimes in Venus’s, the foul goddess whom men call Frig; and in many other forms the devil stretched himself in the bishop’s sight.]

The reference to Norse gods would seem misplaced in the life of St. Martin of Tours if it did not reveal another one of Ælfric’s teaching moments. Since he addresses these lives to Anglo-Saxons, he will make changes to his sources, whenever they can serve his purpose of teaching orthodoxy. Just in case familiarity with the names of Norse gods had deadened his audience’s awareness of the paganism they represented, Ælfric warns the English faithful to resist the gods of the Vikings, just as generations of early Christian martyrs had resisted the gods of the Roman Empire.

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<sup>162</sup> Ælfric’s *Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat Vol. II, 264 (lines 710- 718).

## CHAPTER 3

### ÆLFRIC AND PAGANISM

Out of twenty-six biographical narratives included in the *Lives of Saints*, twenty-one describe the lives and deaths of men and women martyrs, most of these taking place in the Orient, prior to the Edict of Milan, in a pagan Roman Empire. These deaths consistently result from irreconcilable differences between Paganism and Christianity: Christian monotheism could not allow the worship of a human Emperor, just as a pagan Emperor's absolute power could not allow the growing threat of Christian dissent. Although most of Ælfric's martyrs die in distant lands, their example serves well to inspire Anglo-Saxon Christians in their struggle against paganism in all its manifestations, both in the superstitions from the past and in the threat of renewed invasions. In the past, pagans had killed the martyrs Oswald of Northumbria and Edmund of East Anglia, just as they had persecuted all these saints from the Orient. Now, the return of the Northmen confirms in Ælfric the need to remind his audience of the dangers of paganism and provide the faithful with courageous examples from earlier times.

Not far from the burial ground of the monastery of Cernel, a holy well reflects the many layers of belief associated with the Anglo-Saxon conversion to Christianity.<sup>163</sup> One of its names, St Austin's Well, comes from the legend that St. Augustine of Canterbury struck the ground there and gave holy water to neighboring shepherds. Its other name, the Silver Well, refers to the well seen in a vision by St. Edwold, King Edmund of East Anglia's brother, who, after the martyrdom of his brother at the hands of the Danes, lived

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<sup>163</sup> A 180-foot hillside figure of a naked man carved in the chalk bedrock, the Cerne Abbas Giant, also lies near the monastery. Although pagan in form, it is still undated.

as a hermit beside this well until his own death in AD 871.<sup>164</sup> The monastery of Cernel, traditionally founded by St. Augustine, became a Benedictine community in AD 987, growing alongside a wishing, healing and oracular well, normally associated with paganism or heathenism. The Church allowed these associations after Pope Gregory's ca. AD 600 answer to a question from Augustine of Canterbury, on how to deal with conflicts between sacred church law and the customs of the Anglo-Saxons,

For in these days the holy Church corrects some things with zeal and tolerates some things with gentleness, while in her wisdom she connives at other things and so by forbearance and connivance often succeeds in checking the evil which she resists.<sup>165</sup>

As long as the faithful could associate the well at Cernel with St. Augustine or St. Edwold, all the assumed powers of its water gained legitimacy in the eyes of the church hierarchy.<sup>166</sup> Church leaders evidently expected the process of conversion to Christianity to take time and to suffer setbacks, in "an island which always delights in hearing something new and holds firmly to no sure belief."<sup>167</sup>

Nearly 400 years after Augustine came to convert the south of England and Columba brought Christianity to the Northern Picts, 500 years after Ninian evangelized the Southern Picts, and more than 600 years after the martyrdom of St Alban, Ælfric still

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<sup>164</sup> This information, transmitted in different versions, mainly comes from two sources: Andrew Phillips, *The Hallowing of England* (Hockwold-cum-Wilton, U.K: Anglo-Saxon Books, 2002), 16, 18, and 33; and "Houses of Benedictine Monks: The Abbey of Cerne," *A History of the County of Dorset*. Vol.II (1908), 53-58. Retrieved: 17 May 2008 from <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=40139>

<sup>165</sup> Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, 45.

<sup>166</sup> Accommodation and assimilation also form the basis of Pope Gregory's letter to Mellitus of York on what he had "decided after long deliberation about the English people, namely that the idol temples of that race should by no means be destroyed, but only the idols in them... When this people see that their shrines are not destroyed, they will be able to banish error from their hearts and be more ready to come to the places they are familiar with, but now recognizing and worshipping the true God... It is doubtless impossible to cut out everything at once from their stubborn minds: just as the man who is attempting to climb to the highest place, rises by steps and degrees and not by leaps." From Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, 57.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.



deplures, in his *Lives of Saints*, the existence of heathen customs in England.

Paraphrasing the words of St. Augustine of Hippo, he writes:

Nu alyse ic me sylfne wið . and mid lufe eow for-beode .  
þæt eower nan ne axie þurh ænigne wicce-cræft .  
be ænigum ðinge . oððe be ænigre untrumnyse .  
78 ne galdras ne sece . to gremigenne his scyppend .  
forðan se ðe þys deð . se forlysð his cristen-dom .  
and bið þam hæðenum gelic . þe hleotað be him sylfum  
mid ðæs deofles cræfte þe hi fordeð on ecnyse .  
82 and butan he ælmyssan . and mycele dædbote  
his scyppende geoffrige . æfre he biðforloren  
.....  
Eall swa gelice se ðe gelyfð wiglunum  
oððe be fugelum . oððe be fnorum .  
90 oððe be horsum . oððe be hundum .  
ne bið hé ná cristen . ac bið for-cuð wiðer-saca .<sup>168</sup>

[Now I redeem myself towards God, and with love forbid that any one of you should seek through witchcraft, for any reason, or for any illness, or look for magicians, to provoke his Maker. Because he who does this, forsakes his church and is like the heathens who cast lots for themselves through the devil's work, which ruins them forever and ever; and unless he gives alms, and much repentance offers his Maker, he is forever lost.... Just as he who believes in auguries, either with birds or with sneezes, either with horses or with hounds, is not a Christian, but is a wicked apostate.]

In the intervening years, the evidence of penitentials, such as *The Penitential of Theodore* (AD 668-690), and of law-codes suggests a continuing struggle by both civil and religious authorities against ingrained heathen customs. Lengthy penances for the worship of idols, where “he who sacrifices to demons in trivial matters shall do penance for one year; but he who [does so] in serious matters shall do penance for ten years,” compare well with “ten or seven” for murder.<sup>169</sup> The reliance on auguries also deserves serious punishment:

He who celebrates auguries, omens from birds, or dreams, or any divinations according to the custom of the heathen, or introduces such people into his houses,

<sup>168</sup> *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat Vol. I, 368- 370 (lines 75- 83; 88-91).

<sup>169</sup> John T. McNeill and Helena M. Gamer. *Medieval Handbooks of Penance*, 198.

in seeking out any trick of the magicians – when these become penitents, if they belong to the clergy they shall be cast out; but if they are secular persons, they shall do penance for five years.

The kings' laws prove even stricter. The laws of Alfred (AD 871-899) proclaim,

The women who are in the habit of receiving wizards and sorcerers and magicians, thou shalt not suffer to live.<sup>170</sup>

King Athelstan's ordinance (AD 924-939) concerning witchcraft declares,

And we have pronounced concerning witchcrafts and sorceries and secret attempts on life,<sup>171</sup> that, if anyone is killed by such, and he [who practised them] cannot deny it, he is to forfeit his life.<sup>172</sup>

In AD 1008, King Æthelred's code still proclaims, "We must all love and honour one God and entirely cast out every heathen practice."<sup>173</sup>

It would appear that, at the end of the tenth century, while the Anglo-Saxons generally followed the sanctioned faith in one Christian God, resistant beliefs in a pre-Christian British religion, combined with Germanic and Norse influences from the successive invasions, nevertheless survived. Although texts of that period reveal very little about the pre-Christian British system of beliefs, it involved, similarly to Germanic and Norse mythologies, the worship of more than one god. Medieval sources broadly qualify this as "heathenism" or "idolatry." Presently, the most widespread opinion among scholars suggests that

Anglo-Saxon paganism from the period before the Conversion remains fairly opaque to our eyes, chiefly because of the cloak of silence that the early clerics cast over the whole subject of cursed rites.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> D. Whitelock, ed. *English Historical Documents*, 373.

<sup>171</sup> D. Whitelock's comment: "Literally, 'murders'. Open killing was not reckoned as murder in Anglo-Saxon law."

<sup>172</sup> D. Whitelock, ed. *English Historical Documents*, 382-3.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 409.

<sup>174</sup> From John D. Niles. "Pagan Survivals and Popular Belief." *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*. Eds. Malcolm Godden and Michael Lapidge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 127-8.

As a result, readers of Anglo-Saxon texts cannot always isolate these different strands of religious traditions and follow them to their source. Such an opinion, as represented in

*The Search for Anglo-Saxon Paganism*, suggests that,

for a long time Old English literature was much read in the hope of discovering in it a lost world of pre-Christian antiquity, for the reconstruction of which the Old English writings themselves do not provide sufficient fragments.<sup>175</sup>

This would indicate that, at least in literary texts, Christianity seemingly prevailed in its attempt to gloss over most heathen references.

On the other hand, and starting from the same premise that, from the fifth to the eleventh century,

[c]learly the Church was out either to transform the significance of traditional materials so profoundly as to alter the nature of the phenomenon entirely or to conceal or destroy what it considered the most dangerous elements in traditional – what the Church called pagan – culture,<sup>176</sup>

a second group of scholars finds that this effort did not succeed. In fact, it maintains that any evidence of an amalgamation of Germanic/Nordic customs and Christian beliefs should qualify “as evidence of the failure of Christianization in the face of a recalcitrant pagan population.”<sup>177</sup> This position frequently attributes such a failure to the dichotomy inherent to Christianity, for which

medieval man had to choose between God and the Devil, Heaven and Hell – an imaginary choice but nonetheless very real for the men and women of the time. In this world, however, Satan called the tune.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> Eric G. Stanley. *The Search for Anglo-Saxon Paganism* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer Ltd., 1975), viii.

<sup>176</sup> Jacques Le Goff. *The Medieval Imagination*, trans. A. Goldhammer (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), 29.

<sup>177</sup> Karen Louise Jolly. *Popular Religion in Late Anglo-Saxon England: Elf-Charms in Context* (Chapel Hill: the University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 11.

<sup>178</sup> J. Le Goff. *The Medieval Imagination*, 15.

This quasi-Manichaean opinion imprecisely echoes Christian teaching that represents the Devil as a real adversary, albeit not equal to God, to account for the entrenchment of paganism in its varied forms.

A third approach to the question of the survival of heathenism seeks to interpret the evidence of pagan elements as a deliberate process of assimilation or acculturation undertaken by the Church. In *Popular Religion in Late Saxon England: Elf Charms in Context*, Karen Louise Jolly illustrates this process by analyzing the contents of medical and liturgical texts used to dispel elves – elf charms. She argues that

the Christian charms... are not some kind of ‘Christian magic’ demonstrating the weakness of early medieval Christianity but constitute evidence of the religion’s success in conversion by accommodating Anglo-Saxon culture.<sup>179</sup>

This third approach agrees the most with the image of a more conciliatory and somewhat syncretic church, a compromise between the two opposing views depicting either the Church’s successful repression of paganism in literature, or its failure to obliterate pagan practices. In a section on “Christianizing the Landscape and Germanizing Christianity,” Jolly writes, concerning hagiolatry:

The cult of saints, as established and fostered by church leaders, consciously or unconsciously made accommodations to the animistic beliefs of Germanic peoples...The cult of saints Christianized this animistic landscape, populating it with loci of Christian power by supplanting the holy trees, wells, and stones of pagan religion and setting up a revised calendar based on saints’ festivals. In so doing, Christianity began penetrating everyday life and belief. Church leaders promoted saints by telling their stories as part of a conscious effort to spread Christian ideas among the populace and to encourage the laity to patronize saints’ holy places.<sup>180</sup>

As for the matter of pagan charms surviving the conversion process, Jolly agrees that there remains “a puzzle as to why they continued to exist in Christian manuscripts: were

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<sup>179</sup> Karen Louise Jolly. *Popular Religion in Late Anglo-Saxon England: Elf-Charms in Context*, 9.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 27-28.

these people still pagan? or ignorant?” As a solution to this problem, *Popular Religion in Late Saxon England* focuses on folklore, wherein all ambivalent practices can find legitimacy, because folklore need not belong to either paganism or Christianity: if we see these practices as folklore, shading sometimes into paganism or Christian liturgy, then we do not have to either accept or reject them.<sup>181</sup>

Ælfric subscribes to none of these points of view. Although converting to Christianity ostensibly meant giving up the old pagan systems, and tenth-century England stood as a Christian nation, Ælfric still bemoans many heathen customs. With England facing a second wave of pagan invaders from the North, he fears apostasy and relapse into utter paganism. As an orthodox teacher, Ælfric cannot abide half-truths and compromises; therefore, he has no use for acculturation when it comes to matters of faith. Repeatedly, and in all his writings, he insists on the monotheism of Christianity:

Eala ge gebroðra ða leofostan, þæt godcunde gewrit us tæhte þone biggeng anes soðes Godes, þissum wordum cwepende: An Drihten ís, and án geleafan, and án fulluht; án God and Fæder ealra þinga, se ðe is ofer ealle þing, and þurh ealle þing, and on us eallum. Of þam synd ealle þing, and þurh þone synd ealle þing, and on þam synd ealle þing; sy him wuldor á to worulde, amen.<sup>182</sup>

[Lo! Most beloved brethren, sacred scripture taught us the worship of the one true God, declaring in these words: One is the Lord, and one the faith, and one baptism; one God and Father of all creatures, he who is above all creatures, and in all creatures, and among us all. From Him are all things, and through Him are all things, and in Him are all things. To Him be glory forever, amen.]

This oneness of God cannot accommodate the existence of other gods. As a result, to account for all the pagan deities of all times, euhemerization becomes a useful tool. By

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>182</sup> *Homilies of Ælfric: a Supplementary Collection*, ed. John C. Pope (London: The Early English Text Society, 1968). Vol. II, 677.

using this pre-Christian argument, Christian writers can acknowledge the heroic nature of the pagan entities, while denying them any divinity.<sup>183</sup>

Ælfric euhemerizes extensively in his effort to counteract heathenism. One of the best illustrations of this approach remains his lengthy homily “for unspecified occasions” and on pagan gods, “De Falsis Diis.” Here, Ælfric sets out to expose the falsity of the gods worshiped by the Northmen, “but the real force of his attack is carried by the stories from the Old Testament.”<sup>184</sup> He writes of the defeat of Dagon by the Ark of the Covenant, of the victory of Daniel over the dragon and the priests of Bel, and of his two escapes from the lions. Moreover, choosing examples from Christian times, Ælfric describes the deception of Serapis in Alexandria and the defeat of Apollo by Gregory the Thaumaturgist.<sup>185</sup> Consistently, his accounts of the heathen gods show them as degenerate men and women, and never as divinities:

an man wæs eardiende on þam ilande Creta,  
105 Saturnus gehaten, swiðlic and wælhreow,  
swa þæt he abat hys suna, þa þa hi geborene wæron,  
and unfæderlice macode heora flæsc him to mete.  
He læfde swaþeah ænne to life,

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<sup>183</sup> This explains a most common feature of Anglo-Saxon royal genealogies, the listing of Woden as the ultimate origin of any English king. An example of this, in the genealogy of King Alfred, starts the Winchester Manuscript of *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (M. J. Swanton, trans. and ed):

In the year when 494 years had passed since Christ’s birth, Cerdic and Cynric his son landed at Cerdic’s Shore with 5 ships. And that Cerdic was Elesa’s offspring, Elesla’s offspring... Brand Bældæg’s offspring, Bældæg Woden’s offspring.

Bede, in his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (27), recognizes the same origin to the Germanic tribe of the Angles:

Their first leaders are said to have been two brothers, Hengist and Horsa... They were the sons of Wihtgisl, son Of Witta, son of Wecta, son of Woden, from whose stock the royal families of many kingdoms claimed their descent.”

<sup>184</sup> *Homilies of Ælfric: a Supplementary Collection*, ed. J. C. Pope, 668.

<sup>185</sup> The cult of Serapis/Sarapis, a hybrid Egyptian sun-god combining Apis the bull and Osiris of the Underworld and associated with fertility and healing, started in Alexandria during the reign of Ptolemy I. The fact that certain second-century Gnostics (considered heretics by mainstream Christians) adopted him as “the universal godhead” must have influenced Ælfric, particularly since he mentions the destruction of the temple of Serapis in AD 391 as a major defeat of paganism.

Gregory the Wonder-Worker (AD 213 – ca. 270), the son of pagan parents, studied under Origen and converted to Christianity, becoming bishop of Neo-Caesarea in Asia Minor. He spent the rest of his life converting pagans, by the use of healing and persuasion.

- 110      þeah þe he abite his gebroðra on ær;  
          se wæs Iouis gehaten, hetol and þrymlic.  
          He [afligde] his fæder of þam foresædan iglande,  
          and wolde hine acwellan, gif he him come to.  
          Se Iouis wæs swa swiðe gal, þæt he on hys swustor gewifode;  
          seo wæs gehaten Iuno, swiðe healic gyden.  
 115      Heora (ge)dohtra wæron Minerua and Uenus.  
          þa forlæg se fæder fu(l)lice buta,  
          and manega his magan ma[n]lice gewemde.  
          þas manfullan menn wæron þa mæroston godas  
          þe þa hæþenan wurðodan, and worhton him to godum;  
 120      ac se sunu wæs swaþeah swiðor gewurðod  
          þonne se fæder wære on heora fulan biggeng[e].  
          þes Iouis is arwurðust ealra þæra goda  
          þe þa hæþenan hæfdon on heora gedwylde;  
          and he hatte Ðor betwux sumum þeodum,  
 125      þone þa Deniscan leoda lufiað swiðost.<sup>186</sup>

[A man named Saturn was living on the island of Crete, so violent and cruel that he devoured his sons when they were born, and in an unfatherly manner prepared their flesh as food for himself. However, he left one alive, though he had devoured his brothers earlier. He was called Jove, evil and powerful, who expelled his father from that aforementioned island, and would have killed him, if he had returned. This Jove was so very lustful that he married his sister. She was called Juno, a very lofty goddess. Their daughters were Minerva and Venus. Then the father foully fornicated with both, and wickedly defiled many of his kinswomen. These evil men were the greatest gods that the heathens honored, and made into gods; but the son, however, was more honored than the father in their foul worship. This Jove is the most honored of all the gods that the heathens have in their error, and he is called Thor among certain peoples. That one then the Danish people love above all.]

Ælfric continues with his description of other major pagan gods, Mars, Mercury, and Venus, repeating the same pattern of first emphasizing what would strike his audience as their grossly immoral and unnatural behavior, and immediately relating that to the outrageous notion that, for heathens, the height of reverence goes with the depth of depravity. In his Introduction to “De Falsis Diis,” John C. Pope suggests that, although Ælfric might consider Danish paganism “not only a fundamental source of antagonism

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<sup>186</sup> *Homilies of Ælfric: a Supplementary Collection*, ed. J. C. Pope, 682-3.  
 Similar short passages exist in Ælfric’s *Lives of Saints*, such as in Vol. 2, 384 (lines 104-118).

but a threat... his references to the Danish gods... are dispassionately expressed and reveal neither intimate knowledge of the forms of worship nor much fear of their being adopted.”<sup>187</sup> However, it would seem counterproductive for Ælfric to appear too familiar with heathen practices and, more importantly, no orthodox monk would ever assume that heathenism does not constitute a potential danger. In fact, the very deliberate style of the passage on the description of these false gods, linking grossly foul behavior with pagan divinity, echoes the sarcasm and ridicule used in earlier Christian arguments against pagans. Starting with St. Paul, Christian writers frequently emphasized the perversity and immorality of pagan gods, and many before Ælfric went as far as ridiculing them.<sup>188</sup>

The fact that writings on both sides of the Edict of Toleration of AD 313 express the same attitude towards paganism indicates that even though persecutions against Christians may have stopped, in the eyes of Christians, the threat of paganism still existed. Indeed, Constantine’s Edict of Milan in AD 313 only expressed the legal

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<sup>187</sup> *Homilies of Ælfric: a Supplementary Collection*, ed. J. C. Pope. 668-9.

<sup>188</sup> In *The Case Against the Pagans*, trans. G. E. McCracken (New York: Newman Press, 1949), Vol. II, 430-1, Arnobius of Sicca does not flinch when he addresses pagans on the topic of Jupiter:

Jupiter, it is said, burned with love for Ceres. Why, I ask, has that Jupiter, whoever he is, deserved so ill of you that there is no kind of shame, infamy, no adultery, which you do not heap upon his head as if he were some vile and worthless character? Leda betrayed her marriage obligation: Jupiter is said to be responsible for her guilt. Danae could not protect her virginity: Jupiter is said to have stolen it. Europa hastened to become a woman: the same one, so the story goes, was the conqueror of her chastity.

The North African rhetorician Arnobius of Sicca, a pagan until ca. AD 300 when he converted to Christianity, authored *The Case Against the Pagans (Adversus Nationes)*, “the last surviving apology composed before the end of the persecutions.” Although little biographical information exists on him, Jerome mentions him in several of his writings, including his *De Viris Illustribus*. In *The Case Against the Pagans*, trans. G. E. McCracken, Vol. I, 3.

After AD 410, St Augustine himself, in *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans*, trans. H. Bettenson (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), 169, keeps up the sarcasm:

The poets give such a distorted picture of the gods that such deities cannot stand comparison with good men. One god is represented as a thief, another as an adulterer, and so on; all kinds of degradation and absurdity, in word and deed, are ascribed to them. Three goddesses have a beauty contest; Venus wins the prize, and the disappointed candidates overthrow Troy. Jupiter himself is changed into a bull, or a swan, to enjoy the favours of some woman or other. A goddess marries a man; Saturn devours his children. Any imaginable marvel, every conceivable vice can be found in this poetic tradition, however remote from the divine nature.



toleration of all Christians in the Roman Empire, without conferring upon them any privileged status.<sup>189</sup>

Still, Constantine ranked as a favorite with Anglo-Saxon writers, who frequently claim that he and his mother, St. Helena, were born in England.<sup>190</sup> Ælfric regularly mentions Constantine in his writings. He refers to him as “þam æþelan casere”<sup>191</sup> (the noble emperor), “se cristene casere”<sup>192</sup> (the Christian emperor), “ðam geleaf-fullan casere”<sup>193</sup> (the faithful emperor), and often weaves him into his narrative.<sup>194</sup> Above all, Constantine gained respect and credit in Anglo-Saxon England because he ended the

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<sup>189</sup> In the words of the Edict as given in Eusebius, *The History of the Church from Christ to Constantine*, trans. G. A. Williamson (New York: Dorset Press, 1984), 402:

No one whatever was to be denied the right to follow and choose the Christian observance or form of worship; and everyone was to have permission to give his mind to that form of worship which he feels to be adapted to his needs, so that the Deity might be enabled to show us in all things His customary care and generosity... [P]ermission has been given to any others who may wish to follow their own observance or form of worship – a privilege obviously consonant with the tranquility of our times – so that every man may have permission to choose and practise whatever religion he wishes. This we have done to make it plain that we are not belittling any rite or form of worship.

Only during the reign of Theodosius I (AD 379-395) did Christianity become the sole official religion of the Roman Empire. This happened in AD 391, at the expense of all other religions, which consequently became illegal. This position of security and freedom for the Christians lasted until AD 408, when the Visigoths first besieged Rome.

<sup>190</sup> In *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (20), Bede writes:

At this time Constantius died in Britain, a man of great clemency and courtesy, who had governed Gaul and Spain while Diocletian was alive. He left a son, Constantine, who was made emperor of Gaul, being the child of his concubine Helena.

Later, Geoffrey of Monmouth, in *The History of the Kings of Britain*, trans. L. Thorpe (London: Penguin Books, 1966), gives more details:

After Coel [the King of the Britons]’s death Constantius himself seized the royal crown and married Coel’s daughter. Her name was Helen and her beauty was greater than that of any other young woman in the kingdom... After her marriage with Constantius, she had by him a son called Constantine. Eleven years passed and then Constantius himself died at York and bequeathed his kingdom to his son.”(132).

More recently, A. Phillips, in *The Hallowing of England* (34), writes about the city of Colchester (Essex): “According to ancient tradition St. Helen (c. AD 250-330), mother of St. Constantine the first Christian Emperor and finder of the Cross, was born here.” Phillips also notes that York has many churches and holy wells dedicated to Helen (68). History, however, says that Constantine was born in Serbia and Helen came from Asia Minor.

<sup>191</sup> *Ælfric’s Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat Vol. II, 220 (line 18).

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, 58 (line 74).

<sup>193</sup> *Ælfric’s Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat Vol. I, 190 (line 343).

<sup>194</sup> The entry for January 21, on Saint Agnes, includes two long passages on Constantine and his daughter, Constantia. See *Ibid.*, 184- 92 (lines 262-377).

official persecution of Christians in the Roman Empire that had lasted nearly three hundred years. As expected, differences of opinion arise concerning these persecutions. Just as certain writers find the number of Vikings invading England grossly exaggerated, so several writers consider the number of Christians who died during these three hundred years ridiculously inflated. This opinion, as expressed by Keith Hopkins in his article “Christian Number and Its Implications,” argues that

in 100, there were only about 7000 or so Christians, equal to barely 0.01% of the empire's population (roughly say 60 million)... Such estimates imply that, practically speaking, for the whole of this period, Christians were statistically insignificant... From a Roman government point of view, it was not worthwhile persecuting Christians systematically... But what of Christian stories about being persecuted, repeatedly and from the earliest days, by Romans, Jews and pagans, everywhere? As I see it, the image of persistent persecution which Christians manufactured for themselves was more a mode of self-representation, or a tactic of self-unification than an objective description of reality. I am not saying that persecutions did not happen. Sure they did, occasionally and sporadically... But persecutions were also useful... Being persecuted was collective proof of Christian radicality, and an instrument of togetherness. Besides, martyrdom was a special, Christian type of heroism. Mostly, you didn't actually have to die for your faith, though you could parade your willingness--if the need arose. But you had to admire those who, like Christ, were willing to, or had died, for their faith. So the traditional question: "Why were the Christians persecuted?" with all its implications of unjust repression and eventual triumph, should be re-phrased: "Why were the Christians persecuted so little and so late?" Our answer should recognize that for most of the first three centuries c.e., Christians were protected from persistent persecution, both by the Roman government's failure to perceive that Christianity mattered, and by its punctilious legalism, which prohibited anonymous denunciation through the courts. At a formal level, Roman legalism protected Christianity against large-scale persecution, for well over a century. Informally, in unofficial assaults and mass disturbances, Christians were persecuted, but, as I have said, only occasionally and sporadically. So too were Jews.<sup>195</sup>

Peter Brown, in *The Rise of Western Christendom* mentions only one episode of persecutions, “known to Christians as” the Great Persecution of Diocletian in 303, during which, he claims, Roman officials burned books of Christian scriptures and destroyed

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<sup>195</sup> Keith Hopkins. “Christian Number and Its Implications.” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 6.2 (1998): 195-97.

churches. Moreover, he notes that, “bishops and clergy – and not the Christian rank and file – were arrested and forced to sacrifice to the pagan gods.”<sup>196</sup> Elsewhere, Peter Brown refers to the martyrs as “those few who died for Christ.”<sup>197</sup> Judith Herrin, in *The Formation of Christendom* only refers to Diocletian as the one who “devised an official partition of the empire,” the Tetrarchy.<sup>198</sup> For Herrin, the expression “the persecution of Decius” (used without explanatory background) becomes an occasion to point out the divisions among Christians concerning the fate of those who weakened in the face of persecution and sacrificed to the pagan gods.<sup>199</sup>

On the other side of the argument, numerous writers describe at length these persecutions, starting early on with the deaths of Peter and Paul in Rome under the emperor Nero: “On top of his other crimes Nero now persecuted the Christians; of their leaders in Rome he had Peter crucified and Paul killed by the sword.”<sup>200</sup> Bede goes on to enumerate all the subsequent emperors guilty of the same policy: Domitian, Trajan, the brothers Marcus Antoninus Verus and Lucius Aurelius Commodus, Severus Pertinax, Maximin, Decius, Gallus, Valerian, Aurelian, Diocletian, and even Constantine at the beginning of his rule. Eusebius of Caesarea (ca. AD 260 – 339), one of Bede’s sources, writes extensively on the subject, since, as bishop of Caesarea, he witnessed the effects of Diocletian’s edicts.<sup>201</sup> Other early Christian writers<sup>202</sup>, besides Luke in the *Acts of the*

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<sup>196</sup> Peter Brown. *The Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity, A. D. 200- 1000* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), 62.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>198</sup> Judith Herrin. *The Formation of Christendom* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 22-4.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid, 97.

<sup>200</sup> Bede. *The Greater Chronicle*, eds. J. McClure and R. Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 309.

<sup>201</sup> From Eusebius. *The History of the Church*, trans. G. A. Williamson (New York: Dorset, 1984), 330, 335, come the following passages:

It was the nineteenth year of Diocletian’s reign and the month Dystrus, called March by the Romans, and the festival of the Saviour’s Passion was approaching, when an imperial decree was

*Apostles* and Eusebius, describe the persecutions and the martyrs of the first four centuries. According to the *Liber Pontificalis*,<sup>203</sup> a sixth-century reference on the Papacy, the first thirty-one popes suffered martyrdom before Constantine's Edict of Milan. Earlier still, the exchange of letters between Trajan and Pliny the Younger, his governor of Pontus/Bithynia in Asia Minor from AD 111 to 113, indicates a Roman concern for how to process the growing number of Christians.<sup>204</sup> Addressing the Emperor, and still uncertain of what Christians did or believed, Pliny writes:

The matter seemed to me to justify my consulting you, especially on account of the number of those imperiled; for many persons of all ages and classes, and of both sexes are being put in peril by accusation and this will go on. The contagion of this superstition has spread not only in the cities, but in the villages and rural districts as well; yet it seems capable of being checked and set right.

In spite of this abundance of evidence, the other side of this issue will not acknowledge that indeed, most Roman emperors before Constantine did not tolerate Christians and that persecutions started early, involved all the Roman Empire, and resulted in many martyrs.

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published everywhere, ordering the churches to be razed to the ground and the Scriptures destroyed by fire, and giving notice that those in places of honour would lose their places, and domestic staff, if they continued to profess Christianity, would be deprived of their liberty. Such was the first edict against us.

It was not long before the first decree was followed by another, in which it was laid down that if the prisoners offered sacrifice they should be allowed to go free, but if they refused, they should be mutilated by endless tortures. Now once more, how could one count the number of martyrs in every province of the Empire, especially those in Africa and Mauretania, in the Thebais and Egypt?

<sup>202</sup> Included in this list: Cyprian of Carthage (d. AD 258); Gregory of Nazianzus (AD 325-389); Clement of Alexandria (d. AD 215); Lactantius (4<sup>th</sup> century); Origen (AD 185-ca.254); Justin Martyr (AD 100-165); Irenaeus (ca. AD 125- ca.200), many of whom suffered martyrdom themselves.

<sup>203</sup> The original text in Latin of the *Liber Pontificalis* appears on thelatinlibrary.com website.

<sup>204</sup> From Henry Bettenson, ed. *Documents of the Christian Church* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 4.

It is my rule, Sire, to refer to you in matters where I am uncertain. For who can better direct my hesitation or instruct my ignorance? I was never present at any trial of Christians; therefore I do not know what are the customary penalties or investigations, and what limits are observed.... Meanwhile, this is the course that I have adopted in the case of those brought before me as Christians. I ask them if they are Christians. If they admit it I repeat the question a second and a third time, threatening capital punishment; if they persist I sentence them to death. For I do not doubt that, whatever kind of crime it may be to which they have confessed, their pertinacity and inflexible obstinacy should certainly be punished. There were others who displayed a like madness and whom I reserved to be sent to Rome since they were Roman citizens.

However, this will not stand out as the first or last time that individuals or groups have denied or magnified genocides, ethnic cleansings, holocausts, or war casualties. What matters in this discussion remains that, for Ælfric and his audience, persecutions had taken place, martyrs had suffered, and, with the return of the Northmen, the same could happen again.

When Ælfric relates the Passion of St. Alban, protomartyr of England, who died ca. AD 305, he makes obvious the connection between this event in Britain and the rest of persecuted Christianity throughout the Roman Empire:

Sum hæðen casere wæs ge-haten Dioclitianus  
 se wæs to casere gecoren þeahðe he cwealm-bære wære .  
 æfter cristes acennednyss twam hund gearum .  
 4 and syx and hund-eahtatigum ofer ealne middan-eard .  
 and he rixode twentig geara reðe cwellere .  
 swa þæt he acwealde and acwellan het  
 ealle ða cristenan þe he of-axian mihte .  
 8 and forbærnde cyrcan . and berypte ða unscæððigan .  
 and þeos arleasan ehtnyss unablinnendlice eode  
 ofer ealne middan-eard ealles tyngear .  
 oðþæt heo to engla lande eac swylce becom .  
 12 and þær fela acwealde ða þe on criste gelyfdon .  
 an ðæra wæs albanus se æþela martyr .  
 seðe on þære ehtnyss eac wearð acweald  
 for cristes geleafan . swa swa we cyðað her .<sup>205</sup>

[A certain heathen emperor was called Diocletian. He was chosen, although he was blood-thirsty, two hundred and eighty-six years after the birth of Christ, as emperor over all the earth and he ruled twenty years as a cruel killer, so that he killed and ordered the killing of all the Christians of whom he might hear, and burned churches and robbed the harmless. And this wicked persecution took place unceasingly over all the earth for all of ten years, until it also arrived to England and there killed many who believed in Christ, one of whom was Alban the glorious martyr, he who in the persecution also got killed for the faith of Christ, just as we make known here.]

Earlier, Bede had proudly emphasized the unity or communion of Britain with the rest of persecuted Christianity:

<sup>205</sup> *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat Vol. I, 414 (lines 1-15).

Meanwhile Diocletian in the east and Maximianus Herculius in the west ordered the churches to be laid waste and the Christians persecuted and slain, the tenth persecution after Nero. This one lasted longer and was more cruel than almost any of the previous ones; it continued without ceasing for ten years accompanied by the burning of churches, the outlawry of innocent people, and the slaughter of the martyrs. In fact Britain also attained to the great glory of bearing faithful witness to God.<sup>206</sup>

Faithfully following Bede's account of Alban, Ælfric's narrative emphasizes all the typical elements of a *passio*, as listed by M. Lapidge. It must give

an account in which the saint, usually of noble birth, adopts Christianity in days when the state government is pagan; the saint is brought before a local magistrate or governor and asked to recant his/her Christianity by sacrificing to the gods; the saint refuses to do so, even on the pain of innumerable tortures (normally described in excruciating detail), and is eventually killed, usually by beheading.<sup>207</sup>

In Ælfric's *passio*, however, one of the elements varies. The true target in this instance, the priest, tries to avoid martyrdom,

and þa cwelleras cepton ðæra cristenra gehwær  
mid ormetre wodnyse. Ða ætwand him an preost.  
Se arn digodlllice to albanus huse  
and ðær ætlutode his laðum ehterum<sup>208</sup>

[and the killers seized the Christians everywhere with intense frenzy. Then a priest escaped from them. He ran secretly to Alban's house and there hid from his evil pursuers].

Alban then takes the place of the intended victim:

Ða comon ða ærendracan to albanes huse  
ac albanus eode ut to þam ehterum  
mid ðæs preostes hakelan swylce he hit wære  
and hine nolde ameldian ðam manfullum ehterum<sup>209</sup>

[then came the messengers to Alban's house, but Alban came out to the pursuers with the priest's vestment, as though it were he, and he would not betray him to the wicked pursuers.]

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<sup>206</sup> Bede. *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, 16.

<sup>207</sup> M. Lapidge, "The Saintly Life in Anglo-Saxon England," *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*, ed. M. Godden and M. Lapidge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 252-53.

<sup>208</sup> *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat Vol. I, 414 (lines 18-21).

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*, 416 (lines 34-37).

The requirement to recant the Christian faith by sacrificing to pagan gods must remain in the *passio*, since it constitutes the reason for the martyrdom. Beheading fulfills the standard conclusion, with only a single form of torture, scourging, in the process. In addition, a whole range of miracles, a stream drying up, a wellspring appearing upon a hill, and the executioner going blind, all contribute to the significance of this Romano-British martyr, who stands as a counterpart to the martyrs of the Orient.

By building up Alban as a role model, Ælfric writes to make his audience overcome the contempt many Anglo-Saxons felt towards the Britons, their culture or even their understanding of Christianity. From the very start of their occupation of the land,

the Germanic invaders absorbed very little of the native culture of Britain; and, by an act of supreme arrogance, they even termed the Britons ‘wealas’, or ‘foreigners’ in their own island. The Anglo-Saxons learned to speak neither Latin nor Brittonic (the native Celtic vernacular of the Britons), and, unlike their neighbours, they remained for a long time illiterate.<sup>210</sup>

Bede frequently describes the Britons as a sorry lot, a “sluggish people” incapable of managing on its own after the departure of the Romans in AD 407.<sup>211</sup> After his arrival in England, Augustine tries to get the agreement of the leaders of the British Church to follow the customs of the Church of Rome, but to no avail:

After a long dispute they were unwilling, in spite of the prayers, exhortations, and rebukes of Augustine and his companions to give their assent, preferring their own traditions to those in which all the churches throughout the world agree in Christ.<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> John Bryan Ward-Perkins. “Why Did the Anglo-Saxons Not Become More British?” *The English Historical Review* (2000): 514.

<sup>211</sup> Bede. *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, 24.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

Yet, when it comes to Alban's *passio*, both Bede and Ælfric have nothing but praise for the endurance of this early group of Christians facing persecution. With slight variations from Bede, Ælfric writes:

Seo ehtnys geswac ða . and eoden þa cristenan  
of wudum and of wæstenum þær hi wæron behydde .  
140 and comon to mannum and cristen-dom ge-edniwodon  
and gebetton cyrcan þe to-brocene wæron .  
wunodon ða on sibbe mod soðum geleafan .  
Hi worhton eac þa wurðlice cyrcan  
144 þam halgan albane ðær he bebyrged wæs  
and þær wurdon gelome wundra gefremode  
þam hælende to lofe ðe leofað a on ecnysse .<sup>213</sup>

[The persecution then ceased and the Christians came out from the woods and from the wastelands where they had hidden, and went towards men and restored Christianity and restored churches that were destroyed, and dwelt then in peace with the true faith. They then also built a splendid church to saint Alban where he was buried and there frequent wonders were accomplished to the glory of the Savior who lives forever.]

Sometimes referred to as a Roman soldier, neither Bede, nor the *Old English*

*Martyrology*, nor Ælfric, gives Alban a precise ethnicity. Alban's heroism and

steadfastness seem cause enough for Ælfric to end his narrative by praising the Britons

and finding fault with his own ancestors, the Anglo-Saxons:

Dis wæs geworden ær ðæt gewinn come  
148 ðurh hengest . and horsan þe hyndon ða bryttas  
and se cristen-dom wearð ge-unwurðod syððan .  
oðþæt agustinus hine eft astealde .<sup>214</sup>

[This came to pass before the war happened because of Hengest and Horsa who overcame the Britons, and Christianity was further treated with contempt until Augustine established it anew.]

This comment sounds very different from the boastful statement made in *The Anglo-*

*Saxon Chronicle*, for AD 937, after the Anglo-Saxon victory at Brunanburh:

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<sup>213</sup> Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat Vol. I, 422 (lines 138-146).

<sup>214</sup> Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat Vol. I, 422 (lines 147-150).



Never yet in this island was there a greater slaughter of people felled by the sword's edges, before this, as books tell us, old authorities, since Angles and Saxons came here from the east, sought out Britain over the broad ocean, warriors eager for fame, proud war-smiths, overcame the Welsh, seized the country.<sup>215</sup>

In his recognition of the Britons as worthy of respect because they also suffered persecution for their faith, Ælfric establishes their equality with all other Christians, a fact not even expressed by Edgar, the king otherwise much admired by Ælfric. Edgar's AD 962-963 code at "Wihtbordesstan" still maintains an implicit separation between the different ethnic groups when it claims, speaking of secular rights, "Nevertheless, this measure is to be common to all the nation, whether English, Danes or Britons."<sup>216</sup> In "The Passion of St. Alban," Ælfric reaches back to pre-Anglo-Saxon times to write of a non-royal British martyr who witnesses to his faith during Diocletian's empire-wide persecution. Through Alban's *passio*, Britons and Anglo-Saxons, Britain and the great Roman Empire, the saint of Verolamium<sup>217</sup> and all those of the Orient, stand united by their common confrontation of paganism and its potential corollary, martyrdom.

Despite a reputation for tolerance, paganism in its Roman form took nearly 250 years to tolerate Christianity officially. The Roman State established a national religion with a pantheon of state gods, which all citizens must worship. Failure to offer sacrifice to the various gods and to several deified emperors, constituted treason. The evidence of treason as a transgression of the imperial law came out in a trial, and resulted inevitably in a judgment, involving various types of punishments, and sometimes death. The trial, as M. Lapidge writes, takes place when the Christian "is brought before a local magistrate or

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<sup>215</sup> *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, trans. & ed. Michael Swanton (New York: Routledge, 1998), 110.

<sup>216</sup> D. Whitelock, ed. *English Historical Documents c. 500-1042*, 399.

<sup>217</sup> See George Herzfeld. *An Old English Martyrology*, 101. The entry for June 22 indicates that "the place where Alban suffered is near the town that Britons called Verolamium and which the English people now call Wætlingaceaster."

governor and asked to recant his/her Christianity by sacrificing to the gods.”<sup>218</sup> Every single one of Ælfric’s lives of martyrs depicts this scene. Around AD 258, Eugenia<sup>219</sup> stands before Commodus himself

and eugenian he het his godum geoffrian .  
oððe hi man mid witum welreowlice acwealde .  
He het eac acwællan . ealle þa cristenan  
gif hi noldon bugan to ðam bysmorfullum hæðen-scype.<sup>220</sup>

[and he ordered Eugenia to sacrifice to his gods, or men with cruel punishments would kill her. He also gave order to kill all the Christians if they would not submit to the infamous idolatry.]

In the Antioch of Julian and Basilissa (d. AD 302), the ruler Martianus enforces an imperial decree proclaiming that

nan mann bicgan ne moste .  
108 oððe ænig þing syllan buton he onsæged-nysse  
geoffrode þam leasum deofol-gyldum . and his Drihten wið-soce .  
Him wearð þa ge-sæd . be ðam soðan geleafan .  
þe Iulianus heold mid his halgum gebroðrum .  
112 and sende to ðam heape het hi gebugan  
to his deofolgyldum . þe læs þe hí for-demedede wurdon .<sup>221</sup>

[no man is allowed to buy or sell anything unless he has offered sacrifice to the deceitful idols and denied his Lord. He was then told about the true faith that Julianus held along with his saintly monks and sent for that group and ordered them to bow down to his idols lest they be condemned.]

After finding out that Sebastian (d. ca. AD 300) has kept his Christian faith a secret, the Emperor Diocletian tells him,

Ic hæfde þe mid þam fyrmestan . þe minum hyrede folgodon .  
and þu lutodest oð þis on þam laðum cristen-dome .  
þam godum to teonan . and me to un-þearfe.<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> M. Lapidge in “The Saintly Life in Anglo-Saxon England,” 253.

<sup>219</sup> Although Eugenia comes from Rome, once in Alexandria with her pagan father Philip, she learns about Christianity from the letters of Paul and from Christian monks living in Egypt.

<sup>220</sup> *Ælfric’s Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat Vol. I, 46 (lines 361-64).

<sup>221</sup> *Ælfric’s Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat Vol. I, 96 (lines 107-13).

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*, 142 (lines 412-14).

[I considered you among the best of my household attendants and you hid until now in that loathsome Christianity, to insult the gods and to hurt me.]

Diocletian then becomes

deoflice gram  
and hét hine lædan on heardum bendum .  
ut to anum felda and hine þær gefæstnian  
and hentan his mid fl anum . oð þæt he his feorh ageafe .<sup>223</sup>

[diabolically angry and gave orders to take him out, firmly bound, to a certain field and there to bind him to the gallows and shoot him with arrows until he gives up his spirit].

The punishment given in AD 254 (or 304) to the thirteen-year old Agnes by the judge, intentionally designed to mock her desire to remain a virgin, comes in the form of a choice:

Geceos þe nu agnes an þæra twegra .  
oððe þu mid mædenum þæra mæran uestan .  
þinne lac geoffrige . oððe þu laðum myltestrum  
120 scealt beon geferlæht . and fullice gebysmrod  
and ða cristenan ne magon þe þonne abreddan .<sup>224</sup>

[You choose now, Agnes, one of two things, either you with the virgins of the great Vesta offer your sacrifice, or you with loathsome prostitutes shall be associated and shamefully disgraced and the Christians will have no power to rescue you.]

Similar choices face the virgins of Sicily, Agatha (d. AD 250) and Lucy (d. AD 283), and Ælfric emphasizes these three martyrs' great eloquence during their trials. In AD 320, after the Edict of Toleration, the choice given to the forty Cappadocian soldiers of the Emperor adapts to military customs,

þæt hí oþer þæra dydon .  
swa hí þam godum geoffrodon and arwurðnysse hæfdon .  
swa hi ða offrunge for-sawon and gescynde wurdon.<sup>225</sup>

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<sup>223</sup> Ibid., 144 (lines 421-24).

<sup>224</sup> *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat Vol. I, 176 (lines 117-21).

<sup>225</sup> Ibid., 240 (lines 32-4).

[that they do either of these: that they sacrifice to the gods and retain honor, or that they then reject the sacrifice and be shunned.]

When George of Cappadocia (d. ca. AD 304) refuses to sacrifice to the pagan gods, the Emperor Datian

44                    mid deofollicum graman  
                  het ðone halgan wer on hencgene ahæbban .  
                  and mid isenum clawum clifrian his lima .  
                  and ontendan blysan æt bam his sidum  
                  het hine þa siððan of ðære ceastre alædan  
                  and mid swinglum þreagen and mid sealte gnidan .  
                  ac se halga wer wunode unge-derod .<sup>226</sup>

[with diabolical anger, gave orders to raise the saintly man on a rack, and with iron hooks to scratch his limbs, and kindle torches on both sides of him. Then he gave orders to take him out of the town to be tortured with whips and rubbed with salt, but the saintly man remained unhurt.]

Mark, the only evangelist believed by church tradition to have suffered martyrdom (in AD 68), does not experience the typical trial sequence; rather, a mob drags him through the streets of Alexandria.<sup>227</sup> Bishop Apollinaris of Ravenna (d. AD 79), born in Antioch and later a disciple of Peter, battles heathenism all his life and, in the words of Ælfric, defines the ultimate reward of martyrdom:

216    and swa hwa swa hine ne gebit to þam heofonlican gode .  
          se ðe ecelice for-demed on þam ecan fyre .  
          and ða ðe on god gelyfað and mid geleafan beoð gefullode .  
          þa habbað þa ecean reste . and unawendedlice welan.<sup>228</sup>

[and whosoever does not pray to the heavenly god is eternally doomed to the perpetual fire, and they who believe in God and are baptized in the faith have then eternal rest and unceasing happiness.]

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<sup>226</sup> Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat Vol. I, 310 (lines 41-7).

<sup>227</sup> As a footnote to Mark's martyrdom, Ælfric makes sure to repeatedly remind his audience that Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, in that order, "and þas feower ana syndon to under-fonne . / on geleaffulre gelaðunge and forlætan þa oðre / þe lease gesetnysse gesetton . ðurh hi sylfe . / na þurh þone halgan gast . ne ðurh ðæs hælendes gecorennysse" (and these four alone are to be accepted in the faithful church, and the others relinquished, who composed untruthful narratives by themselves, not through the Holy Spirit nor through the Savior's choice.)

<sup>228</sup> Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat Vol. I, 484 (lines 216-19).

After arresting the Persian kings Abdon and Sennes around AD 250, “Decius þa het þa halgan cyningas / his godum geoffrian”<sup>229</sup> (Decius then ordered the saintly kings to sacrifice to his gods). For Maurice and his companions of the Theban legion,<sup>230</sup> Christian soldiers in a Roman legion, the dilemma arises around AD 287, when Maximian decides

to clypian  
ealne þone here . þæt hi his hæse gefyldon .  
and mid him ge-offrodon ealle heora lác  
þam deoflicum godum . gode ælmihtigan to teonan.<sup>231</sup>

[to summon all the army so that they satisfy his command, and with him, all offer their sacrifices to the diabolical gods as an insult to almighty God.]

In the days of Domitian, ca. AD 258, after much torture, Denis<sup>232</sup> and his companions reject the prefect’s final order to

geoffrian heora lác þam lifleasum godum  
gif hi heora lifes rohton . oþþe rædfæste wæron.<sup>233</sup>

[offer their sacrifices to the inanimate gods if they cared for their lives or were wise.]

Almachius, another prefect, orders Cecilia (d. AD 117):

Awurp þine dyrstignysse  
and geoffra þam godum arwurðlice onsægednysse.<sup>234</sup>

[Cast aside your insolence and offer sacrifice to the gods reverentially.]

The *passio* for November 29<sup>235</sup> describes how in AD 283,

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<sup>229</sup> *Ælfric’s Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat Vol. II, 54 (lines 15-16).

<sup>230</sup> According to *An Old English Martyrology*, 175, The Theban Legion “came from the East from the country of Cappadocia.” Egypt, however, particularly the Thebaid region where the Desert Fathers established monasteries, remains a more likely origin for this Roman legion of 6600 or 6666 (according to Ælfric) Christian soldiers.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*, 160 (lines 26-29).

<sup>232</sup> According to Ælfric, the Greek Denis (or Dionisius), converted by Paul, studied in Egypt before becoming bishop of Paris. More recently, Italy seems the more likely birthplace of this bishop of Paris who apparently did not meet Paul.

<sup>233</sup> *Ælfric’s Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat Vol. II, 186 (lines 278-79).

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, 374 (lines 332-33).

<sup>235</sup> *Ælfric’s Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat Vol. II, 378 (lines 14-16). According to Ælfric, Chrysanthus and his father, both pagans, traveled from Alexandria to Rome, where Chrysanthus studied “the

se hæðena dema het ge-hæftan crisanum  
and darian samod for drihtnes geleafan  
and mid mislicum witum hét hí gewitnian oð deað  
gif hí noldon ge-offrian þam arwurðum godum.<sup>236</sup>

[the heathen judge gave orders to arrest Chrysanthus and Daria together, for their faith in the Lord; and with manifold torments, he ordered them tortured until death if they would not sacrifice to the venerable gods.]

The apostle Thomas (d. AD 72), traditionally the apostle of India, also

wearð þa gelæd to þam lifleasum godum  
þæt he his lác sceolde lecgan . him on offrunga  
and his cneowa gebigan þam bysmorfullum anlicnyssum.<sup>237</sup>

[was then taken to the inanimate gods so that he should place his offering as a sacrifice to them, and bend his knees to the blasphemous idols.]

Ælfric's last entry in Skeat's second volume of the *Lives of Saints* describes the

martyrdom of Vincent (d. AD 304), the Spanish deacon. By this time, Roman authorities had understood the influence of the hierarchy within the Church and had changed some of their tactics. Datianus

ge-cyðde his wódnysse ofer þa cristenan menn .  
began to drecenne mid dyrstigum anginne  
þa halgum bisceopas . & þa ge-hádodan preostas .  
36 Wolde ærest þa heafod-men þæs halgan geleafan  
mid witum ofer-swiðan . þæt he syððan mihte  
þa læssan ofer-cuman & fram heora geleafan gebigan.<sup>238</sup>

[made known his frenzy against Christians and began to torment with bold design the saintly bishops and the ordained priests. He wanted first to overcome the leaders of the holy faith with tortures, so that afterwards he might overcome the followers and turn them away from their belief.]

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grammatican cræft . / and þa hæðenan béc . oþþæt þa halgan godspel / him becómon to hande” (the art of grammar and the heathen books, until the holy gospels came into his hand), at which point he became a Christian.

<sup>236</sup> *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat Vol. II, 386 (lines 136-39).

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*, 424 (lines 400-02).

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*, 428 (lines 33-38).

In all of these saints' lives, the pagan authority requires the denial of the Christian faith. Martyrdom ensues when the Christian refuses. As long as Christianity remained outlawed throughout the Roman Empire, of necessity, all Christians could expect to face such a situation, and either "turn away from their belief" or die for their faith.

While Ælfric's *Lives of Saints* praise the holy martyrs who died for their faith, they also reveal an awareness of human frailty, thereby including continuous warnings and exhortations addressed to weakening and fearful Christians. They also frequently speak of the dangers of apostasy. Sebastian, the covert Christian in Diocletian's household,

20      ... wolde gehyrta . ða þe se hæðena casere .  
dæghwamlice acwealde . for cristes geleafan .  
Ða geseah sebastianus hu sume þa cristenan .  
woldon awacian . for ðam ormætum witum .  
and gehyrta heora mod . to þæs hælendes geleafan .<sup>239</sup>

[... wanted to encourage those the heathen emperor killed daily for believing in Christ. Then Sebastian saw how some of the Christians wanted to lapse because of the intense tortures and he revived their spirits into the Savior's faith and led to God those whom the devil wanted to snatch away.]

A soldier using strong terms of encouragement would certainly sound very familiar to Anglo-Saxon audiences:

Ne awurpe ge ic bidde eowerne beorhtan sige .  
for wifa swæsnyssum . oððe for cyldra tearum .  
Arærað eower sige-becn . fram eorðlicum ge-wilnungum .  
and onginnað eower gefeoht . ongan ða unge-sewenlican fynd .<sup>240</sup>

[Do not throw away, I beg you, your brilliant victory, for the wheedling of wives, or the tears of children. Lift up your cross away from earthly longings and begin your battle against the unseen fiend.]

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<sup>239</sup> Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat Vol. I, 116 (lines 19-23).

<sup>240</sup> Ibid., 120 (lines 57-60).

Sometimes all exhortations fail, as with one of the forty Cappadocian soldiers, arrested in Sebaste, Armenia. After resisting many tortures, their persecutors finally shove them, unclothed, in a “mere... mid forste ofer-beaht . / and se winterlica wind wan mid þam forste.”<sup>241</sup> (lake... covered with ice, and the wintry wind raged together with the frost). Warm water in a vessel temptingly stands nearby as a reward for anyone who forsakes his faith for relief from the freezing water;

156    Ða eargode heora an for þam ormætum cyle .  
           awearp his geleafan and wolde hine baðian  
           on þam wlacum wætere and wende fram his geferum .  
           ac he gewat sona swa hé þæt wæter hrepode .  
 160    and wearð seo wearmnys him awend to deaðe .  
           forþan þe his geleafan ne geleaste oð ende .<sup>242</sup>

[Then one of them turned coward because of the intense cold, cast aside his faith and wanted to bathe in the tepid water, and he went away from his comrades, but he died as soon as he touched the water and the warmth was turned for him into death because his faith did not endure to the end.]

Repeatedly, Ælfric illustrates the opposite consequences stemming from martyrdom or apostasy: eternal life with God or an eternity deprived of the divine presence. Above all, however, the *Lives of Saints* remind his audience that a soul has free will and can choose:

Seo sawul is gesceadwis gast, æfre cucu and mæg underfón ge godne wyllan  
 and yfelne, æfter agenum cyre.<sup>243</sup>

[The soul is a rational spirit, ever living and able to assume either a good purpose, or an evil purpose, according to its own free will.]

The consequences of a wrong choice became a major issue during and after the Roman persecutions, consequences Ælfric hopes his faithful will avoid if they follow the examples of the martyrs of the eastern Roman Empire. Latin sources frequently wrote

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<sup>241</sup> *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat Vol. I, 246 (lines 143-4).

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*, 248 (lines 156-161).

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*, 20 (lines 171-2).



about apostasy and the early church hierarchy debated at length the fate of the *lapsi*.<sup>244</sup> In his letter to Trajan, Pliny shows off his effectiveness at reviving paganism by remarking on the widespread apostasy among Christians. Pliny's methods of persuasion must have proven effective and

There is no shadow of doubt that the temples, which have been almost deserted, are beginning to be frequented once more, that the sacred rites which have been long neglected, are being renewed, and that sacrificial victims are for sale everywhere, whereas, till recently, a buyer was rarely to be found. From this it is easy to imagine what a host of men could be set right, were they given a chance of recantation.<sup>245</sup>

If recantation meant, to the pagan authorities, being “set right,” members and leaders of the Church certainly understood the expression differently. Could a surviving community of Christians who had suffered torture and lost family members during the persecutions forgive the apostate who lapsed under torture? Could the Church even accept the return of the *sacrificati*, who volunteered to sacrifice to the pagan gods before the trial, or of the *libellatici*, who had procured, by bribery or influence, a written statement<sup>246</sup> to prove that they had sacrificed to the gods, or even of the *thurificati*, who had merely burned incense

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<sup>244</sup> The term *lapsi* applies more particularly to those who, previously pagans, converted to Christianity, and later relapsed into paganism, particularly during the great persecution of Decius (AD 250-1).

<sup>245</sup> H. Bettenson, ed. *Documents of the Christian Church*, 5.

<sup>246</sup> Robert H. Beattie, in “The Certificate of an Apostasy during the Persecution of Decian.” *The Biblical World* (1896): 289-296 gives an example of such a document, a *libellus*, found in the Fayûm (Egypt). The text follows:

To the commission on sacrifices of the village Alexander's Island  
from Aurelius Diogenes, the son of Satabas (a native) of the village  
Alexander's Island, seventy-two years old (with) a scar over the right  
eye-brow: As I have always, hitherto, been in the habit of offering  
sacrifices to the gods, so have I also now in your presence, according to  
the edict, offered sacrifices, poured libations, and eaten of the  
consecrated food, and I beseech you to bear witness by your attest.  
I salute you. I, Aurelius Diogenes, have made this application.  
I Mus(thes), the son of — (have seen) Aurelius sacrificing, and hereto  
set my seal.

In the first year of the Emperor Cæsar Gaius Messius Quintus Trajan Decius Pius Felix Augustus.  
Epiphi. 2.

before the gods? The Donatists refused to re-admit any of these apostates.<sup>247</sup> The Church hierarchy, however, emphasized the possibility of penance, best illustrated in *The Lapsed*, a public address by Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, made in AD 251, after a persecution by Decius. After praising the martyrs, Cyprian confronts the reality of apostasy:

At the first threatening words of the Enemy, an all too large number of the brethren betrayed their faith; they were not felled by the violence of the persecution, but fell of their own free will.<sup>248</sup>

Although Cyprian understands those who lapsed under torture, he shows more severity towards those who denied their faith before suffering:

a man can only blame the tortures if it is they that overcame him: the plea of pain can only be made by one who was broken by the pain.<sup>249</sup>

However, to all the lapsed, Cyprian offers hope for forgiveness:

Let each one, I entreat you, brethren, confess his sin while he who has sinned is still in this world, while his confession can still be heard, while satisfaction and forgiveness granted through the priests are pleasing to God. Let us turn back to the Lord with our whole heart and, expressing our repentance in deep sorrow, implore God for His mercy.<sup>250</sup>

For Cyprian, as for Ælfric, apostates could die before having repented, and since this would condemn their souls to eternal punishment, martyrdom remains the best choice, because, in the words of Augustine of Hippo:

Death is not to be regarded as a disaster, when it follows on a good life, for the only thing that makes death an evil is what comes after death. Those who must inevitably die ought not to worry overmuch about what accident will cause their death, but about their destination after dying. Christians know that the death of a

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<sup>247</sup>The Church had by then labeled Donatists as heretics for their inordinate desire for martyrdom, which sometimes bordered on suicide. As a result, as noted in W. E. Stempsey's "Laying Down One's Life for Oneself." *Christian Bioethics* (1998): 215, "the Council of Elvira (?305) ... and the Council of Carthage (348) ... both distinguish those who bring about their own death from true martyrs." Ælfric makes a similar comment in the "Passion of St. Alban, Martyr" (*Lives of Saints*, Vol. I, 428, lines 229-30): "Ælc man bið eac forðemed þe hine sylfne adyt . / and ælc agen-slaga á on ecnyssse ðrowað" (Every man is also doomed who kills himself, and every slayer of self suffers forever).

<sup>248</sup> St. Cyprian. *The Lapsed*, trans. M. Bévenot (New York: The Newman Press, 1957), 18.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid., 36.

poor religious man, licked by the tongues of dogs, is far better than the death of a godless rich man, dressed in purple and linen. Why then should those who have lived well be dismayed by the terrors of death in any form?<sup>251</sup>

Death, according to Augustine and to the Church, is preferable to living as an apostate.

Referred to by Ælfric in the *Lives* as “the great Augustine” and “the wise bishop,”

Augustine of Hippo represents the ideal witness to and a frequent source of information about both Paganism and Christianity.<sup>252</sup> Born in AD 354 of a pagan father and a Christian mother, he did not convert to Christianity until AD 386. Educated as a Roman, and having studied the pagan authors of Latin rhetoric and Greek philosophy, Augustine knew paganism and all its rituals:

When I was a young man I used to go to sacrilegious shows and entertainments. I watched the antics of madmen; I listened to singing boys; I thoroughly enjoyed the most degrading spectacles put on in honour of gods and goddesses – in honour of the Heavenly Virgin, and of Berecynthia, mother of all.<sup>253</sup>

We divided our gaze between the procession of harlots on one side, and the virgin goddess on the other. I saw prayerful worship offered to her, and indecent performances enacted before her. I saw no sense of shame in the mimes, no trace of modesty in any actress – all the duly prescribed obscenities were punctiliously performed.<sup>254</sup>

These pagan rites took place well after the Edict of Milan, until Theodosius I (AD 379-395), the last ruler of an undivided empire, in a move similar to that of previous emperors, banned all religions except one. This time, in AD 391, Christianity became the only official religion of the Roman Empire,<sup>255</sup> which did not prevent many among the

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<sup>251</sup> St. Augustine. *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans*, trans. H. Bettenson (London: Penguin Books, 1984), 20.

<sup>252</sup> The references come from the “Passion of St. Thomas the Apostle” (line 3) and “On Auguries” (line 67) respectively. In the first reference, Ælfric refuses to include an event considered untrue by Augustine; in the second, he uses Augustine’s writings as a direct source for his warnings against pagan practices and sorcery.

<sup>253</sup> St. Augustine. *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans*, 51.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid. 83.

<sup>255</sup> From H. Bettenson, ed. *Documents of the Christian Church*, 31: “it is our desire that all the various nations which are subject to our Clemency and Moderation, should continue in the profession of that

upper classes from remaining pagan, and pagan philosophers from teaching in the famous schools of Athens and Alexandria.<sup>256</sup> This period of coexistence, after the persecutions ended, proved to have a most lasting and constitutive influence on Christian thought, when Augustine both fought pagan polytheism and “wept for Dido, who surrendered her life to the sword.”<sup>257</sup> No one seems better suited to illustrate this duality. Augustine, like all Christians who had not previously belonged to Judaism, started out as a pagan. Similarly, most of the saints in Ælfric’s *Lives* came from pagan families, and so did the Anglo-Saxons who conquered Britain. Several of the saints described by Ælfric studied pagan books, perhaps the same as those available to Augustine,

12       for-ðam-þe on þam dagum ne mihte nan man beon geþogen  
           buton he hæþene bec hæfde geleornod .  
           and þa cræftas cuþe þe kaseres þa lufodon .  
           Crisantus þa leornode mid leohtum andgite .  
           and mid gleawum mode grammatican cræft .  
           and þa hæðenan bec .<sup>258</sup>

[because in those days no man could be successful unless he had studied the heathen books and knew the skills that emperors then favored. Chrysanthus then studied, with clear understanding and with penetrating mind, the art of grammar and the heathen books.]

The Church could not and did not deny the intellectual contributions of pagan authors. Does not Augustine, for a time, follow Manichaeism, and later adopt Neoplatonism, elements of which he integrates into his writings? Still, this intellectual progression from Paganism to Christianity, incorporating by necessity Latin and Greek influences, gives rise to ambivalence:

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religion which was delivered to the Romans by the Divine Apostle Peter, as it hath been preserved by faithful tradition...”

<sup>256</sup> As explained in J. Marenbon’s *Medieval Philosophy: An Historical and Philosophical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2007), 56, the emperor Justinian closed this pagan school in AD 529. The school of Alexandria, once a center of pagan, Greek, Jewish and Christian learning, survived longer still, after Christians took over as teachers and students.

<sup>257</sup> St. Augustine. *Confessions*, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin (New York: Dorset, 1986), 34.

<sup>258</sup> Ælfric’s *Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat Vol. II, 378 (lines 10-15).

Although Augustine's attack on polytheist paganism is remorseless, his attitude to the Platonic philosophers is different. He accepts not only that, by using their reasons, they correctly discerned the one, true God but also that, in setting forth the scheme of three hypostases, they showed an understanding of the Trinity. Although a careful reading ... shows him deeply critical of the failings of the philosophers, their pride and their fear, ... chapters of *De civitate Dei* could be taken – and were (Chapter 5, section 2, Interlude iv) – to depict ancient philosophy in a golden light.<sup>259</sup>

Augustine of Hippo's *De Civitate Dei* was commonly found in Anglo-Saxon libraries and frequently cited by Ælfric, who knew that many early Christians had routinely received a solid foundation in pagan learning.<sup>260</sup> In another one of his *Lives*, he describes St. Basil's education, from Cappadocia to Athens, and then to Egypt, studying pagan philosophers before he felt “þæt heo sceolde secan þa soðan lare / on cristenum bocum . be his scyppende”<sup>261</sup> (that he should seek the true learning about his Maker in Christian books). As long as paganism can lead to God, either intellectually or in martyrdom, Ælfric perceives it as a sometimes-necessary step towards salvation. However, when paganism leads to a weakening of the will and to apostasy, it becomes diabolical. For Ælfric, eternal life with God is the ultimate goal of human life and he cannot admonish his audience enough to resist paganism in all its nefarious forms in order to spend eternity in heaven,

for-þan þe þes middan-eard flihð aweg swyðe .  
 and ure dagas gewitað . swa swa weg-færende menn .  
 and se forþ-gewitena dæg ne went næfre ongean .  
 156 ac ælc tid us drifð forð to deaþe unþances  
 Ða halgan þe we herað . and heora gelican .  
 forsawon þisne middan-eard . þeah þe he myrge wære  
 þa ða hi on life wæron . forþan þe hi gewilnodon þæs ecan .<sup>262</sup>

<sup>259</sup> J. Marenbon. *Medieval Philosophy: An Historical and Philosophical Introduction*, 32.

<sup>260</sup> Michael Lapidge. *The Anglo-Saxon Library* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 252.

<sup>261</sup> *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat Vol. I, 52 (lines 30-1).

<sup>262</sup> *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat Vol. II, 166-8 (lines 153-9).

[because this earth flees away fast, and our days depart just as wayfaring men, and the day gone by never again returns, but every hour drives us unwillingly towards death. The holy ones that we praise, and their equals, renounced this world when they were alive, although it was pleasing, because they longed for the everlasting.]

## CHAPTER 4

### ÆLFRIC AND JUDAISM

The promise of the everlasting became the drawing message of Christianity, attracting many gentiles, slaves, and women to this new faith that proclaimed, “there is neither Jew nor Greek: there is neither bond nor free: there is neither male nor female.”<sup>263</sup> It promised a better life after death and the Way to attain it. The day after the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, Jesus speaks to the same crowd of spiritual nourishment, “I am the bread of life. Your fathers did eat manna in the desert: and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven: that if any man eat from it, he may not die.”<sup>264</sup> These words were blasphemous to the Jews, and, unable to comprehend or accept these exceedingly disturbing statements, many of his disciples left and “walked no more with him. Then Jesus said to the twelve: Will you also go away? And Simon Peter answered him: Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.”<sup>265</sup> Jesus of Nazareth, who promised eternal salvation to the world, could only be the son of God for his followers and the ultimate blasphemer to the Jews. This fundamental disagreement, starting in the Orient and spreading West to Anglo-Saxon England, converged on the person of Jesus and on his words, and could find no resolution, neither in the early days of Christianity, nor in Ælfric’s writings.

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<sup>263</sup> Gal. 3:28.

<sup>264</sup> John 6: 48-50.

<sup>265</sup> John 6: 67-9.

The Jews listening to Jesus knew that most of the texts of the Hebrew Bible, or *Tanakh*,<sup>266</sup> closely link the concept of eternal life to the idea of *Sheol*, which, as “the underworld, was a rather unpleasant place, in which the individual lived a half-life of sorts.”<sup>267</sup> “The depths of the nether-world” (Prov. 9: 18)<sup>268</sup> remain forever where “the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten” (Ecc. 9: 5). In the words of Job, after death, he will “go whence I shall not return, even to the land of darkness and of the shadow of death; a land of thick darkness, as darkness itself; a land of the shadow of death, without any order, and where the light is as darkness” (Job 10: 21-2). The Jewish *Sheol*, a place neither of reward nor of punishment, treats all its inhabitants, good or bad, equally. Had not God told Adam after the Fall, “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken; for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return”?<sup>269</sup> Most civilizations of the Ancient Near East conceived of the afterlife in a similar manner. From an area close to Ur, birthplace of Abraham, and in a Semitic language, both *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (Akkadian, ca. 1300 -1000 B.C.) and the *Descent of Ishtar to the Nether World* (Akkadian, ca. 1000 B.C.) use terms analogous to the biblical ones on *Sheol* to describe the Akkadian Underworld:

Looking at me, he leads me to the House of Darkness,  
The abode of Irkalla,  
To the house which none leave who have entered it,  
On the road from which there is no way back,  
To the house wherein the dwellers are bereft of light,

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<sup>266</sup> The Tanakh includes three subdivisions: the *Torah* (the Five Books of Moses), the *Nevi'im* (the “Prophets”) and the *Ketuvim* (the “Writings”). All seven were translated in Alexandria, from Hebrew into Greek (between ca. 300 B.C and 100 B.C.), and later referred to as the *Septuagint*.

<sup>267</sup> Marc Brettler. “Is There Martyrdom in the Hebrew Bible?” in *Sacrificing the Self: Perspectives on Martyrdom and Religion*, ed. Margaret Cormack (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 11.

<sup>268</sup> From the online version of the Jewish Publication Society's 1917 edition of the *Hebrew Bible in English* at <http://www.mechon-mamre.org/e/et/jps1917.htm>.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid., Gen. 3: 19.



Where dust is their fare and clay their food.  
They are clothed like birds, with wings for garments,  
And see no light, residing in darkness.<sup>270</sup>

In Ancient Israel, “so long as the body exists and the bones at least remain, the soul exists, like a shade, in a condition of extreme weakness, in the subterranean abode of Sheol,”<sup>271</sup> because

The distinction between soul and body is something foreign to the Hebrew mentality, and death, therefore, is not regarded as the separation of these two elements. A live man is a living ‘soul’ (*nephesh*), and a dead man is a dead ‘soul’, a dead ‘nephesh’.

Only later, in the post-exilic Book of Daniel, does the afterlife acquire a more positive dimension:

And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to reproaches and everlasting abhorrence. And they that are wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn the many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.<sup>272</sup>

Finally, for the Sadducees and the Samaritans who “officially recognized as inspired only the first five books of the Bible,”<sup>273</sup> resurrection did not take place.<sup>274</sup>

In this mixed environment, the fact that Jesus speaks “the words of eternal life” and adds, “He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood hath everlasting life: and I will

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<sup>270</sup> “The Epic of Gilgamesh” in *The Ancient Near East: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures* Vol. I, ed. James B. Pritchard (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 58-9.

<sup>271</sup> Roland de Vaux. *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, trans. John McHugh (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 1997), 56.

<sup>272</sup> Dan. 12: 2-3, from the *Hebrew Bible in English*. The Book of Wisdom and First and Second Maccabees present this same aspect. However, although included in the *Vulgate*, these books did not belong to the Hebrew canon.

<sup>273</sup> Henri Daniel-Rops. *Daily Life in Palestine at the Time of Christ*, trans. Patrick O’Brian (London: Phoenix Press, 2002), 337. The Book of Daniel belongs to the third subdivision, the *Ketuvim*.

<sup>274</sup> Geddes MacGregor, in *Images of Afterlife* (New York: Paragon House, 1992), 133, describes the concept of an afterlife in Medieval Judaism as developing with Saadia (AD 892-942). This “father of medieval Jewish thought writes that the life of the world to come “will consist of a specially created luminous substance [perhaps similar to the Beatific Vision] that sustains and delights the righteous while at the same time burning and torturing the wicked.” By the twelfth century, “Jewish thinkers, under the influence of Aristotle, were divided on the possibility of individual afterlife” and Moses Maimonides (AD 1135- 1204), in his *Guide to the Perplexed*, “is unclear on this question, sometimes denying individual immortality, sometimes admitting it.”

raise him up in the last day”<sup>275</sup> would understandably cause many of his Jewish disciples to leave him. This situation worsens when, soon after, the chief priests hear that Jesus brought Lazarus back to life, and blasphemously pretends to assume powers of life and death rightfully belonging to God,

from that day therefore they devised to put him to death. Wherefore Jesus walked no more openly among the Jews: but he went into a country near the desert, unto a city that is called Ephrem. And there he abode with his disciples... And the chief priests and Pharisees had given a commandment that if any man knew where he was, he should tell, that they might apprehend him.<sup>276</sup>

Judas becomes the one who tells, and, as a result, in the terse words of *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* for the year 33: “Here Christ was hanged, 5 thousand 200 and 26 years from the beginning of the world.”<sup>277</sup> Bede, for the corresponding year 3984<sup>278</sup> in *The Greater Chronicle*, writes, “In the eighteenth year of Tiberius the Lord redeemed the world by his passion.”<sup>279</sup> Neither one of these medieval sources expresses the passions stirred up among the Jews and among the growing number of Christians at the time of Jesus’ death. On the other hand, the *Acts of the Apostles* and the Epistles of Paul, well known to Anglo-Saxon England, document at length the violent discord of this early period. Then, both groups exchanged epithets of anger and shock; they called each other blasphemers and heretics, or deicides and traitors.<sup>280</sup> Dissension between Jews and Christians soon

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<sup>275</sup> John 6: 55.

<sup>276</sup> John 11: 53-6.

<sup>277</sup> *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, ed. M. Swanton, 7.

<sup>278</sup> Bede takes the birth of Adam as the starting-point of the First Age, and calculates the birth of Christ as taking place 3,952 years later. Thus starts the Sixth Age, our own, and, according to Bede, the end of that age “is open only to God.” *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, xxviii-xxix.

<sup>279</sup> *The Greater Chronicle*, eds. Judith McClure and Roger Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 308.

<sup>280</sup> At the end of AD 34, the church had its first martyr, Stephen the deacon, and the high priest and the council interrupted his speech at trial and, “casting him forth without the city, they stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man, whose name was Saul” (Acts 7: 57). Later on, this Saul, “as yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked of him letters to Damascus, to the synagogues: that if he found any men and women

spread to Rome and reached a climax when, in AD 49, and in the words of a Roman, “because the Jews at Rome caused continuous disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he [the Emperor Claudius] expelled them from the city.”<sup>281</sup> To the Romans, this action, erroneously or conveniently, quelled what they considered an internecine quarrel between Judaism and its latest heretical offshoot; but the Jews were convinced that the Christians had directly caused their expulsion. The same event, available to Ælfric in *Orosius*, is attributed to famine, “On þæm nigeþan geara his rices wearð micel hunger on Rome, [and Claudius] het ut adrifan ealle þa Iudan þe þærbinnan wæron” (In the ninth year of his reign, there was such a great famine in Rome, that Claudius drove out all the Jews that lived there).<sup>282</sup> This one event, interpreted three different ways, is representative of the situation soon after the death of Jesus. Then, as during his lifetime,

[t]he challenge which Christianity presented to the Judaism of its day was clear: it believed not just in the teaching of a teacher who had been rejected, but in the Messiahship of one who was branded as an impostor and the divinity of one condemned for blasphemy. When challenged to retract their judgment and accept as true his claims, the Jewish leaders could do no other than exercise to the fullest extent their authority.<sup>283</sup>

This authority, exercised by the Jewish leaders, “resulted in the hardening of each party’s attitude... But continual discipline slides into persecution, and persecution of one group

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of this way, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem” (Acts 9: 1-2). On the road to Damascus (ca. AD 36), Saul, the Jew, the Pharisee, and a citizen of Rome by birth, changed sides and converted.

<sup>281</sup> Suetonius. *The Twelve Caesars*, trans. Robert Graves (London: Penguin Books, 1989), 202. A mention of this event also appears in Acts 18:2, in reference to Paul: “And finding a certain Jew, named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with Priscilla his wife (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome), he came to them.”

<sup>282</sup> *The Old English Orosius*, ed. Janet Batley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 137. In his Old English Preface to the First Series of *Catholic Homilies*, Ælfric expresses knowledge of books translated into Old English by Ælfred: “ðam bocum ðe Ælfred cyning snoterlice awende of Ledene on Englisc þa synd to hæbbenne” (those books which King Ælfred wisely translated from Latin into English, which are to be had), in Benjamin Thorpe’s *The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church: the first part containing The Sermones Catholici or Homilies of Ælfred* (London: The Ælfric Society, 1844), 2. For a long time, *Orosius* was considered one of these books and only in the 1950s was this opinion challenged.

<sup>283</sup> Peter Richardson. *Israel in the Apostolic Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 45-6.

by another demands separation.”<sup>284</sup> Equating Jesus’ situation with that of prophets in the Old Testament, Peter Richardson develops a plausible explanation of what caused the rift between Judaism and Christianity:

Amos, Ezekiel, John the Baptist, and Jesus: each faces his nation with a boundary-line problem. Each comes in the first instance with a creative message from God for his own people, setting apart those who respond to the challenge as a slightly different group – a sect. Each creates a new boundary-line or shifts the old one. The degree to which the developing group becomes self-contained affects the speed with which the boundary-line is transformed into a wall of separation... the wall may be erected from the other side too, of course, by the explicit rejection of everything new.<sup>285</sup>

In such a construct, the sharing of boundaries identifies “similar yet different groups” and any confrontation between these “poses the greatest problems and creates the most violent upheavals.”<sup>286</sup> Consequently, the message of Jesus the Jew must inevitably give rise to more bitterness and violence than the same message from Jesus the non-Jew, just as the rejection of this message by the Jews would also cause more Christian resentment than if Gentiles reject it.

The bitterness of this continuing conflict soon included territorial claims by both faiths on Palestine and particularly on Jerusalem. The Jews believed that the land given to Abraham, and where their temple had stood, should be theirs. The Christians equally laid claim to the Holy Places, where Jesus and his disciples had lived. This territorial confrontation becomes the underlying issue in all medieval accounts involving the quest for the True Cross and other relics. Using the importance of relics in the Middle Ages and

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<sup>284</sup> Ibid., 46-47.

<sup>285</sup> P. Richardson. *Israel in the Apostolic Church*, 3- 4.

<sup>286</sup> According to Richardson, the more such groups have in common, the more any disagreement creates “tension that ends in rupture... Such events are often marked by great bitterness and opposition.”

applying “recent strands of postcolonial criticism”<sup>287</sup> to “examine some of the more popular narratives of relic discoveries in the fifth and sixth centuries from the area of Jerusalem,” some historians have sought to demonstrate “the ways in which Christian empire could be built on the remains of the Jew.” Andrew Jacobs states that, in these narratives,

the remains of the Jerusalem Jew in Christian thought and imperial practice were not merely univocal signs of the “other,” always conquered and eliminated, lifeless trophies mounted on the wall. The remains of the Jew functioned rather as an open signifier of a new Christian identity emanating (in part) from the holy city of Jerusalem, a Christian identity that could not exist without the constant remastery and uneasy incorporation of a sacred and potent Jewish remnant.

In any hierarchy of relics, “[F]rom late antiquity through the Middle Ages, the most famous and paradigmatic holy land relic was the wood of the true Cross.” Jacobs notes the proliferation of stories describing Helena, mother of Constantine, discovering the Cross in spite of the resistance of the Jews, by bringing “her full power and piety to bear on a subject population in Jerusalem.”<sup>288</sup> All these tales of “relic discovery” include the character “of the local Jew in order to inscribe authenticity and religious dominion into imperial Christian identity.”<sup>289</sup> Of course, such arguments of “religious dominion” do not generally take into account the fact that Constantine, or his mother, or indeed the entire imperial army, do not represent Christianity. This event might just as well point toward a conquering emperor who needed to “sanctify” his new capital with relics, since Rome already had Peter and Paul, and catacombs lined with the relics of martyrs. One should

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<sup>287</sup> Andrew S. Jacobs. “The Remains of the Jew: Imperial Christian Identity in the Late Ancient Holy Land.” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 33.1 (2003): 25-26.

<sup>288</sup> Jacobs. “The Remains of the Jew: Imperial Christian Identity in the Late Ancient Holy Land,” 27.

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.*, 29. The Christian relics leaving Jerusalem and taken to Constantinople by a conquering force remind some of the Parthenon marbles traveling from Athens to the British Museum, or of the ubiquitous Egyptian obelisks, resulting from what is sometimes called “cultural vandalism” or “elginism.” The term now applies to any cultural object taken from a poorer nation to a richer nation, particularly during times of war or occupation.

also note that for the medieval writers of such accounts, Christianity, born in Judaea, was never foreign or “other” to Roman Palestine. Finally, cultural vandalism usually implies taking away from a culture not one’s own; in this case, any Anglo-Saxon writer would have contended that Christians had rights to the wood of the Cross.

In his *Lives of Saints*, Ælfric frequently encourages a devotion to relics and includes a narrative for September 14 and the feast of “The Exaltation of the Cross,” in which he also briefly mentions “The Discovery of the Cross” celebrated on May 3, and previously described at length in Cynewulf’s Old English *Elene*. In “The Exaltation,” the conflict is mainly with the Persians, whereas the two other texts relate a confrontation with the Jews. The former takes place in AD 629 and the discovery of the True Cross dates from AD 326, when Helena

- 8        to-dælde þa rode swa swa Drihten hire gewissode.  
         and forlæt þa ænne dæl on þære ylcan byrig .  
         þe crist on þrowode . swa swa us cyþað gewritu .  
         mid selfre bewunden . and wende ham siððan  
12        mid þam oþrum dæle þæs deorwurþan treowes.  
         to hire leofan sunu his geleafan to getrymmenne .<sup>290</sup>

[divided the rood just as the Lord instructed and left then one part in the very town where Christ suffered, as the Scriptures tell, encircled with silver, and she went home afterwards with the other part of the precious tree, to her beloved son, to strengthen his faith.]

Centuries later, when the Zoroastrian Persians sacked Jerusalem in AD 614, they massacred the population and took with them that half of the Cross. Only in AD 622 does the Eastern Roman Emperor Heraclius leave Constantinople to recover the Cross from the Persian monarch, Khosrow II, and reconquer Jerusalem. In AD 630, Heraclius personally returns the Cross to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. As

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<sup>290</sup> Ælfric’s *Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat, Vol. II, 144 (lines 8-13).  
Helena might have had good reason to wish to strengthen her son’s faith: Constantine only accepted baptism in AD 337, on his deathbed.

expected, Ælfric uses this event as an opportunity to teach his audience that a pious Christian ruler can surely fight anyone, Jew or pagan, for the sake of a relic of the Holy Rood. Starting on line 46, he introduces Heraclius as “cristen and gelyfed” (Christian and pious) and “unearh on gefeohtum”<sup>291</sup> (brave in battle). The confrontation between him and Khosrow’s son,

52      gewearð him bam . þæt hi bealdlice twegen  
             to anwige eodon on þære éa brycge .  
             and se ðe sige gewunne weolde þæs rices  
             butan þæra manna lyre þe him mid comon .<sup>292</sup>

[was settled by both, that the two boldly went for single combat on the bridge at the river, and he who obtained victory would rule the kingdom, without the loss of the men who came with them.]

This comment by Ælfric brings to mind the battle of Maldon in AD 991, with another bridge over water. There, however, the Anglo-Saxon leader Byrthnoth chooses not to fight in single combat, thereby causing the death of most of his men. No doubt, this aside on the war tactics of a great emperor has a purpose, just as the very meaningful sign of the Jerusalem gate turning into a solid wall when the Emperor, “on kynelicum horse”<sup>293</sup> (on a royal horse), tries to enter the town as a victorious conqueror returning the half-Rood. The angel reminds Heraclius that through this same gate, Jesus entered “to his agenre þrowunge”<sup>294</sup> (to His own passion), but “on assan hricge he rád eadmodlice / mannum to bysne . þæt hi modignysse onscunion”<sup>295</sup> (on the back of an ass he humbly rode, an example to men, that they reject pride). Immediately, and as a Christian ruler should,

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<sup>291</sup> *Ælfric’s Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat, Vol. II, 146 (lines 46-7).

<sup>292</sup> *Ibid.*, (lines 52-5).

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid.*, (line 86).

<sup>294</sup> *Ibid.*, (line 95).

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid.*, (lines 98-9).

Hwæt ða se casere cafllice lithe  
 þancigende gode þære wissunge .  
 and dyde of his purpuran . and his pelleman gyrlan .  
 104 eode þa mid nacodum fotum . and genam þa rode  
 mid agotenum tearum god wurpigende .<sup>296</sup>

[Lo, then the emperor promptly dismounted, thanking God for the guidance,  
 and took off his purple garment and his purple cloak. He then went with bare feet  
 and carried the rood, praising God with the shedding of tears.]

Ælfric continues to define Heraclius as a kingly role model when he explains in detail the  
 results of his victory over the Persians. Heraclius offers Khosrow (“Cosdrue” in the text)  
 a chance to accept baptism, live and remain ruler of his kingdom, or die beheaded.

Cosdrue chooses beheading. After baptizing the king’s ten-year-old son and giving him  
 the kingdom, Heraclius returns to Jerusalem with the regained half-Rood and, admittedly,  
 all of Cosdrue’s gold and gems, but he gives those to the Church — certainly a wise  
 decision for a Christian emperor to make.

Slightly over half Ælfric’s narrative for this feast day describes the events; the  
 remaining 219 lines dwell on the significance of the Rood and include indirect comments  
 on the Jews. Acknowledging that the Cross “is wide todæled / mid gelomlicum ofcyrfum  
 to lande gehwilcum”<sup>297</sup> (is widely dispersed, with numerous sections to many lands),  
 Ælfric insists that “seo gastlice getacnung is mid gode æfre / a unbrosnigendlic þeah þe  
 se beam beo to-coruen”<sup>298</sup> (the spiritual manifestation is perpetually with God, forever  
 incorruptible though the cross be cut to pieces). A Christian must make the sign of the  
 Cross, “ure guðfana wiþ þone gram-lican deofol”<sup>299</sup> (our war-banner against the fierce  
 devil), properly: “Mid þrym fingrum man sceall senian and bletsian / for þære halgan

<sup>296</sup> *Ælfric’s Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat, Vol. II, 150 (lines 101-5).

<sup>297</sup> *Ælfric’s Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat, Vol. II, p. 152 (lines 143-4).

<sup>298</sup> *Ibid.* (lines 145-6).

<sup>299</sup> *Ibid.*, (line 148).



þrynnysse þe is þrim-wealdend god”<sup>300</sup> (With three fingers, man must cross and bless himself for the holy trinity, who is a power-wielding God).<sup>301</sup> The rest of the entry develops two of Ælfric’s main recurring themes: man’s free will and the undeniable opportunity granted to all, including Jews, until the time of death, to repent and convert.<sup>302</sup>

172     Ælc man þe yfel deþ mid yfelum willan .  
           is scyldig wið god . þeah þe hit sumum fremige .  
           and ælc man þe god deð mid godum willan  
           hæfð his mede æt gode . þeah þe hit hearmige sumum .  
           forþan þe se rihtwisa dema deð ælcum þa mede .  
           be þam þe he sylf wolde . and his willa him dihte .<sup>303</sup>

[Every man who does evil with an evil purpose is guilty towards God, even if it benefits some; and every man who does good with a good purpose has his reward from God, even if it harms some, because the righteous judge then gives each one compensation as he willed it himself and his will directed him.]

Ælfric believes that human beings have governance over their actions and therefore, must expect to face judgment at the end of their lives. He also firmly believes that God, a merciful judge, will forgive any sinner who repents, even one who betrays Him or plots against Him:

176     Nu synd þa iudeiscan . and se sceamlease læwa  
           cristes deaðes scyldige . þe syrwdon be him .  
           þeah þe hit us become to ecere alysednysse .  
           and heora nan ne becymð to cristes rice næfre .  
 180     butan þam þe hit gebetton . and ge-bugan to criste .  
           Swa milde is se hælende þæt he miltsian wolde  
           his agenum slagum gif hi gecyrran woldon .  
           and biddan his miltsunge . swa swa heora mænig dyde .<sup>304</sup>

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<sup>300</sup> Ibid., 154 (lines 155-6).

<sup>301</sup> Most Christians in the East still use three fingers to cross themselves, unlike Christians in the Roman rite.

<sup>302</sup> To “convert” goes beyond the simple concept of changing faiths, in this instance, from non-Christian to Christian. It can also indicate a “turning about” of a Christian’s life, from sin to virtue, from wickedness to good. The possibility and the necessity of change are constant reminders made by Ælfric.

<sup>303</sup> *Ælfric’s Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat, Vol. II, 154 (lines 170-5).

<sup>304</sup> Ibid., 154-6 (lines 176-183).

[Now are the Jews, and the shameless traitor [Judas], guilty of Christ's death, they who plotted against him, even if it became for us our eternal redemption. And none of them will ever enter the kingdom of Christ, unless he atones first and submits to Christ. So kind is the Savior that he would show mercy to his own slayers if they converted and prayed for his mercy, just as many of them did.]

Not singling out the Jews in this call to repentance, Ælfric then gives the ultimate example of Longinus, “se hundredes ealdor . þe hine hetelice stang / on his halgan sidan . and siððan him beah to”<sup>305</sup> (the centurion who violently pierced his holy side, and thereupon submitted to him). By mentioning the conversions of Longinus and of the heathen judge, Octavius, who condemned him to death, Ælfric emphasizes the mercy of God in granting His grace to every sinner willing to repent. Throughout his writings, Ælfric repeatedly insists on the absolute need for all, including Jews, to repent and convert, and always reminds his audience that they have this choice to make, because they were created with free will.

While reaching different conclusions, both Lynne Grundy's *Books and Grace: Ælfric's Theology*<sup>306</sup> and Carmen Acevedo Butcher's *God of Mercy: Ælfric's Sermons and Theology*<sup>307</sup> examine this emphasis on free will found in Ælfric's sermons, also a major trait of his *Lives of Saints*.<sup>308</sup> In her book, Lynne Grundy describes Ælfric's theology as faithful to the teachings of the Church and to the writings of St. Augustine of Hippo, affirming original sin and explaining it as a direct consequence of man's free will and not as a sign of predestination. Adam fell because he “was endowed with the freedom to choose. God did not oblige him to obey, nor perhaps more importantly, to disobey.”<sup>309</sup>

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<sup>305</sup> Ibid. 156 (lines 184-5).

<sup>306</sup> Lynne Grundy. *Books and Grace: Ælfric's Theology*. King's College London Medieval Studies VI (Exeter: Short Run Press, 1991).

<sup>307</sup> Carmen Acevedo Butcher. *God of Mercy: Ælfric's Sermons and Theology* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2006).

<sup>308</sup> Both Grundy and Butcher concentrate their study on Ælfric's sermons.

<sup>309</sup> L. Grundy. *Books and Grace*, 91.

Although the devil undoubtedly provides the temptation, in fact, “Ælfric is clear that whatever the influence of the devil, the responsibility for the turning away from obedience rests with free will.”<sup>310</sup> According to Grundy, once fallen, or having turned away from God, man can no longer “be rewarded with the crowns of sinlessness and immortality.”<sup>311</sup> As a consequence of original sin, the will becomes “enslaved to sin, no longer at liberty to choose the right. To recover this liberty, it needs the grace of God.”<sup>312</sup> Grace means, “in biblical language, the condescension or benevolence (Greek *charis*) shown by God toward the human race; it is also the unmerited gift proceeding from this benevolent disposition.”<sup>313</sup> Grundy contends that Ælfric believes that “God in his mercy gives grace to some, but in his justice leaves the rest of mankind to suffer the punishment due to all.”<sup>314</sup> As a result, Grundy perceives that, noticeable in Ælfric’s writings, a

predestination to punishment... applies uniquely to the Jews: they, of all people, have most conclusively condemned themselves. Of their own volition and determination, they have excluded themselves from the love of God. Their sin was in their collusion with the devil in engineering the death of Jesus... in their proud insistence that the sin was one they wanted to bear for themselves (and even transfer to their children), the Jews were rejecting the forgiveness available from God through the Spirit. They therefore placed themselves in the category of those who could not be saved, because they refused to receive the salvation offered to them.<sup>315</sup>

We noted, however, in an earlier passage from “The Exaltation of the Holy Cross” how Ælfric does insist on the mercy of God for all sinners, including His slayers: “Swa milde is se hælende þæt he miltsian wolde / his agenum slagum gif hi gecyrran woldon . / and biddan his miltsunge . swa swa heora mænig dyde”<sup>316</sup> (So kind is the Savior that he

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<sup>310</sup> L. Grundy. *Books and Grace*, 93.

<sup>311</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>312</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>313</sup> John A. Hardon. *Modern Catholic Dictionary* (Bardstown, KY: Eternal Life, 1999), 236.

<sup>314</sup> L. Grundy. *Books and Grace*, 88.

<sup>315</sup> L. Grundy. *Books and Grace*, 271.

<sup>316</sup> *Ælfric’s Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat, Vol. II, 154-6 (lines 181-3).

would show mercy to his own slayers if they converted and prayed for his mercy, just as many of them did). On the other hand, in *God of Mercy: Ælfric's Sermons and Theology*, Carmen Acevedo Butcher finds that “the core of Ælfric’s theology is praising God’s generous goodness.”<sup>317</sup> In return, “each person’s responsibility is simply to respond to God’s grace and ‘gentle forgiveness’ made especially evident when God the Father sent his Son to earth, to redeem humanity.”<sup>318</sup> Whether some Jews respond to God’s grace and believe in Christ after his raising of Lazarus, or whether they refuse “to eat or drink with Gentiles,” Carmen Butcher still finds that “Ælfric speaks favorably of Jews.”<sup>319</sup> However, “whenever Ælfric is speaking of Jews in conjunction with the persecution and death of Christ, he uses epithets like ‘unblest,’ ‘wicked,’ ‘evil,’ ‘hardhearted,’ ‘presumptuous,’ ‘impious,’ even ‘bloodthirsty.’” Carmen Butcher notes that these “harsh words” do not target all Jews, but only the “unbelieving,” which leads her to conclude,

Ælfric was not anti-Semitic. What he condemns is not the Jewish nation or Jewish ethnicity but the rejection by some Jews of Christ. To him, the Christ-rejecting Jews represent all people who refuse to accept and follow the Son of God.

Indeed, Ælfric devotes much more of his *Lives of Saints* discussing paganism, heresy in general, and Satan, than speaking about Judaism. One of these few instances, at the beginning of “The Exaltation of the Cross,” concentrates his harshest accusation against the Jews: “Ða iudeiscan hi behyddon mid hetelicum geðance . / noldon þæt se maðm wurde mannum to frofre”<sup>320</sup> (The Jewish people hid it [the cross] with malignant intention; they did not want this treasure to become a consolation to men). In “Abdon

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<sup>317</sup> C. A. Butcher. *God of Mercy*, 16.

<sup>318</sup> Ibid, 19.

<sup>319</sup> Ibid, 39-40.

<sup>320</sup> *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat, Vol. II, 144 (lines 4-5).

and Sennes”<sup>321</sup> and in “The Forty Soldiers,”<sup>322</sup> Ælfric accuses the Jews of plotting to ensnare and kill Jesus. At the end of “St. Edmund, King and Martyr,”<sup>323</sup> he compares England and its many saints working miracles to the lack of “wonders” in Judaism, because they “ne gelyfað on þone lifigendan crist” (do not believe in the living Christ), and therefore “hí synd awyrgeðe swa swa hí wiscton him sylfum” (they are cursed, just as they wished upon themselves). In an extensive paraphrase of both books of *Maccabees*, Ælfric, as noted in Chapter 2, has mainly positive comments on the people of Israel. Nevertheless, some critics still argue whether to consider Ælfric anti-Semitic or not, because of this contradiction or ambivalence towards the Jews, which he expresses by using harsh words for those responsible for the death of Jesus, and by showing a definite respect for those heroes of the Old Testament who remained faithful.

In “Anti-Judaism in Ælfric’s *Lives of Saints*”<sup>324</sup> and *The Footsteps of Israel*,<sup>325</sup> Andrew Scheil opts for the term “anti-Judaic” as suitable for the early Middle Ages, “characterized by ‘logical’ (albeit nonrational) conclusions about the Jews that are derived from empirical thinking,”<sup>326</sup> rather than the term “anti-Semitic” more often used for “the centuries following 1100, characterized by more fantastical, irrational suppositions.” After a close analysis of the sermon “De populo Israhel”<sup>327</sup> and the saints’

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<sup>321</sup> Ælfric’s *Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat, Vol. II, 60 (lines 99-100).

<sup>322</sup> Ælfric’s *Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat, Vol. I, 256 (lines 317-19).

<sup>323</sup> Ælfric’s *Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat, Vol. II, 334 (lines 269-72).

<sup>324</sup> A. P. Scheil. “Anti-Judaism in Ælfric’s *Lives of Saints*.” *Anglo-Saxon England* 28, ed. M. Lapidge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

<sup>325</sup> A. P. Scheil. *The Footsteps of Israel: Understanding Jews in Anglo-Saxon England* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2004). The title of this book comes from Bede speaking of Christianity’s relationship with Judaism: “And we have been admitted among the descendents of the Israelites, since, although according to the flesh we have our origins from other nations, nevertheless by the faith of truth and by purity of the body and mind, we follow in the footsteps of Israel” (quoted on page 2).

<sup>326</sup> A. P. Scheil. *The Footsteps of Israel*, 8.

<sup>327</sup> *Homilies of Ælfric: A Supplementary Collection*, ed. J. C. Pope, Vol. II (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 641-666. Written after the *Lives of Saints*, the homily “De populo Israhel” comments on

life of the “Maccabees,” Scheil finds that “the various traditions of anti-Judaic discourse underlie and inform Ælfric’s thinking on the subject.”<sup>328</sup> One of these traditions stems indeed from the “basic dilemma” of explaining to his audience “that the Jews are at once the noble *populus Israhel* of the Old Testament and also the mad killers of Christ found in the New Testament.” Scheil concludes, “Jews trouble Ælfric,” and his “ambivalence, his uneasiness over the correct interpretation of Jews, always hovers about these texts.” This would contradict Carmen Butcher’s observations that Ælfric only uses harsh words “whenever Ælfric is speaking of Jews in conjunction with the persecution and death of Christ,”<sup>329</sup> and has no trouble speaking favorably of them whenever they show faithfulness to God. In fact, even the Old Testament Israelites in exile in the desert earn Ælfric’s harsh words when they defy God and Moses and return to idol-worship. The second anti-Judaic tradition Scheil finds in Ælfric is the perceived difference between the “spiritual” Christians and the “carnal” Jews, as expressed in the following passage:

300      Hi wæron flæsclice menn, and underfencgon heora wite  
             on ðyssere worulde, æfter Moyses æ;  
             we syndon gastlice menn under Godes gife nu,  
             and ure sawul sceal, gif we forseoð God,  
             þæt wite underfón on þære toweardan worulde,  
             buton we swa gesælige beon þæt we hit sylfe gebeton  
             ær ure geendunge wið ðone ælmihtigan God<sup>330</sup>

[They were carnal men, and received their punishment in this world, following Moses’ law. We are spiritual men, now under the shelter of God’s grace; and our soul, if we reject God, shall receive the punishment in the coming world, unless we are so fortunate as to make amends ourselves before our death, with the almighty God.]

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“seven occasions when the people murmured or actively rebelled against God and Moses and incurred God’s wrath” (638).

<sup>328</sup> Ibid. 286.

<sup>329</sup> C. A. Butcher. *God of Mercy*, 39-40.

<sup>330</sup> *Homilies of Ælfric: A Supplementary Collection*, 655 (lines 297-303).

The fact that, for a long time, Judaism had no concept of an afterlife other than *Sheol* might explain this difference perceived by early Christian writers between “carnal” men whose reward, by necessity, occurs in this world, and “spiritual” men who look to the next life for their salvation. Scheil detects a third anti-Judaic tradition in Ælfric’s description of the “intractable attitude of God’s chosen people in the desert” or the “rebelliousness of Israel,” with the purpose of “drawing binary oppositions to firm up the difference between Jew and Christian.”<sup>331</sup> However, going back to the original Hebrew version of the account of the golden calf, God Himself speaks harshly to his own people:

And the LORD spoke unto Moses: 'Go, get thee down; for thy people, that thou broughtest up out of the land of Egypt, have dealt corruptly; they have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them; they have made them a molten calf, and have worshipped it, and have sacrificed unto it, and said: This is thy god, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.' And the LORD said unto Moses: 'I have seen this people, and, behold, it is a stiffnecked people.'<sup>332</sup>

The punishment of an angry God comes immediately, when Moses orders the sons of Levi to “slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbour.” And the sons of Levi did according to the word of Moses; and there fell of the people that day about three thousand men.”<sup>333</sup>

Besides their intractability, the spiritual blindness of the Jews ranks highly among the “common characteristics of medieval anti-Judaism,”<sup>334</sup> according to Scheil. He suggests that the “paradigm for the Christian understanding of Jews in the early Middle Ages was set by Augustine” who allegedly claimed that “the Jews were once God’s chosen people, but, due to their spiritual blindness, they killed Christ and were thus

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<sup>331</sup> Scheil. “Anti-Judaism in Ælfric’s *Lives of Saints*,” 66.

<sup>332</sup> *Hebrew Bible in English*. Exodus 32:7-9.

<sup>333</sup> Exodus 32: 26-28.

<sup>334</sup> Scheil. “Anti-Judaism in Ælfric’s *Lives of Saints*,” 67.

forever cast out from God's grace." In fact, although Augustine does refer to the unbelief and obstinacy of the Jews, which he could find illustrated in the Old Testament, he does not consider them "forever cast out from God's grace" but rather, through the return of the prophet Elijah, destined to conversion before the Last Judgment.<sup>335</sup> As for spiritual blindness, numerous verses of the Hebrew Bible, generally directed by and towards the Jewish people, refer to seeing and emphasize their own blindness.<sup>336</sup> In the New Testament, even more statements similarly address anyone who refuses to see. Moreover, the topos of spiritual blindness does occur quite frequently in Greco-Roman literature.<sup>337</sup> However opportune the association, it does not appear that Christian writers singled out the Jews to accuse them of spiritual blindness. Finally, what does appear clear is that, in the very few passages on Judaism and Jews of the *Lives*, Ælfric expresses traditional views; however, these are provided to him by the Old Testament, rather than attributable to ignorance and personal prejudice.

Scheil's fundamental observation, since Jews in any significant number only came to England after the Norman Conquest in 1066, remains that

the understanding of Jews and Judaism in Anglo-Saxon England is therefore solely a textual phenomenon, a matter of stereotypes embedded in longstanding Christian cultural traditions.<sup>338</sup>

Elsewhere, he also writes,

Absent from Anglo-Saxon England in any real physical sense, Jews were nevertheless present as imaginative, textual constructs, manifest only in the distorted shadow cast by the Christian tradition.<sup>339</sup>

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<sup>335</sup> Augustine. *City of God*, 957.

<sup>336</sup> In the *Hebrew Bible*, see Isaiah 26:11; 29:10; 29:18; 42:7; 44:18; Jeremiah 5:21; Psalms 13:4; 82:5; 119:18.

<sup>337</sup> For an analysis of the Ancient World's attitudes towards blindness, see Felix Just, S.J., "From Tobit to Bartimaeus, From Qumran to Siloam: The Social Role of Blind People and Attitudes toward the Blind in New Testament Times" (PhD diss., Yale University, 1997).

<sup>338</sup> Scheil. "Anti-Judaism in Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*," 65.

<sup>339</sup> Scheil. *The Footsteps of Israel*, 3.



The value of first-hand knowledge notwithstanding, today's medievalists, suffering from a greater unavailability of medieval monks in our society, must nevertheless pursue scholarship on Anglo-Saxon monasticism, inevitably based on "solely a textual phenomenon." The primordial text available to Anglo-Saxon writers, the *Vulgate*, the version of the Old Testament Jerome translated directly from the Hebrew, provided those writers with a direct link to a holy text written by Jews and for Jews.<sup>340</sup> Scholars cannot disregard such a fundamental source of information, and should realize that it was not the only one.

What Ælfric and other Anglo-Saxon writers knew about Judaism forms the main argument of Damian Fleming's "*The Most Exalted Language': Anglo-Saxon Perceptions of Hebrew*," an examination of the "knowledge and awareness of the Hebrew language in the Anglo-Saxon period."<sup>341</sup> This study concludes that, despite "the suggestion made in recent scholarship that anti-Jewish themes can be detected in Old English literature," the same literary evidence shows that the Anglo-Saxons exhibited "profound respect [...] for the language and culture of the ancient Jewish people."<sup>342</sup> Fleming demonstrates Bede's knowledge of Hebrew based on the writings of Jerome, the evident interest in the Hebrew language as illustrated by the presence of Hebrew alphabets in Anglo-Saxon manuscripts, and the use of loan translations and Hebraic syntax in homilies and vernacular literature. A substantial section of this dissertation

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<sup>340</sup> Between AD 390 and 405, Jerome, convinced that both the Greek *Septuagint* and the *Old Latin* version of the Old Testament suffered from generations of scribal corruptions, produced a direct Latin translation from the Hebrew. This translation met with much resistance (most famously by Augustine of Hippo) and later became part of the *Vulgate*, the version of the Bible most widely disseminated during the Middle Ages.

<sup>341</sup> Fleming, Damian Joseph. "*The Most Exalted Language': Anglo-Saxon Perceptions of Hebrew*." (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2006).

<sup>342</sup> Ibid. Quoted from the *Abstract*.

describes for the first time Ælfric's interest in Hebrew.<sup>343</sup> Drawing attention to his *Grammar*, *Glossary*, and *Colloquy* as indicative of Ælfric's interest in languages and translation, Fleming also notes the frequent inclusion of linguistic information in several of Ælfric's *Catholic Homilies* and in the *Lives of Saints*. Ælfric writes, "Alleluia is ebreisc word . þæt is on leden Laudate dominum . and nan gereord nis swa healic swa ebreisc"<sup>344</sup> (Alleluia is a Hebrew word that is in Latin, *Laudate Dominum*, and no language is as exalted as Hebrew). In the life of *St. Mark, Evangelist*, Ælfric also reminds his Anglo-Saxon audience that Matthew wrote the first gospel in Hebrew:

Se forma godspellere is, þe gode gecoren wæs, Matheus gehaten, þone se hælend geceas of woruldlicum tollere to gastlicum godspellere, and he wæs an ðæra twelfa Godes ðegna, þe awrat on Ebreisc ærest þa godspel, þe on ðæra forman bec beoð geendebyrde. He awrat hi on Ebreisc þam Ebreiscum mannum ðe on Iudea lande gelyfdon on Criste.<sup>345</sup>

[The first evangelist who was chosen by God is named Matthew, whom the savior chose from worldly tax collector to spiritual evangelist. And he was one of God's disciples, who wrote in Hebrew the first gospel, which is placed as the first of those. He wrote it in Hebrew for the Hebrew people in Judea who believed in Christ.]

Such statements reflect, on the part of Ælfric, a respect for the Hebrew language and knowledge of the Scriptures that do indicate an important "textual" acquaintance with Jews and Judaism. Nevertheless, this acquaintance does not appear to result in the pervasive anti-Semitic or anti-Judaic stereotypes recent scholarly theories claim to find in Ælfric's writings.

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<sup>343</sup> As stated by the author on page 161: "While Bede's interest in Hebrew has been noted by scholars in the past, to my knowledge the similar interest displayed by Ælfric has never been noted before."

<sup>344</sup> From Godden, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies II*, 5.50-51.270-276, as cited and translated by Fleming on page 183.

<sup>345</sup> From Skeat, *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, I: 328, as cited and translated by Fleming on page 180.

A Benedictine monk who prayed the entire Psalter every week of his life,<sup>346</sup> Ælfric reveals his knowledge of the Old Testament, in particular in his biblical translations from Latin to Old English. Sometime between AD 992 and 1002, while he was working on the *Lives of Saints* and in answer to a request by Æthelweard, his friend and patron, Ælfric translated the first half of *Genesis*,<sup>347</sup> the second half of *Numbers*, and composed condensed versions of *Joshua*, *Judges*, *Kings*, *Esther*, *Judith*, and *Maccabees*.<sup>348</sup> The *Preface to Genesis* expresses the very reluctance with which Ælfric undertakes the assignment. This unease does not come from his inability to do the task, but from his fear that the laity might misunderstand the “nacedan gerecednisse”<sup>349</sup> (naked narrative) of a translation without the traditional commentary, and learn about, or even adopt, Old Testament practices no longer acceptable after the coming of Christ. These practices extend from strict dietary laws to polygamy<sup>350</sup> and even to incest.<sup>351</sup> To overcome his reluctance, Ælfric chooses to take certain freedoms with the text when he “makes significant omissions and occasionally adds interpretative comments.”<sup>352</sup> In his translation of the *Books of Maccabees*, Ælfric

condemns (or, at least, radically delimits) the use of violence even as he describes glorious military exploits. Likewise, in his translation of the Book of Esther,

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<sup>346</sup> In his *Rule*, Benedict instructs his community that “the whole Psalter of a hundred and fifty psalms be recited every week, and always begun afresh at the Night Office on Sunday. For those monks show themselves too slothful in the divine service who say in the course of a week less than the entire Psalter, with the usual canticles; since we read that our holy fathers resolutely performed in a single day what I pray we tepid monks may achieve in a whole week.” From Dom Paul Delatte’s *A Commentary on the Holy Rule of St. Benedict*, trans. & edit. Dom Justin McCann (London: Burns Oates, 1950), 182-3.

<sup>347</sup> Æthelweard asked Ælfric for a complete translation of this book, but Ælfric eventually only translated chapters 1-24.22, since someone else translated the rest, as he writes in his “Preface to Genesis” in *The Heptateuch*, ed. Samuel J. Crawford ((Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2004), 76, lines 1-6.

<sup>348</sup> He had previously drawn extensively on “Exodus” and “Job” for his *Catholic Homilies*. For more information on Ælfric’s biblical translations into the vernacular, see *Ælfric’s Prefaces*, ed. Jonathan Wilcox (Durham, 1996), 37- 44.

<sup>349</sup> *The Heptateuch*, 77, line 43.

<sup>350</sup> Most patriarchs and kings of Israel practiced polygamy and concubinage.

<sup>351</sup> Most strikingly described in the seduction of Lot by his two daughters (Gen.19. 32-36).

<sup>352</sup> *Ælfric’s Prefaces*, 44.

Ælfric retains the essential story of Esther's reversal of King Ahasuerus's condemnation of the Jews but tones down considerably the moral of vengeance implicit in the biblical account.

A later letter to his friend, the nobleman Sigeweard,<sup>353</sup> referred to as the *Treatise on the Old and New Testament*, reflects Ælfric's relative adjustment to a form that remains more adaptation and interpretation than translation, "not word for word but sense for sense."<sup>354</sup> Whatever the reason for his reservations and resulting approach to the task of translating the Old Testament, Ælfric's attitude towards Jews and Judaism does not come from ignorance of the subject or from disrespect for the text or the language. In fact, Fleming's study leads him to conclude, "the overall image of Jews found, for example, in Ælfric's writings is decidedly mixed," and "the conflicting images of Jews found in these two most important Anglo-Saxon authors [Bede and Ælfric] resists [sic] easy classification as 'anti-Jewish'."<sup>355</sup>

After suggesting that the understanding of Jews and Judaism in Anglo-Saxon England came solely from texts, Scheil's second reason given to explain the existence of anti-Jewish stereotypes focuses on Christian tradition, which Scheil claims casts a "distorted shadow."<sup>356</sup> In *The Footsteps of Israel*, Scheil also writes,

It has been an axiom of this book that the representation of Jews and Judaism in Anglo-Saxon England tells us nothing about Jews, per se, but instead more about the self-image of Christian Anglo-Saxon England; distorted mirror, Rorschach

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<sup>353</sup> According to Hugh Magennis, in "Letter to Sigeweard [Treatise on the Old and New Testament]" for *The Literary Encyclopedia* (15 April 2005), "running to 1274 lines of Old English prose in its standard modern edition (in an Early English Text Society volume), it is the earliest extended discussion of the Bible, considered as a whole, in a western vernacular language and is one of the major discussions of the Bible in medieval English." <http://www.litencyc.com/php/sworks.php?rec=true&UID=16740>, accessed 19 November 2008.

<sup>354</sup> Ælfric's *Prefaces*, 63-4.

<sup>355</sup> Fleming, "The Most Exalted Language": *Anglo-Saxon Perceptions of Hebrew*, 251- 2.

<sup>356</sup> Scheil. *The Footsteps of Israel*, 3. By using the term "tradition," Scheil must suggest a handing down of beliefs or customs from generation to generation; by limiting it to "Christian," Scheil must only refer to beliefs and customs held by the Church.

blot – pick your metaphor.... By building an identity upon a rejection or repudiation of Judaism, Christianity establishes an existential flaw at its heart.<sup>357</sup>

Scheil views Christian tradition's anti-Jewish stance as an intrinsic component of that religion. His book ends with several fatalistic questions: "Is, then, antipathy towards Jews – a sense of them as a surpassed people (and all that flows from that statement) – inevitable in the Christian tradition? Is hatred of Jews as natural in a Christian society as understanding itself?"<sup>358</sup> An awareness of the early experience of Judaism transmitted in Christian tradition, and expressed in writings circulating before and during Ælfric's time, might answer these questions.

For the first hundred years after the death of Jesus, all the Christian bishops of Jerusalem were converts from Judaism,<sup>359</sup> and so were most of the faithful. These Jewish Christians, as Jesus before them, whose dying words come from Psalm 21,<sup>360</sup> prayed the same traditional psalms and listened to the same Old Testament readings the Jews prayed and heard. Both Jews and Christians suffered under the Romans, as revolts and insurrections followed a harsh rule and resulted in the massacres and sufferings of the First Jewish-Roman War of AD 66-73. The small minority of Jewish Christians left Jerusalem in AD 70 for Pella, across the Jordan River, refusing to fight any longer against the Romans, thereby fulfilling the words of Jesus as recorded by Luke in his gospel:

And when you shall see Jerusalem compassed about with an army, then know that the desolation thereof is at hand. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains: and those who are in the midst thereof depart out: and those who are

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<sup>357</sup> *The Footsteps of Israel*, 334.

<sup>358</sup> *The Footsteps of Israel*, 339.

<sup>359</sup> As indicated in Bede's *The Greater Chronicle*: "Mark was the first non-Jew to be made bishop of Jerusalem, thus ending the line of fifteen Jewish bishops extending for one hundred and seven years from the Passion of the Lord," 312.

<sup>360</sup> "O God, my God, look upon me: Why hast thou forsaken me?"

in the countries not enter it. For these are the days of vengeance, that all things may be fulfilled, that are written.<sup>361</sup>

In AD 71, Titus conquered Jerusalem, destroying the city and killing over 600,000 Jews.

The rabbis and all Jewish survivors moved to Jabneh/Jamnia, which then became the seat of the Great Sanhedrin. From about AD 90 comes the *Birkat ha-Minim*, the 12<sup>th</sup>

benediction in the *Shemoneh 'Esreh* or the Eighteen (in fact Nineteen) Benedictions Jews recited standing.

The words of *Birkat ha-Minim* address “heretics and Sadducees (and traducers, informers, and traitors)”:

May no hope be left to the slanderers; but may wickedness perish as in a moment; may all Thine enemies be soon cut off, and do Thou speedily uproot the haughty and shatter and humble them speedily in our days. Blessed be Thou, O Lord, who strikest down enemies and humblest the haughty.<sup>362</sup>

As converts from Judaism, and therefore considered heretics by the Jews, Jewish

Christians felt targeted by this new prayer. When Justin Martyr, born in Palestine and one of the earliest Christian apologists mentioned by Eusebius and known to Bede,<sup>363</sup> writes his *Dialogue with Trypho*<sup>364</sup> around AD 160, he still refers to a “curse” against Christians recited by Jews during prayers.<sup>365</sup> Whether the encounter between Justin the Christian

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<sup>361</sup> Luke 21: 20-22.

<sup>362</sup> From the *JewishEncyclopedia.com*’s article on “The Birkat ha-Minim” at <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=612&letter=S#2012>

<sup>363</sup> Bede refers to Justin as a philosopher and martyr in *The Greater Chronicle*, 312. A poem, “Passio Sancti Justini Martyris,” was also long attributed to Bede. This poem in Latin can be found in Rev. J. A. Giles’ *The Complete Works of Venerable Bede, in the Original Latin*, Vol. I (London: Whittaker and Co., 1843), 38-49. This text is available at [http://files.libertyfund.org/files/1912/0990-01\\_Bk\\_SM.pdf](http://files.libertyfund.org/files/1912/0990-01_Bk_SM.pdf).

<sup>364</sup> Justin the Martyr, “Dialogue with Trypho” in *The Works now Extant of S. Justin the Martyr, Translated, with Notes and Indices* (Oxford: J. H. Parker, 1861), 70- 243.

<sup>365</sup> An extensive discussion of this topic makes up the greater part of D. Boyarin’s “Justin Martyr Invents Judaism.” *Church History* 70 (2001): 427-461. Boyarin does acknowledge that there existed “non-liturgically formalized, or even popular, curses on gentile Christians and reviling of Christ in the synagogues. That development may very well have taken place first in the areas in which Jews and gentile Christians were in intense and tense contact... and that Justin must be believed when he says that there was a curse against Christians pronounced in synagogues in some places by the middle of the second century,” but Boyarin argues that “this has no direct and genetic connection with the alleged “Blessing of the minim,” allegedly instituted at Yavneh” (436). However, Boyarin finds that by the mid-third century, the *Tosefta* (compilation of the Oral Law) provides positive evidence for the term “minim” being used in reference to Christians and “perhaps not incidentally the first attestation as well of birkath hamminim”(430).

and Trypho the Jew is purely fictional or reflects an actual interfaith dialogue, readers can clearly distinguish the prevalent controversies of the second century.<sup>366</sup> These ranged from Jews accusing the uncircumcised Christians of cannibalism, sexual promiscuity, and idolatry and challenging the divinity of Jesus, to Christians accusing the Jews of deicide, calumny and hardness of heart. In the account of a two-day discussion that remains civil and dignified to the end, Justin plainly sets out the main Christian objections to Judaism:

you have slain the Just One, and His prophets before Him, and now those who trust in Him; and the Almighty God, the Creator of all, Who sent Him, you set at nought, and, as far as you are able, clothe with dishonour, heaping curses in your synagogue on those who put their trust in Christ. For you have not actual power to destroy us: from this you are restrained by those in authority, though as often as you have been able you have proceeded even to this extremity.... Other nations, in fact, are not equally guilty with you of this injustice, which is committed toward us and toward Christ; ... for when you crucified Him ... not only did you feel no repentance for your crimes, but you even sent chosen men from Jerusalem to all countries, to say that a godless heresy, termed the Christian, had lately sprung up, adding those other calumnies against us, which all who know us not are accustomed to repeat.<sup>367</sup>

Previously, Trypho expresses what Justin considers the main grievances of the Jews towards the Christians:

you who make a profession of piety, and consider yourselves better than others, do in no respect excel the heathen in your lives; for you do not keep the feasts nor observe the sabbaths, nor practise circumcision, but you put your trust in a mere crucified man, and still, though neglecting God's commandments, hope to obtain good from Him.<sup>368</sup>

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<sup>366</sup> W. Varner's "In the wake of Trypho: Jewish-Christian dialogues in the third to the sixth centuries." *Evangelical Quarterly* 80.3 (2008): 219-236, provides a useful survey of answers to the question, "Do these dialogues reproduce with any accuracy actual discussion between Jews and Christians during this period?" (220). Varner concludes, "it is still probable that these dialogues represent an authentic discussion that was being carried on between the faiths.... If they were no longer needed because of the triumphalist victory of the post-Constantinian Church, why did they continue to be produced? Did the Christian community simply perpetrate an enormous fraud in continuing to produce falsified literature when it was no longer needed?" (234-5).

<sup>367</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>368</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

The *Dialogue with Trypho* appeared after the failed Bar Kochba revolt of AD 132-135 against the Roman Emperor Hadrian who had started to rebuild the ruined Jerusalem into a pagan Roman city and had forbidden circumcision. Several rabbis from Jabneh proclaimed Bar Kochba, born Simeon ben Kosiba, the leader of the Jewish armies, as the Messiah. The Second Jewish War failed amid terrible atrocities committed by the Romans against the Jewish people, and is mentioned by Jerome in Chapter 2:15 of his *Commentary on Isaiah*,<sup>369</sup> describing the citizens of Judaea hiding with their wives and children in underground tunnels and deep caves.<sup>370</sup> Hadrian exiled both Jews and Christians from Jerusalem and this time, the Jewish religious center moved further away to Babylon. When Justin Martyr writes, the hostility between Jews and Christians had reached an unprecedented level, because Jewish Christians had refused to participate in the revolt, denying the Messiahship of Bar Kochba. As a result, for the first four centuries of Christianity, Christian writers were mostly apologists, defending their faith against paganism and Judaism. Writings by Tertullian and Cyprian of Carthage, Jerome, Augustine of Hippo, and John Cassian, akin to Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho* and similar in purpose to St. Paul's "Epistle to the Hebrews," circulated in Christian communities. Their purpose was to defend their faith against frequent accusations brought against them by the Jews, to ask for tolerance from the pagan authorities, and to

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<sup>369</sup> Jerome's *Commentary on Isaiah* exists in an early 7<sup>th</sup> century manuscript from Bobbio (Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana MS S.45.Sup). A Latin version can be found at *Documenta Catholica Omnia* at [http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/02m/0347-](http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/02m/0347-0420,_Hieronymus,_Commentariorum_In_Isaim_Prophetam_Libri_Duodeviginti,_MLT.pdf)

0420,\_Hieronymus,\_Commentariorum\_In\_Isaim\_Prophetam\_Libri\_Duodeviginti,\_MLT.pdf

<sup>370</sup> On page 28 of *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, Bede similarly describes the fate undergone by the Britons at the hands of the Anglo-Saxon "newcomers": "there was no one left to bury those who had died a cruel death.... some fled sorrowfully to lands beyond the sea, while others remained in their own land and led a wretched existence, always in fear and dread, among the mountains and woods and precipitous rocks."



proclaim that the Christian faith is the only true faith.<sup>371</sup> Certainly, Scheil is right to recognize the importance of tradition in Christianity, since it represents divine revelation as much as Holy Scripture does. Scheil is also accurate in establishing that someone like Ælfric would be quite knowledgeable of this tradition, but he fails to trace this tradition to its origins in the Orient, to the first-hand experience of living side by side with Judaism.

The “calumnies” against Christians mentioned by Justin Martyr and Jerome’s comment that Jesus was called a magician by the Jews come directly from stories of the Babylonian *Talmud* and the *Toledot Yeshu*. The final form of the uncensored<sup>372</sup> Babylonian *Talmud* dates from the early seventh century, while the *Toledot Yeshu* appears as a narrative in the late fourth century, spreading throughout Europe in the ninth century. In *Jesus in the Talmud*,<sup>373</sup> Peter Schäfer argues that the stories about Jesus and his family found in the uncensored Babylonian *Talmud*, the *Bavli*, “are deliberate and highly sophisticated counternarratives to the stories about Jesus’ life and death in the Gospels.”<sup>374</sup> In the final chapter, Schäfer discusses “the major motifs that appear in the rabbinic sources and that the rabbis obviously regarded as representative of the Christian

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<sup>371</sup> Tertullian, in “Adversus Judaeos,” and Cyprian of Carthage, in “Testimonia ad Quirinum,” express the fulfillment and replacement of the Old Covenant by Jesus Christ. Augustine of Hippo, in several of his books and sermons, mentions the existence of a Jewish community in Hippo. In a sermon for the Epiphany (in *Sermons for Christmas and Epiphany*, trans. Thomas Lawler [New York: Newman Press, 1952], 179), Augustine sees Christ as a cornerstone for the union of Jews and Gentiles who, like the Jewish shepherds and the Magi, “heard and obeyed; they came both from near-by and from afar; they kept peace, they put an end to their hatreds.” In *Select Letters of St. Jerome*, trans. F.A. Wright (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), Jerome mentions that “the Jews called my master a magician” (187). Although Cassian believes that both the Old and the New Testaments nourished the soul, he also recognizes the “superstitions of the Law and of Judaism” in *Conferences*, trans. Colm Luibheid (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 166.

<sup>372</sup> After the 1631 Jewish synod of Petrikau (Poland), Jewish communities self-censored the Talmud to remove mentions of Jesus. However, these *Talmudic Omissions* have survived and still circulate in book form.

<sup>373</sup> Peter Schäfer. *Jesus in the Talmud* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

<sup>374</sup> Ibid, 8.

sect and its founder Jesus.”<sup>375</sup> Sex, “more precisely sexual promiscuity,” makes Jesus a *mamzer* (born out of wedlock), the son of an adulterous Miriam and her lover Pandera, the lover of the “notorious female hostess of an inn,” and Christianity an orgiastic cult. Magic, learnt in Egypt, accounts for why Jesus “was not only indecent and prone to sex; he also set up an idolatrous brick worship and, as the Talmud explains, led Israel astray by his magical practices.”<sup>376</sup> Idolatry and Blasphemy lead Rabbi Hiyya bar Abba (late third/early fourth century AD) to attack Jesus, “the ‘son of the whore’ who claims to be God, of equal rank with the God of whom the Jews say that he is the only and single one.”<sup>377</sup> The Christians’ belief in the Resurrection of Jesus and in the Eucharist becomes a source of satire and ridicule. As a result, the *Talmud* describes, “in a bizarre story unequaled in the Greco-Roman literature,” Jesus’s fate: he “is punished by forever sitting in hell in the excrement of his followers, who believe that through eating his flesh and drinking his blood, they will live forever.”<sup>378</sup>

Although the references to Jesus and Mary in the *Talmud* do not appear as a coherent narrative, which might explain why Christians only became truly aware of them in the thirteenth century,<sup>379</sup> the *Toledot Yeshu*<sup>380</sup> circulated widely in Western Europe by the ninth century. This collection of stories parodies the life of Jesus, starting with his birth as the illegitimate son of Mary and Pandera, and ending with his shameful execution as a magician, idolater, and blasphemer. Many of the negative details of this life come from passages in the *Talmud* and serve to demonstrate that Jesus could not possibly

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<sup>375</sup> Ibid, 97.

<sup>376</sup> Ibid, 102

<sup>377</sup> Ibid, 110-11.

<sup>378</sup> Ibid, p.113.

<sup>379</sup> In *Jesus in the Talmud*, Schäfer considers the work of the Spanish Dominican friar Raymond Martini (d.1285), *Pugio Fidei*, as “one of the first landmarks of a Christian examination of these Jewish sources, made increasingly accessible through Jewish converts” (3).

<sup>380</sup> The title variously translates as “History of Jesus” or “Genealogy of Jesus.”

represent the Messiah. An illegitimate birth, even resulting from rape, stands for uncleanness and sexual impurity, thus precluding Messiahship. Later in the text, the stories describe numerous miracles performed by Jesus but attribute them to the power of magic. Jesus's claims to divinity amount to blasphemy and he dies the death of a criminal and does not resurrect. The *Toledot Yeshu* and subsequent versions of these stories<sup>381</sup> remain above all polemical tracts destined to discredit Jesus and his followers. Historically, the most frequent response to any complaint resulting from the introduction of this sort of material remains the denial that Jesus ben Pantera/Pandera or Ben Stada represent Jesus, the founder of Christianity. The second most standard response claims that anti-Jewish or anti-Semitic sentiment lies behind the mention and evocation of such stories. The literature indicates that such responses have generally limited further study of these stories. More recently, and addressing existing versions of the *Bavli Talmud* that replaced references to Jesus with allusions to "that man," Peter Schäfer, in *Jesus in the Talmud*, suggests approaching such stories "with the deliberately naïve assumption that the relevant sources do refer to the figure of Jesus unless proven otherwise."<sup>382</sup> He believes that in these passages, the writers are saying:

there is no reason to feel ashamed because we rightfully executed a blasphemer and idolater. Jesus deserved death, and he got what he deserved... in other words, there is no justification whatsoever for this Christian sect that impudently claims to be the new covenant and that is on its way to establish itself as a new religion (not least as a "Church" with political power).

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<sup>381</sup> Periodically, and under different guises, the tradition of such stories continues. Of interest to this writer, the University of Las Vegas student paper, *The Rebel Yell*, as recently as March 2005, featured fiction by R. Baumgardner with the title *The untold story of Jonas Friedman, Father of Christ*. This story describes Mary as a foul-mouthed adulteress abused by Joseph, and the true father of Christ, Jonas Friedman, as "fond of wine, women and gambling."

<sup>382</sup> Peter Schäfer. *Jesus in the Talmud*, 7-9.

“This,” writes Schäfer, “is the historical message of the (late) talmudic evidence of Jesus. A proud and self-confident message that runs counter to all that we know from Christian and later Jewish sources.” He proposes that this message proved easier to express in Sasanian Babylon, a “non-Christian and even progressively anti-Christian environment,”<sup>383</sup> than in Roman and Byzantine Palestine, “with Christianity becoming an ever more visible and aggressive political power.”<sup>384</sup> Whereas Andrew Scheil views the “antipathy towards Jews – a sense of them as a surpassed people (and all that flows from that statement)” as “inevitable in the Christian tradition,”<sup>385</sup> Peter Schäfer sees no less antipathy in the attitude of Jews towards Christians, an attitude expressed in the *Bavli Talmud*’s

proud proclamation that what their fellow Jews did to this Jesus was right: that he deserved to be executed because of his blasphemy, that he will sit in hell forever, and that those who follow his example up until today will not, as he has promised, gain eternal life but will share his horrible fate.<sup>386</sup>

It would seem unreasonable to believe that Christians and Jews who lived in the same communities would be unaware of such reciprocal levels of antipathy. Besides tradition, Christian Scripture also preserves the common memory of significantly divisive events, starting with the stoning of Stephen, the first to die after Jesus, when

there was raised a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem. And they were all dispersed through the countries of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles... But Saul made havock of the church, entering in from house to house; and dragging away men and women, committed them to prison.<sup>387</sup>

When Saul of Tarsus, “as yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord,” still worked for the high priest, he “asked of him letters to

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<sup>383</sup> *Jesus in the Talmud*, 129.

<sup>384</sup> *Ibid*, 9.

<sup>385</sup> *The Footsteps of Israel*, 339.

<sup>386</sup> *Jesus in the Talmud*, 129.

<sup>387</sup> Acts 8:1-3.

Damascus, to the synagogues: that if he found any men or women of this way, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.”<sup>388</sup> After his conversion, the epistles of Paul document how he himself then becomes the target of persecutions. In the words of Ælfric, men cannot follow both the Old and the New Laws,

for ðan ðe seo ealde gecyðnys ateorode on cristes andwerdnyse fram flæsclicum weorcum, and wearð awend to gastlicum ðeawum.<sup>389</sup>

[because the Old Law changed in the presence of Christ from deeds of the flesh, and was turned into spiritual virtues.]

Using the words of Christ, “The law and the prophets were until John. From that time the kingdom of God is preached: and everyone useth violence towards it,”<sup>390</sup> Ælfric makes a clear distinction between the two Laws:

Moyses æ wæs and witegan soþlice oð Iohannes wearð acenned, þe Crist gefullode. He ys ende þære ealdan æ and æt him ongann seo godspellbodung.<sup>391</sup>

[The Law of Moses was then, and the Prophets, until John was born, who baptized Christ. He is the end of the Old Testament and from him began the new dispensation.]

This new dispensation preached conversion and eternal life, which Paul explained to his Jewish audience:

my brethren, you also have become dead to the law, by the body of Christ: that you may belong to another, who is risen again from the dead that we may bring forth fruit to God. For when we were in the flesh, the passions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members, to bring forth fruit unto death. But now we are loosed from the law of death wherein we were detained; so that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter.<sup>392</sup>

Understandably, the Jews could only perceive him as a heretic and a blasphemer.

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<sup>388</sup> Acts 9:1-2.

<sup>389</sup> *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: The Second Series*, ed. Malcolm Godden (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 31.

<sup>390</sup> Luke 16:16.

<sup>391</sup> *Old English Version of the Heptateuch, Ælfric's Treatise on the Old and New Testament and his Preface to Genesis*, ed. Samuel J. Crawford, EETS OS 160. (London: Oxford University Press, 2004), 52.

<sup>392</sup> Romans 7: 4-6.

Jews may have only come to England with the conquering Normans, but there is ample evidence that Anglo-Saxon England had, from Antiquity, maintained constant contact with areas of the world where Jews lived. Whether as a member of the Church or as a link in the Benedictine network of monasteries, Ælfric had indeed both texts and church tradition at his disposal. As we have seen, these texts and this tradition came from Christians living in close contact with Jewish communities, mostly in the Orient, where both religions started, developed, and grew apart. If anything, the geographical distance between Ælfric and the nearest Jew may have helped put Judaism into perspective. It became one adversary of Christianity among many others, perhaps the first in time, but certainly not the last.

## CHAPTER 5

### ÆLFRIC AND HERESY

Throughout the history of religions, older established faiths have customarily looked upon any new and challenging doctrine as potentially heretical. When the first Christians claimed that Jesus was God, and not just the son of Mary and of Joseph the carpenter, they became heretics in the eyes of faithful Jews. When the early Christians heard that “some, coming down from Judea, taught the brethren: ‘That, except you be circumcised after the manner of Moses, you cannot be saved,’” they faced their first heresy.<sup>393</sup> If the Circumcisers (Pharisees converted from Judaism who required circumcision as part of becoming Christian) rejected Peter’s teaching that Gentiles did not need circumcision to belong to the new faith, and strayed from the right, or orthodox way, they became heretics.<sup>394</sup> To the early Christian community in Palestine, heresy therefore implied the informed denial or rejection of a truth or law accepted by the established group, and the refusal to desist from propagating it.<sup>395</sup> Peter may have resolved this first problem at the First Council of Jerusalem (c. A.D. 50), but the next ten

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<sup>393</sup> Acts 15:1

<sup>394</sup> Early Christians commonly used the term ‘heresy’ to refer to an “unorthodox” opinion expressed by a baptized person, another Christian who has accepted membership in the group. Non-baptized persons could therefore never qualify as “heretics.” According to Canon 751 of the Roman Catholic 1983 Code of Canon Law, “Heresy is the obstinate post-baptismal denial of some truth which must be believed with divine and catholic faith, or it is likewise an obstinate doubt concerning the same.” [Translated from the Latin by J. A. Coriden, T. J. Green, and D. E. Heintschel, eds. *The Code of Canon Law: A Text and Commentary* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 547.]

<sup>395</sup> Heresy differs from “apostasy,” which stands as a complete denial of the faith and a consequent abandonment of this faith. Although it might lead to it, heresy also differs from “schism,” which indicates a formal breach or split with the established faith. For the somewhat different interpretation of this terminology in antiquity, see Maureen A. Tilley, “2006 NAPS Presidential Address, When Schism Becomes Heresy in Late Antiquity: Developing Doctrinal Deviance in the Wounded Body of Christ.” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 15:1 (2007): 1-21. For another analysis of the distinction between these terms, see Geoffrey D. Dunn, “Heresy and Schism According to Cyprian of Carthage.” *Journal of Theological Studies* 55:2 (2004): 551-574.

centuries of the church witnessed the development in the Orient of numerous heresies, mostly revolving around the natures of God and of Jesus. Many of these Eastern heresies eventually spread to the West, changing the course of history, occasioning wars, and causing persecutions of Christians by Christians. Although the Anglo-Saxon Church proved immune to many of them, a few proved tenacious in England, and the knowledge of heresy's harmful effects in the rest of the Christian world did not escape writers such as Bede and Ælfric. They also believed in the postlapsarian inclination of humans to misuse their free will, as the apostle Paul once warned,

there shall be a time when they [men] will not endure sound doctrine but, according to their own desires, they will heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears: And will indeed turn away their hearing from the truth, but will be turned unto fables.<sup>396</sup>

In his homily for the Sixth Sunday after Pentecost, Ælfric reminds his audience of the betrayal of many an Englishman who, a century earlier,

to ðam Deniscum gebugað,  
and mearciað hy deofle to his mann-rædene,  
and his weorc wyrcað, hym sylfum to forwyrde,  
135 and heora agene leode be(læwað) to deaðe.  
Hwæt, bið æfre wyrse ænig þing on worlde  
þonne swylc dæd is on gean his agene Drihten,  
and hine sylfne besence on ðam ecum suslum,  
ælfremed fram Gode, and fram eallum his halgum?<sup>397</sup>

[submits to the Danes, and the devil brands him into his service, and he does his work, for his own ruin, and his own people he betrays to death. Indeed, is anything in the world ever worse than such a deed against one's own Lord, and to make one's self sink into the eternal torment, estranged from God and from all his saints?]

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<sup>396</sup> 2 Timothy 4: 2-4

<sup>397</sup> *Homilies of Ælfric: A Supplementary Collection*, ed. John C. Pope, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 2: 521, lines 132-139.



The present time of renewed Viking attacks could certainly bring a resurgence of heresies, and, as in the past, renouncing Christ always results in the loss of salvation,

þa ða man acwealde  
þa halgan martiras huxlice mid witum,  
for cristes geleafan, þa cyddon wel fela  
heora ungetrywðæ, and wiðsocon Criste,  
145 and hine forleton, þæt hy libban moston,  
ac heora lif wæs syððan wyrse þonne deað.<sup>398</sup>

[when men killed the holy martyrs shamefully with tortures, for believing in Christ, then a great many made known their unfaithfulness, and renounced Christ, and forsook Him, so that they might live, but their life was afterwards worse than death.]

For an orthodox teacher like Ælfric, the words of the Epistle also provide the only defense against this threat, and that is to “Preach the word: be instant in season, out of season: reprove, entreat, rebuke in all patience and doctrine.”<sup>399</sup> This chapter will illustrate how, in his *Lives of Saints*, Ælfric frequently uses the examples of heresies from the Orient to emphasize the consequences of error and to demonstrate how the saints stood unwavering in their faith.

Ever fearful of heresy and conscious of the far-reachingness of words, Ælfric makes sure to express in several of his Prefaces the pitfalls of interpreting scripture, and the spiritual dangers involved in offering his translations of Latin texts to unlearned audiences. Only at the request of others does he write his *Lives*, because he believes that, “it is not fitting to introduce more in this language, lest, perhaps, the pearls of Christ be held in disrespect.”<sup>400</sup> Another danger inherent in translations comes from purposely misinterpreting these texts and leading others into error. Heresy does not always result from ignorance: most condemned heretics of the early centuries of the Church in the

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<sup>398</sup> Ibid., 521-522, lines 141- 146.

<sup>399</sup> 2 Timothy 4:2

<sup>400</sup> *Ælfric's Prefaces*, ed. J. Wilcox, 131.

Orient studied at the famous theological schools of Antioch and Alexandria, and their superior knowledge instead helped promote widespread heresy.<sup>401</sup> Having warned his readers, Ælfric provides them with a chronology of events, and traces the rise of heresies to the time after the persecutions of the Roman Empire, when

192      ða halgan martiras swa micclum onbryrde,  
          þæt hi sweltan woldon ærðan þe hi wiðsocon gode  
          and heora lif aleton ærðan þe heora geleafan;  
          and wurdon ofslagene for ðam soðan geleafan,  
          fela þusenda martira on mislicum witum  
 196      and hi habbað þa ecan myrhðe for heora martyrdome.<sup>402</sup>

[the holy martyrs were so greatly inspired that they wished to die sooner than to deny God, and give up their lives sooner than their faith; and they were slain because of the true faith, many thousand martyrs by various tortures and they possess eternal joy because of their martyrdom.]

According to Ælfric, once the persecutions ended and

         ðaða god sealde sibbe his gelaðunge  
          þa wolde se deofol mid gedwylde amyrran þone soðan geleafan  
          and seow ða gedwyld on dyrstigum mannum.<sup>403</sup>

[when God gave peace to his church, then the devil wished to kill their faith with error, and he sowed heresy in presumptuous men.]

Indeed, many heresies developed because of these persecutions, sometimes leading to schisms within the Church. Donatism, for instance, resulted in split congregations and rival claimants to the see of Carthage.<sup>404</sup> Since the Donatists formed an effective majority

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<sup>401</sup> Both cities had famous theological schools, representing different and opposing approaches to biblical exegesis. Whereas the Alexandrian school of exegesis emphasized the spiritual meaning of scripture by studying its allegories and prophetic implications, the Antiochene School concentrated on its literal sense. For more information on the Antiochene School and its influence in Anglo-Saxon England, see *Biblical Commentaries from the Canterbury School of Theodore and Hadrian*, eds. Bernard Bischoff and Michael Lapidge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

<sup>402</sup> *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat, Vol. I, 350 (lines 191-196).

<sup>403</sup> *Ibid.*, lines 203-205.

<sup>404</sup> During the Diocletian persecution (AD 303-305), the authorities demanded that the Christian clergy turn over to the government the sacred books and the archives of their churches. After the persecution, the Donatists insisted that members of the clergy who had committed such actions could no longer validly celebrate the sacraments. They maintained that the Church could have no claim to holiness if her ministers had proven unworthy. The Church responded that since members of the Church (including the clergy),

of the upper and middle classes of society, they presented a serious threat to the Church. Even after the A.D. 314 Council of Arles, attended by the Bishops of London, York, and Lincoln, condemned their heresy, the Donatists did not recant. They soon became identified with a political and national resentment against all Roman authority, secular or religious. With the later addition of violence to their heresy, documented in Augustine of Hippo's *Letter 88* to Januarius the Donatist bishop, the leaders of the Catholic Church called for another conference at Carthage in A.D. 411.<sup>405</sup> An edict was passed declaring that the Catholic Church can, for the sake of converting them, accept sinners as members without losing its holiness.<sup>406</sup> Soon after, Donatism died out, making way for other dissensions among Eastern Christians, most of them revolving around the nature of God, particularly of Jesus. One of the first and most enduring, Arianism, appears in the *Lives of Saints* as the heresy most often named and described by Ælfric. Over the centuries, Arianism proved hard to eradicate because of the very centrality and disputability of its claim, that Jesus was not divine, but a creature of God and not of the same substance as God. Ælfric expresses its fundamental concept:

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because of the tendency to sin of human nature, could never claim inherent holiness, the validity of sacraments does not depend on the holiness of the person administering them. St. Augustine of Hippo, in *De baptismo*, iv. 16, 18 (as quoted on page 109 of Henry Bettenson's edition of *Documents of the Christian Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947), explains, "anyone who is on the devil's side cannot defile the sacrament, which is of Christ."

<sup>405</sup> Augustine's opening words to the Donatist bishop were: "Your clergy and your Circumcelliones are venting against us their rage in a persecution of a new kind, and of unparalleled atrocity. Were we to render evil for evil, we should be transgressing the law of Christ. But now, when all that has been done, both on your side and on ours, is impartially considered, it is found that we are suffering what is written, 'They rewarded me evil for good'; and (in another Psalm), 'My soul hath long dwelt with him that hateth peace. I am for peace: but when I speak, they are for war'" From *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Second Series Vol. 1, ed. Philip Schaf (Edinburgh: T & T Clark; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1988-1991), 369.

<sup>406</sup> This conference gathered 286 Catholic and 279 Donatist bishops.

Sume gedwol-menn wæron þuruh deofol beswicane swa þæt hi cwædon þæt crist godes sunu nære æfre mid þam halgan fæder wuniende ac wære sum tima ær þan þe he acenned wære.<sup>407</sup>

[Some heretics were deceived by the devil so that they said that Christ the Son of God was not always in existence with the Holy Father, but there was a certain time before he was born.]

He also describes the undignified death of its originator, the priest Arius, whom Ælfric singles out among heretics: “an ðæra wæs Arrius þe þæt yfel ongann, ac him eode se innoð ut æt his forð-gange”<sup>408</sup> (one of them was Arius who began that wickedness, but his insides came out of him in his privy).

In his *Life of St. Martin*, Ælfric reminds his audience of how far this heresy spread, “Ða asprang geond ealle woruld arrianes gedwyld”<sup>409</sup> (Then arose throughout the world the Arian heresy). When Martin (ca. A.D. 316- 397) decides to become a disciple of Hilary of Poitiers, he learns that Arians have already established themselves in Gaul and exiled the bishop. When Martin tries to build a monastery in Milan, “þa gedwol-men sona hine adrifon þanon”<sup>410</sup> (the heretics soon drove him away from there). Indeed, despite the council of Nicaea in A.D. 325,<sup>411</sup> which had affirmed the divinity of Christ and condemned Arius as a heretic, Arianism spread from the Orient into Europe, and all the way to England. In the words of Bede,

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<sup>407</sup> Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat, Vol. I, 10 (lines 5-8). This belief that God the Father might have created God the Son implies that Christ exists as a creature of God, and therefore, not of the same nature as God the Father.

<sup>408</sup> Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat, Vol. I, 350 (lines 206-08). Although Arius first started spreading his unorthodox beliefs from his parish in Alexandria, he had previously studied in Antioch.

<sup>409</sup> Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat, Vol. II, 230 (line 184).

<sup>410</sup> Ibid., 232 (line 192).

<sup>411</sup> In answer to Arianism, the Nicene Creed, resulting from this council, states that Jesus is “the Son of God, the only-begotten of the Father, that is, of the substance of the Father; God from God, light from light, true God from true God; begotten, not created, consubstantial with the Father.”

the churches of Britain remained at peace until the time of the Arian madness which corrupted the whole world and even infected this island, sundered so far from the rest of mankind, with the poison of its error.<sup>412</sup>

Several centuries later, Ælfric still feels the need to confront this ancient heresy. The very first entry in his *Lives* for December 25 and the Nativity of Jesus provides his audience with a refutation of Arius' heresy:

ac þæt halige godspell hæfð oferswiðod swylcera gedwolena andgit for oft. Ða iudeiscan axodon crist hwæt he wære. Ða andwyrde he him þus: 'Ego sum principium qui et loquor vobis'; 'ic eom anginn þe eow to spræce'. Nu ge habbað gehered hu se hælend be him sylfum spræc, þæt he is ordfruma and angin ealra þinga mid his heofonlican fæder and mid þam halgan gaste. Se fæder is angin and se sunu is angin and se halga gast is angin, ac hi ne synd na þreo anginnu, ac hi ealle þry synden an angin and an ælmihtig god, æfre unbegunnen and ungeændod.<sup>413</sup>

[but the holy gospel has very often overcome the understanding of such heretics. The Jews asked Christ who he was. He then answered them thus: 'Ego sum principium qui et loquor vobis'; 'I who speak to you am the beginning.' Now you have heard how the Savior spoke about himself, that he is the Creator and the beginning of all things, with his heavenly Father and with the Holy Ghost. The Father is the beginning and the Son is the beginning and the Holy Ghost is the beginning, but they are not three beginnings; they are all three one beginning, and one Almighty God, forever unbeginning and unending.]

To persuade his audience, Ælfric uses the words of Jesus as proof of his divine nature, but he also warns that, in this struggle, even the saints cannot always prevail when political leaders and armies sustain and enforce heretical beliefs.

In his *Life of St. Basil*, Ælfric focuses on a leader of the Eastern Church, Basil the Great, Bishop of Caesarea (A.D. 329-79), who exemplifies the struggle of orthodoxy against a revival of paganism under Julian the Apostate, and against Arian rule under the emperor Valens.<sup>414</sup> In his short reign (A.D. 361-63), Julian the Apostate rescinded most

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<sup>412</sup> Bede. *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, 19-20.

<sup>413</sup> Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat, Vol. I, 10 (lines 8-16).

<sup>414</sup> Gabriella Corona, in her scholarly edition of *Ælfric's Life of Saint Basil the Great* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2006), describes the Anglo-Saxons' acquaintance with Basil as going back to AD 669 and the

of the privileges previously granted to Catholics by his half-brother, Constantine the Great, and reinstated the worship of the gods as state religion. Ælfric describes him as the “wælreowa iulianus, / cristen fram cyld-hade, se wearð casere siððan / and awearp his geleafan, and gewende to deofle”<sup>415</sup> (cruel Julian, Christian from childhood, who later became Emperor and cast aside his faith, and turned to the devil). Ælfric relates an event in the life of Basil when, on his way to war with the Persians, Julian passed by Caesarea and encountered Basil, once a fellow student. In a fit of anger, he threatened to destroy Caesarea upon his return from battle. Basil and the entire population of the town then fasted for three days and “þone hælend bædon / þæt he hraðe to-wurpe þæs wæl-reowan andgyt / and hi ahrædde wiþ ðone reðan casere”<sup>416</sup> (beseeched the Savior to quickly dissipate the plan of that cruel man and rid them of the harsh emperor). As an unexpected answer to this prayer, Ælfric then describes a most unusually militant and forceful Mother of God, and writes:

244        Pa geseah se biscop, þa þa hi swiðost bædon,  
              on sumere nihte, Sancta Marian cuman  
              mid heofonlicum werode, to þære halgan stowe,  
              and cwæð to ðam halgum þe hyre gehendost stodan:  
              ‘Clypiað þone martyr Mercurium to me,  
              þæt he ardlice fare to þam arleasan Iuliane  
              and hine acwelle, for þan þe he Criste wiðsoc,

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arrival of Theodore of Tarsus as Archbishop of Canterbury, 29. Besides Theodore, Aldhelm of Malmesbury and Bede reveal knowledge of Basil in their writings. Aldhelm speaks of him as a virgin saint and the author of a monastic rule, 32. In *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, 9, Bede quotes from Eustathius’ fifth-century Latin translation of Basil’s *Hexameron*. Soon after finishing the *Lives of Saints*, Ælfric also composed his own loose translation of Basil’s text into Old English. Finally, for any monk of the Benedictine reform, Basil stands out as the founder of a monastic rule, the *Admonitio ad filium spiritualem*, which Ælfric also translated. Benedict in his own *Rule* recommends Basil’s rule to “those who hasten to the perfection of the religious life: “the *Conferences of the Fathers*, their *Institutes* and their *Lives*, and the Rule of our holy Father Basil – what else are they but examples for well-living and obedient monks and instruments of virtue?” From Dom P. Delatte, *A Commentary on the Holy Rule of Benedict*, trans. & ed., Dom Justin McCann (London: Burns Oates, 1950), 492-3. By these words, Benedict, the so-called Father of Western Monasticism, also acknowledges the contributions of the monks of the Orient, as transmitted in the works of John Cassian and in the lives of the Desert Fathers.

<sup>415</sup> Ælfric’s *Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat, Vol. I, 50 (lines 16-18).

<sup>416</sup> Ælfric’s *Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat, Vol. I, 64 (lines 238-40).

248 and be minum sunu, þam soðan gode,  
tælllice sprecþ, mid toþundenum mode.<sup>417</sup>

[Then the bishop saw, when they prayed the most a certain night, Saint Mary come with a heavenly host to the holy place. And she said to the holy ones that stood nearest to her: ‘Call the martyr Mercurius to me, that he may quickly set forth to the impious Julian and kill him, because he has forsaken Christ, and of my son, the true God, he speaks blasphemously, with an arrogant spirit.’]

In the early hagiography of the West, Mary does not commonly give orders to have someone killed. On the contrary, she generally shows subservience to her Son, and provides Christians with a model of quiet devotion and merciful love.<sup>418</sup> As a result, the faithful did not normally associate the name of Mary with acts of violence and retribution. Yet, the orthodox Ælfric has no misgivings about this seemingly ambivalent depiction of Mary. Just as in Genesis 3: 15, where the words of God to the serpent prefigure a Mary unafraid of confrontation, “I will put enmities between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed: she shall crush thy head, and thou shalt lie in wait for her heel,” so Mary in the tradition of the Orient often reveals this characteristic.<sup>419</sup> Again, Ælfric uses sources from the Orient<sup>420</sup> for his *Life of Basil* and particularly for this episode

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<sup>417</sup> Ælfric’s *Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat, Vol. I, 64 (lines 241-249).

Ælfric already used this most uncharacteristic order given by Mary in his “First Homily for the Assumption of Mary” (*Catholic Homilies* I, 30), as noted in Gabriella Corona’s edition of *Ælfric’s Life of Saint Basil the Great*, 50.

<sup>418</sup> Starting from the related story of Theophilus and his pact with the devil, Kate Koppelman analyzes a similar contradiction in “Devotional Ambivalence: The Virgin Mary as ‘Empresse of Helle.’” *Essays in Medieval Studies* 18 (2001): 67-82.

<sup>419</sup> From the time of the foundation of Constantinople by Constantine, Mary became the Great Protectress of the city, defending it against the Persians in AD 625 and the plague in AD 910. The *Akathist Hymn to the Most Holy Mother of God*, traditionally attributed to Romanus the Melodist (d. AD 556) best represents the Orient’s understanding of Mary. In fact, most of the prayers to Mary used in the Western Church come from the Eastern liturgies.

<sup>420</sup> Gabriela Corona, on page 14 of her edition of *Ælfric’s Life of Saint Basil the Great*, establishes that, “Regardless of its time and place of composition, the Greek life of Basil by Pseudo-Amphilochius gained considerable popularity in the West and was translated three times into Latin in the same century [9<sup>th</sup>].” One of these translations from the Greek must have served as Ælfric’s direct source.

involving Mary.<sup>421</sup> Whereas some accounts report that the Persians or one of his own officers killed Julian, others, that a Saracen or one of the Barbarian jesters did, “the scene of Mercurius killing Julian is the only one that will be retained by Byzantine and East Christian artists.”<sup>422</sup> Furthermore, “it is only in the late eighth and early ninth centuries that the intervention of the Virgin is recalled in a clear manner” in the story of Julian’s death.<sup>423</sup> In his decision to put forth this uncommon side of Mary’s persona, Ælfric opts for an essentially Eastern account of the death of Julian the Apostate, within his *Life of Basil*.

Ælfric next relates Basil’s two encounters with the Arian Valens, the Eastern Emperor from A.D. 364 to 378. During his rule, Arianism prevailed politically and militarily in the Orient.<sup>424</sup> Ælfric typically describes Arians as “gedwolmen” (heretics) who “wæron gefullode on gode, / ac hi ne gelyfdon onriht on þone lifigendan crist; / ac, mid manegum gedwyldum, dwelodan þa cristenan”<sup>425</sup> (were baptized in God, but they did not properly believe in the living Christ; moreover, with many heresies they led Christians astray). With the backing of the Emperor, of the Arian Archbishop, and of the

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<sup>421</sup> Norman Baynes, in “The Death of Julian the Apostate in a Christian Legend,” *The Journal of Roman Studies* 27 (1937): 26, also links Julian’s death to the Pseudo- Amphilochian *Life of Basil* and to Mercurius. However, he believes that the “president of the heavenly conclave is... a nameless glorious female form which suggests the Mother of God herself.” R. M. Dawkins, in “A Byzantine Carol in Honour of St. Basil,” *The Society for the Promotion of Hellenic Studies* 66 (1946): 44, provides the text of a carol found in a Jerusalem manuscript from the “early Byzantine period,” describing an event closely similar to the one related in Ælfric’s *Life of Saint Basil*.

<sup>422</sup> In “Two Miracles of the Virgin in the Poems of Gautier de Coincy,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 41 (1987): 157-163, Sirarpie Der Nersessian focuses on “the different approaches of Eastern and Western artists to the same event, the Emperor Julian’s death at the hand of Mercurius. For this analysis, Der Nersessian studies two miniatures from the early 13<sup>th</sup> century *Les Miracles de Notre Dame* by the Benedictine monk and musician, Gautier de Coincy.

<sup>423</sup> Der Nersessian, 157.

<sup>424</sup> Around 367, Eudoxius, the Arian Patriarch of Constantinople, baptized the pagan Valens, who then ordered the persecutions against the Eastern Catholics, lasting from AD 369 to the end of his reign. In AD 370, eighty catholic bishops and priests came to Constantinople to ask Valens for freedom of worship. The Emperor had them set adrift in a burning ship, an event commemorated on September 5 by the feast day of Sts. Urban and 79 companions.

<sup>425</sup> Ælfric’s *Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat, Vol. I, 70 (lines 355-57).



Arian church hierarchy, Arians imprisoned or exiled Catholic bishops and confiscated their churches.<sup>426</sup> However, Ælfric appears less disturbed by the persecutions that took place than by the spreading of error among Catholics. With this particular form of heresy, where Arians do not believe in the divinity of Jesus, the Incarnation and all sacraments instituted by Jesus lose their meaning. Throughout his writings, Ælfric feels the urgent duty to defend all sacraments, but one most particularly, the Eucharist. In his *Life of Basil*, Ælfric describes the way Jesus appeared to Basil as soon as he became bishop, and taught him how, “mid agenre spræce, him offrian mihte ða lyflican onsægednysse mid soðfæstre þenunge”<sup>427</sup> (with His own words, he might offer Him the living sacrifice with pious ministration). Not only does the following passage indicate that Anglo-Saxons knew that different liturgies were used in the East,<sup>428</sup> it also reminds Ælfric’s audience of the divinity of Jesus and of the centrality of the Eucharist to the Catholic faith.

þa stod se hælend sylf æt þam halgan weofode  
 and mid his halgum handum husel senode  
 and þam bisceope tæhte þæs þe he biddende wæs.  
 116 He cwæð to Basilie beo þin muð afylled  
 mid haligre herunga æfter þinre bena  
 þæt ðu mid agenre spræce geoffrian mæge  
 þa lyflican onsægednysse mid soðre þenunge.<sup>429</sup>

[Then stood the Savior himself at the holy altar and with his hallowed hands, consecrated the host; and he showed the bishop that for which he had prayed. He

<sup>426</sup> Ælfric relates such an episode in the *Life of Basil* (lines 318 -354), associating the return of a church through the power of prayer with Basil’s steadfastness in the face of Valens’ tyranny.

<sup>427</sup> *Ælfric’s Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat, Vol. I, 56 (lines 107-08).

<sup>428</sup> In the Greek Church, the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom has now replaced the Liturgy of St Basil, once used throughout the Orient. St Basil’s liturgy remains in use “for the Sundays of Lent with the exception of Palm Sunday, on Holy Thursday and Holy Saturday, on the vigils of Christmas and of the Epiphany, and on the feast of St. Basil, which in the Greek calendar occurs on the first day of January.” See John Goggin. “Liturgy of St. Basil.” *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. 2. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1907. 11 Jul. 2009 <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02321a.htm>>.

<sup>429</sup> *Ælfric’s Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat, Vol. I, 56 (lines 113-19). Ælfric’s concern that heresy may attack the sacrament of the Eucharist in particular pervades his writings. As the conclusion of this chapter will show, the Eucharist and transubstantiation remain linked to Ælfric’s name and to the renewal of interest in Old English literature.

said to Basil: “let your mouth be full of praise for God throughout your prayer so that you, with my own words, may offer the living sacrifice with rightful ministration.]

Added to the knowledge that Arianism had once before reached Britain, the evidence of several continental sources witnessing to the material ravages and spiritual trials endured in Western Europe because of heresy, could only have strengthened Ælfric’s purpose to teach orthodoxy. He did this by fittingly presenting to his audience lives of saints from the common past of the Eastern Church who had confronted these heresies by keeping their faith.<sup>430</sup>

For centuries, heresy threatened the Catholic faith in Western Europe. In his [A.D. 742-746] letter to Abbess Eadburga of Minster-in-Thamet, the Anglo-Saxon Boniface asks her for prayers to help him in his mission to Germany. He writes, “On every hand is struggle and grief, fighting without and fear within. Worst of all, the treachery of false brethren surpasses the malice of unbelieving pagans.”<sup>431</sup> To orthodox Christian writers of the fifth century,<sup>432</sup> Bishop Ulfila the Goth (ca. A.D. 310- 383) personified such a betrayal.<sup>433</sup> To Anglo-Saxons of the ninth century, King Ælfred’s translation of Orosius’s *Historia Adversus Paganos*<sup>434</sup> recorded that the Arian emperor Valens sent Arian bishops to the Goths to convert them to his heresy. As a missionary, Ulfila left Constantinople and travelled to previously orthodox areas of Gothia, with his Arian beliefs and a translation of the *Bible* in the Gothic language. After him, in a more military and

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<sup>430</sup> Gregory of Tours (ca. 538 - 593), Boniface (d. 755), and Paul the Deacon (ca. 720 - 799), represent some of these sources describing the spread of various heresies throughout western Europe which the Catholic Church had to resist, often unsuccessfully.

<sup>431</sup> *The Letters of Saint Boniface*, trans. Ephraim Emerton (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 100.

<sup>432</sup> The terms “orthodox Christian” or “Nicene Christian” stand in opposition to “Arian” or “Arian Christian.”

<sup>433</sup> Hagith Sivan provides an overview of the Nicene and Arian opposing perceptions of Ulfila’s conversion in “Ulfila’s Own Conversion,” *The Harvard Theological Review* 89.4 (1996): 373-386.

<sup>434</sup> *The Old English Orosius*, ed. Janet Bately (London: Oxford University Press, 1980), 153.

destructive way, the propagation of Arianism into Europe followed the expansionist waves of the Goths into the Western Roman Empire, of the Ostrogoths and later, of the mostly Arian Lombards into Italy, while the Visigoths established themselves in Gaul and Spain, and the Vandals crossed over to Roman Africa. St. Martin of Tours, in his own life and through his association with Hilary of Poitiers, stands out as a major opponent of Arianism in Western Europe, first in Lombardy and later in Gaul.<sup>435</sup> In the words of Gregory of Tours, with the coming of Martin,

our new luminary began to shine, and Gaul became bright with new rays coming from its lamps.... By his many miracles he overcame the disbelief of the Gentiles and made it clear to the people that Christ, the Son of God, is Himself the true God.<sup>436</sup>

More than once, Ælfric's *Life of St. Martin* refers to Martin's encounters with Arians and indicates that, although the secular powers supported and promoted Arianism, the power of the saint's prayer could often sway them. When the Emperor Valentinian refuses to see Martin because of his "micele mod and his manfulla ge-bedda / þe mid arrianiscum gedwylde dwelligende lyfode"<sup>437</sup> (great arrogance and his infamous consort, who lived deceitfully in the Arian heresy), Martin

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<sup>435</sup> Soon after his baptism, Martin (316-397) wished to become Bishop Hilary's disciple in Poitiers. However, the Arians of Gaul had convinced the emperor Constantius, an Arian sympathizer, to exile Hilary to Phrygia. : "hilarius was afaren to wræc-siðe / for þam ylcan ge-dwylde þe þa dwollice asprang [Hilary was gone into exile, because of the same heresy that had then falsely arisen]." See *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat, Vol. II, 232 (lines 190-91).

<sup>436</sup> Gregory of Tours, *The History of the Franks*, trans. Lewis Thorpe (London: Penguin, 1974), 138-9.

<sup>437</sup> *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat, Vol. II, 260 (lines 652-3). Valentinian's "consort," in fact, his mother Justina, the second wife of Valentinian I, became Valentinian II's regent. While married to the orthodox Valentinian I, Justina kept secret her Arian faith, only to promote it after his death. Ælfric seems to confuse the two Valentinians, but correctly comments on Justina's "deceit."

As an Arian, Justina frequently came into conflict with Ambrose of Milan (AD 340-397). Valentinian himself sent Ambrose to Milan as consular governor of the region. By then, the Arian Auxentius, bishop of Milan, having replaced in AD 355 the Catholic bishop Dionysius sent into exile in the East, had already fought the Catholic Christians of Milan for twenty years. When he died in AD 374, Ambrose, still an unbaptized catechumen, became bishop by popular proclamation. Several confrontations took place between Bishop Ambrose and Justina, a major one in AD 385-6 over the surrender of a Catholic basilica to the Arians. Ambrose's popularity with the people of Milan helped him prevail and prevented the Empress

664        þa gewende to his ge-wunelican helpe  
           scrydde hine mid hæran and mid axum be-streowode  
           and fæstende þurh-wunode on singalum gebedum  
           oð-þæt an scinende engel on þam seofþan dæge  
           him com to and cwæð þæt he to þam casere ferde  
           and him ælc get sceolde beon open to-geanes  
           and þæs modigan caseres mod beon geliðegod.<sup>438</sup>

[then turned to his customary support: he clothed himself with a sackcloth of hair and covered himself with dust, and remained fasting with continuous prayers, until a shining angel, on the seventh day, came to him and told him to go to the emperor, and all gates should be open to meet him, and the emperor's arrogance would be mitigated.]

Valentinian sees Martin and grants him his request, offering him “fela gifa” which Martin does not accept. Here, even when heresy had become the virtual religion of the state, Ælfric tells his audience not to underestimate the power of prayer. Just as Basil and Martin had earlier defeated the Arian heresy by remaining faithful, Anglo-Saxons could now resist the paganism of the Northmen and not apostatize or pervert their faith, because no Christian should expect to live without suffering for the faith. The Lord Himself had announced it: “If the world hate you, know ye that it hath hated me before you... If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you.”<sup>439</sup> Soon after Martin and Ambrose died in AD 397, Rome itself fell to Alaric the Visigoth, as recorded in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*,

409 [410]. Here the stronghold of the Romans was destroyed by the Goths,  
 11 hundred and 10 years after it was built. Afterwards, beyond that, the

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from treating him with the same extreme measures used with Dionysius. When Justina died in AD 388, her son Valentinian abandoned Arianism and eventually requested Ambrose to come to Gaul and baptize him. The Emperor's murder in AD 392 prevented this. The lives of Ambrose and Basil represent the parallel struggles of the Niceans of the East and of the West against the Arians.

<sup>438</sup> Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat, Vol. II, 260 (lines 661-667).

<sup>439</sup> John 15: 18-20. In St Augustine's *City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin, 1984), 833, the author pursues this concept as far as to affirm that heretics “undoubtedly benefit by their wickedness the genuine, catholic members of Christ, since God makes good use even of the wicked, and ‘makes all things co-operate for good for those who love him’ [Rom. 8: 28].” As Bishop of Hippo, Augustine fought heresy continuously (Manichæism, Donatism, Pelagianism, and Arianism) and died in AD 430, during the Arian Vandals' eighteen-month siege of his city.

kings of the Romans no longer ruled in Britain; in all they had ruled there 4 hundred and seventy years since Julius Caesar first sought out the country.<sup>440</sup>

In waves, Arianism then returned to power in Italy, first with the Visigoths, followed by the Ostrogoths, then the Lombards.<sup>441</sup> In A.D. 596, “the monastery of St Benedict was destroyed by Lombards,” the very same year “Pope Gregory sent Augustine to Britain.”<sup>442</sup> In a similar language, Paul the Deacon writes,

the monastery of the blessed father Benedict which was situated in the stronghold of Casinum (Monte Cassino) was attacked at night by the Langobards, and although they plundered everything, they could not get hold of one of the monks.<sup>443</sup>

He also writes that, in seven years of occupation,

the churches were despoiled, the priests killed, the cities overthrown, the people who had grown up like crops annihilated, and ... the greater part of Italy was seized and subjugated by the Langobards.<sup>444</sup>

Paul shows a clear understanding of “the infidelity of the Arian heresy” when he comments that

the Arians, indeed, say to their own ruin that the Son is less than the Father, and the Holy Spirit also is less than the Father and the Son. But we Catholics confess that the Father and Son and Holy Spirit are one and the true God in three persons, equal in power and the same in glory.<sup>445</sup>

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<sup>440</sup> The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, trans. & ed. M. J. Swanton, 11.

<sup>441</sup> By the eighth century, the fate of Boethius at the court of the normally tolerant Ostrogoth Theodoric was used as a standard example of the persecution of an orthodox believer at the hands of an Arian ruler. As for the Lombards, several sources, including Steven Fanning’s “Lombard Arianism Reconsidered,” *Speculum* 56.2 (1981): 241-258, argue the theory that Lombards invaded Italy as Arians. Fanning suggests rather “that the Lombards entered Italy predominantly as heathens” (246) and that “there is no evidence that the Arians among the Lombards ever posed a real challenge to the Catholic faith or that any serious effort to convert Lombard Arians was ever mounted by orthodox Christians” (257).

<sup>442</sup> The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 21.

<sup>443</sup> Paul the Deacon, *History of the Lombards*, trans. William D. Foulke (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 162. A Lombard himself, the historian Paul the Deacon (once a monk at Monte Cassino and later, with Alcuin of York, part of Charlemagne’s court) also composed a collection of homilies which Ælfric frequently used as a source- book.

<sup>444</sup> Ibid, 93.

<sup>445</sup> Ibid, 194.

In A.D. 680, at the synod of Hatfield, Theodore of Canterbury uses similar words to confirm the orthodoxy of the Anglo-Saxon Church. As quoted by Bede, the synodal book states,

we confess the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit to be rightly and truly a Trinity consubstantial in Unity and the Unity in Trinity, that is, one God in three substances or consubstantial persons equal in glory and honour.<sup>446</sup>

When acknowledging the five councils of the Church, the synodal book lists each council and the corresponding heresy it addressed. In A.D. 325, Nicaea condemned “the impious Arius,” Constantinople in A.D. 381 condemned “the madness of Macedonius and Eudoxius,” Ephesus in A.D. 431 condemned “the worthless Nestorius,” and Chalcedon in A.D. 451 condemned Eutyches and Nestorius, while Constantinople in A.D. 553, condemned Theodore of Mopsuestia, Theodoret, and Ibas. The document ends with a strong restatement of the Anglo-Saxon Church’s Trinitarian beliefs. Bede surrounds this major event with several references to Rome’s preoccupation with orthodoxy in England. In A.D. 669, Theodore of Tarsus, Pope Vitalian’s second choice for Canterbury, arrived in England with Hadrian, the Pope’s first choice, so that Hadrian “would take great care to prevent Theodore from introducing into the church over which he presided any Greek customs which might be contrary to the true faith.”<sup>447</sup> Ten years later, another Pope, Agatho, sent Abbot John “to enquire carefully into the beliefs of the English church, and report on them on his return to Rome.”<sup>448</sup> Bede records these papal tactics, and with his earlier characterization of England as “an island which always delights in hearing

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<sup>446</sup> Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, 199.

<sup>447</sup> Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People* 171.

<sup>448</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

something new and holds firmly to no sure belief,” suggests a long propensity to heresy in England.<sup>449</sup>

The three major waves of the evangelization of Britain most likely encountered and probably benefited from this propensity to delight “in hearing something new.” Whether Christianity first came to Britain with the Romans after A.D. 43, or to the Glastonbury marshes with Joseph of Arimathea in A.D. 63, remains uncertain. However, by the third century, long before the arrival of Augustine of Canterbury in A.D. 597, Roman Britain already had its first martyr, Alban. The British monk Gildas (ca. A.D. 516 - 570), in *On the Ruin of Britain*, writes of Alban and of his fellow martyrs and of the short time after the persecutions when “all Christ’s young disciples, after so long and wintry a night, begin to behold the genial light of heaven.”<sup>450</sup> However, even so strong a “holy union” between “Christ their head and the members of his church” could not withstand “the Arian treason,” which

fatal as a serpent, and vomiting its poison from beyond the sea, caused deadly dissensions between brothers inhabiting the same house, and thus, ... they inflicted dreadful wounds upon their country, which is ever desirous to hear something new, and remains constant long to nothing.

Adding to this list of negatives, the Welsh monk Nennius, in his *History of the Britons* (ca. A.D. 800), gives a reason for the success of the Saxon conquest of Britain. He tells his audience:

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<sup>449</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>450</sup> Gildas, *On the Ruin of Britain*, in *Six Old English Chronicles*, ed. John A. Giles (1848; reprint, Boston: Adamant, 2005), 304. He adds, “They rebuild the churches, which had been levelled to the ground; they found, erect, and finish churches to the holy martyrs, and everywhere show their ensigns as token of their victory; festivals are celebrated and sacraments received with clean hearts and lips, and all the church’s sons rejoice as it were in the fostering bosom of a mother.”

let him that reads understand, that the Saxons were victorious, and ruled Britain, not from their superior prowess, but on account of the great sins of the Britons: God so permitting it.<sup>451</sup>

Certainly, some of these sins, in the form of heresy, had occasioned the visits by

Germanus of Auxerre in A.D. 429 and 447, to confront another heresy, Pelagianism.<sup>452</sup>

Bede diplomatically writes of the Britons as having

no desire at all to accept this perverse teaching and so blaspheme the grace of Christ, but could not themselves confute by argument the subtleties of the evil belief; so they wisely decided to seek help in this spiritual warfare from the Gaulish bishops.<sup>453</sup>

Bede goes on to describe the confrontation,

on the one side was divine faith, on the other side, human presumption: on the one side piety, on the other pride: on the one side Pelagius the founder of their faith, on the other Christ.<sup>454</sup>

In the end, “Falsehood was overcome, deceit unmasked.” Surviving the two heresies of

Arianism and Pelagianism, the British Church fared less well after the arrival of the

Germanic tribes. Inviting the Angles “as defenders of [their] homeland,” the Britons

“soon realized that the men they had chosen were attackers and conquerors.”<sup>455</sup> By the

end of the fifth century, the Angles and the Saxons “subjugated virtually the whole of the

island by fire or the sword, from the eastern shore as far as the western one,” until the

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<sup>451</sup> Nennius, *History of the Britons*, in *Six Old English Chronicles*, ed. J. A. Giles (1848; reprint, Boston: Adamant, 2005), 405.

<sup>452</sup> Either a Briton or a Scot, Pelagius (early fifth century) denied original sin by declaring that Adam’s sin only harmed him and not the entire human race. He also denied the divine gift of grace, claiming that human will, without the help of grace, sufficed to attain the highest level of virtue. Most likely born in the West, the highly educated Pelagius had knowledge of Latin and Greek and his teachings resemble many of the more heretical views of the East (Theodore of Mopsuestia). At the AD 415 council of Jerusalem, Paulus Orosius, friend of Augustine of Hippo and of Jerome and known to the Anglo-Saxons, confronted Pelagius and his teachings. He later wrote the *Liber apologeticus contra Pelagium de Arbitrii libertate*.

<sup>453</sup> Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, 29.

<sup>454</sup> Ibid., 31. Bede also mentions Pelagianism in Britain in *The Greater Chronicle*, 327.

<sup>455</sup> Bede, *The Greater Chronicle*, 326.



monasteries of Wales and Strathclyde became the last strongholds of British Christianity.<sup>456</sup>

Evangelizing the north of the island, Columba came from Ireland to Iona in AD 563 to preach the word of God to the peoples of Northumbria and to the northern Picts. Referring to it as Celtic, scholars often associate this brand of Christianity with that of the British and pit it against the Roman one, later imported by Augustine. Although Bede recognizes their erroneous reckoning of Easter, he charitably blames it on their use of “tables of doubtful accuracy” and on the fact that “they were so far away at the ends of the earth that there was none to bring them the decrees of the synods concerning the observance of Easter.”<sup>457</sup> In fact, both the dating of Easter and the frontal tonsure adopted by the Irish monks originally came from the Orient, and most certainly caused disputes between Celtic monks and Roman monks during the seventh century. However, they never reached the level of heresies because, in A.D. 664, to prevent further dissension and since “this dispute naturally troubled the minds and hearts of many people,”<sup>458</sup> the synod at Whitby chose Rome over Iona.<sup>459</sup> At the synod, Wilfrid of Ripon gives the main reason for this choice:

the Easter we keep is the same as we have seen universally celebrated in Rome, where the apostles St Peter and St Paul lived, taught, suffered, and were buried.... We learned that it was observed at one and the same time in Africa, Asia, Egypt, Greece, and throughout the whole world, wherever the Church of Christ is scattered, amid various nations and languages. The only exceptions are these men and their accomplices in obstinacy, I mean the Picts and the Britons, who in these, the two remotest islands of the Ocean, and only in some parts of them, foolishly attempt to fight against the whole world.<sup>460</sup>

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<sup>456</sup> Margaret Deanesly, *A History of the Medieval Church 590-1500* (New York; Methuen, 1985), 12.

<sup>457</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

<sup>458</sup> Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, 153.

<sup>459</sup> By this time, Iona mostly stood alone among Irish monasteries in its refusal to follow Rome in the dating of Easter. However, since they always observed Easter on a Sunday, the Irish did not either follow the Quartodeciman dating, the custom most in keeping with the Mosaic Law.

<sup>460</sup> Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, 155.

This time, the Anglo-Saxon Church in the North survived the attempt to separate it from Rome, by then firmly re-established in the South.

When Augustine arrived in Canterbury with the third wave of evangelization, he found no vestiges of British Christianity, except for a “church built in ancient times in honour of St Martin, while the Romans were still in Britain, in which the queen who, as has been said, was a Christian, used to pray.”<sup>461</sup> Except for this small group of Christians, paganism prevailed. Pope Gregory, in a letter to Augustine, reflects this situation in his advice:

Do not let [the English people] sacrifice animals to the devil, but let them slaughter animals for their own food to the praise of God, and let them give thanks to the Giver of all things for His bountiful provision. Thus while some outward rejoicings are preserved, they will be able more easily to share in inward rejoicings. It is doubtless impossible to cut out everything at once from their stubborn minds.<sup>462</sup>

The long and slow rebuilding of Christianity started in Kent with King Æthelberht, and then failed for a time when his son Eadbald apostatized after his father’s death. It spread to the East Angles where soon after, King Rædwald abandoned his new Christian faith and reverted to idolatry. It reached Northumbria and flourished, only to attract the raids of the Northmen. It witnessed the growth of monasteries and double monasteries all over England, only to watch them fall into ruins after the ninth century. Following Gregory’s advice, it raised cathedrals over Saxon pagan temples, as in Winchester,<sup>463</sup> where Ælfric first became a monk under Æthelwold, only to see them fall into laxity and corruption in

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<sup>461</sup> Ibid., 41. Queen Bertha came from Paris with her own bishop, Luidhard, to marry King Æthelberht, with the condition that she could practice her faith freely.

<sup>462</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>463</sup> Founded in AD 634 and next in rank after Canterbury and York, Winchester enshrined the relics of St Swithun (d. AD 862), its patron, and claimed St Æthelwold (d. AD 984) as its bishop, consecrated by St Dunstan. Ælfric includes lives of both Swithun and Æthelwold in the five English lives of his *Lives of Saints*’ collection.

the aftermath of the first wave of Danish invasions. After working under Dunstan in Glastonbury to reform such a monastery, Æthelwold then applied the *Rule* of St Benedict in Winchester and reformed the monastery there. Aware of these lapses, Ælfric understood the human propensity to unfaithfulness and realized the constant need to hearten his audience to confront heresy. Had not Peter denied Christ three times? Had not the Church in Britain come near extinction several times? Had not Islam, after over six centuries of established Christianity, conquered the Christian lands in the Orient?

By AD 998, when Ælfric composed his *Lives of Saints*, Islam had taken over Syria, Iraq, Persia, and Central Asia to the Indian border provinces in the East, while also advancing West over Palestine, Egypt, and North Africa, establishing itself in Spain, in the Andalus. From there, in AD 732, a century after Muhammad's death, his followers crossed the Pyrenees and advanced towards Tours, St Martin's city, seizing Avignon in AD 734 and pillaging Lyons in AD 743. In AD 827, they conquered Sicily, and threatened Rome in AD 846, sacking the cathedrals of St Peter and St Paul, and desecrating the graves of the pontiffs.<sup>464</sup> In AD 883, nearly three hundred years after the Lombards, the Saracens sacked and burned down Monte Cassino. AD 972, when Ælfric might have entered Winchester,<sup>465</sup> also saw the abduction for ransom of Abbot Maiolus of Cluny by Muslim raiders, as he crossed the Great Saint Bernard Pass.<sup>466</sup> Considering the close connection between Winchester and Cluny, this information must have reached England some time thereafter. Since all Ælfric's lives of saints from the Orient pre-date the advent and spread of Islam, he does not speak much of Islam in his *Lives*, other than

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<sup>464</sup> For a more detailed account of this conquest, see Philip K. Hitti, *The Arabs: A Short History* (Washington, DC: Regnery, 1996).

<sup>465</sup> Caroline I. White, *Ælfric: a new study of his life and writings* (Hamden, CT: Archon, 1974), 36.

<sup>466</sup> For an account of this event, see Scott G. Bruce, "An abbot between two cultures: Maiolus of Cluny considers the Muslims of La Garde-Freinet," *Early Medieval Europe* 15 (2007): 426-440.

perhaps in a veiled reference, made in the present tense, to nations still invading Jerusalem.<sup>467</sup> However, he does refer to Arabs or Saracens in other writings. In his *Grammar*, he defines the term ‘Arab’ “straightforwardly as ‘one from Arabia’,” and uses the adjective *arabisc* to describe “the Arab nation as the home of the phoenix, which (Ælfric digresses to explain) is a bird which lives five hundred years, dies and rises again, signifying the resurrection of the body.”<sup>468</sup> His brief mentions of Saracens in other writings “[suggest] that Ælfric was confident that the name of the Saracens would be recognized by the less literate.”<sup>469</sup> In his “Homily for Friday after the Fifth Sunday in Lent,” Ælfric describes the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans and the resulting dispersion of the Jewish people. Using again the present tense, he finally seems to make the association between Saracens and Islam:

Ða læddon þa Romaniscan þæt þær to lafe wæs þæs folces  
 fela hund manna, ham to heora burgum.  
 And þær naht ne belaf on þam lande þæs cynnes,  
 and is swa gefylled þæt, þæt hi foresædon,  
 þæt hi wæron benæmode lifes and eardes.  
 Is swa ðeah micel dæl þæs mancynnes gehwær  
 wide tosawen and Saracenas habbað  
 þone æpelan eard, þe hi ær hæfdon.<sup>470</sup>

[Then the Romans led away what was left of the people, many hundred men, homewards to their cities. And they left none of the tribe there in the land, and so what was foretold is fulfilled, that they would be deprived of life and land.]

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<sup>467</sup> In *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat, Vol. II, 144 (lines 20-21), in the account of “The Exaltation of the Holy Cross,” Ælfric writes: “Hit gewearð for yfelnysses swa swa for oft git bið / þæt þa hæðenan leoda þæt land gehergoden” (Because of evil, it happened, just as it often still does, that the heathen nations invaded the land). In this passage, Ælfric refers to the AD 614 invasion by the Persian armies of “Cosdrue.” However, by using the present tense in “swa swa for oft git bið,” he might also have intended to bring up the more than three centuries (at that time) of occupation of Jerusalem by Islam (starting in AD 636 and lasting until AD 1099, when Jerusalem fell to the Crusaders).

<sup>468</sup> Katherine Scarfe Beckett, *Anglo-Saxon Perceptions of the Islamic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 183.

<sup>469</sup> Beckett, *Anglo-Saxon Perceptions of the Islamic World*, 187.

<sup>470</sup> “Homily for Friday after the Fifth Sunday in Lent” in Bruno Assmann, *Angelsächsische Homilien und Heiligenleben* (1889; reprint with introduction by Peter Clemoes, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1964), as cited and translated in Beckett, *Anglo-Saxon Perceptions of the Islamic World*, 184.

But a great portion of the people is widely scattered everywhere and the Saracens possess the noble land which they once owned.]

As in the case of the Jews, no Saracens or Muslims may have lived in Anglo-Saxon England, but information about them appeared in texts most likely available to Ælfric.

Both Jerome and Cassian lived for years in the deserts of Syria and Egypt and in Bethlehem, and provided details about Arabs and Saracens to seventh-century Anglo-Saxon England.<sup>471</sup> Clearly, Arabs came from Arabia, and Saracens, in these pre-Islamic sources, descended from Ishmael, Abraham's son with the Egyptian handmaid of Sara, Agar, to whom God said: "Arise, take up the boy, and hold him by the hand: for I will make him a great nation."<sup>472</sup> In reality, early sources used the terms "Arab" and "Saracen" as interchangeably and inaccurately<sup>473</sup> as our contemporary society uses the terms "Arab" and "Muslim." Jerome<sup>474</sup> and Cassian refer to Saracens as nomadic raiders, frequently attacking hermits and isolated centers of population. Describing her fourth-century pilgrimage, and the view from Mount Sinai, Egeria writes, "And from there we saw beneath us Egypt and Palestine, the Red Sea, and the Parthenian Sea which leads to Alexandria, and finally the endless lands of the Saracens."<sup>475</sup> In the eastern provinces, they also "were found everywhere.... In fact, for many, their homeland was the very

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<sup>471</sup> Stephen Lake's "Knowledge of the Writings of John Cassian in early Anglo-Saxon England," *Anglo-Saxon England* 32, eds. M. Lapidge, M. Godden, and S. Keynes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), establishes that "the writings of John Cassian circulated widely through the Middle Ages, not least in Anglo-Saxon England," 27.

<sup>472</sup> Gen. 21:18. Cassian, in his *Conferences* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), uses the biblical account of the two sons of Abraham and their mothers to explain his classification of "spiritual lore" into "tropology, allegory, and anagoge," 160.

<sup>473</sup> Philip Mayerson, in "The Saracens and the Limes," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 262 (1986): 35-47, and in "Saracens and Romans: Micro-Macro Relationships," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 274 (1989): 71-79, provides excellent information about the eastern frontier of imperial Rome and its pre-Islamic inhabitants.

<sup>474</sup> Jerome includes references to Saracens as Ishmaelites and nomadic raiders in his *Life of Malchus*.

<sup>475</sup> Egeria, *Diary of a Pilgrimage*, trans. & ed. George Gingras (New York: Newman Press, 1970), 53.

region occupied by Rome.”<sup>476</sup> From this region of the Byzantine Empire, in AD 669, came Theodore of Tarsus (AD 602-690), the seventh Archbishop of Canterbury, whose birthplace, Tarsus, had fallen to the Muslim Arabs by AD 661, and who then went to live in Rome as a refugee. Theodore, most probably a monk of the order of St. Basil, and Abbot Hadrian, from the eastern part of North Africa, write in the *First Commentary on the Pentateuch*, “Ishmael’s race was that of the Saracens, a race which is never at peace with anyone but is always at war with someone.”<sup>477</sup> They also refer to the recurring problem of terminology: “Madianites and Ishmaelites and Madiani and Agarreni are the same peoples who are now inappropriately called Saracens.”<sup>478</sup> Later, Bede first speaks of Saracens as “a terrible plague” ravaging Gaul in AD 721 “with cruel bloodshed.”<sup>479</sup> He follows their destructive path through Africa and Sardinia, where they “dug up the place whither the bones of the holy bishop Augustine had once been moved (on account of the ravaging of the barbarians),”<sup>480</sup> and all the way to the gates of Constantinople. In his *On the Holy Places*,<sup>481</sup> which incorporates a revision of Adamnan of Iona’s account of the *Pilgrimage of Arculfus* in AD 670, Bede makes several mentions of Saracens in the Holy Places, now under Islamic rule. He describes how “in the lower part of the city - where the temple was situated near the eastern wall... – the Saracens now assemble for prayer. There they have built a square house of shoddy workmanship constructing it by raising boards and great beams on some remains of ruins. It seems to hold three thousand

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<sup>476</sup> P. Mayerson, “The Saracens and the Limes,” 262.

<sup>477</sup> From Bernhard Bischoff and Michael Lapidge, eds. *Biblical Commentaries from the Canterbury School of Theodore and Hadrian* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 325.

<sup>478</sup> *Ibid.*, 339.

<sup>479</sup> Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, 288.

<sup>480</sup> Bede, *The Greater Chronicle*, 340.

<sup>481</sup> Foley, W. Trent and Arthur G. Holder, trans. “On the Holy Places,” *Bede: A Biblical Miscellany* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999).

people.”<sup>482</sup> Bede also describes Arculf’s visit to Damascus, “fortified with a long circle of walls and numerous towers,” where “Christians frequent the church of St. John the Baptist, while the king of the Saracens and his own people have erected and consecrated another church for themselves.”<sup>483</sup> In their separate places of worship, Christian and Muslim customs differed. For the same reason as Judaism, Islam prohibits all representations of the human form, claiming they promote idolatry. In AD 726, influenced by Islam or convinced by some Christians who believed that images contradicted the first commandment and encouraged superstition, the Byzantine Emperor Leo III the Isaurian prohibited the veneration of images. Riots and persecutions followed, with the destruction of monasteries, the killing or banishment of monks, and the burning of icons and relics in churches. The heresy of iconoclasm persisted for two centuries, causing severe strains in the relationship between Rome and Constantinople.<sup>484</sup>

Born in the Damascus of the Umayyads, ca. AD 670, John Damascene followed Rome and opposed iconoclasm and the heresy of Islam in his writings. *On Heresies* and *Dispute between a Saracen and a Christian*, generally attributed to him, “constitute the earliest explicit discussions of Islam by a Christian theologian,”<sup>485</sup> in which

John identifies Islam as the religion of the Arabs, which is historically sound for the Umayyad period, though contrary to the portrayal of Islam in the Qur’an as a universal religion. These people, says John, once worshipped the morning star and Aphrodite. They remained idolaters until the time of the emperor Herakleios, where there appeared a false prophet called Muhammad (in Greek: *Mamed*). He

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<sup>482</sup> Foley, W. Trent and Arthur G. Holder, trans. “On the Holy Places,” 9.

<sup>483</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>484</sup> Anglo-Saxon England, then still faithful to Roman customs, remained unaffected by this heresy.

<sup>485</sup> Andrew Louth, *St. John Damascene: Tradition and Originality in Byzantine Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 77. Avery Dulles, in *A History of Apologetics* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), also writes of St John Damascene’s understanding of Islam. Dulles pairs him with Isidore of Seville, considering them “the true founders of the Middle Ages. In the East, John Damascene (c. 674 – c. 750) is often designated as the last of the Fathers; in the West, it is Isidore of Seville (d. 636),” 91-92.

concocted his own heresy, from the Old and New Testaments which he had chanced upon, and from a conversation with an Arian monk.<sup>486</sup>

The connection between Arianism and Islam seems foreseeable. Both deny the divinity of Christ and consider him a human prophet. Both affirm the unity of God, thereby denying the Christian Trinity, which leads John Damascene and all those he influenced to claim, “Islam is not a new religion but the last in a long line of deviant Christianities.”<sup>487</sup>

In the West, although “the dearth of early Latin writing against Islam is in sharp contrast to the situation in the Greek east,”<sup>488</sup> a “non-textual transmission of ideas” most likely took place, after the Islamic conquest of AD 711, between John Damascene’s monastery of Mar Saba in Palestine and Spain. These ideas included the perception of Islam as an Arian heresy. The strong presence in North Africa of Vandal Arianism, “closer theologically to Islam than any other form of Christianity, provided an effective transitional stage between Trinitarianism and Islam.”<sup>489</sup> In most areas conquered by Islam, “the Christian religion suffered setbacks or was eclipsed in some measure, but it did not disappear. In North Africa, however, Christianity was not merely eclipsed, it was supplanted.”<sup>490</sup> Heresies had weakened the Eastern Church in that they allowed error to divide and separate its members. Ælfric knew the same would happen in Anglo-Saxon England, and because he considered heresies inevitable, he warned his faithful:

lease witegan ær þisre worulde ge-endunge  
on gehwylce land cumað . and þone ge-leafa amyrrað .

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<sup>486</sup> Ibid., 78. By the sixteenth century, from “false prophet,” Muhammad had become, in Luther’s words, “first-born child of Satan.”

<sup>487</sup> John V. Tolan, *Saracens: Islam in the Medieval European Imagination* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 51.

<sup>488</sup> Janna Wasilewski, “The ‘Life of Muhammad’ in Eulogius of Córdoba: some Evidence for the Transmission of Greek Polemic to the Latin West,” *Early Medieval Europe* 16 (2008): 334.

<sup>489</sup> Charles J. Speel II, “The Disappearance of Christianity from North Africa in the Wake of the Rise of Islam,” *Church History* 29 (1960): 381.

<sup>490</sup> Ibid., 379.



844    oþ-þæt antecrist sylf ende-next becymð .<sup>491</sup>

[deceitful prophets, before the end of this world, will come to every land and hinder the faith, until the Antichrist himself comes last.]

The only defense against heresy and any assault on Christians remains the teaching of the truth. What else does Alcuin write to Ethelred of Northumbria after the AD 793 raid on Lindisfarne, but the teachings of the Christian faith?

Have decent habits, pleasing to God and laudable to men. Be rulers of the people, not robbers; shepherds, not plunderers. You have received honours by God's gift; give heed to the keeping of his command, that you may have him as a preserver whom you had as a benefactor.... But, above all, have the love of God in your hearts, and show that love by keeping his commandments.... "For the fashion of this world passeth away"; and all things are fleeting which are seen or possessed here.... We must all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ, and each must show all that he did, whether good or evil. Beware of the torments of hell, while they can be avoided; and acquire for yourselves the kingdom of God and eternal beatitude with Christ and his saints in eternal ages.<sup>492</sup>

If Alcuin could thus admonish a king after the attack on Lindisfarne, Theodore, a refugee from the heresies of the East, while still confident that the gates of hell would never prevail against the Church,<sup>493</sup> also made sure at the synod of Hatfield to confirm the orthodoxy of the Anglo-Saxon church. Now, in the historical circumstances of his time, Ælfric's only weapon against error remained to teach the truth as he knew it, even though others would later use his own words to promote dissension in his name.

In spite of all his orthodox writings and teachings, Ælfric himself became associated with heresy. Some writers who came after him used his words to give legitimacy to their own dissenting views. Most notably, two Old English words used and

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<sup>491</sup> *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat, Vol. II, 272 (lines 842-44).

<sup>492</sup> D. Whitelock, ed. *English Historical Documents*, 777.

<sup>493</sup> Mat. 16:18.

explained by Ælfric, *lichamlice* and *gastlice*,<sup>494</sup> in a Sermon for Easter Day became evidence for Matthew Parker, archbishop of Canterbury under Elizabeth I of England, to argue that the orthodox Ælfric, and consequently the Anglo-Saxon Church as a whole, had already denied transubstantiation centuries earlier. Indeed, the Old English language first appeared in print in a book “with the following revealing title: *A Testimonie of Antiquitie Shewing the Auncient Fayth in the Church of England touching the Sacrament of the Body and Bloude of the Lorde, Here Publikely Preached and also Receaved in the Saxons Tyme, above 600 Yeares Agoe.*”<sup>495</sup> Several other passages in Ælfric’s *Lives of Saints* could easily have established his firm belief in transubstantiation, but those would not have suited Matthew Parker’s purpose. For example, in his life of St Basil, Ælfric clearly expresses his belief in transubstantiation when he tells his audience,

Sum Iudeisc man wolde . ge-wytan to soþan  
 be ðære halgan husle . þeah þe he hæðen wære .  
 156 Eode þa to mæssan mid oðrum mannum .  
 and hlosnode georne be ðære lyflican onsægednysse .  
 þa mid ðam þe basilius . to-bræc þæt husel .  
 þa þuhte þam Iudeiscan . swylce he to-dælde an cyld .  
 160 eode swa þeah mid oðrum mannum earhlice to husle .  
 and him wearð ge-seald an snæd flæscas .  
 and he sæp of ðæm calice eac swylce blod .<sup>496</sup>

[A Jewish man, although he was a heathen, wanted to know truly about the holy mass and what power it had, and about the holy Eucharist. He went then to mass with other men and waited earnestly for the living sacrifice. Then, when Basil broke up the Eucharist, it then appeared to the Jew as if he divided a child. However, he went fearfully with other men to the Eucharist, and it happened that a piece of flesh was given to him, and he also sipped blood from the chalice.]

<sup>494</sup> Ælfric used *lichamlice* (bodily) and *gastlice* (ghostly) to “distinguish between the manner of Christ’s presence on earth as a man and the nature of his presence in the sacrament.” From Michael Murphy, “Religious Polemics in the Genesis of Old English Studies,” *The Huntington Library Quarterly* (1969): 245. Murphy points out that denying transubstantiation because of these two words does not take into account that Ælfric’s ambiguity might have contributed to the problem. Murphy also remarks, “Old English was not a precision instrument capable of dealing unambiguously with such recondite matters as the exact nature of the presence of Christ in the eucharist, and scholastic debate was still in the future.”

<sup>495</sup> *Ibid.*, 242.

<sup>496</sup> *Ælfric’s Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat, Vol. I, 58 (lines 153-62).

Matthew Parker obviously could not use this episode to further his argument. Scholars later associated Ælfric with the heresy of millenarianism because of his repeated calls for orthodox belief, often combined with warnings of dire times ahead. Around the end of the tenth century, when he composed his *Lives of Saints*,

England was swept by anxiety about the nearness of the end, perhaps because of the approach of the year 1000, or because of the revived maraudings of the Danish between 980 and 1014, or because of the corruption in English society.<sup>497</sup>

Indeed, three times in a short passage,<sup>498</sup> Ælfric refers to “his days” as the end of the world:

220      Nu on urum dagum on ende þissere worulde .  
          swicað se deofol digollice embe us .  
          hu he þurh leahtras forlære ða cristenan .  
          and to mislicum synnum heora mod awende .  
          ac ða beoð gesælige þe his swic-domas to-cnawað .  
 224      and his lot-wrencas mid geleafan ofer-swyðað .  
          He wet nu swiðe and wynð on ða cristenan .  
          forðan þe he wat geara þæt þysre worulde geendunge  
          is swyðe gehende . and he on-et forði .  
 228      We sceolan eac onettan and urum sawlum gehelpan .  
          þurh gode biggengas gode to gecwemednysse .  
          forðan þe we ne motan lange on ðysum life beon .  
          And þæt is godes mildheortnyss . þeah ðe hit digle sy .

[At this time, in our days at the end of the world, the devil secretly wanders around us, so he, through vices, may lead astray Christians and pervert their spirits to manifold sins; but they are blessed who understand his deceptions, and overcome his cunning with faith. He now rages fiercely and fights Christians because he perceives well that the end of this world is exceedingly near and he therefore hastens. We should also hasten and help our souls with good practices to God’s contentment because we might not be long in this life. And that is the mercy of God, although it is hidden.]

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<sup>497</sup> Penn Szittya, “Domesday Bokes: the Apocalypse in Medieval English Literary Culture,” in *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, eds. Richard Emmerson & Bernard McGinn (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 379.

<sup>498</sup> Ælfric’s *Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat, Vol. I, 352 (lines 219-31).

This sense of urgency could also come from the current invasions taking place around him, and the mention of the end of the world could refer to the end of their immediate world as they knew it then. There are many other passages in his writings proving that Ælfric, after Bede and Augustine, always faithfully follows the teachings of the Church concerning the end times. These teachings stem entirely from the words of Christ<sup>499</sup> and leave no place for misinterpretation. Ælfric knows, however, the risks of error, accidental or intentional, and he places warnings in most of his Prefaces in Old English. Other than the English works of Alfred, Ælfric “considers English work a source of heresy.... He implies that his own English works, however, are equivalent in value to the patristic and Carolingian writers whom he lists as his sources.”<sup>500</sup> He asks future copyists to transcribe his words faithfully, and “states that the soul of the erring scribe will be held accountable at the Day of Judgement for any who are led astray through scribal error.” Scribal error, or “[f]alse copying may create *gedwyld* [error, heresy], whereas Ælfric repeatedly states his concern to oppose the errors of heresy and fallacy.” Today, “heresiology is an embarrassment to modern scholars,”<sup>501</sup> in part because “many modern critics, both of late Antiquity and of Byzantium, remain uncomfortable with the idea that theological argument needs to be taken seriously as a historical factor.”<sup>502</sup> Nevertheless, textual evidence proves “the centrality of the topic for Byzantium as well as the West.”<sup>503</sup> Heresy, well discussed in his *Lives of Saints*, remains for Ælfric one of the greatest

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<sup>499</sup> Apoc. 16: 15: “Behold, I come as a thief”; Matt. 25: 13: “Watch ye therefore, because you know not the day nor the hour”; Mark 13: 32-33: “But of that day or hour no man knoweth, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father. Take ye heed, watch and pray. For ye know not when the time is”; Luke 21: 35: “For as a snare shall it come upon all that sit upon the face of the whole earth.”

<sup>500</sup> Jonathan Wilcox, ed. *Ælfric's Prefaces*, 70.

<sup>501</sup> Averil Cameron, “How to Read Heresiology,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 33: 3 (2003); 472.

<sup>502</sup> *Ibid.*, 484.

<sup>503</sup> *Ibid.*, 471.

dangers facing his flock, worse than the death of the body, because heresy denies God and leads to perpetual torment in Hell. For this reason, Satan himself, the adversary, “swicað digollice embe us” (secretly wanders around us), and incites men to heresy.

## CHAPTER 6

### ÆLFRIC AND SATAN

The preceding chapters of this study have focused in turn on the Northmen, Paganism, Judaism, and Heresy, as the major historical opponents Ælfric considers dangerous to Christianity and frequently represents in his *Lives of Saints*. He firmly believes that these antagonists ultimately derive from the existence of Satan, who incites men to heresy, blinds them to the true faith, and encourages the persecution of Christians. Above all, the orthodox Ælfric holds that every face of evil in this world reflects Satan, the ultimate adversary of humanity. In the face of the current Viking invasions, Ælfric, besides explaining to his audience the dangers of adopting heresies or of surrendering to persecutions, prepares them above all else to confront Satan by providing them with the information and the means to overcome him. Chapter Three, “Ælfric and Paganism,” already described his efforts to fight all remnants of pagan practice among his audience. This chapter will more specifically address Ælfric’s teachings on Satan. In spite of the Old English words often used to describe him in the *Lives of Saints*, he bears little resemblance to the popular and folkloric Anglo-Saxon personifications of evil, but instead derives his characteristics from orthodox sources in the Orient.

Although the imported word “Satan,” meaning “adversary,” comes from the Semitic, and “devil” has a Greek origin, Old English already had a wealth and variety of terms available to describe evil under its many forms. This would indicate a well-established tradition among the Anglo-Saxons of belief in evil creatures and evil powers, clearly pre-dating the influence of Christianity. Elves and goblins, aquatic monsters and

dragons, doomed spirits and spirits from hell, dwarves, giants and werewolves inhabit the lines of *Beowulf* and of the many medicinal elf-charms.<sup>504</sup> Old English compound words based on *hell* number in the dozens.<sup>505</sup> This extensive vocabulary witnesses to an Anglo-Saxon consciousness of evil permeating all levels of existence and all elements of nature. According to Richard North, before Christianity, a hierarchy of gods coexisted with this belief in evil, and although “heathen gods are hard to find in Old English literature,”<sup>506</sup> ... to the heathen mind in the early seventh, if not to our own blind folly in the late twentieth century, the world was charged with their power.”<sup>507</sup> In the opinion of some scholars, this might have helped the introduction and spread of Christianity, since, they claim, Anglo-Saxon paganism “was probably a form of animism sufficiently widespread, ingrained and powerful to swallow up a new god whenever one appeared.”<sup>508</sup> In reality, since their “new god” would have to supplant all others, Christian missionaries eager to evangelize still had to consider the implications of King Æthelberht’s welcoming speech:

The words and the promises you bring are fair enough, but because they are new to us and doubtful, I cannot consent to accept them and forsake those beliefs which I and the whole English race have held so long. But as you have come on a long pilgrimage and are anxious, I perceive, to share with us things which you believe to be true and good, we do not wish to do you any harm; on the contrary, we will receive you hospitably and provide what is necessary for your support;

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<sup>504</sup> Elf: *ælf*; goblin: *nihtgenga*, *puca*, *pucel*; aquatic monster: *brimwulf*, *meredeor*, *nicor*, *wætergesa*; dragon: *draca*, *ligdraca*, *niðraca*, *wyrn*; doomed spirit: *geosceftgast*; spirit from hell: *hellegast*, *helsceaða*; dwarf: *dweorg*; giant: *ent*, *fifel*, *ðyrs*; werewolf: *werwulf*; monster: *aglæca*, *egesa*.

<sup>505</sup> These words include: *hell-bend*: a hell-bond; *hell-cræft*: hellish art; *hell-cwalu*: hell-torment; *hell-deóful*: god of the underworld; *hell-dor*: the gate of hell; *helle-bealu* or *helle-bróga*: the terror of hell; *helle-bryne*: hell-fire; *helle-ceafl*: the jaws of hell; *helle-cinn*: the race of hell; *helle-fýr*: gehenna; *helle-grut*: the abyss of hell; *helle-hund*: a hell-hound; *helle-mere*: the lake of hell, Styx; *helle-rúne*: one who is skilled in the mysteries of hell, a sorceress, necromancer; *helle-seáp*: the pit of hell; *helle-wíte*: hell-torment, punishment; *hell-firen*: a hellish crime; *hell-sceaða*: fiend, devil; *hell-waran*: the inhabitants of hell.

Bosworth and Toller’s *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* at [http://lexicon.ff.cuni.cz/html/oe\\_bosworthtoller/b0526.html](http://lexicon.ff.cuni.cz/html/oe_bosworthtoller/b0526.html).

<sup>506</sup> Richard North, *Heathen Gods in Old English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1.

<sup>507</sup> *Ibid.*, 342.

<sup>508</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

nor do we forbid you to win all you can to your faith and religion by your preaching.<sup>509</sup>

As a result, the recommendations of Pope Gregory I soon led to “the integration of popular practices into the structure of the church and its texts.”<sup>510</sup> The adoption and survival of a pre-Christian vocabulary on evil would certainly illustrate this tactic. However, after the AD 793 sack of Lindisfarne by the Northmen and the realization that syncretism often weakens the faith against heresy, Alcuin criticizes the overly tolerant and inclusive spirit of the then numerous Anglo-Saxon priests and monks. In a letter to a friend in England, he writes,

Let God’s words be read in priestly assembly. There it is the reader who should be heard, not the harper; the sermons of the Fathers, not the songs of pagans. What has Ingeld to do with Christ?<sup>511</sup>

For Ælfric, at the start of new Viking raids on monasteries and towns, Ingeld and Norse mythology should have even less to do with Christ and Christianity. He frequently warns his audience:

Us sceamað to secgenne ealle ða sceandlican wiglunga .  
þe ge dwæs-menn drifað . ðurh deofles lare .  
102 oððe on wifunge . oððe on wadunge .  
oððe on brywlace . oððe gif man hwæs bitt  
þonne hi hwæt onginnað . oþþe him hwæt bið acenned .  
Ac wite ge to soðan . þæt se sceocca eow lærð  
106 þyllice scincraeftas . þæt he eowre sawla hæbbe  
ðone ge gelyfað his leas-brædnysse .<sup>512</sup>

[It shames us to speak of all the vile sorcery that you foolish men practise by the devil’s teaching: whether in marrying, or in traveling, or in brewing, or whether people pray to someone when they begin something, or when something is born to them. But be aware of the truth, that the devil teaches you such sorcery so that he may possess your souls when you believe his deceptions.]

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<sup>509</sup> Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, 40.

<sup>510</sup> Karen Louise Jolly, *Popular Religion in Late Saxon England*, 25.

<sup>511</sup> Quoted and translated in Richard North, *Heathen Gods in Old English Literature*, 56.

<sup>512</sup> Ælfric’s *Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat, Vol. I, “On Auguries,” 370-2 (lines 100-107).



By insisting on the reality of the Christian devil, Ælfric also tries to eliminate all remnants of his audience's pre-Christian beliefs in evil and replace them with orthodox teaching. Although Norse mythology did include the evil character of Loki, who is the god of fire, "the origin of all evil and the father of lies,"<sup>513</sup> Ælfric would only consider Satan in this capacity. Yet, according to the *Eddas*,

In the beginning of time, he was... united with All-father; but afterwards, like a fallen angel, having descended on earth, he became crafty, devastating and evil, like the desolating flame.... The foul, pernicious Loki was by the gods thrust down into the earth and confined in its caverns; there he yet works, though men notice it only when he moves, for then the earth trembles. The bonds yet hold him, but when they are loosed the gods will lose their sway over the world... then will the great serpent move itself in the deep, threaten the land and raise itself to heaven. The raging fire will cause death and desolation around it.<sup>514</sup>

Despite these similarities between Loki and Satan, "undoubtedly sufficiently marked to deserve comment,"<sup>515</sup> and possibly explained by the post-Christianization date of some of these texts, Loki has another side. He "does also some good: it is he who has almost always to procure what is wanting; he causes the implements and ornaments to be made for the gods."<sup>516</sup> Satan, as described in Anglo-Saxon literature, has no such redeeming features, and Christian writers strive to make this clear, by discrediting all pagan gods and classifying them as "demons" under the rule of Satan, an adversary of a supremely different caliber. Some scholars view this effort as successful, when it allows Grattan and Singer to ask:

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<sup>513</sup> Benjamin Thorpe, *Northern Mythology: comprising the principal popular traditions and superstitions of Scandinavia, North Germany and the Netherlands* (London: Edward Lumley, 1851), 203.

<sup>514</sup> *Ibid.*, 180-81. Thorpe used the *Eddas* as his sources, written down in the thirteenth century, long after Scandinavia became Christianized.

<sup>515</sup> R. E. Woolf, in "The Devil in Old English Poetry," *The Review of English Studies* 4:13 (1953): 1-12, makes this connection, when he refers to Jacob Grimm's belief that "Loki was at one time popularly associated with the devil." Woolf, however, also writes, "there is no evidence that at any historical date the Anglo-Saxons knew of Loki."

<sup>516</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

In what sense can Christianized Anglo-Saxons, on the cultural level of our documents (eight to twelfth century), be said to have “believed” in the supernatural beings of the Northern Pagan mythology?<sup>517</sup>

The evidence provided by Anglo-Saxon literature also suggests that, “when we catch a glimpse of the great gods of England they are devoid of many of the attributes ascribed to them in the Scandinavian cycle.”<sup>518</sup> In Ælfric’s writings, if he does mention pagan gods, they are all, without exception, referred to as demons. Yet, on the other hand, a text such as the *Lacnunga*, contemporary to Ælfric, contains “much purely pagan material and is packed with passages that are but superficially Christian.”<sup>519</sup> Based on this dual evidence, it would appear that if the Christianization of the Anglo-Saxons had largely eliminated the worship of the Northern gods, it had still to contend with “their lesser supernatural followers [who] still worked their evil wills on mortals,” such as Woden’s “fierce women,” the “dreaded elves” and the “oppressive dwarfs.”<sup>520</sup> Such recalcitrant beliefs emerge in a ritual copied in the late tenth or early eleventh century, most remarkable for its expressed purpose of getting rid of both “elfin enchantment and all temptations of the Fiend,” and requiring sacred objects, consecrated wine, prayers, celebrated masses, and written passages from the New Testament.<sup>521</sup> This ritual reveals the association still enduring in the popular mind between the Satan of Christianity and pre-Christian malignant spirits. In his *Lives of Saints*, Ælfric, true to the spirit of the Benedictine reform, endeavors to dismiss the shadowy fear associated with these remnants of evil from a polytheistic past, and to replace them with a true Christian understanding of Satan

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<sup>517</sup> John H. G. Grattan and Charles Singer, *Anglo-Saxon Magic and Medicine* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 57.

<sup>518</sup> Ibid.

<sup>519</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>520</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>521</sup> Ibid., 109.

and of the limits of his power over human beings. This perception of Satan originates in the Orient where monotheistic Judaism first appeared among faith systems built on a multitude of gods warring against each other. Judaism declared for the first time that the One God has no equal, when He said:

See ye that I alone am, and there is no other God beside me: I will kill and I will make to live. I will strike and I will heal; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand.<sup>522</sup>

To his audience now concerned with assuaging its fear of malevolent invaders from the North, Ælfric will frequently reiterate the fundamental tenets of Christian monotheism.

Monotheism implies the belief in one Supreme God, the Creator of all and having power over all. This Supreme God, generally perceived by man as essentially All-Good, cannot also cause the evil that is present in this world. In a system of multiple gods, the source of all evils can be attributed to one or several other competing gods. In monotheism, however, accounting for the existence of evil can often lead to unorthodox conclusions.<sup>523</sup> To inform and persuade the faithful, the Anglo-Saxon Church had at its disposal a tradition of solid arguments and explanations upon which Ælfric could rely. Emerging from the dualist heresy of Manichaeism, Augustine of Hippo was directly influenced by the Egyptian Plotinus, a Platonist who formulated the inevitable dilemma in that, although the One/Good is necessarily perfect, it must still, by its very nature, “diffuse itself into all the different possible forms of being.” Therefore, if matter both derives from the One/Good and can be evil, then “there is evil as the necessary

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<sup>522</sup> Deut. 32:39.

<sup>523</sup> To account for the problem of evil, many groups, mostly in the East, established dualistic religions, such as Zoroastrianism, Gnosticism, Manichaeism, Yazidism, and Bogomilism, based on the conflict between the two principles of Good and Evil. All these religions arose during the first millennium.

consequence of the Good diffusing itself.”<sup>524</sup> Once he converted to Christianity,

Augustine resolved this contradiction by explaining in his *City of God*,

There is then one sole Good, which is simple, and therefore unchangeable; and that is God. By this Good, all good things were created; but they are not simple, and for that reason, they are changeable. They are, I say, *created*, that is to say, they are made, not begotten. For what is begotten by the simple Good, is itself equally simple, identical in nature with its begetter.<sup>525</sup>

Since a being created by the Good is changeable and not “simple” (and “what is meant by ‘simple’ is that its being is identical with its attributes”), this being may then, like the fallen angels, turn away from the Good and choose evil, which is, according to

Augustine, “the loss of good.” Also available to Ælfric in King Alfred’s translation,

Boethius’s *The Consolation of Philosophy*, rediscovered by Alcuin of York, elaborates on this argument for the goodness of God. In Chapter XXXIV, Alfred translates,

Hu ne wast þu nu ðætte eall moncyn is anmodlice geþafa God is fruma ealra gooda and waldend ealra gescefta? He is hehste good, ne nænne mon nu þæs ne tweoð; forðæ þe hi nauht niton betere, ne furðu nauht emngoodes. Forðæm us sægð ælc gesceadwisnes and ealle men ilce andettað god sie hehste good, forþæmpe hi tacniað eall good on him sien.<sup>526</sup>

[How do you not now know that all mankind unanimously agrees that God is the cause of all goods and the ruler of all creatures? He is the highest good, nor are there any men now that doubt it, because they know no better being, nor any being equally good. For that reason, every statement tells us, and all men acknowledge, that God is the highest good, because they are a sign that all good is in him.]

Nevertheless, in Chapter XVI, Boethius also remarks that good things can become evil

“þurh þæs monnes yfel þe him yfel mid deð, and þurh dioful”<sup>527</sup> (because of the evil of

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<sup>524</sup> John Marenbon, *Medieval Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2007), 18-9.

<sup>525</sup> St Augustine, *Concerning the City of God Against the Pagans*, trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin Books, 1984), 440.

<sup>526</sup> *King Alfred’s Old English Version of Boethius ‘De Consolatione Philosophiae,’* ed. Walter John Sedgefield (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899), 83.

<sup>527</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

the man that does evil with them, and through the devil). The devil, or the personification of evil, appears again at the end of Alfred's translation:

Drihten ælmihtiga God, wyrhta and wealdend ealra gesceafta, ic bidde þe for þinre micelan mildheortnesse ... gestapela min mod to þinu willan and to min sawle þearfe; and gestranga me wið þæs deofles costnungu....<sup>528</sup>

[Lord Almighty God, Creator and Ruler of all creatures, I beg thee through thy great mercy... to strengthen my mind to your will and to my soul's need; and make me strong against the devil's temptations.]

How then could the goodness of God allow the existence of evil? Alfred writes,

is eac minre unrotnesse se mæsta dæl, ic wundrige forhwy se gooda God læte ænig yfel bion, oððe gif hit þeah bion scyle, and he hit gefapfian wille, forhwy he hit sona ne wrece.<sup>529</sup>

[this is also the greatest part of my anxiety; I wonder why the good God allows any evil to exist, or if it must exist, and He wills to consent to it, why he does not quickly punish it.]

Whereas the existence of evil is easily admissible in a pre-Christian and polytheistic system, it can become a major obstacle in monotheism, particularly in difficult times.

Ælfric addresses all these issues in his writings, starting with the nature of God, and the resulting nature of Satan. Always wary of heresy, he uses his *Lives* as elemental teaching opportunities, eliminating any propensity to dualism by making it clear that evil neither comes from God nor stands equal to Him. Faithful to Scripture and to Church teachings, Ælfric believes and tells his audience that, when God created the angels, He created them good and gave them free will. In that sense, the devil is a creature of God, as defined after the second Council of Braga of AD 572 by Martin of Braga in *De correctione rusticorum*.<sup>530</sup> Following this likely source, Ælfric presents the devil and the

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<sup>528</sup> Ibid., 149. This prayer only appears in *MS Bodley 180*, at the very end of this all-prose text.

<sup>529</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>530</sup> Stephen McKenna, in *Paganism and Pagan Survivals in Spain up to the Fall of the Visigothic Kingdom* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1938), 86, mentions that Carl P. Caspari

angels who followed him later as falling from heaven because they freely chose to commit the sin of Pride.<sup>531</sup>

308 seo is ord and ende ælcere synne .  
seo geworhte englas to atelicum deoflum .  
and ðone man macað eac gif he modigað to swyðe  
þæs deofles geferan ðe feol ær þurh hi .<sup>532</sup>

[it is the source and end of every sin. It made angels into terrible devils, and makes man also, if he grows exceedingly proud, the associate of the devil who fell previously because of it.]

Not only does God not create Satan as evil, but also never can Satan rank equal to Him.

In “Memory of the Saints,” classified by Ælfric as “Spel loca hwænne mann wille”<sup>533</sup> (a discourse for any occasion one wishes), he starts by entreating his audience, with examples from the Old Testament, “þæt ure life beo swa gelógod . / þæt ure ende geendige on god”<sup>534</sup> (that our life be so ordered / that our end ends in God). After Abel, Enoch, Noah, and Abraham, Ælfric chooses Job and his sufferings to make very clear the limits of the devil’s powers:

36 Iob se eadiga and se anræda godes ðegn .  
wæs swa ful-fremed on eallum godnyssum . þæt god sylf cwæð be him .  
þæt his gelica nære ða on ðam life ofer eorðan .

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, who edited *De correctione rusticorum* , “is of the opinion that a homily by an English monk, Aelfric, written in Anglo-Saxon about the year 1000, is borrowed in part from Martin. He bases his reason on the fact that both Martin and Aelfric follow the same general plan in regard to the origin of idolatry. There is also a remarkable agreement between the two writers in their descriptions of the shameful lives led by Jupiter, Juno, Mercury, Venus, and Saturn, whom the people later worshiped as gods. Both writers may have been following a common patristic tradition.” Martin was born in Pannonia (present-day western Hungary and parts of eastern Austria), and later became a monk in Palestine. Accounts of pilgrims from Spain later convinced him to travel to Galicia (where he became bishop of Braga) to convert Arians and pagans. Interestingly, in the late fifth century when the Anglo-Saxons occupied England, many Britons fled to Galicia and established the see of Britonia, which lasted till the Viking attacks of the late ninth century. Paulus Orosius, well known to the Anglo-Saxons, was born in Braga.

<sup>531</sup> The concept of “falling from heaven” appears in the Old English word for the devil as *helle-hinca*, the hell-limber lamed by his fall from heaven.

<sup>532</sup> *Ælfric’s Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat, Vol. I, “Memory of the Saints,” 358, (lines 308-11). Soon after the *Lives of Saints*, Ælfric elaborates on this concept of the Fall of Satan in his version of the *Hexameron* of St. Basil.

<sup>533</sup> *Ælfric’s Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat, Vol. I, “Memory of the Saints,” 336.

<sup>534</sup> *Ælfric’s Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat, Vol. I, “Memory of the Saints,” 336, (lines 6-7).

40      Ða bæd se deofol æt gode þæt he moste his fandian .  
          hwæðer he ðurh-wunian wolde on his godnysse  
          and bile-witnysse oð his lifes ende .  
          oððe he wolde fram gode abugan þurh ða ormætan ehtnysse .  
          þe se niðfulla deofol him on asende .<sup>535</sup>

[Job the blessed and constant servant of God was so perfect in all virtues that God Himself said of him that there was then no equal to him alive on earth. Then the devil asked God to be allowed to test him, whether he would be steadfast in his virtue and purity until the end of his life, or whether he would turn from God because of the intense persecutions the devil would send him.]

Here, Ælfric affirms that, as feared as he may be by many, Satan still needs God's permission to test anyone. In the New Testament, the very powerlessness of Satan in front of God first appears in the Synoptic gospels, when Satan tries unsuccessfully to tempt Jesus,<sup>536</sup> and culminates in *The Apocalypse*, when God seals the fate of Satan for all eternity;

And I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, the old serpent, which is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. And he cast him into the bottomless pit and shut him up and set a seal upon him, that he should no more seduce the nations till the thousand years be finished. And after that, he must be loosed a little time.<sup>537</sup>

The emphasis, both in the New and in the Old Testament, remains on the absolute power of God over Satan, and on the latter's role as determined by God's will, and thereby serving God's ultimate plan. In "On Auguries," Ælfric again insists on this subordinate position of Satan,

174      Ac wite ge to wisan þæt se wælhreowa deofol .  
          ne mæg mannum derian mid nanre untrumnysse .  
          ne heoraorf adydan butan drihtnes gepafunge .  
          God is eall godnys . and he æfre wel wile .  
 178      ac manna yfelnysses mod beon gestyrod .  
          þonne geðafað god þam sceoccan for oft .

<sup>535</sup> Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat, Vol. I, "Memory of the Saints," 338-40 (lines 36-43).

<sup>536</sup> Matt. 4:1-11; Mark 2:13; Luke 4:2-13.

<sup>537</sup> Apoc. 20:1-3.

þæt he men geswenct for heora mis-dædum .<sup>538</sup>

[But be sure that the cruel devil may not hurt men with any illness, nor kill their cattle, except with the Lord's permission. God is all goodness, and he always wishes well, but the spirits of men are moved by wickedness; then God often allows the devil to torment men for their misdeeds.]

Clearly, Satan has powers limited by God, and can only “torment men” when He allows it. Unlike the pagan faiths brought by the Anglo-Saxons, and by the Vikings in Ælfric's time, the monotheism expressed in the Bible permits no comparison or equivalence between good and evil, because the God of Israel is supreme: “I am the Lord, that make all things, that alone stretch out the heavens, that establish the earth. And there is none with me.”<sup>539</sup>

For Ælfric, contrary to what some scholars have suggested, this belief in the supremacy of God in no way prevents the belief in the existence of Satan and its straightforward expression in his *Lives of Saints*. Such scholars sometimes reach opposite conclusions because of the way they consider references to Satan in the writings of the past. In a series of five volumes on the history of the concept of the devil, Jeffrey Burton Russell analyzes the experience of evil as expressed in legends and texts throughout the centuries. In *Lucifer*, his volume on “The Devil in the Middle Ages,” he recommends that:

To understand early medieval diabolology, one must go beyond theological speculation to the colorful stories found in homilies and saints' lives that brought home to monks and laypeople the ubiquity of the Devil and his demons.<sup>540</sup>

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<sup>538</sup> Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat, Vol. I, “On Auguries,” 376 (lines 174-80).

<sup>539</sup> Isaias 44: 24.

<sup>540</sup> Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Lucifer: The Devil in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 154. The other volumes of the series are *The Devil: Perceptions of Evil from Antiquity to Primitive Christianity* (1977); *Satan: The Early Christian Tradition* (1981), , *Mephistopheles: The Devil in the Modern World* (1986) and *The Prince of Darkness: Radical Evil and the Power of Good in History* (1988).



On the other hand, and more recently, Peter Dendle, after studying the Devil in Old English Literature, follows a different approach. In *Satan Unbound*, he starts with this assumption:

I must emphasize from the beginning, however, that the devil is largely a literary motif, encountered primarily in ecclesiastical productions. There are no secular laws forbidding interaction with the devil, and no instructions for how local authorities should deal with a demon, were they ever to catch one.... If the devil looms large in many of our sources, it is because the extant writings were largely produced and preserved in ecclesiastical environments, and because they are moral rather than scientific in nature.<sup>541</sup>

The lack of consistency among medieval thinkers concerning the location of the devil is but a proof of this unscientific approach to the subject. Dendle questions why, if all medieval thinkers

are agreed, of course, that the devil is the originator of all sins in being their first cause, historically... now that he lies shackled in hell, to what extent is he implicated in the ongoing sins of fallen humanity?<sup>542</sup>

It is a fact that medieval thinkers believed that Satan was, according to the *Apocalypse*, bound in hell for a thousand years, and

when the thousand years shall be finished, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison and shall go forth and seduce the nations which are over the four quarters of the earth.<sup>543</sup>

Most of them, however, did not assume that the thousand years designated a specific time.<sup>544</sup> Moreover, it was also well established that Satan alone did not fall from heaven.

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<sup>541</sup> Peter Dendle, *Satan Unbound: The Devil in Old English Narrative Literature* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 12-13. As noted in Chapter Three, on “Ælfric and Paganism,” Anglo-Saxon secular laws did exist to punish witchcraft and sorcery, which presupposes the existence of at least one evil entity.

<sup>542</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>543</sup> Apoc. 20:7. Psalm 89:4 expresses the depth of difference between the divine and human perceptions of time: “For a thousand years in thy sight are as yesterday, which is past.” This concept later re-appears in 2 Peter 3:8: “But of this one thing be not ignorant, my beloved, that one day with the Lord is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.” From here, Augustine developed the concept of the Six Ages of the World, with the coming of Christ as the start of the Sixth. In *City of God*, 1091, he names the Seventh as the Sabbath, when “God will rest, as it were, on the seventh day, and he will cause us, who are the seventh day, to find our rest in him.”

There are more instances of the plural word “devils” in the New Testament and in Ælfric’s writings than of any individual name for a diabolical creature. Indeed, when asking for the name of the unclean spirit possessing a man, the spirit answers Jesus; “My name is Legion, for we are many.”<sup>545</sup> This explains why, if medieval thinkers believe that Satan was truly bound in hell for a thousand years, they also think that he still, with the help of the multitude of his demons, “as a roaring lion, goeth about seeking whom he may devour.”<sup>546</sup> The Benedictine monk Ælfric was also familiar with John Cassian’s *Conferences*, praised by Benedict in his *Rule*, and providing specific details on demons, particularly on their number and their activity:

the atmosphere which extends between heaven and earth is ever filled with a thick crowd of spirits, which do not fly about in it quietly or idly, so that most fortunately the divine providence has withdrawn them from human sight. For through fear of their attacks, or horror at the forms, into which they transform and turn themselves at will, men would either be driven out of their wits by an insufferable dread, and faint away, from inability to look on such things with bodily eyes, or else would daily grow worse and worse, and be corrupted by their constant example and by imitating them, and thus there would arise a sort of dangerous familiarity and deadly intercourse between men and the unclean powers of the air, whereas those crimes which are now committed among men, are concealed either by walls and enclosures or by distance and space, or by some shame and confusion: but if they could always look on them with open face, they would be stimulated to a greater pitch of insanity, as there would not be a single moment in which they would see them desist from their wickedness, since no bodily weariness, or occupation in business or care for their daily food (as in our case) forces them sometimes even against their will to desist from the purposes they have begun to carry out.<sup>547</sup>

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<sup>544</sup> According to Bernard McGinn, in *Visions of the End: Apocalyptic Traditions in the Middle Ages* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 88, “On the basis of a handful of texts, some nineteenth- and twentieth-century French historians created a picture of widespread terror in Christendom at the approach of the year 1000, the final year of the sixth and last millennium. We must remember, however, that the tradition of the centuries since Augustine had been against the literalistic treatment of the final thousand-year period.”

<sup>545</sup> Mark 5:9.

<sup>546</sup> 1 Peter 5:8.

<sup>547</sup> Conference Eight, Chapter XII of *The Conferences of John Cassian*, translated and edited by Edgar C.S. Gibson. From *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* (New York: 1894), accessed at <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/cassian/conferences.ii.ix.xii.html>. John Cassian (360-435) started his monastic life in Bethlehem, spent several years with hermits in the Egyptian deserts, and with St. John Chrysostom in Constantinople. He later founded two monasteries in Marseilles, one for men

In the face of such beliefs and with the knowledge that a monk like Ælfric does not share some information with the laity, as he indicates in the Latin Preface to the *Lives of Saints*,<sup>548</sup> many of Dendle's statements seem obvious. With such a multitude of shape-shifting demons, it is no surprise that Dendle should find that, in Old English hagiographical narratives, "Anglo-Saxon authors devote little attention to his physical description."<sup>549</sup> Since the very purpose of the devil is to cause humans to sin, it follows that "of the numerous mentions of the devil in Old English, a large proportion ostensibly refer to his role as tempter."<sup>550</sup> Since no human has the power of a devil, it is also expected that the devil "is most often, and most significantly, introduced as a character where a different functional villain (such as a thief or a Jew) would not do." What is not at all obvious in Old English literature is Dendle's fundamental assumption limiting the devil's function to a narrative one because of

the two great theological innovations that rendered his function in Christian thinking otherwise obsolete, Augustine's formulation of Original Sin and Anselm's reformulation of redemption theology. Original Sin eliminates the need for external motivation in daily human sin.

Yet, not only does the doctrine of Original Sin pre-date Augustine and originates with Paul,<sup>551</sup> but affirming that original sin "eliminates the need for external motivation in daily human sin" reveals a complete misunderstanding of the doctrine. Ælfric knows the

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and one for women. Michael Lapidge, in *The Anglo-Saxon Library*, 257, indicates that Ælfric cited Cassian's *Conferences* in several of his homilies.

<sup>548</sup> In *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat, Vol. I, 3, Ælfric writes: "And therefore I hold my peace as to the book called *Vitae Patrum*, wherein are contained many subtle points which ought not to be laid open to the laity, nor indeed are we ourselves quite able to fathom them." The *Vitae Patrum* or Palladius's ca. 420 AD *Lausiac History* abounds with encounters with demons.

<sup>549</sup> Peter Dendle, *Satan Unbound*, 11.

<sup>550</sup> Ibid.

<sup>551</sup> In Romans 5:12, Paul writes: "Wherefore as by one man sin entered into this world and by sin death; and so death passed upon all men, in whom all have sinned." Augustine himself, confronting Pelagianism in *Contra Jul.*, II, x, 33, names eleven Greek and Latin Fathers of the Church who previously mention this doctrine. From Stéphane Harent, "Original Sin." *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. 11 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1911), <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11312a.htm>.

difference between original sin and individual sin. He is equally aware of the external reality of the occasions of sin, when he exhorts his audience in “The Prayer of Moses,” intended to revitalize weakening penitents around the middle of Lent, because

Nis nan þincg swa lað þam geleafleasum deofle .  
 swa þæt hine man gebidde bealdlice to gode .  
 52 forðan þe [se] swicola wat þæt his wæpne sceolan  
 þurh halige gebedum toberstan swiðost .  
 and he bið ofer-swiðost simble þurh gebedum .

[There is nothing so loathsome to the unbelieving devil as a man who prays confidently to God, because the deceitful one knows that his weapons will, through holy prayers, shatter the most, and that prayers always overcome him.]<sup>552</sup>

As expressed in his writings, Ælfric’s perception of the devil’s role elaborates on that of a tempter, and represents him on occasion as prince of this world, the source of lies and of evil, feeling hatred and envy of humanity, attacking monks relentlessly, assailing souls at death, and even, impersonating Christ. Sometimes, Ælfric presents the devil as the Antichrist of the Apocalypse, as a wolf, a dragon and a werewolf, and devils as heathen gods, birds and cormorants, and exiles to wastelands.<sup>553</sup> In spite of Ælfric’s numerous references to evil and to the devil, Dendle still states in his conclusion,

I do not know what the devil may have meant personally for an individual in the Middle Ages, doubtlessly he meant different things to different people.<sup>554</sup>

He then surmises that

the tensions in these [early medieval] narratives, broadened in scope to encompass the widest possible cosmic dimensions, are abstract intellectual ones; they are meditations on the nature of being. They are symbolic chess games, as it were, quite distanced from the daily concerns of human behaviour.

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<sup>552</sup> *Ælfric’s Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat, Vol. I, “The Prayer of Moses,” 286 (lines 50-4).

<sup>553</sup> Robert DiNapoli, in *An Index of Theme and Image to the Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church* (Norfolk, UK: Anglo-Saxon Books, 2003), 27-9, provides a complete list of the corresponding passages. Old English literature commonly represents the devil as a shape-shifter: in *Solomon and Saturn*, he appears as a bird, wolf and dragon; the devils hounding *Guthlac* can look like humans or serpents.

<sup>554</sup> Peter Dendle, *Satan Unbound*, 120.

It can easily be argued, nevertheless, that the purpose of hagiography and of Ælfric's *Lives of Saints* in particular, is not "distanced from the daily concerns of human behaviour" but rather intended to distinctly influence and change human behaviour. When medieval scholars debate at length the choices made by Ælfric in his selection of saints to write about, they always agree that these choices were deliberate. They propose that either "Ælfric was attempting above all to make the Christian devotions of the liturgical year comprehensible to a lay audience,"<sup>555</sup> or "he seems to have deliberately refrained from presenting the life of the contemplative hermit as an ideal."<sup>556</sup> Moreover, as a genre, saints' lives are usually viewed at two levels, so that "purely as narratives their characteristic kind of 'meaning' is exemplary; at a literal or symbolic level, the saints present a pattern of life that reflects on the lives of others."<sup>557</sup> Why, when it comes to strengthening his audience against Satan, the greatest adversary of humanity, should Ælfric not seek the same outcome?

It was only in AD 1215 that the Fourth Lateran Council officially confirmed that the devil tempted man to sin, after God had created him and all the angels in a state of goodness. It then became official church teaching that the devil and many angels fell from heaven and chose evil out of their own free will. The Council also added that, after their death, the wicked shall suffer eternal punishment with the devil. Centuries earlier, however, the Anglo-Saxons already knew all this, from Bible texts and apocryphal

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<sup>555</sup> Michael Lapidge, "Ælfric's *Sanctorale*," *Holy Men and Holy Women* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 115.

<sup>556</sup> Mary Clayton, "Hermits and the Contemplative Life," *Holy Men and Holy Women* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 162.

<sup>557</sup> Malcolm R. Godden, "Experiments in Genre," *Holy Men and Holy Women* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 265.

writings from the Orient, particularly the *Book of Enoch* and the *Gospel of Nicodemus*.<sup>558</sup>

They also believed in the words of the *Apostles' Creed* applying to Jesus, as provided by

Ælfric as *Se Læssa Credo* (the Minor Creed):

... ic gelyfe on Hælend Crist, his ancennedan Sunu, urne Drihten, se wæs geeacnod of ðam Halgan Gaste, and acenned of Marian þam mædene, geðrowod under ðam Pontiscan Pilate, on rode ahangen, he wæs dead and bebyrged, and he niðer-astah to helle, and he arás of deaðe on ðam ðriddan dæge, and he astah up to heofenum, and sitt nu æt swiðran Godes Ælmihtiges Fæder, þanon he wyle cuman to demenne ægðer ge ðam cucum ge ðam deadum.<sup>559</sup>

[... I believe in Christ the Savior, his only-begotten Son, our Lord, who was conceived of the Holy Ghost, and born of Mary the virgin, suffered under Pontius Pilate, hanged on a cross, he was dead and buried, and he descended to hell, and he arose from the dead on the third day, and he ascended to heaven, and sits now at the right of God the Father Almighty, from there he will come to judge both the living and the dead.]

A contemporary of Ælfric, Wulfstan of York, presents the same tenets of the faith in a less traditional form in his homily "To Eallum Folc:"

... we gelyfað þæt hine man on rode ahenge [and] hine to deaðe acwealde [and] hine syððan on eorðan bebyrigde. And we gelyfað þæt he to helle ferde [and] ðærof gehergode eal þæt he wolde. And we gelyfað þæt he syððan of deaðe arise.... And we gelyfað þæt ða synfullan sculon þanon on an to helle faran [and] ðær a syððan mid deoflum wunian on byrnendum fyre [and] on ecan forwyrd, [and] ðæs ænig ende ne cymð æfre to worulde.<sup>560</sup>

[... we believe that men hanged him on a cross and slaughtered him to death and afterwards buried him in the earth. And we believe that he went to hell and

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<sup>558</sup> Written at least a century before Christ, the *Book of Enoch* or *Henoch* tells of the fall of the angels and of the origin of sin. The canonical "Epistle of St. Jude the Apostle" quotes Enoch in verses 14-15: "Now of these Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied, saying: 'Behold, the Lord cometh with thousands of his saints: / To execute judgment upon all and to reprove all the ungodly for all the works of their ungodliness, whereby they have done ungodly: and for all the hard things which ungodly sinners have spoken against God.'" The *Gospel of Nicodemus*, also called *Acta Pilati*, dates from the middle of the fourth century and is at the origin of the belief in Christ's descent to hell, an event widely depicted in Old English literature and art. Bede refers to it indirectly in his retelling of Drythelm's vision of hell in *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, 253-255.

<sup>559</sup> The two Creeds, along with other prayers, appear at the end of Benjamin Thorpe's edition of *The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church: the first part, containing the Sermones Catholici, or Homilies of Ælfric*, Vol. II (London: The Ælfric Society, 1846), 596.

<sup>560</sup> Dorothy Bethurum, *The Homilies of Wulfstan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1957; New York: Sandpiper Books, 1998), 167.

harrowed there all that he wanted. And we believe that he afterwards rose from the dead.... And we believe that the sinful shall then [after the Final Judgment] go at once to hell and thereafter dwell with the devils in the burning fire and die perpetually, and to this, there will come no end for all eternity.]

Explaining the fall of the angels in his *Treatise on the Old and New Testaments*, Ælfric writes,

nan yfel ðing næs on ðam englum þa git, ne nan yfel ne com ðurh Godes gesceapennisse, for ðan ðe he sylf ys eall god and ælc god cimd of him.<sup>561</sup>

[there was still no evil among angels, nor had any evil come because of God's creation, because he is all good, and every good comes from him.]

Yet, very soon,

gesceawode se an engel þe þær ænlicost wæs, hu fæger he silf wæs and hu scinende on wuldre, and cunnode his mihte, þæt he mihtig wæs gesceapen, and him wel gelicode his wurðfulniss þa: se hatte 'Lucifer,' þæt ys 'Leohtberend,' for ðære miclan beorhtnisse his mæran hiwes. Ða þuhte him to huxlic, þæt he hiran sceolde ænigum hlaforde.... He nolde þa habban his Scippend him to hlaforde....<sup>562</sup>

[an angel who was there the most splendid, beheld how fair he himself was and how shining in glory, and he knew his power, that he was created mighty, and he well liked his dignity then. He was called 'Lucifer,' that is 'Lightbearer,' for the intense brightness of his sublime appearance. Then he thought it too shameful that he should be subject to any lord.... He would not have his Creator be lord over him....]

Similar narratives also circulated in England in the so-called *Cædmon Manuscript* (*MS Junius 11*), contemporary to Ælfric, particularly in the earlier poems "Genesis B," and "Christ and Satan." "Genesis B" relates the falls of Satan and the angels and of Adam and Eve, and "Christ and Satan" covers the Harrowing of Hell and the temptation of Jesus in the desert. Composed in Anglo-Saxon England but with an oriental setting, *Solomon and*

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<sup>561</sup> *The Old English Version of the Heptateuch, Ælfric's Treatise on the Old and New Testament and his Preface to Genesis*, ed. Samuel J. Crawford, EETS OS 160 (London: Oxford University Press, 2004), 18.

<sup>562</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

*Saturn II* adds disobedience to the sin of pride as reasons for the fall of the devil.<sup>563</sup> All these texts rely heavily on details borrowed from apocryphal books originally composed in Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek, the *Book of Enoch* and the *Gospel of Nicodemus*. Although written in the Orient, their influence spread to Europe and England during the Middle Ages. The selective Ælfric, however, rejects apocryphal sources in his writings; indeed, he, as Augustine of Hippo before him, strongly condemns the popular third-century *Visio Pauli*, or Apocalypse of Paul, as a “false composition.”<sup>564</sup> “The most influential apocryphal vision in the Middle Ages,”<sup>565</sup> describing the apostle Paul’s vision of Hell, was first composed in Greek and purported to have been found in Paul’s house in Tarsus. Some Anglo-Saxon homiletic material, as in *Blickling XVI*, relies directly on the *Visio Pauli*, but not Ælfric’s. Instead, in “Alia Visio,” from the *Second Series* of his *Catholic Homilies*, Ælfric uses material from Bede to relate a vision of hell similar to that of Drythelm, relying here on Bede’s reputation for careful and judicious use of information:

Ic þa beheold þone ormætan lig. þe of þære neowelnysse astah; Se lig wæs mid manna sawlum afylled. and hi asprungon upp mid þam fyre swa swa spearcan, and eft ongean into þære nywelnysse. and þær sloh ut of þære nywelnysse ormæte stenc mid þam æðmum. se afylde ealle þa þeosterfullan stowe.<sup>566</sup>

[I then beheld the immense flame that rose from the abyss. The flame was filled with men's souls, and they sprung up with the fire like sparks, and then again

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<sup>563</sup> For more on the apocryphal traditions underlying the Anglo-Saxon perception of the fall of angels, see Daniel Anlezark’s “The Fall of the Angels in *Solomon and Saturn II*,” in *Apocryphal Texts and Traditions in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. Kathryn Powell and Donald Scragg (Woodbridge, UK: D.S. Brewer, 2003), 121-133.

<sup>564</sup> This condemnation appears on page 332 of Benjamin Thorpe’s *The homilies of the Anglo-Saxon church: the first part containing the Sermones Catholici, or Homilies of Ælfric in the original Anglo-Saxon* (London: The Ælfric Society, 1844).

<sup>565</sup> Charles Darwin Wright, *The Irish Tradition in Old English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 106-7.

<sup>566</sup> “Alia Visio” in *Ælfric’s Catholic Homilies: the Second Series*, ed. Malcolm Godden (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 200.



into the abyss; and there came out of the abyss an intense stench with the fumes,  
that filled all the dark place.]

Indeed, even though he must have known about *The Book of Nicodemus*, Ælfric acknowledges Bede in the homily where, for the first time in Old English, he uses the word *hergunge* to refer to the Harrowing of Hell. Here, he briefly describes Christ's descent into hell to free the souls of the righteous traditionally held captive there after the Fall: "Hell oncneow Crist, ðaða heo forlet hyre hæftlingas ut þurh ðæs Hælendes hergunge"<sup>567</sup> (Hell acknowledged Christ when it let its prisoners out because of the Savior's harrowing). Besides Bede and *The Book of Cerne*,<sup>568</sup> which also includes an account of the event, another popular text from the Orient, the apocryphal letter from Christ to Abgar, King of Edessa, was used by Ælfric to introduce a mention of the Harrowing of Hell in his *Lives of Saints*.<sup>569</sup> After the narrative of the martyrdom of Kings Abdon and Sennes of Persia under Decius, Ælfric adds 191 unrelated lines on King Abgar of Armenia, the recipient of this letter from Christ. In them, he writes:

          þa het se cynincg cuman his ceaster-gewaran .  
          and tatheus him bodade bealdlice be criste .  
176   and him eallum sæde þone soðan geleafan .  
          and mancynnes alysednysse þurh ðone mildan hælend .  
          þæt he wolde hine sylfne syllan to deaðe .  
          and to helle gecuman to gehelpene adames .  
180   and eac his gecorenra of adames cynne .  
          and hu he syþþan astah to his soðfæstan fæder .

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<sup>567</sup> From the homily "Easter Sunday" in *The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church*, Vol. I, ed. Benjamin Thorpe (London: The Ælfric Society, 1844), 228. It is widely accepted that Ælfric is the first to use the Old English word *hergunge* in the context of Christ's descent into hell.

<sup>568</sup> *The Book of Cerne* (Cambridge University Library, MS Ll. 1. 10) is a ninth-century illuminated prayer book in Old English, made for Bishop Æthelwold of Lichfield (818-30). In addition to a collection of prayers, it includes the four narratives of the passion of Christ, according to the four evangelists. Of interest to this chapter, it also contains a short drama in Latin based on the *Harrowing of Hell*. David Dumville provides a critical edition of this text in "Liturgical Drama and Panegyric Responsory from the Eighth Century? A Re-Examination of the Origin and Contents of the Ninth-Century Section of the 'Book of Cerne.'" *Journal of Theological Studies* XXIII, 2 (October 1972).

<sup>569</sup> More on the transmission of this letter to Anglo-Saxon England can be found in Christopher M. Cain's "Sacred Words, Anglo-Saxon Piety, and the Origins of the *Epistola salvatoris* in London, British Library, Royal 2.A.xx," in *JEGP, Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 108, 2, April 2009.

and cymð eft to demenne ælcum be his dædum.<sup>570</sup>

[Then the king summoned his citizens to come and Thaddeus boldly preached to them about Christ, and told all of them about the true faith, and about mankind's redemption by the merciful Savior; that he wanted to surrender himself to death, and to arrive in hell to help Adam, and also His chosen from Adam's offspring; and how he then rose to his just Father, and will come again to judge each one according to his deeds.]

Aside from adopting the popular belief in the Harrowing of Hell, Ælfric also describes hell itself in his *Lives*. In St. Sebastian's, it is a place of

reðum witum . on þam widgyllan fyre .  
þær dracon and næddran . mid deofollicum toðum .  
76 þæra hæðenra breost . biterlice ceowað .  
Ðær is wop . and wanung . and þæs ne wurð nan ende .<sup>571</sup>

[fierce tortures in the broad fire, where dragons and adders with diabolical teeth, there sadly chew the heathens' breasts. There is weeping and lamentations, and this has no end].

In the narrative of her martyrdom, Agnes proclaims her faith and warns the judge Sempronius of the horrors of hell:

seo grimlice hell . mid þam grædigum fyre .  
on þam ge beoð toblawene . and forbyrnan ne magon .  
140 ac beoð æfre ge-edniwode . ðære scan ontendnyse .<sup>572</sup>

[that terrible hell, with the hungry fire where you will be blown to pieces and not consumed, but you will be forever renewed in the blazing fire].

Expounding the teachings of Paul at the beginning of "On Auguries," Ælfric again emphasizes the eternity of those torments:

Gehwa mot yfeles geswican . and gebetan . ac gif he ðurh-wunað on yfelnyse .  
and forsihð his scyppendes beboda . and deofle gecwemð . þonne sceal he  
unðances on ecnyse ðrowian . on ðam unadwæscend-licum fyre . betwux ðam  
wyrrestan wurm-cynne . þe næfre ne bið adyd . ac ceowað symle . þæra arleasra  
lichama . on ðam hellican lige .<sup>573</sup>

<sup>570</sup> Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat, Vol. II, "Abdon and Sennes," 64 (lines 174-82).

<sup>571</sup> Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat, Vol. I, "St. Sebastian, Martyr," 120 (lines 74-7).

<sup>572</sup> Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat, Vol. I, "St. Agnes, Virgin," 178 (lines 138-40).

<sup>573</sup> Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat, Vol. I, "On Auguries," 366 (lines 29-34).

[Everyone can abstain from evil and make amends, but if he does not desist from evil and rejects his Creator's commands and pleases the devils, then he shall, against his will, suffer for all eternity in the unquenchable fire, among the worst sort of serpent that will never be destroyed, but will chew forever the bodies of the wicked in the fire of hell].

There is no doubt that Ælfric incorporated certain details from non-biblical narratives on the fall of the angels, on hell and on its harrowing by Christ. These details, however, were intended to emphasize the horrors of hell and reassure his audience of the ultimate power of God over Satan. Centuries before the Fourth Lateran Council, Ælfric might have felt that, in the dire circumstances they were experiencing, even certain apocryphal writings from the Orient could help the Anglo-Saxons understand the eternal consequences of their acts, and convince them that they could be saved if they accepted God's commands.

In addition to reminding his audience that evil never comes from God, but that it is nevertheless real, Ælfric always writes of God's fundamental gift of free will, both to Satan and to humans. Ælfric attributes the devil's fall to his own free will, just as he always tells his listeners that they too have free will and can choose between Sin and Virtue,<sup>574</sup> because they may not both "gecwæman criste and deofle"<sup>575</sup> (please Christ and the devil). Free will had little to do with the situation of pagan Anglo-Saxons before the advent of Christianity, a time spent in propitiatory sacrifices and rituals born of the fear

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<sup>574</sup> In "Memory of the Saints," in the *Lives of Saints*, Ælfric reminds his audience of the eight "heafod-leahtras" (Capital Sins): *Gula* or "gyferynss" (gluttony); *Fornicatio* or "forligr and unge-metegod galnyss" (fornication and excessive lust); *Avaritia* or "yfele gitsung" (evil greediness); *Tristitia* or "ðyssere worulde unrotnyss" (the grieving for things of this world); *Accidia* or "asolcennys oppe slæwð" (laziness or sloth); *Jactantia* or "ydel gylp" (idle or boastful speech), and *Superbia* or "modignyss" (pride or arrogance). Ælfric also reminds his audience of the corresponding eight "heafod-mægnu" (Capital Virtues that counteract the eight "heafod-leahtras"): *Temperantia* or "gemetegung" (moderation); *Castitas* or "clænnysse" (purity or chastity); *Largitas* or "cystignyss" (generosity); *Patientia* or "geðyld and þolmodnys" (patience and forbearance); *Spiritualis laetitia* or "gastlice blys" (spiritual joy); *Instantia boni operis* or "anrædnys" (constancy); "soðe lufu to gode" (true love of God), and "soðe eadmodnys" (true meekness).

<sup>575</sup> Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat, Vol. I, "On Auguries," 378 (line 221).

of evil powers. In the Bible, however, and in eastern sources, free will characterizes Satan's fate and all human behavior after the Creation. Every biblical account of the past glory of Lucifer attributes his disgrace to his own actions. In Isaiah 14:12-15, the prophet reveals,

How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, who didst rise in the morning? How art thou fallen to the earth, that didst wound the nations? And thou saidst in thy heart: I will ascend into heaven. I will exalt my throne above the stars of God, I will sit in the mountain of the covenant, in the sides of the north. I will ascend above the height of the clouds. I will be like the most High. But yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, into the depth of the pit.

After referring to this fall in his *Catholic Homilies* and shortly after composing the *Lives*, Ælfric will again reflect this belief in his adaptation of a Doctor of the Eastern Church, Basil of Caesarea's *Hexameron*, where he writes about the events of the sixth day of Creation, when

ure drihten wolde mannan gewyrcan of ðære ylcan eorðan. forðam ðe on ðysum fyrste afeoll se deofol of ðære healian heofonan mid his gegadum for his upahæfednysse into helle wite... [he] feoll sona adun mid eallum ðam englum ðe æt his ræde wæron. and hi wurdon awende to awyrigedum deoflum. Be ðam cwæð se hælend her on ðysum life. "Ic geseah ðone sceoccan swa swa scinende liget feallende adun dreorig of heofenum" forðam ðe he ahreas ungerydelice.<sup>576</sup>

[Our Lord would make man from that same earth, because at this time the devil fell with his companions from the high heavens into the punishment of hell because of his pride... [he] fell immediately down with all the angels who were in his counsel, and they were turned into accursed devils. About them the Savior, here in this life, said, "I saw the devil, just like a shining light, falling headlong down from heaven"<sup>577</sup> because he fell suddenly.]

Soon after Satan freely disobeys God, Adam and Eve also choose to disobey Him, an act made possible because He created them fully capable of choice. Theodore, an Eastern

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<sup>576</sup> Henry W. Norman, *The Anglo-Saxon Version of the Hexameron of St. Basil, or Be Godes Six Daga Weorcum And the Anglo-Saxon Remains of St. Basil's Admonitio Ad Filium Spiritualem : Now First Printed from Mss. in the Bodleian Library* (London: John Russell Smith, 1849), 16-18.

<sup>577</sup> From Luke 10:18, "And he said to them: I saw Satan like lightning falling from heaven."

monk from Tarsus in Cilicia, who later became Archbishop of Canterbury in seventh-century England, firmly states this doctrine of the Church in his *Laterculus Malalianus*:

And thus it should be believed that man was made in the beginning by God appropriate in age and capable in mind and full of understanding, with which he could have captured victory, if he had been able to overcome the author of death. And accordingly, he incurred the penalty of death, since he was not under the motion of a child and deficient in sense, but a person full of intelligence offending in paradise, since it was in his knowledge to do good and not to do wrong.<sup>578</sup>

In his *Lives of Saints*, Ælfric repeatedly writes of free will, not only Satan's, but also man's. The following passage from "On Auguries" is a perfect example of Ælfric's clear, didactic style:

ac god us ne nyt swa þeah þæt we god don sceolon .  
ne eac us ne forwyrnð yfel to wyrccenne .  
250 forðan þe he us forgeaf agenne cyre .  
He sealde swiðe fæste gife . and swyðe fæste . æ .  
mid þære gife ælcum menn oð his ende . earmum and eadigum .  
þæt is seo gifu þæt se man mot don þæt he wile .  
and þæt is seo . æ . þæt god forgyt ælcum menn be his gewyrhtum .  
255 ægðer ge on þysre worulde . ge on þære toweardan .  
swa god . swa yfel . swa hwæðer swa he begæð .  
Gif hwa nu wundrige hwi god wolde  
258 forgifan þam yfelum mannum agenne freo-dom .  
þone he wat on ær þæt hi yfel don willað .  
Nu cweðe we þæt hit ne gerist nanum ricum cynincge  
þæt hi ealle beon þeowa menn ðe him þenian sceolon .  
262 and on his anwealde ne beo furðon an frig man .<sup>579</sup>

[but God does not however compel us to do good, nor does He prohibit us from striving after evil, because He gave us free will. He gave a most constant gift, and a most constant law along with that gift, to every man until his death, to rich and poor. This is the gift, that a man may do as he wills, and the law, that God rewards every man according to his merit, both in this world and in the future, either good or evil, whichever he does. If anyone now wonders why God willed to give evil men their own freedom, when he knew beforehand that they will do evil, we now say that it does not befit any powerful king that all men who must serve him are slaves, and that there not be one free man under his authority.]

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<sup>578</sup> Jane Stevenson, *The "Laterculus Malalianus" and the School of Archbishop Theodore* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 145.

<sup>579</sup> Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat, Vol. I, "On Auguries," 380 (lines 248-262).

Still, the monk Ælfric knows human weakness, the power of temptation, and the despair of sinners. He offers his faithful the hope of forgiveness when a battle is lost to the devil, and the chance to be delivered from demonic possession. Ælfric's 670-line life of Saint Basil, who was taught about Christianity in Egypt and baptized in Jerusalem, provides a detailed account of a young man making a pact with the devil and forsaking Christ in exchange for the love of a woman.

368      Ða ge-brohte se dry-man . þone cnapan . to his deofle .  
          and se deofol befran .þone dweligendan cnapan .  
          gif he wolde on hine gelyfan . and his hælende wiðsacen .  
          wið þam þe he gefremode his fulan galnysse .<sup>580</sup>

[Then the sorcerer led the young man to his devil and the devil asked the deceived young man if he would believe in him and renounce his Savior if he fulfilled his impure lust.]

The devil drives a hard bargain and wants a record of the pact:

376      Ða cwæð se sceocca eft . Ge synd swiðe unge treowa .  
          þonne ge min be-hofiað . þonne ic helpe eow .  
          and ge wipsacað me eft . and cyrrað to eowrum criste  
          sepe is swiðe myld-heort . and myldelice eow under-fehþ  
          ac wryt me nu sylf wylles . þæt þu wiðsaca criste .  
          380      and þinum fulluhte . and ic ge-fremme ðinne lust .<sup>581</sup>

[Then said the fiend again: "you are very unfaithful. When you want me, then I help you and you renounce me afterwards and return to your Christ, he who is merciful and kindly accepts you. But write for me now, of your own accord, that you renounce Christ and your baptism, and I will fulfill your lust, and you will be doomed with me on the Day of Judgment.]

The young man signs the pact forsaking Christ, and then feels anguish and guilt. Under Basil's care, after fourteen days of repentance and prayers, the young man is taken to the Church, where Basil and all the people pray to God for his deliverance.

Mid þam þe hi swiðost bædon . binnan þæra cyrcan .

<sup>580</sup> Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat, Vol. I, "Saint Basilus, Bishop," 72, (lines 367-70).

<sup>581</sup> Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat, Vol. I, "Saint Basilus, Bishop," 72, (lines 375-81).

Da com se wæl-reowa deofol . wolde geniman þone cnapan .  
 of basilius handum . hetelice teonde .  
 444 and cwæð to ðam halgan . þæt he hine be-rypte .  
 ne sohte ic na hine . ac he sylf com to me .  
 her ic habbe his hand-ge-wryt . þæt ic hit ge-healde mid me  
 to þam ge-mænelican dome . on þam micclum dæge .  
 448 Ða cwæð se halga wer . we clypiað to ðam hælende .  
 up-ahafenum handum oð þæt þu þæt hand-ge-wryt agife .  
 Ða clypodon hi ealle . kyrrieleyson .  
 up-ahafenum handum . wið heofonas weard .<sup>582</sup>

[When they prayed the most inside the church, then came the cruel devil wanting to take the young man from Basil's hands, pulling violently, and told the saint that he had robbed him: "I sought him not, but he came to me himself. Here I have his handwritten contract that I retain with me till the universal judgment on the great day." Then the holy man said, "We shall implore the Savior with our hands towards heaven until you return the contract." Then they all cried out "Kyrie Eleison."]

The contract then falls within Basil's reach and he destroys it just as Jesus destroys by dying on the Cross the

Blotting out the handwriting of the decree that was against us, which was contrary to us. And he hath taken the same out of the way, fastening it to the cross: And despoiling the principalities and powers, he hath exposed them confidently in open shew, triumphing over them in himself.<sup>583</sup>

What Basil does is show that a person who wills it and repents can be saved from the devil. Another path to deliverance from devils is exorcism. Ælfric explains to his audience that as powerful as a demon may be, there are humans who have the power to fight the devil and defeat him. In Matt 10:1, Jesus gives his disciples power over demons:

And having called his twelve disciples together, he gave them power over unclean spirits, to cast them out and to heal all manner of diseases and all manner of infirmities.

After the death of Christ, his disciples continue his acts of exorcism. In Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*, there are several instances of expulsion of demons. Martin of Tours (ca. 316-397)

<sup>582</sup> Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat, Vol. I, "Saint Basilus, Bishop," 76, (lines 441-50).

<sup>583</sup> Colossians 2:14-15.

first ordained an exorcist by Hilary of Poitiers speaks with devils, sets fire to their temples, drives them out of people, and even tries to convert the devil in a most unusual manner:

Pa cwæð martinus to þam manfullan eft ðus .  
þeah ðu earming woldest on þisum end-nextan timan  
744 manna ehtnysse geswican . and þine dæda behreowsian .  
ic on god truwode . þæt ic þe mildsunge behete .<sup>584</sup>

[Then Martin spoke again to the wicked one: “If you, poor wretch, would in this final time abandon the persecution of men and repent of your deeds, I so trust in God that I promise you mercy.]

St Maur, the disciple of St. Benedict, who himself performed numerous exorcisms, calls down God’s punishment upon a demon:

312 Ða cwæð se halga wer . to ðam hetolan sceoccan .  
Ðreage ðe se hælend . þe hæfð ealles geweald .  
þu leas-breda feond . and facnes ord-fruma .<sup>585</sup>

[Then the holy man said to the evil spirit, “May the Savior, who has dominion over all, chastise you, you deceiving fiend and instigator of evil.]

These two lines contain the Church’s essential teachings on the devil, which Ælfric faithfully transmits to his audience. The devil deceives and incites to evil, from his first appearance in the Orient, in the Garden of Eden, where

a river went out of the place of pleasure to water paradise, which from thence is divided into four heads. The name of the one is Phison... And the name of the second river is Gehon: the same is it that compasses all the land of Ethiopia. And the name of the third river is Tigris: the same passes along by the Assyrians. And the fourth river is Euphrates.<sup>586</sup>

Before Christ, demons

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<sup>584</sup> Ælfric’s *Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat, Vol. II, “Saint Martin, Bishop and Confessor,” 266, (lines 742-45).

<sup>585</sup> Ælfric’s *Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat, Vol. I, “Saint Maur, Abbot,” 166, (lines 312-14).

<sup>586</sup> Genesis 2: 10-14.



were viewed as malignant and as harbingers of evil for man. Astrology flourished, even philosophers were magicians, and people flocked to the oriental cults in hope of redemption from despair. A fear and despair, a feeling of weariness, had begun to spread over the ancient world and the second century B.C.<sup>587</sup>

For the early Christians of the Orient, the coming of Christ the Savior and his resurrection changed everything. They still lived in a demonic world, but now Christ had “dominion” and there was the new hope of eternal life in heaven:

We magon þurh godes fylst ða feondlican leahtras  
mid gecampe ofer-winnan . gif we cenlice feohtað .  
380 and habban us on ende þone ecan wurð-mynt .  
a mid gode sylfum gif we swincað nu her .<sup>588</sup>

[We may, with God’s help, overcome with a struggle the hateful vices if we fight properly, and obtain for ourselves the eternal glory, forever with God himself, if we strive here now.]

Missionaries and monks carried this message to the West with their sacred books, living tradition, and the narrative of their saints’ lives who, without exception, faced the devil and won because

Ne mæg se deofol mannum derian butan godes ðafunge .  
ne heora ðincg amyrran . þonne he ne moste faran  
198 furðon on þa swin . butan him geðafode þæs se hælend .  
Gif se deofol drecð . oþþe ure þincg adyd  
þæt getimað þonne swa for twam intingum .  
oþþe god swa þreað ure ðwyrlican dæda .  
202 oððe he ure afandað on ðære frecednysse .  
and se sceoccan sceall aswæman æt us .  
gif we anræde beoð on urum geleafan .  
and crist hine adræfð þæt he us derian ne mæg  
206 gif we ða ehtnysse eadmodlice forberað .  
and butan ceorunge symle gode þancige .<sup>589</sup>

[The devil may not hurt men without God’s permission, nor destroy their property, since he could not enter at first into the swine unless the Savior allowed

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<sup>587</sup> Diana Walzel, “Sources of Medieval Demonology,” in *Articles on Witchcraft, Magic and Demonology* Vol. 2, ed. Brian P. Levack (New York: Garland Publishing, 1992), 83.

<sup>588</sup> *Ælfric’s Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat, Vol. I, “Memory of the Saints,” 362 (lines 378-81).

<sup>589</sup> *Ælfric’s Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat, Vol. I, “On Auguries,” 378 (lines 196-207).

him. If the devil torments us or destroys our property, then that happens for two reasons. Either God punishes our perverse deeds in this way or he tests us in danger, and the devil shall grieve because of us, if we are constant in our faith. And Christ will drive him away so that he may not hurt us if we suffer the persecution meekly, and without murmuring always thank God.]

In Ælfric's understanding, Satan, though limited in powers, is still the ultimate adversary of man, bent on revenge for having lost his place in heaven:

Pa ongeat se deofol þæt Adam and Eua wæron to ðy gesceapene þæt hi sceolon mid eadmonysse and mid gehyrsumnysse geearnian ða wununge on heofenan rice ðe he of-afeoll for his up-afednysse, þa nam he micelne gramen and andan to þam mannum, and smeade hu he hi fordon mihte.<sup>590</sup>

[When the devil discovered that Adam and Eve were created in order that they should, with meekness and with docility, merit living in the kingdom of heaven from which he fell because of his arrogance, then he took umbrage and felt very angry towards mankind, and he considered how he could destroy them.]

By using saints' lives to illustrate Christian eschatology, Ælfric both warns his faithful of the seriousness of their situation and comforts them with the promise of a better life.

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<sup>590</sup> From the homily "On the Beginning of Creation," in *The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church*, Vol. I, ed. Benjamin Thorpe (London: The Ælfric Society, 1844), 16.

## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSION

In recent decades, Old English's extensive hagiographical corpus of saints' lives by Ælfric and other anonymous ones has become the object of renewed interest.<sup>591</sup> The discovery of sources, the search for common themes, the attitudes to orthodoxy and authority, and the interest in female saints' lives are but a few of the directions this scholarship has taken.<sup>592</sup> The examination of Ælfric's *Lives of Saints* as social commentary has also produced opinions of their author ranging from "Ælfric possessed a keen awareness of political events"<sup>593</sup> to "whilst Ælfric clearly demonstrates an interest in warfare... his saints' lives serve a larger spiritual and ecclesiastical purpose."<sup>594</sup> In general, scholars would agree that, "Although he is often presented as a cloistered scholar unaware of the great secular turmoil of his time, Ælfric's importance as a commentator on society should not be underestimated."<sup>595</sup> This paper has taken into account this variety of opinions and presented the *Lives of Saints* as a deliberate selection of saints, mostly martyrs, as role models for an audience facing renewed violence from the Vikings. That Ælfric mostly chooses saints from the Orient should be seen as the

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<sup>591</sup> E. Gordon Whatley, in "An Introduction to the Study of Old English Prose Hagiography: Sources and Resources," *Holy Men and Holy Women: Old English Prose Saints' Lives and Their Contexts*, ed. Paul E. Szarmach (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 4, sets the number at "100 or so vernacular texts."

<sup>592</sup> For a review of current trends in the field, see Claire Watson's "Old English Hagiography: Recent and Future Research" in *Literature Compass* 1 (2004), 1-14.

<sup>593</sup> Here C. Watson refers to James W. Earl, "Violence and Non-Violence in Anglo-Saxon England: Ælfric's Passion of St. Edmund," *Philological Quarterly* 78 (1999), 125-49.

<sup>594</sup> C. Watson mentions Hugh Magennis, "Warrior Saints, Warfare and the Hagiography of Ælfric of Eynsham," *Traditio* 56 (2001), 27-51.

<sup>595</sup> C. Watson directly quotes Malcolm Godden, "Money, Power and Morality in Late Anglo-Saxon England," *Anglo-Saxon England* 19 (1990), 41-65, here 55.

expression of the Anglo-Saxons' awareness and recognition of the Orient as the source of their religious inheritance.

In the fourth and fifth centuries AD, "significant numbers of pilgrims were, it seems, on the road to Jerusalem. Rome was active as a goal by the seventh century and Santiago de Compostela by the ninth century."<sup>596</sup> History can usually best explain these changes of destination for pilgrimages after Constantine's AD 313 Edict of Toleration. Jerusalem and the Holy Places, with a mostly Christian population, then became the major center until several outbreaks of smallpox and bubonic plague in the Eastern Roman Empire were followed by the Persian and Muslim conquests of Jerusalem in AD 614 and 638.<sup>597</sup> By then, Pope Gregory the Great had sent missionaries to England and Rome had become the "capital of Anglo-Saxon England" and the new destination of Anglo-Saxon pilgrims.<sup>598</sup> Soon after the Muslims conquered Jerusalem and the new rulers officially protected the Holy Sites, pilgrims returned to Jerusalem until 1009, when Al-Hakim bi Amr Allah, generally intolerant of religious minorities, ordered the destruction of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher.<sup>599</sup> By that time, after the discovery of the tomb of St James in the ninth century, Anglo-Saxon pilgrims were traveling to St.

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<sup>596</sup> J. Stopford, "Some Approaches to the Archaeology of Christian Pilgrimage." *World Archaeology* 26, 1 (1994), 59.

<sup>597</sup> For the importance of narratives for knowledge of early pilgrimages, see Blake Leyerle's "Landscape as Cartography in Early Christian Pilgrimage Narratives," in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 64, 1 (1996), 119-43.

<sup>598</sup> Nicholas Howe, in "Rome: Capital of Anglo-Saxon England." *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 34, 1 (2004), 147-72, argues that, despite the "traditional focus of Anglo-Saxonists on the cultural links between the island and the northwestern regions of Europe," the Anglo-Saxons "found an intellectual and spiritual *patria* that had Rome as its capital," 148.

<sup>599</sup> The Fatimid ruler Al-Hakim bi Amr Allah, a Shia of the Ismaili branch, broke the policy of religious tolerance of his predecessors and established in 1005 the "law of differentiation" ordering Christians and Jews to wear different and distinguishing clothing. Soon after his disappearance in AD 1021, his son mended relations with Christians and pilgrimages resumed. In AD 1065, however, the Turks conquered Jerusalem and pilgrims were frequently attacked on their way to the Holy Places. One memorable episode concerns The Great German Pilgrimage of 1064-65 when several thousand pilgrims were slaughtered by Bedouins. For more details, see <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/1064pilgrim.html>.

James of Compostella by sea, or “the English Way,” because Viking invasions of England and Northern France and Muslim attacks on Rome disrupted the traditional pilgrimage routes to Jerusalem or Rome.<sup>600</sup> The Holy Places, however, remained the preferred destination.

To reach Jerusalem, pilgrimages followed well-established trade routes across the Channel, through Europe and across the Mediterranean. Trade between Britain and the Orient historically dates back to the days of the Roman occupation of Britain. In his *Colloquy*, Ælfric includes a merchant as one of his characters, who lists all the goods he normally carries to England on his ship:

pællas ond sidan, deorwyrþe gymmas ond gold, selcuþe reaf ond wrytgemangc,  
win ond ele, ylþesban ond mæstlingc, ær ond tin, swefel ond glæs, on þylces  
fela.”<sup>601</sup>

[purple garments and silk, gems and gold of great worth, rare robes and perfumes,  
wine and oil, ivory and brass, copper and tin, sulfur and glass, and many such  
goods.]

Goods such as “purple garments” in particular would indicate an Eastern Mediterranean provenance. To reach their destination, tradesmen and pilgrims may have followed the same routes, but the latter enjoyed traditional privileges not granted to merchants. On the subject of pilgrims, in a letter to King Offa of the Mercians, Charlemagne writes:

We have granted that they may go on their journey in peace without any disturbance, carrying with them their necessities. But we have discovered that certain [men] are mingled with them fraudulently for the purposes of trade, pursuing profit, not religion. If such men are found among them, let them pay the established tolls at the proper places. Let the others go free in peace.<sup>602</sup>

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<sup>600</sup> During the ninth century, when Anglo-Saxons travelled less to the Holy Places, Cynewulf’s four signed poems, *The Fates of the Apostles*, *Juliana*, *Elene*, and *Christ II*, deal exclusively with saints and events from the Orient. For Christians living far away from the Holy Places, this remembrance of events related to their spiritual past can be compared to the creation of labyrinths in the floor of twelfth-century medieval cathedrals and stations of the Cross for the faithful to vicariously retrace the Passion of Christ.

<sup>601</sup> The Old English text of Ælfric’s *Colloquy* can be found at <http://www.ucalgary.ca/UofC/eduweb/engl401/texts/frame.html>

<sup>602</sup> Howard L. Adelson. *Medieval Commerce* (New York: D. Van Nostrand, 1962), 122.

This special treatment of pilgrims reflects the extraordinary purpose of what was a long and arduous trip undertaken to venerate a holy person, obtain physical or spiritual healing, fulfill a promise or thank God. Pilgrimages were common to most ancient religions: the Greeks consulted the oracle at Delphi, Buddhists visited the four places representing the four stages of Buddha's life, and Jewish pilgrims visited the Temple of Jerusalem. As a Jew, Jesus himself went there numerous times: he was presented there as a 40-day old infant, lost there by his parents at the age of twelve, prayed and taught there, and chased the moneychangers and merchants from its courtyard. He was later tried by the Sanhedrin, which met in the Temple. Since it led to the places where Jesus had lived, taught, suffered and died, the road to Jerusalem remained the most sacred journey for Christian pilgrims and they travelled it for generations and in large numbers.

In the fifth century, Jerome in his letter "To Eustochium" shares with her the emotional details of her mother Paula's pilgrimage to the Holy Places. She travelled from site to site, everywhere reliving the narratives of the Gospels. In Bethlehem,

she protested in my hearing that she could behold with the eyes of faith the infant Lord wrapped in swaddling clothes and crying in the manger, the wise men worshipping Him, the star shining overhead, the virgin mother, the attentive foster-father, the shepherds coming by night to see "the word that was come to pass" ... She declared that she could see the slaughtered innocents, the raging Herod, Joseph and Mary pilgrims to Jerusalem...<sup>603</sup>

In his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, Bede includes a much less emotional narrative, made up of short excerpts from Adamnan's account of a trip by "Arculf, a

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<sup>603</sup> Philip Schaff, ed. "Letter CVIII: To Eustochium," in *Jerome: the Principal Works of St. Jerome*, trans. W. H. Fremantle. In *Select library of Nicene and post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church., Second Series*, Vol. 6 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954). Also at <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf206.v.XXII.html>

bishop of Gaul who had visited Jerusalem to see the holy places,” around AD 680.<sup>604</sup>

These excerpts still provide enough specific details to affect the faithful, such as the description of the footprints of Jesus in the center of the church built on the place “from which the Lord ascended to heaven” and of eight lamps whose “rays are said to stir the hearts of all who see them to zeal and penitence.”<sup>605</sup> Bede also writes down the entire account of Arculf’s pilgrimage in his *On the Holy Places*. In *Writing the Map of Anglo-Saxon England*, Nicholas Howe suggests that this text by Bede “was meant to inspire its readers to a kind of mental tourism that would take them from their native place to Jerusalem and its environs.”<sup>606</sup> In Howe’s words:

Bede’s *On the Holy Places* stands as the textual equivalent of a pilgrimage object ... a textual reliquary that closes the distance between the originary center of Christian belief and the distant north. His text is a guide for diminishing the remoteness of the island, and thus its distance from the warming rays of Christ the sun.<sup>607</sup>

As a familiar place where events of the Old and New Testaments occurred, Ælfric frequently names Jerusalem in his *Catholic Homilies*. He gives it precedence over Rome when he describes the uniting, rather than distant, rays of the rising sun:

Swa hraðe swa heo up-asprincð on ærne merigen, heo scinð on Hierusalem, and on Romebyrig, and on ðisum earde, and on eallum eardum ætgædere.<sup>608</sup>

[As soon as he rises in the early morning, he shines on Jerusalem, and on Rome, and on this land, and on all lands together.]

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<sup>604</sup> Bede. *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, 263-66.

<sup>605</sup> Bede. *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, 265.

<sup>606</sup> Nicholas Howe. *Writing the Map of Anglo-Saxon England: Essays in Cultural Geography* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 140. The complete text of *On the Holy Places* can be found in *Bede: A Biblical Miscellany*, trans. W. Trent Foley and Arthur G. Holder (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999), 5-25.

<sup>607</sup> Nicholas Howe. *Writing the Map of Anglo-Saxon England*, 139.

<sup>608</sup> Benjamin Thorpe, ed. *The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church*, Vol. I (London: The Ælfric Society, 1844), 286.

Yet, in Ælfric's mind, and however primary it may be to a Christian, Jerusalem is just a place on this earth. Above all, Ælfric insists on the need for the faithful to look towards a heavenly Jerusalem.

In his "Homily for Palm Sunday," Ælfric teaches:

Sion is an dun, and heo is gecweden, 'Sceawung-stow'; and Hierusalem, 'Sibbe gesihð.' Siones dohtor is seo gelaðung geleafullra manna, þe belimpð to ðære heofonlican Hierusalem, on þære is symle sibbe gesihð, butan ælcere sace, to ðære us gebrincð se Hælend, gif we him gelæstað.<sup>609</sup>

[Sion is a hill, and it is regarded as a 'Place of Contemplation'; and Jerusalem, 'A Vision of Peace.' The daughter of Sion is the assembly of the faithful, who belong to the heavenly Jerusalem, where there is always a vision of peace, without any conflict; there will the Savior lead us, if we follow him.]

After bemoaning the sack of Rome and looking for causes to this loss, Augustine of Hippo had also turned his eyes to the City of God and revisited Psalm 137 to preach in Carthage in AD 412 "this psalm's imagery of exile."<sup>610</sup> Just as the Jews lost Jerusalem and went into exile to Babylon, many Christians fled to Africa from Rome. Rather than seek retribution and the return of the temporal Jerusalem, as do the rabbis in their Midrash of that psalm, Augustine asked the faithful to

sigh for the everlasting Jerusalem: whither your hope goeth before, let your life follow; there we shall be with Christ. Christ now is our Head; now He ruleth us from above; in that city He will fold us to Himself; we shall be equal to the Angels of God.<sup>611</sup>

For Augustine, as it would be for Ælfric,

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<sup>609</sup> Benjamin Thorpe, ed. *The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church*, Vol. I (London: The Ælfric Society, 1844), 210.

<sup>610</sup> For a parallel discussion of rabbinic and Augustinian exegeses, see Robert Kirschner, "Two Responses to Epochal Change: Augustine and the Rabbis on Ps. 137 (136)," *Vigiliae Christianae* 44, 3 (1990), 243.

<sup>611</sup> Philip Schaff, ed. "Expositions on the Book of Psalms." *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series*, Vol. 8 (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1888.), <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf108.ii.CXXXVII.html>



Earthly dominion is merely a divine dispensation that may be revoked at any time. Even the sack of Rome cannot shake Christian hope, for such hope transcends worldly tribulations... the Christian's home is not here but elsewhere.<sup>612</sup>

If Ælfric sees Jerusalem more as a spiritual destination than a geographical location, it follows that his concept of the Orient is that of a believer in the eternal life. According to this belief, the Orient is where the divine light rises, and Ælfric prays:

Þæt soðe Leoht, Hælend Crist, ðe onlihte ealne middaneard, onlihte ure mod mid his godcundan leohte; and þæt ne beo næfre ðurh ðone laðan deofol adwæsced, þæt we mid leohte ures geleafan and godum gearnungum to ðam ecum life becuman moton. Amen.<sup>613</sup>

[May the true Light, Christ the Savior, who gives light to the whole earth, give light to our spirits with his divine light; and may it never be extinguished by the loathsome devil, so that we with the light of our faith and with good merits might enter the eternal life. Amen.]

When Christ comes again, he will come from the Orient, "For as lightning cometh out of the east and appeareth even into the west: so shall also the coming of the Son of man be."<sup>614</sup> All the saints are already in the heavenly Jerusalem and in the presence of God.

They have "fought a good fight... finished [the] course... kept the faith."<sup>615</sup> That is why

their characteristic kind of "meaning" is exemplary: at a literal or symbolic level, the saint presents a pattern of life that reflects on the lives of others... The miracles that characterize the genre can be seen also as attesting to the power of the true God.<sup>616</sup>

When Ælfric selected most of his saints from the Orient, he knew that it had seen the birth of Christianity and for centuries, witnessed the waves of persecutions, the dividing heresies, the brutal conquests and the religious intolerance, and a multitude of martyrs and saints. Although younger in the faith, Ælfric's England had already suffered and was

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<sup>612</sup> Robert Kirschner, "Two Responses to Epochal Change: Augustine and the Rabbis on Ps. 137," 259.

<sup>613</sup> Benjamin Thorpe, ed. "Wednesday in Easter Week," in *The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church*, Vol. I (London: The Ælfric Society, 1844), 295.

<sup>614</sup> Matt. 24: 27.

<sup>615</sup> 2 Tim. 4: 7.

<sup>616</sup> Malcolm Godden, "Experiments in Genre," *Holy Men and Holy Women: Old English Prose Saints' Lives and Their Contexts* (Albany: State University of New York, 1996), 265-6.

about to suffer more and he could offer his flock nothing more befitting to endure the onslaught than the lives of those who had travelled that road before.

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