

# Reading Bede as Bede would read

Author: Sally Shockro

Persistent link: <http://hdl.handle.net/2345/1746>

This work is posted on [eScholarship@BC](#),  
Boston College University Libraries.

---

Boston College Electronic Thesis or Dissertation, 2008

Copyright is held by the author, with all rights reserved, unless otherwise noted.

Boston College  
The Graduate School of Arts and Sciences  
Department of History

READING BEDE AS BEDE WOULD READ

a dissertation

by

SALLY SHOCKRO

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

December 2008

© copyright by SALLY JEAN SHOCKRO  
2008

Dissertation Abstract  
*Reading Bede as Bede Would Read*  
Sally Shockro  
Robin Fleming, Advisor  
2008

Early medieval readers read texts differently than their modern scholarly counterparts. Their expectations were different, but so, too, were their perceptions of the purpose and function of the text. Early medieval historians have long thought that because they were reading the same words as their early medieval subjects they were sharing in the same knowledge. But it is the contention of my thesis that until historians learn to read as early medieval people read, the meanings texts held for their original readers will remain unknown.

Early medieval readers maintained that important texts functioned on many levels, with deeper levels possessing more layers of meaning for the reader equipped to grasp them. A good text was able, with the use of a phrase or an image, to trigger the recall of other seemingly distant, yet related, knowledge which would elucidate the final spiritual message of the story. For an early medieval reader, the ultimate example of the multi-layered text was the Bible. But less exalted texts also aspired to this ideal, and the source of the trigger phrases and images most often used to achieve this was the Bible itself, a text that became both the early medieval writer's model and reserve of references. For an early medieval reader, who would have been a monk or a nun, the Bible was more than a document of faith. In the closed and often

isolated world of an early medieval monastery, the words of the Bible would have constantly been in the minds of monastic readers, and also would have been the entryway into the world of eternal truth, with each phrase or image in itself a key to the meaning of sacred history.

In the intellectual climate of this world, a monk named Bede, living in a remote monastery in northern England, wrote what is arguably the most important text of the early Middle Ages. This text, the *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* (*The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*) (hereafter *HE*), traces English history from the period of the Roman invasion through the creation of a handful of united, Christian, English kingdoms. Yet this text is in no way a chronicle. Instead it is the story of kings and saints; of the pious and their rewards and the impious and their punishment. For Bede this was a deeply Christian story in which a pagan land was given the gift of faith and of good missionaries ready to establish what became a thriving, living Church.

For many historians, Bede's *HE* first and foremost is studied as an early text of history: a description of "what happened" and little else. Medieval exegetes, though, like Bede and his contemporaries, thought this first layer of literal meaning was followed by three others: the moral, allegorical, and anagogical levels. To access these levels we must read as Bede did, with the Bible in mind and with an awareness of the presence of many

levels of meaning at almost every point in the text. When read this way, the *HE* is a minefield of biblical allusions that conflate Bede's story of kings and saints with the story of Creation and Judgment. When we view the *HE* through the filter of Bede's biblical allusions, we can see the English become the new Chosen People of God, and England emerge as the new Holy Land. It is in this reading that I have discovered Bede's Apocalypticism and his explanations for the way events of his own world were connected to the world to come. Bede wrote the *HE*, so I argue, to make such a reading possible, and yet modern scholars, despite their knowledge of the power and prevalence of early medieval reading culture, have failed to read it in this way—a way that recasts the early medieval intellectual world as a highly mature and literate culture. It is reading Bede as an exegete would, as Bede himself would, that allows us to reconstruct the rarified and sophisticated religious, cultural, and intellectual worlds of early medieval monasteries.

FOR MY MOTHER AND GRANDMOTHER,

*Cynthia Chick and Eleanor Chick*

**Table of Contents**

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>ii</i>
<i>List of Tables</i>	<i>v</i>
Chapter One- Early-Medieval Reading and Writing: Bede and the Art of <i>Grammatica</i>	1
Chapter Two- How Bede Read	45
Chapter Three- How Bede Wrote	78
Chapter Four- England's Entry into Sacred Time 114	
Chapter Five- The Burden of Being Chosen 150	
Chapter Six- Outside and After Time: Readings and Misreadings of Bede and his Text 190	
<i>Bibliography</i>	206



### ***Acknowledgements***

In the course of this project I have incurred a debt of thanks to both the individuals and institutions that have supported me.

I received research funding for this project from the Medieval Academy of America and the Graduate Student Association of Boston College. The generosity of the History Department of Boston College was essential for this project. Much of my dissertation was researched and written during a year of support provided by the Dissertation Fellowship I received from the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, through the History Department. The History Department provided a warm and collegial atmosphere, from which I, and this project, have benefited greatly. My thanks are also due to the staff of the Thomas P. O'Neill Library at Boston College for their assistance, most especially the Interlibrary Loan Department.

I would also like to thank both Nancy Netzer and Robert Stanton. I met Nancy Netzer during my very first days at Boston College and her advice has been invaluable in the years that followed. I met Robert Stanton very soon after, and his generosity and guidance, especially in areas of study that were new to me, have made me a better scholar. They both provided insightful readings of this project at various stages of completion.

My thanks are also due to the members of Robin Fleming's medieval seminar, from the fall of 2001 through the fall of 2008, who have read my work annually. Their thoughtful reactions and suggestions have made this a stronger piece of work. Some of the members of this seminar have also become friends, and so my thanks to them are even more heartfelt: Kylie Dodson, David Crane, Tracey-Anne Cooper, Lisabeth Buchelt, Mark Mullane, and Alecia Arceo.

I cannot imagine my time at Boston College without Kylie Dodson. It was while lunching with her on a break from Burns Library many years ago that I began to contemplate the very earliest iteration of this thesis. Our conversations have been a constant source of inspiration. I would never have anticipated that my years in graduate school would have seemed so short, and I know that the ease with which this time has passed has been in large part because of her company. My thanks for her generosity with her knowledge, and even more for her friendship, are profound.

To Robin Fleming I would like to express my most sincere respect and gratitude, and also, affection. I know how much she has invested in this project and in me. I want her to know how grateful I am, not only for what she has done while I was writing this dissertation, but also for all of the years that preceded it. I have asked her to read everything I have written for the past eight years, sometimes in dozens of versions. She has never refused. Her constant interest and support have been

the foundation of my intellectual life. I could not have been more fortunate.

I would also like to express my appreciation to my father, Edward Shockro, for his support of my goals. I know how pleased he has been to see his own love of history reflected in me, and I also know how very proud he is of me as well.

I am saddened that my darling and much-missed Mr. P is not here to see the finished product of the work in which he took so much interest. Lastly, I would like to thank Cynthia Chick and Eleanor Chick, my mother and grandmother. Their belief in my abilities has been unshakable, and their support of me unfailing. Their presence has been the greatest blessing of my life. Without them I would have had neither the strength nor the desire to complete a project such as this, and so it is to them, with love and my deepest gratitude, that this work is dedicated.

*List of Tables*

*Table 1. The Anonymous Life of Cuthbert*  
111

*Table 2. Bede's Life of Cuthbert* 112

**PART I****CHAPTER ONE****EARLY-MEDIEVAL READING AND WRITING: BEDE AND THE ART OF  
*GRAMMATICA***

Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* (hereafter *HE*) is one of the most-studied works of the Middle Ages, and, indeed, English history.<sup>1</sup> Its seminal place has ensured that it has been subject to each successive wave of scholarly fashion, and even more, has been a mirror to the scholars who have studied it.<sup>2</sup> The near-universal conclusion of these studies has been, unsurprisingly, that the *HE*, and Bede himself, were extraordinary. The *HE* has been characterized as a text before its time, anticipating modern scholarly standards and possessing a sophistication far more developed than its medieval peers. And Bede himself seems to exist as a scholar outside of time, eternally relevant and familiar to readers at centuries' remove.

It is easy to see how so readable a text and so skillful an author could appear to transcend the limitations of temporality, and it is also easy to understand why so many adoring readers wished to remove Bede, with whom they had so much sympathy, from the unattractive eighth century. But this desire is not

---

<sup>1</sup> Benedicta Ward, *The Venerable Bede* (New York, 2002), 1-18; Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, Bertram Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors (eds. and trans.), (Oxford, 1969). Hereafter *HE*.

<sup>2</sup> A.H. Merrills, *History and Geography in Late Antiquity* (New York, 2005), 231-3.

productive; historians learn little about Bede while contemplating his universal applicability. Rather than seeing the *HE* as a text for all time, I would like to situate it firmly in its own century. In this study I will consider the *HE*, and several other of Bede's texts, as products of the Late-Antique and early-medieval intellectual culture in which Bede lived. The very changes in Western European history that make the end of Antiquity so clear to some historians would not have impressed Bede.<sup>3</sup> He and his Insular contemporaries were participants in the same Christian intellectual culture centered on Rome that had existed for centuries—they were simply engaging in it in a new locale.<sup>4</sup> Bede saw himself and his purpose as part of a continuous effort begun by Christian intellectuals centuries before.

Historians fail to place Bede in the midst of this Late-Antique intellectual culture not because the sources that document it are unavailable, but rather because they fail to read them. The literary culture in which Bede was educated and thrived is abundantly-attested in the surviving manuscripts—manuscripts studied almost exclusively by scholars of literary theory and criticism. These abstract texts that advise and describe Late-Antique and early-medieval reading and writing practices are

---

<sup>3</sup> R. Ray, "Who Did Bede Think He Was?," in S. DeGregorio (ed.), *Innovation and Tradition in the Writings of the Venerable Bede* (Morgantown, 2006), 11-36. This article is especially valuable in establishing Bede's view that his work was in the "footsteps of the Fathers." For other views on that issue, see Scott DeGregorio, "Footsteps of His Own: Bede's Commentary on Ezra-Nehemiah," in S. DeGregorio (ed.), *Innovation and Tradition in the Writings of the Venerable Bede* (Morgantown, 2006), 143-68, and R.W. Pfaff, "Bede Among the Fathers? The Evidence from Liturgical Commemorations," in E.A. Livingstone (ed.), *Studia Patristica*, 28 (1993), 225-9.

<sup>4</sup> Éamonn Ó Carragáin, *The City of Rome and the World of Bede* (Durham, 1994) and N. Howe, "From Bede's World to 'Bede's World'," in R.M. Stein and S. Pierson Prior (eds.), *Reading Medieval Culture*, (Notre Dame, 2005), 21-44.

unattractive sources to historians. But as the rules that governed every early-medieval reader's and writer's experience of the written word, they are fundamental to a correct understanding of early-medieval texts, and to Bede's *HE* in particular.

What follows in this chapter is a overview of that world, the one in which all early-medieval readers and writers learned to conceive of written language as a series of enriched connections to other texts. It was in this literary paradigm that Bede wrote, and his readers read, the *HE*, and without a thorough understanding of the workings of this world, historians will never understand how that text, which provides so much of our information about early-medieval England, functions. This study is by necessity a multidisciplinary work. No modern scholarly discipline has the breadth to encompass all of the practices Bede and his contemporaries employed in their creation and consumption of texts. If historians of Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages are to engage with the texts of their period as their original readers would have, they must read them as their authors would have wished, disregarding the boundaries imposed by modern scholarly fields.

Although Bede explicitly aligned himself, or at least his work, with the Church Fathers and figures from the past, modern scholars never read his work as part of that intellectual milieu. The goal of this work is to restore Bede to the intellectual world in which he lived, and then to see how his own texts testify to his immersion in early-medieval literary culture. This literary culture of *grammatica* and rhetoric, the paradigm in which all of Bede's contemporary readers learned to comprehend

and compose texts, has been largely overlooked by modern scholars. The exceptions are the works of Martin Irvine on *grammatica* and of Roger Ray on rhetoric. These scholars have studied the way Late-Antique and early-medieval readers and writers had absorbed the disciplines of *grammatica* and rhetoric by virtue of their participation in literary culture. This chapter will not only examine Bede's inclusion in this intellectual world, but show how the rules of *grammatica* and rhetoric, as defined by Irvine's and Ray's works, provide a guide to a more authentic, and historically appropriate, reading of Bede's texts.

#### **GRAMMATICA**

To better understand the intellectual world in which Bede and his readers lived, I want to examine the basic methodology of early-medieval education. From the texts that early-medieval monasteries possessed and preserved, we know both the contents and the aim of early-medieval monastic education, and it is clear that monks taught and followed the same practices that had been the dominant literary paradigm for centuries: *grammatica*. *Grammatica* is an inclusive term, which describes both the literary practices and linguistic values of the educated elite from antiquity through the Middle Ages. As Martin Irvine argues:

But the social effects of *grammatica* were different in kind and degree from other arts and disciplines: *grammatica* was foundational, a social practice that provided the exclusive access to literacy, the understanding of Scripture, the knowledge of a



literary canon, and membership in an international Latin textual community.<sup>5</sup>

As a discipline, *grammatica* is composed of all the elements of the textual experience, from the most basic levels of linguistic accuracy to the most sophisticated levels of exegesis. "The scholar's *grammatica* was a literary and interpretive method, an intellectual discourse directed toward the understanding of texts of any kind."<sup>6</sup> Although *grammatica* was the foundational educational technique of Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages, it was not an end in itself; rather it was a set of practices that guided the reader through texts at all levels of understanding.

There were many compilations of texts circulating in the early-medieval period that instructed the monastic student in the practice of *grammatica*, but the best known and the most influential was Donatus's *Ars minor*.<sup>7</sup> Donatus's mid-fourth-century text had been a staple of late-Roman education (Donatus was the famed teacher of Jerome), and by the early Middle Ages his *Ars minor* existed both in its original form and in a Christianized version in which examples from Christian texts had been substituted for the pagan originals. A preface to Donatus's text was written near the turn of the eighth century in an Insular monastery and was copied into the sole surviving manuscript in Northumbria in the eighth century. This preface, the *Anonymus ad Cuimnanum*, is an elementary introduction to the

---

<sup>5</sup> Martin Irvine, *The Making of Textual Culture: 'Grammatica' and Literary Theory 350-1100* (Cambridge, 1994), 1.

<sup>6</sup> Martin Irvine, "Bede the Grammarian and the Scope of Grammatical Studies in Eighth-Century Northumbria," in P. Clemoes (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon England*, 15 (1986), 17.

<sup>7</sup> This is Aelius Donatus, the fourth-century grammarian, not to be confused with Donatus Magnus, the fourth-century heretic.

basic principles of *grammatica*, and also, by the multitude of examples referenced, evidence for many otherwise unknown grammatical compilations, almost all of which bear the marks of Insular origins.<sup>8</sup>

The unknown author of the *Anonymus* defined *grammatica* in the words of other authors whose works he extracted (and sometimes those extracts were originally from other works as well), piecing together a patchwork definition of the discipline. But originality was unimportant to the good compiler, and the extracts he chose are revealing. The *Anonymus*'s brief definition of *grammatica*, taken from the anonymous *De officiis grammaticae artis* (which, in turn, took its text from Maximus Victorinus's *Ars Victorini*), is practical and informative: *grammatica* is the art of correct interpretation and correct language.<sup>9</sup> But the fuller definition the author of the *Anonymus* used (and which, incidentally, Bede would also later use) is from Diomedes's *Ars grammatica* and describes the two branches of *grammatica*, and their respective responsibilities, in greater detail.<sup>10</sup> The first branch follows the lines of what modern readers would call "grammar," *ratio recte scribendi et loquendi*:<sup>11</sup> the rules of proper writing (and speaking) by which readers can decide what is worthy of emulation. The other field of *grammatica* was *scientia interpretandi*, the "science of interpreting," or what has been called the equivalent of Late-Antique and early-medieval literary

---

<sup>8</sup> Irvine, "Bede the Grammarian," 19, 22.

<sup>9</sup> Irvine, "Bede the Grammarian," 24-5.

<sup>10</sup> Irvine, "Bede the Grammarian," 25. Irvine also discusses Bede's use of Diomedes's *Ars Grammatica*, among other texts, in Bede's *De Schematibus et Tropis* and *De Arte Metrica*. Irvine, *Textual Culture*, 290.

<sup>11</sup> Indeed, the modern term "grammar" came from this subdivision of *grammatica*.

criticism.<sup>12</sup> *Scientia interpretandi* taught readers how to obtain the fullest meaning from texts and how texts functioned literarily. There are four sub-sets or sub-disciplines of *scientia interpretandi*, each concerned with an increasingly complex level of textual understanding.

The first is *lectio*, the rules for reading aloud from a set text, knowledge especially valuable in a monastic context. Without an adequate knowledge of *lectio* a monk could not hope to perform *lectio divina*, a form of prayerful, meditative reading. The second is *enarratio*, the broadest and arguably most prolific element of early-medieval *grammatica*. *Enarratio* governs the interpretation of texts, both in content explicitly written and that contained in literary conventions. The study of *enarratio* taught readers how to understand literary figures and tropes, an essential skill for any exegete. If any of the sub-disciplines of *grammatica* could be said to embody it, it certainly would be *enarratio*. The third is *emendatio*, the rules for determining authenticity, a major concern for an intellectual community devoted to the precedent of ancient authority.<sup>13</sup> The fourth and the most loosely defined is *iudicium*, the guidelines for determining the value of a text. Even though these sublevels of *scientia interpretandi* are increasingly complex, each is useful to readers at every level of this education. *Iudicium*, for

---

<sup>12</sup> Martin Irvine and David Thomson, "Grammatica and Literary Theory," in A. Minnis and I. Johnson (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism: Volume 2 The Middle Ages* (2005), 15-41, at 15.

<sup>13</sup> An interesting examination of Bede's views on textual authority less directly influenced by ideas about *grammatica* can be found in Calvin B. Kendall, "The Responsibility of Auctoritas: Method and Meaning in Bede's Commentary on Genesis," in S. DeGregorio (ed.), *Innovation and Tradition in the Writings of the Venerable Bede* (Morgantown, 2006), 101-120.

example, is the most challenging level of *scientia interpretandi*, but it could be practiced fully and purposefully by even the most elementary student of *grammatica*. So this methodology of interpretation would have been the student's first introduction to the literate world, but also would have been his guide to all textual encounters in his adult life.

*Enarratio* is in itself an enormous field and subsumes all of the methods of literary interpretation, a subject of immense importance to anyone trying to understand the text of the Bible, including every early-medieval monk for whom this was the ultimate goal. The Bible is teeming with one of the types of *enarratio: allegoria*. *Allegoria* includes both verbal allegory, in which meaning is transferred by the use of words, and factual allegory, in which the transfer is made by the very action of the narrative itself.<sup>14</sup> But within both verbal and factual allegory there exists four levels of mutually-enhancing and increasingly profound interpretation. A knowledge of these levels of interpretation allowed an advanced reader to understand a particular example of verbal or factual allegory on multiple levels simultaneously, while a less-advanced reader might comprehend only the simplest sense, but could still find the allegory edifying.<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> Irvine, "Bede the Grammarian," 36-7.

<sup>15</sup> A detailed discussion of the four levels of allegory can be found in Chapter Two. The precise details of the grouping were disputed, rearranged, and renamed throughout the Middle Ages, but are often identified as literal, moral, allegorical (or typological), and anagogical. These four levels are the most common arrangement I have found, but all of the various groupings have a fourth level that is the hidden or ultimate spiritual meaning that can only be found by transcending the text, which is the relevant point for this study. A good description of the grouping I have used can be found in Umberto

It is a testament to the consistency and diligence of Late-Antique and early-medieval monastic education that a discipline requiring such dedicated and intense Latinity survived. Early-medieval *grammatica* was an outgrowth of the *grammatica* of late-Roman education, and the Christianization of *grammatica* at the end of the late-Roman era was a watershed moment for both branches of its methodology. Christianized *grammatica* would be taught to and by those who were not native Latin speakers, making the rules of Latinity that had been of theoretical interest to Romans of more essential concern to early-medieval students. The more central change came to the branch of *grammatica* that dealt with the interpretation of texts, especially the subsection *enarratio*. The correct interpretation of texts had been of pedagogical interest to late-Roman scholars, but for its new Christian audience it took on a monumental gravity. For late-Romans this was a matter of the richness of their literary cultural legacy, but for Christians, now using the rules of *enarratio* to interpret the Bible, this was a matter of the salvation of their souls and the purpose and direction of Christendom.

*Grammatica* was a literary way of life. It determined all aspects of Late-Antique and early-medieval readers' experience of the text. It "transmitted a philosophy of language, indeed, a whole ideology of language with explicit links to centres of institutional authority."<sup>16</sup> *Grammatica* was a discipline and a methodology; it dictated both how a writer conceived of his text

---

Eco, *The Role of the Reader—Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts* (Bloomington, 1979), 51.

<sup>16</sup> Irvine and Thomson, "Grammatica," 30.

and the words he would use to compose that conception. It also determined how the reader was able to take that author's phrasing and extract the intended meanings from it—both those conveyed by the literal meaning of the words and those implied by references recognizable to any other reader trained in the practices of *grammatica*.

It provided the cultural category of the literary as such, which meant an available network of writings and a textual genealogy extending back to the early *auctores*. It provided the first assumptions, the main presuppositions, of any understanding of language, writing and texts. *Grammatica* meant literacy, but literacy in a specific kind of language with a specific canon of texts.<sup>17</sup>

Sharing both a methodology and a textual background "gave readers and writers what we now call a 'literate subjectivity,' a position in a network of texts and language that defined how to read and what could be written."<sup>18</sup> Late-Antique and early-medieval education was centered on the indoctrination of students into literate culture, which existed only in this form—there was no alternative. As this "literate subjectivity" was universal among all those participating in early-medieval textual culture, it was within this paradigm that every text was composed and understood.

At its core, Christianized *grammatica* was about standardizing, or at least providing consistent guidance for, interpreting spiritual texts. The validity of grammatical methodology relies on choosing texts that can provide infinite meaningful interpretations, in Irvine's words: "both late

---

<sup>17</sup> Irvine and Thomson, "*Grammatica*," 41.

<sup>18</sup> Irvine and Thomson, "*Grammatica*," 40.

classical and early-medieval Christian exegetes assumed that religious texts were oracular and therefore systematically oblique or allegorical in their mode of signifying."<sup>19</sup> Any good spiritual text, certainly any text from the Bible, could provide this "inexhaustible and encyclopedic plenitude of meaning."<sup>20</sup> The universal applicability of Scripture could now be matched by the universal meaning of any text of the Bible. Every biblical book possessed, in some facet, the full truth of the entire text—if the reader possessed the requisite knowledge and skill to find it. Through the methodology of *grammatica*, the very act of reading was always an interpretive one, in which the reader accessed the literary canon he shared with the author to determine the fullest meaning he had the resources to grasp. If the reader did not, in the course of his reading, create a mental commentary on the text, he could hardly be said to be "reading;" "implicit in grammatical methodology is the assumption that texts, as systems of literary signs, require interpretation embodied in a commentary, a supplementary text."<sup>21</sup> Indeed, this impulse to combine the text and the commentary physically was the birth of the gloss.<sup>22</sup>

If every act of reading requires commentary in order for the text to be understood fully, then the original text itself is not explanatory—its purpose is not to divulge, but rather to hide its information until an appropriate reader approaches it. In the more complex realms of *grammatica*, the text is a code that

---

<sup>19</sup> Irvine, *Textual Culture*, 245.

<sup>20</sup> Irvine, *Textual Culture*, 245.

<sup>21</sup> Irvine, "Bede the Grammarian," 27.

<sup>22</sup> Irvine, "Bede the Grammarian," 27.

must be deciphered. This characterizes the text as a work of "textual semiosis," in which the text is seen as a work of hidden, rather than revelatory, knowledge, reserved for an elite audience who will need to write another, explanatory text to access the original text's full meaning.<sup>23</sup> This "principle of semiosis" postulates that "signs are interpreted through other signs, texts through other texts."<sup>24</sup> According to the field of textual semiotics, every text is a system of signs that can only be understood by someone with the necessary, and previously acquired, knowledge.<sup>25</sup> The success of *grammatica* was entirely dependent on the reader being able to understand the writer's meaning; the reader and writer, despite their separation by thousands of miles or years, must have the same store of knowledge and expectations of the text if the reader is to understand the author's meaning. This is accomplished, according to the theory of textual semiotics, through the sharing of what Martin Irvine calls a "cultural encyclopedia," and what semioticians term a "system of connotative semiotics."<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> Irvine, *Textual Culture*, 244.

<sup>24</sup> Irvine, *Textual Culture*, 246.

<sup>25</sup> Examples of the foundational works of this field would include Umberto Eco, *The Limits of Interpretation* (Bloomington, 1990); Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader*; Umberto Eco, *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language* (Bloomington, 1984); and Tzvetan Todorov, *Theories of the Symbol*, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca, 1977).

<sup>26</sup> For the "cultural encyclopedia," see Irvine, *Textual Culture*, 246. Modern literary theory is also in agreement with the assumption that Bede's monastic audience would have known many of the same texts that Bede did and have had similar thoughts about them, indeed, "communities that share a textual history reach a consensus about meaning because they shares codes and conventions of expression." Lori Hope Lefkowitz, "Creating the World: Structuralism and Semiotics," in G. Douglas Atkins and Laura Morrow (eds.), *Contemporary Literary Theory* (Amherst, 1989), 61. For a "system of connotative semiotics," see Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics*.



One of the basic systems of symbolic language, a system of connotative semiotics<sup>27</sup> contains two intentional layers of meaning in a text or symbol, with the second, more developed (and more important) meaning intended for only a select audience. The first meaning of the text or symbol is obvious to anyone who has the most basic cognizance of the language. The second meaning is constructed solely of the first meaning's information logically reinterpreted through a "key" previously acquired by the reader. The reader can access this second meaning by recognizing its existence based on the form or content of the text, and can then decode the meaning by using the key of prior knowledge. Members of this select audience are the only ones who grasp the full weight of the text, because they are the only ones who are fluent in the author's true "language." This prior knowledge that creates the key for the second meaning's decoding obviously must be shared by the author and his intended reader, or the entire purpose of the encoded second layer of meaning is lost. The knowledge that constitutes the key must either be relatively stable or the author and reader must be in frequent contact, in order to ensure that they still share the same understanding of the key.

Likewise, a "cultural encyclopedia" is the background knowledge a reader brings to a text, acquired simply by

---

<sup>27</sup> Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics* (Bloomington, 1976), 54 (2.2). Eco is certainly the expert in the field of theoretical semiotics, but my work has also been influenced by Michael Riffaterre's work on literary semiotics in the study of poetry. Michael Riffaterre, *Semiotics of Poetry* (Bloomington, 1978). Although Riffaterre's work is extremely accessible on its own, it would be remiss not to mention L.H. Lefkowitz's excellent synthesis of Riffaterre's work, and her analysis of the current state of the field of semiotics. Lefkowitz, "Creating the World."

participating in the creating culture; it is "the sum of all the discourses available to a culture."<sup>28</sup> This cultural knowledge is inescapable to anyone participating in the culture, and mystifying to anyone outside it. The knowledge contained in the author's cultural encyclopedia (and even more importantly, the connections this knowledge suggests) sets the boundaries of interpretations a text can accommodate. The line between valid, meaningful interpretation and utter misreading is determined by the connections fostered or forbidden by the information contained in the encyclopedia. Any reader that approaches a text from outside its creating culture must either consciously acquire, to the best of his ability, the creating culture's encyclopedia or be doomed to misinterpret the text.

In practice, an able reader who possessed the knowledge contained in the cultural encyclopedia would come across a word (or phrase, or image) in a text. Something about this word would signal its enriched meaning to the able reader—he would know either this word was not "right" in the context (perhaps it did not make literal sense or was far too specific for the narrative) and he would mentally mark it as "deficient in meaning and therefore in need of a supplement."<sup>29</sup> Once the able reader's attention was brought to this word he would search his cultural lexicon to locate its "real," hidden, symbolic meaning. The reader would recall where he had read this word before, what it meant in that text, and in what circumstances it had been used—the word would open a window to another text in the reader's

---

<sup>28</sup> Irvine, *Textual Culture*, 246.

<sup>29</sup> Irvine, *Textual Culture*, 246.

memory. Once the reader had located the reference in his mental cache, he would then associate the meaning of the referenced passage with the meaning of the original text. His initial understanding of the original text was now nuanced by its association with the referenced work because he knew which word to further pursue and which text was the source of the reference. All hopes of the reader reconstituting the intended meaning depend on him locating the interpretant: "the intertextual knowledge allowing the relation" between the two texts.<sup>30</sup> In short, he must be fully conversant in the knowledge contained in the cultural encyclopedia and be perpetually sensitive to the presence of window-words in the text.<sup>31</sup>

As difficult as it is for modern readers to imagine, *grammatica* was the sole path to Christian literate culture in the early Middle Ages. Every person who was reading these texts had been taught to read and understand texts through these methods. *Grammatica* determined the very conception that early-medieval readers had of the written word. It was the methodology by which all early-medieval readers yearned to understand the text of the Bible, and it provided the means they used to wring the ultimate spiritual meaning out of its words. A Late-Antique or early-

---

<sup>30</sup> Irvine, *Textual Culture*, 246.

<sup>31</sup> Irvine notes that semiotic theory presents the discovery and understanding of the interpretant, and the subsequent connection between the original and referenced texts, as recreating the author's original meaning before he encoded it. It seems that instead of moving the text to the next level of understanding, the able reader is taking the text back to its pristine form: open and understood, with no need for subterfuge. In Irvine's words, "allegorical interpretation provides a string of statements that seem to reverse or invert the semiotic process, presenting the supplementary text of commentary as the object text denuded of allegory, the true text unknown to itself. A text read as being allegorically encoded will be interpreted in a substitute text, the commentary, which presents itself as the rewriting of the text de-allegorized from its own textuality." Irvine, *Textual Culture*, 246.

medieval writer could address his text to all of the scholars of Christendom and have every reasonable expectation that no matter what their distance or difference of circumstance, they would have had the same literary education and come to his text with the same preconceptions and expectations to facilitate a full and complete understanding. The unity of this intellectual culture rested firmly on the shoulders of *grammatica* and it allowed both the quality and quantity of intellectual exchange of the early Middle Ages.

As the long-standing and central language and methodology of education and, by default, elite intellectual culture, *grammatica* valued some characteristics over others. The foremost of these was the preference for the written word over oral testimony. In the culture of *grammatica*, the written word was the ultimate authority. Because of its relative permanence, its ability to be analyzed and to remain stable while holding multiple meanings, written text was the only kind of language in which *grammatica* could exist. This preference for the written over the oral was so pronounced that the written word came to be synonymous with language itself.<sup>32</sup> The love of the written word was the basis of *grammatica's* other predilections. The Fathers of *grammatica* also valued a set, "universal" language,<sup>33</sup> which Latin supplied, trumping any vernacular.

Just as the written outshone the spoken, so, too, did old texts surpass new ones. *Grammatica* valued the authority of ancient texts, especially classical Roman ones. This penchant for

---

<sup>32</sup> Irvine and Thomson, "*Grammatica*," 30.

<sup>33</sup> Irvine and Thomson, "*Grammatica*," 30.

the texts of the past is easy to understand for early-medieval Insular readers. In a culture newly Christian and struggling to pull away from its recent barbarian and illiterate past, early Roman Christians would have made a pleasing example. Those from the distant past, who defined the faith and, potentially, knew knowledge now lost, would have been obvious authorities and their texts clearly would have taken immediate precedent over those of more recent, and therefore less exalted, authors.

Indeed, this love of the written word, its permanence and authority, as well as its widespread accessibility when put in the right language, combined to form a unique view of history itself. Isidore of Seville wrote that all writing, every instance of creating the written word, was the creation of history.<sup>34</sup> He explains by saying that every time something is written down, whatever the purpose, content, or intended audience, it is, without exception, done to preserve some element of the past, something that has gone before, and is being written down lest it pass from human knowledge. Indeed, Augustine of Hippo agreed that "whatever was committed to writing as worthy of memory necessarily became the concern of *grammatica*."<sup>35</sup> Isidore says that all text is history, and, thus, history cannot exist outside of the realm of *grammatica*, just as history cannot exist outside the written text. The idea of preserving information in a format other than the written word was inconceivable to Isidore, and

---

<sup>34</sup> Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae* 1.3.1-2; 1.41.1-2, as quoted in Irvine and Thomson, "Grammatica," 33. For an excellent edition of the *Etymologiae* in English, see Isidore of Seville, *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, ed. and trans. Stephen A. Barney (New York, 2006). For a discussion of Bede's view of "true history" as being composed of spiritual interpretation, see Ward, *Bede*, 67.

<sup>35</sup> Irvine, "Bede the Grammarian," 18. Irvine's views are based on Augustine's *de Ordine*. II.xiii.37.

there is no reason to think that his literate contemporaries and readers felt any differently. Every act of writing is one of history-making, and history, the background of all texts, cannot survive, perhaps cannot even be attempted, without the use of the methodology of *grammatica*.

The works of Augustine himself were the backbone of an exclusively Christian *grammatica*, with the first three books of his *De doctrina Christiana* (hereafter *DDC*) acting as a grammatical textbook.<sup>36</sup> Augustine applied the methodology of *grammatica* to Christian texts, both the Bible and biblical commentary, to show how their meaning could be better and more fully understood through these methods of literary interpretation. "Augustine's *De doctrina Christiana* promotes the grammatically trained exegete, who has special access to the interpretive codes and the cultural encyclopedia of the Roman Christian textual community."<sup>37</sup> No early-medieval reader would have doubted that the Scriptures possessed many levels of meaning, and Augustine provided the means by which these levels could be understood, by the discipline of *grammatica*. "Augustine's *De doctrina Christiana* attempts to produce a Christian encyclopaedic grammarian, equipped with knowledge of language and rules, for interpretation that would allow readers

---

<sup>36</sup> Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana*, R.P.H. Green (ed. and trans.), (Oxford, 1995). Hereafter *DDC*. It is worth noting that the first three books of *DDC* act as a complete text in themselves and are sufficient to transmit the full scope of *grammatica* without Book Four. This also stifles the doubt that some scholars have voiced over whether Bede could have understood *grammatica* and rhetoric without having known Book Four of *DDC*. And *DDC* was not Augustine's only work that contained the blueprint for the practice of *grammatica*: according to Irvine and Thomson, *De ordine*, *De dialectica*, and *De magistro* all were works that conveyed the methodology of *grammatica*. Irvine and Thomson, "Grammatica," 18.

<sup>37</sup> Irvine, *Textual Culture*, 246.

to resolve problems of interpretation in the Scriptures." <sup>38</sup>

Early-medieval students following Augustine's guide in *DDC* could not only read and understand earlier authors' interpretations, but they also had the apparatus to interpret the Scriptures on their own. *Grammatica* was the training exegetes needed, potentially all they needed, to participate in the full literary culture of the Bible. <sup>39</sup> This is the foundation of the rich tradition of biblical interpretation that fueled Western Christian culture through the Renaissance.

Augustine's technique of interpretation relies on the use of textual signs that are meant to call an aware reader's attention to the expanded meaning that biblical allusions allow. <sup>40</sup>

For Augustine, the grammatical interpretation of texts fits into this larger sign-theory, <sup>41</sup> in which complex Christian messages could be conveyed through externally-simplistic texts. <sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup> Irvine and Thomson, "*Grammatica*," 18

<sup>39</sup> Irvine mentions "transferred signs" as the basis of *DDC's ars grammatica* in Irvine and Thomson, "*Grammatica*," 36

<sup>40</sup> For an interpretation of Augustine's sign theory more heavily influenced by literary theory, see Jesse M. Gellrich, *The Idea of the Book in the Middle Ages: Language Theory, Mythology, and Fiction* (Ithaca, 1985), 33.

<sup>41</sup> Irvine light-heartedly notes that Augustine saw man as belonging to "the species *homo signans*," and sums up Augustine's view nicely. Irvine, *Textual Culture*, 257.

<sup>42</sup> For an excellent discussion of a contemporary theory of signs, see R.A. Markus, *Signs and Meanings: World and Text in Ancient Christianity* (Liverpool, 1996). For a more modern view, there is no text more widely regarded as the foundational work of literary semiology than Roland Barthes's *Mythologies*. In *Mythologies* Barthes presents a system through which the meaning embedded in symbolic language can be understood. Barthes writes that myth (culturally-specific symbolic language) is a type of discourse or a form of speech. This speech, for Barthes, need not be constituted of words or text, but equally can be image or act. Myth attaches itself to the primary meaning (or the signifier) of any of these types of speech, so that the speech still functions literally, but it is also weighted with another meaning, the form. The form is the mythic meaning of the text, the result of a culturally-informed reading. This reading can vary, and the very existence of the form could be disputed by a reader unaware of the concept, which is the link between the primary meaning and the form. Yet to an informed reader, one who is

Texts, like spoken discourse, consist of *signa data*, intentionally given or motivated signs; the Scriptures are made of these signs, and the interpretation of their message requires a set of codes and knowledge of the Christian cultural encyclopedia. For Augustine and early medieval culture in general, the Scriptures were not formally different from other texts or other written signs: the Scriptures were understood to be different only in degree, in the fullness or complexity of their meaning.<sup>43</sup>

This was an essential lesson for even a rudimentary understanding of Scripture. The signs of Augustine's *grammatica* were physical items and actual events in the text, but to understand them only as such was to overlook the textual opening for exegesis. The sign might be a physical thing, but the idea it signifies allows the reader to transcend the physicality of the sign and the temporality of his reading. For Augustine, spiritual truth was on the other side of the text, but there were many ways to reach it, and a single sign with a single interpretation was not necessarily a satisfying or enlightening way to reach the ultimate spiritual truth the text held. Some signs could only be understood through other signs, and some texts would reveal multiple, and seemingly uncomplimentary, meanings simultaneously. Rather than cause for exegetical alarm, this was, in Augustine's eyes, a "mark of God's generosity."<sup>44</sup>

Augustine wrote *DDC* as a manual to assist students of the Bible and other Christian texts in interpreting the symbolic and layered language of Scripture. For Augustine, the correct reading

---

aware of the mythic concept involved, the connection between the meaning and the form will seem obvious, nearly intuitive, and the final impression in the mind of the reader will be almost entirely determined by the form. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York, 1972).

<sup>43</sup> Irvine, *Textual Culture*, 257-8.

<sup>44</sup> Noted by Irvine, *Textual Culture*, 258, from Augustine, *DDC*, III, X 14.33 (146)-III XV 23.54 (157).



of the Bible was his primary concern, and he warned his readers that they should always make sure that their reading complies with the basic tenets of the faith. But the only reason such misreadings were possible was because the meaning of Scripture itself was not immediately clear even to a devoted reader. Some passages seemed contradictory to the fundamental character of God and the Church, and other passages made no sense at all when read literally. Those are the times, Augustine says, when one must read for an alternate meaning beyond the literal one, a meaning that is not initially apparent in the text and is transmitted by the signs and symbolic language he taught the reader to expect. At times this biblical symbolism is figural (tropological), requiring the reader to understand one element in the story as a substitute for another. This is perhaps the most common type of biblical interpretation, often employed to show how the Israelites of the Old Testament prefigured the first Christians, the new "Chosen People," in the New Testament.

Augustine allows that this type of interpretation can be far more subtle and complex than this rather elementary example would suggest. Figural examples need not be confined to the text but, Augustine says, may be paralleled with the present: if upon their departure from Egypt, the Old Testament Israelites took items that the Egyptians did not properly appreciate, so may Christian scholars appropriate elements from pagan philosophy that non-believers did not fully value.<sup>45</sup> Perhaps even more than

---

<sup>45</sup> "Any statements by those who are called philosophers, especially the Platonists, which happen to be true and consistent with our faith should not cause alarm, but be claimed for our own use, as it were from owners who have no right to them. Like the treasures of the ancient Egyptians,

Augustine's willingness to match biblical events with contemporary ones, we should note that after this example Augustine writes that "I say this without prejudice to any other interpretation of equal or greater importance."<sup>46</sup> The possibility of multiple, valid interpretations is pivotal in Augustine's view and is in itself what makes the Bible an endlessly fascinating

---

who possessed not only idols and heavy burdens which the people of Israel hated and shunned but also vessels and ornaments of silver and gold, and clothes, which on leaving Egypt the people of Israel, in order to make better use of them, surreptitiously claimed for themselves (they did this not on their own authority but at God's command, and the Egyptians in their ignorance actually gave them the things of which they had made poor use) – similarly all the branches of pagan learning contain not only false and superstitious fantasies and burdensome studies that involve unnecessary effort, which each one of us must loathe and avoid as under Christ's guidance we abandon the company of pagans, but also studies for liberated minds which are more appropriate to the service of the truth, and some very useful moral instruction, as well as the various truths about monotheism to be found in their writers. These treasures—like the silver and gold, which they did not create but dug, as it were, from the mines of providence, which is everywhere—which were used wickedly and harmfully in the service of demons must be removed by Christians, as they separate themselves in spirit from the wretched company of pagans, and applied to their true function, that of preaching the gospel. As for their clothing—which corresponds to human institutions, but those appropriate to human society, which in this life we cannot do without—this may be accepted and kept for conversion to Christian purposes." ("Philosophi autem qui vocantur si qua forte vera et fidei nostrae accommodata dixerunt, maxime Platonici, non solum formidanda non sunt sed ab eis etiam tamquam ab iniustis possessoribus in usum nostrum vindicanda. Sicut enim Aegyptii non tantum idola habebant et onera gravia quae populus Israel detestaretur et fugeret sed etiam vasa atque ornamenta de auro et de argento et vestem, quae ille populus exiens de Aegypto sibi potius tamquam ad usum meliorem clanculo vindicavit, non auctoritate propria sed praecepto dei, ipsis Aegyptiis nescientur commodantibus ea quibus non bene utebantur, –sic doctrinae omnes gentilium non solum simulata et superstitiosa figmenta gravesque sarcinas supervacanei laboris habent, quae unusquisque nostrum duce Christo de societate gentilium exiens debet abominari atque devitare, sed etiam liberales disciplinas usui veritatis aptiores et quaedam morum praecepta utilissima continent, deque ipso uno deo colendo nonnulla vera inveniuntur apud eos. Quod eorum tanquam aurum et argentum, quod non ipsi instituerunt sed de quibusdam quasi metallis divinae providentiae, quae ubique infusa est, eruerunt, et quo perverse atque iniuriose ad obsequia daemonum abutuntur, cum ab eis auferre Christianus ad usum iustum praedicandi evangelii. Vestem quoque illorum, id est hominum quidem instituta, sed tamen accommodata humanae societati qua in hac vita carere non possumus, accipere atque habere licuerit in usum convertenda christianum." ). Augustine continues on to list examples in which Christian writers have successfully appropriated the riches of pagan literature. Augustine, *DDC*, II XL 60.144-5 (124-7).

<sup>46</sup> "Quod sine praeiudicio alterius aut parvis aut melioris intellegentiae dixerim." Augustine, *DDC*, II XL 61.147 (126-7).

mystery, to "remove boredom."<sup>47</sup> But the level of interpretation with which Augustine is most concerned is more difficult and murky than the substitutions of figural interpretation, and the bulk of *DDC* concerns the use of words and images as signs. Although signs provide the most invigorating and inspiring way to convey extra knowledge in Scripture, because they leave the reader with a satisfying spiritual reward after a search, they are also dangerous: if they are not understood, they can be revered for what they are, not for what they represent.<sup>48</sup> There are many possible ways to find a correct meaning of a sign, but one of the ways is to recognize how a word, phrase, or image has been used elsewhere in Scripture and to combine that meaning with the present text.<sup>49</sup> By use of these references the author has

---

<sup>47</sup> "It is a wonderful and beneficial thing that the Holy Spirit organized the holy scripture so as to satisfy hunger by means of its plainer passages and remove boredom by means of its obscurer ones. Virtually nothing is unearthed from these obscurities which cannot be found quite plainly expressed somewhere else." ("Magnifice igitur et salubriter spiritus sanctus ita scripturas sanctas modificavit, ut locis apertioribus fami occurreret, obscurioribus eruitur quod non planissime dictum alibi reperiatur."). Augustine, *DDC*, II II VI 8.15 (62-3).

<sup>48</sup> "That is why the people who resolutely held fast to these signs were unable, when the time had come for them to be explained, to tolerate the Lord who disregarded them; and that is why their leaders engineered false accusations against him because he healed on the sabbath, and why the people, devoted to signs as if they were things, did not believe that he was God or that he had come from God, since he refused to follow those practices in the way that they were observed by the Jews." ("Et ideo qui talibus signis pertinaciter inhaeserunt, contemnentem ista dominum, cum iam tempus revelationis eorum venisset, ferre non potuerunt; atque inde calumnias, quod sabbato curaret, moliti sunt principes eorum populusque signis illis tanquam rebus astrictus non credebat deum esse vel a deo venisse, qui ea sicut a Iudaeis observabantur nollet attendere."). Augustine, *DDC*, III VI 10.23 (142-3).

<sup>49</sup> "From passages where such things are expressed clearly one should find out how they are to be understood in obscure contexts. There is no better way of understanding what was said to the Lord in the words, 'Take your arms and shield and rise to help me' [Psa 34 (35):2] than by using the passage 'Lord, you have crowned us as with the shield of your goodwill.' [Psa 5:13(12)] Not that we should understand only the meaning 'God's good will' in every passage where we read of the shield being used as a defence; there is also 'the shield of faith, with which you may extinguish all the arrows of the evil one' [Eph 6:16]. Nor again

allowed the more sophisticated reader to enrich the meanings of the passage by allying it with another.<sup>50</sup>

In order to practice this type of biblical interpretation the reader has to be thoroughly familiar with the very words of the Bible, and the contexts in which they are used. In addition to discussing this method, Augustine also simultaneously practices it in this text as he describes it, and notes when he is doing so, making the very text that instructs the reader on this method also a workbook in which to practice it. Augustine quotes a description of Neptune, and then reacts to the passage by saying that this is empty writing, "inside its attractive shell this husk is a jangle of fine-sounding stones; but it is

---

should we necessarily assign the meaning 'faith' just to the shield alone among such spiritual armour; in another passage the breastplate of faith is also mentioned: 'Put on the breastplate of faith and love' [1Thess 5:8]. ("Ubi autem apertius ponuntur, ibi discendum est quomodo in locis intellegantur obscuris. Neque enim melius potest intellegi quod dictum est deo, *apprehende arma et scutum et exsurge in adiutorium mihi*, quam ex loco illo ubi legitur, *domine ut scuto bonae voluntatis tuae coronasti nos*. Nec tamen ita ut iam ubicumque scutum pro aliquo munimento positum legerimus non accipiamus nisi bonam voluntatem dei. Dictum est enim et *scutum fidei, in quo possitis*, inquit, *omnes sagittas maligni ignitas extinguere*. Nec rursus ideo debemus in armis huiusmodi spiritualibus scuto tantummodo fidem tribuere, cum alio loco etiam lorica dicta sit fidei: *induti*, inquit, *loricam fidei et caritatis*." ). Augustine, *DDC*, III XXVI 37.83 (168-9).

<sup>50</sup> "Sometimes not just one meaning but two or more meanings are perceived in the same words of scripture. Even if the writer's meaning is obscure, there is no danger here, provided that it can be shown from other passages of the holy scriptures that each of these interpretations is consistent with the truth. The person examining the divine utterances must of course do his best to arrive at the intention of the writer through whom the Holy Spirit produced that part of scripture; he may reach that meaning or carve out from the words another meaning which does not run counter to the faith, using the evidence of any other passage of the divine utterances." ("Quando autem ex eisdem scripturae verbis non unum aliquid sed duo vel plura sentiuntur, etiam si latet quid senserit ille qui scripsit, nihil periculi est si quodlibet eorum congruere veritati ex aliis locis sanctarum scripturarum doceri potest, id tamen eo conante qui divina scrutatur eloquia, ut ad voluntatem perveniatur auctoris per quem scripturam illam sanctus operatus est spiritus, sive hoc assequatur sive aliam sententiam de illis verbis quae fidei rectae non refragatur exculpat, testimonium habens a quocumque alio loco divinatorum eloquiorum." ). Augustine, *DDC*, III XXVII 38.84 (168-9).

the food of pigs, not men.”<sup>51</sup> After this comment, as an aside, Augustine then writes that “anyone who knows the gospel knows my meaning,”<sup>52</sup> as a hint to students that there was more to that statement than the literal words conveyed. Here, Augustine has alluded to a well-known biblical passage that encapsulates his feelings on the subject: “And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him” (*et cupiebat implere ventrem suum de siliquis quas porci manducabant et nemo illi dabat*).<sup>53</sup> Then, instead of writing his thoughts outright, he has left, for those who know the passage, the meaning of the quotation to fully explicate the meaning of his own text. Those who do not have the requisite knowledge to catch the allusion will understand some of the statement on its basest level, but those who know the Bible well enough to have Augustine’s phrasing spark their memory will understand the deeper meaning. If this is, indeed, meant to be a school-book example, it is perhaps telling, then, of the difficulty of those allusions a truly advanced student might be expected to catch. Here Augustine uses the word *siliqua* (“husks”), as well the image of pig’s food to recall the passage in Luke, but never mentions the source of the word or image by name. Interestingly, Augustine expects the reader to be able to recognize the word

---

<sup>51</sup> “Haec siliqua intra dulce tectorium sonantes lapillos quatita non est autem hominum, sed porcorum cibus. Novit quid dicam, qui Evangelium novit.” Augustine, *DDC*, III VII 11.27 (144-5).

<sup>52</sup> Augustine, *DDC*, 74.

<sup>53</sup> Luke 15:16. The theory that Bede did not know Augustine’s *DDC* directly fails to hold water in light of Roger Ray’s discovery that a passage in Bede’s commentary on I Samuel (at chapter 14) encapsulates Augustine’s vindication of rhetoric that opens Book 4 of *DDC*. Considering this information, it would be difficult to argue that Bede was not well-acquainted with the whole of Augustine’s text. R. Ray, *Bede, Rhetoric, and the Creation of Christian Latin Culture* (Jarrow, 1997), 3-5.

despite its different declensions in the two texts, just as the image of pig's food must have been enough to recall the biblical text without the benefit of identical phrasing. This type of allusion allows each reader to interact with the text at his own level of advancement, receiving meaning equal to his learning.<sup>54</sup>

Writing in this paradigm would be a powerful tool for a monastic author to employ, assuring that a more advanced message would only be understood by those who already had the knowledge necessary to deal with the content. Or, in Augustine's words:

Could God have built into the divine eloquence a more generous or bountiful gift than the possibility of understanding the same words in several ways, all of them deriving confirmation from other no less divinely inspired passages?<sup>55</sup>

After his own instructions on how to identify and interpret signs, Augustine explains and recommends the works of Tyconius, especially his *Book of Rules*, despite Tyconius's Donatist tendencies.<sup>56</sup> Augustine describes Tyconius's book as possessing "seven rules which could be used like keys to open up the

---

<sup>54</sup> "It often happens that someone who is, or thinks he is, at a higher stage of the spiritual life regards as figurative instructions which are given to those at a lower stage. So, for example, a man who has embraced a life of celibacy and castrated himself for the sake of the kingdom of heaven [Matt 19:12] might maintain that any instructions given in the sacred books about loving or governing one's wife should not be taken literally but figuratively; or someone who has resolved to keep his own daughter unmarried might try to interpret as figurative the saying 'Marry off your daughter, and you will have done a great deed' [Ecclus 7:27]." ("Saepe autem accidit ut quisquis in meliore gradu spiritualis vitae vel est vel esse se putat figurate dicta esse arbitretur quae inferioribus gradibus praecipuntur; ut verbi gratia si caelibem amplexus est vitam et se castravit propter regnum caelorum, quidquid de uxore diligenda et regenda sancti libri praecipunt, non proprie sed translate accipi oportere contendat; et quisquis statuit servare innuptam virginem suam tamquam figuratam locutionem conetur interpretari qua dictum est, *trade filiam, et grande opus perfeceris.*"). Augustine, *DDC*, III XVII 25.58 (156-9).

<sup>55</sup> "Nam quid in divinis eloquiis largius et uberius potuit divinitus provideri quam ut eadem verba pluribus intellegantur modis quos alia non minus divina contestantia faciant approbari?" Augustine, *DDC*, III XXVII 38.85 (168-71).

<sup>56</sup> This reference is to Dontaus Magnus, the heretic.

secrets of the divine scriptures." <sup>57</sup> Augustine then explains Tyconius's seven rules in some detail, but before he begins his explanations, he quotes Tyconius's own claims as to what the rules can achieve:

'There are certain mystical rules which govern the secret passages of the entire law and make the treasures of the truth invisible to some people. If the principle of these rules is accepted in the ungrudging spirit with which I offer them, all doors will swing open and all obscurity will be as light as day, so that the reader who roams through the vast forest of prophecy will be guided by these rules as by so many illuminated pathways, and be preserved from error.'<sup>58</sup>

Augustine certainly drew on Tyconius's approach to deciphering Scripture, a remarkable compliment in light of Tyconius's Donatism.<sup>59</sup>

Tyconius writes of the duality of all Scripture, in which, because of the existence of a level of truth that readers cannot immediately fathom from the text, a single passage can say opposite things, and both can be simultaneously true. The core of Tyconius's interpretive system is his belief in the existence of the particular and the general, in which a figural element of Scripture can be both literally and allegorically understood, but

---

<sup>57</sup> "...quia in eo quasdam septem regulas exsecutus est quibus quasi clavibus divinarum scripturarum aperirentur occulta." Augustine, *DDC*, III XXX 42.92 (172-3).

<sup>58</sup> "*Sunt enim quaedam regulae mysticae quae universae legis recessus obtinent et veritatis thesauros aliquibus invisibiles faciunt. Quarum si ratio regularum sine invidia, ut communicamus, accepta fuerit, clausa quaeque patefient et obscura dilucidabuntur, ut quis prophetiae immensam silvam perambulans his regulis quodam modo lucis tramitibus deductus ab errore defendatur.*" Augustine, *DDC*, III XXX 43.95 (174-5); Tyconius, *Tyconius: The Book of Rules*, ed. and trans. William S. Babcock (Atlanta, 1989), 3. Hereafter *Rules*.

<sup>59</sup> The essential elements of Tyconius's system for interpreting Scripture are summed up by Augustine in *DDC*, so even if Bede did not possess a copy of the *Book of Rules* he still knew the basic tenets of Tyconius's method.

also in which any other part of Scripture can be seen as having at least two meanings. Beyond the figural reading this allows, it also demands that all parts of Scripture be read for a wider spiritual meaning, no matter how valid a literal meaning seems. In a very telling passage that also, I would suggest, works as an example of the very message he is expressing, Tyconius writes:

On this account, having asked the help of God's grace, we must spell out the "entries" into reading and the "subtle" discourse of the "manifold spirit" so that when he inserts the general into the particular or the particular into the general as an obstacle to understanding, we can easily see whether we are dealing with the particular or the general.<sup>60</sup>

In the English translation of this passage several words are marked as quotations, but this is not so in the original. But perhaps the notation of the translation makes it easier for us to see the passage as Tyconius would have wished a learned reader to: that this passage on the "general" and the "particular" alludes to passages from Scripture in which the very topic is discerning wisdom and the characteristics that accompany it, and he makes these allusions by using words that are pivotal in their original context as central words in his own phrasing.<sup>61</sup> So,

---

<sup>60</sup> "Quam ob rem Dei gratia in auxilium postulata elaborandum nobis est, est *Spiritus multiplicis ingressus* legendi eloquiumque *subtile*, quo, dum ad impedimentum intellectus specei genus aut generi speciem inserit, genus speciesne sit facile videri possit." Tyconius, *Rules*, 54-7.

<sup>61</sup> Tyconius, *Rules*, 55. "[E]ntries" (*ingressus*) comes from Sirach (Ecclesiasticus) 1:7 ("To whom hath the discipline of wisdom been revealed and made manifest? and who hath understood the multiplicity of her steps?" ("disciplina sapientiae cui revelata est et manifestata et multiplicationem ingressus illius quis intellexit")), and "subtle" (*subtile*) and "manifold spirit" (*Spiritus multiplicis*) come from Wisdom 7:22 ("For in her is the spirit of understanding; holy, one, manifold, subtile, eloquent, active, undefiled, sure, sweet, loving that which is good, quick, which nothing hindereth, beneficent," ("est enim in illa spiritus intellectus sanctus unicus multiplex subtilis mobilis disertus incoquinatus certus suavis amans bonum acutus qui nihil vetat benefacere")). Tyconius, *Rules*, 56-7.



Tyconius tells his reader how to correctly read the Bible, in which there are always deeper levels of meaning if one can pick up on the trigger, by embedding biblical allusions into this very passage. That Tyconius and Augustine both clearly practice and preach this method of biblical interpretation would have made this a stellar form for a grammatically-trained writer to emulate, and one that held the very highest text as its exemplar.

It would be hard to match the popularity of Augustine's texts, but his (with Tyconius's excerpts) and Donatus's were not the only transmitters of *grammatica* to early-medieval monastic readers. Isidore of Seville's *Origins sive etymologiae* (often referred to simply as the *Etymologiae*) and Cassiodorus's *Institutiones*,<sup>62</sup> *De orthographia*, and his *Expositio psalmorum* are all texts that are both exemplars of and instructors in *grammatica*. Cassiodorus's texts are the products of his own late-Roman education and the interest he took in the advancement of the study of Christian texts at Vivarium. Isidore's *Etymologiae* is even more helpful for a beginning student of *grammatica*, as it breaks down the discipline into its components, including both its linguistic and literary elements.

The texts of Augustine, Isidore, and Cassiodorus formed the backbone of early-medieval *grammatica*, but texts by other prominent writers, such as Jerome, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen, also promoted the same methodology. There were also

---

<sup>62</sup> With the exception of Cassiodorus's *Institutiones*, Bede knew all these texts of *grammatica*, and likely much more. Bede was a product of a thoroughly grammatical education; the books he read, the texts he cited, the texts he wrote, and his approach to the Bible itself all confirm this. Ray, *Bede, Rhetoric*, 5. On Bede's not knowing Cassiodorus's *Institutiones*, see Paul Meyvaert, "Bede, Cassiodorus, and the Codex Amiatinus," *Speculum*, 71.4 (1996), 827-83, at 827-31.

compilation texts, almost certainly used as introductory textbooks, which contain texts of unknown, or hotly-contested, origin. Isidore's clear exposition made him a favorite with compilers of *grammatica*-samplers, so although Isidore was widely known through the *Etymologiae* itself, his texts reached an even larger audience through *grammatica*-compilations. These texts are difficult works for modern scholars to study because of the uncertain attribution of the incorporated excerpts. Many of the constituent texts contain the common elements of *grammatica* described the same way as in myriad other manuscripts, making a definitive attribution almost impossible.<sup>63</sup> But although these texts do not lend themselves easily to modern study, they were essential for the advancement of *grammatica* through early-medieval monastic schools. By the ninth century the original authors who had preserved *grammatica* and formed the basis of early-medieval monastic education had been joined by those who had learned this methodology in those schools. Anglo-Saxon and Carolingian schools were using texts written by their own former pupils. As Irvine argues, "in the Anglo-Saxon world, the work of Aldhelm, Boniface, Bede, Alcuin, and Ælfric formed a Christian *grammatica* devoted to exegesis, reading, and knowledge of some of the liberal arts."<sup>64</sup>

It is clear that Bede existed in the intellectual world of *grammatica*, and details in his texts confirm his place within this textual paradigm. Irvine sees two broad areas in which

---

<sup>63</sup> For an excellent example of the difficulties, and potential rewards, of tracing these early-medieval grammatical compilations, see Anna Carlotta Dionisotti, "On Bede, Grammars, and Greek," *Revue Benedictine*, XCII, 1-2 (1982), 111-41.

<sup>64</sup> Irvine and Thomson, "*Grammatica*," 18.

Bede's texts prove his allegiance to the grammatical tradition: his conception of authority and his use of classical texts.<sup>65</sup> Although Irvine sees these as two large themes, I would argue that it is, in fact, a single aspect of Bede's work reflected here, and that it certainly is one about authority, both "temporal and textual."<sup>66</sup> According to Irvine, all of Bede's texts, but especially the *HE*, preserve and promote the hierarchy of Northumbrian political and ecclesiastical society. This may sound like a practice unaffiliated with *grammatica*, but it is actually one of the strategies used by grammatical forefathers, like Cassiodorus, to secure the authority of the text by associating it with the temporal authority of a ruler, either secular or ecclesiastical. This is most famously done in the *Praefatio* of Bede's *HE*, but it is also present in most of Bede's biblical commentaries, which he offers and commends to his bishop, Acca.<sup>67</sup> In the *HE*, Bede dedicates his text to the king, Ceolwulf, the highest example of authenticating temporal authority.<sup>68</sup> In grammatical methodology, the text benefits by association; it falls, much like a retainer, under Ceolwulf's temporal protection. In the *Praefatio* Bede states that the king himself being interested in studying moral examples, both of the good and the bad, makes him all the more admirable—and also underscores the purpose of *historia* in the system of *grammatica*. Bede's mention of both the readers and listeners of the *HE*

---

<sup>65</sup> Irvine, *Textual Culture*, 273-6.

<sup>66</sup> Irvine, *Textual Culture*, 273.

<sup>67</sup> *HE*, *Praefatio*. Irvine particularly notes this in Bede's *In Ezram et Neemian*, *In Samulelem*, *In Genesim*, *In Lucam*, *In Marcum*, and *Expositio Actuum apostolorum*. Irvine, *Textual Culture*, 273.

<sup>68</sup> *HE*, *Praefatio*, 2-3.

continues the "chain of authority" by which the text is accepted, and therefore, from which it derives authority.<sup>69</sup> In the biblical commentaries Bede first mentions his bishop, Acca, and then invokes the other source of authority he can associate with his text: the texts of the Church Fathers. The biblical commentaries gather their authority from their ability to instruct. They provide the reader with a more advanced reading than he might otherwise have experienced, "an authoritative reading."<sup>70</sup> Irvine writes that this bestowing of knowledge on the reader, or perhaps it is better described as the opening of the original biblical text for the reader by means of commentary, reproduces the hierarchy of authority in the reader's own experience, with the reader being the recipient of this series of authenticating sources.<sup>71</sup> Irvine sees Bede's texts as crafted to benefit from this downpouring of authority every time the text was read. Each reader's experience in which the text was associated with authority (of several varieties) reaffirmed Bede's larger grammatical program, which Irvine identifies as "the promotion of local authority," especially as it is connected to the narrative of the *HE*, and "the assumption that the Anglo-Saxons had been chosen by God to extend the Church in Britain—the later [sic] of which is the master narrative underlying the entire *Historia*."<sup>72</sup>

The other grammatical trait that characterizes all of Bede's works is his reliance on classical, pagan literary

---

<sup>69</sup> Irvine, *Textual Culture*, 273.

<sup>70</sup> Irvine, *Textual Culture*, 275.

<sup>71</sup> Irvine, *Textual Culture*, 275.

<sup>72</sup> Irvine, *Textual Culture*, 275.

authorities, most notably Vergil. In grammatical culture ancient texts carry, by virtue of their age, authority. Classical texts, written closer to the nexus of Roman civilization, both geographically and temporally, are more authentic repositories of Latinity. Some Late-Antique Christian authors, such as Jerome, discouraged the use of pagan texts when Christian ones that taught the same lesson were available. But others, Augustine and Bede included, argued that if there was truth to be found in the texts that corresponded with Christian teaching, then there was nothing to be feared from them. This attitude towards classical texts, in which a Christian writer or reader could take what he found useful and leave the paganism of the author behind, was a hallmark of Late-Antique and early-medieval *grammatica*. Irvine calls this tendency of grammatical writers to utilize what they wanted from classical texts, without concern for the author's religious beliefs, a "general drift toward textual anonymity," in which the "grammatical methodology would have neutralized the poet of his pagan associations."<sup>73</sup> So for Late-Antique and early-medieval grammatical readers and writers, the *Aeneid* was less about Vergil's paganism than it was about the Latin of his verse and the text's rich potential for fruitful interpretation.<sup>74</sup>

---

<sup>73</sup> Irvine, *Textual Culture*, 277.

<sup>74</sup> Bede's knowledge of Vergil's texts has been a topic of contention among Bedan scholars. It is generally thought that the *Aeneid* was ubiquitous during the Middle Ages, and this combined with Bede's use of Vergilian quotations in his texts has led to the assumption that Bede had himself read Vergil's texts. The definitive statement on Bede and Vergil came from Charles Plummer, who thought that Bede was familiar with Vergil's works directly from Vergil's texts. This view was complicated by Peter Hunter Blair's article (P. Hunter Blair, "From Bede to Alcuin," in G. Bonner (ed.), *Famulus Christi: Essays in Commemoration of the Thirteenth Centenary of the Birth of the Venerable Bede* (London, 1976), 239-60) in which Hunter Blair claimed that Bede knew Vergil's text not directly but rather through excerpts in grammars

Bede's strategies for dealing with the classical writers were neither humanist nor fundamentalist; every use and citation of a classical text in Bede's works bears the marks of the grammatical strategies for intervention in the archive of literary discourse that functioned to co-opt and appropriate the classics for uses within the Christian textual community.<sup>75</sup>

*Grammatica* allowed Christian culture to absorb classical texts and the authority they embodied for use in creating a powerful and "ancient" Christian intellectual culture.

#### RHETORIC

*Grammatica* was, as we have seen, the methodology by which all early-medieval texts would have been written and assessed. But there was also another discipline inherited from the classical world that was still practiced in early-medieval

---

or other texts. This would mean that when Bede used Vergil's phrases in his own texts he was not implying the meaning the quotation had in its original context because Bede would not have known it since he never saw the original. This is a bold but problematic thesis. So many of Bede's quotations of Vergil's text clearly are chosen because of the meaning they carry from their original context, a context that suggests Bede had access to a significant chunk of Vergil's texts intact. The most recent addition to this debate came from Neil Wright's 1981 article (Neil Wright, "Bede and Vergil," *Romanobarbarica*, 6 (1981), 361-79), in which he established that Bede did indeed have direct access to Vergil's texts. Although in the end (or at least the state of the argument at the moment) this debate concluded where it started—that Bede knew Vergil's texts firsthand—the very fact that Bede's possession of such a foundational text could be unsure says a great deal both about the state of our knowledge of Bede's library and the unclear transmission of even the popular texts in the early Middle Ages. Ray is unsure if Bede knew Vergil (and Ovid and Lucan, for that matter) is notable, according to Irvine. But what Irvine also notes is that of all of the quotations Bede used from Vergil's texts, only a fraction of these quotations were found in grammatical treatises circulating in Bede's day, and since the quotations are from locations scattered throughout Vergil's text, Bede must have seen a full copy of the *Aeneid*. Even more convincing, as Irvine notes, is Bede's knowledge of the context of the quotations he uses from the *Aeneid*. When Bede incorporated a phrase from the *Aeneid* into the *HE*, he put Vergil's phrase into a complementary context. The situation Vergil's phrase as taken from in the *Aeneid* matched the circumstances it was put into in the *HE*—Bede knew the entire story and knew which place in it this line came from—he had read the whole text. Irvine, *Textual Culture*, 278-9.

<sup>75</sup> Irvine, *Textual Culture*, 277.

Western intellectual centers: rhetoric, *saecularis eloquentia*. If at its most basic level *grammatica* was how to understand the texts of others fully and correctly, rhetoric was how to build a text of one's own that would be both persuasive and erudite.

Since antiquity, writers of *historia* wrote not to inform but to persuade. These were writers who knew what conclusions they wanted their audience to draw and wrote in such a way as to make their story convincing, a format obviously appealing to early Christian authors. This is not to suggest that ancient writers schooled in the art of rhetoric disregarded what modern readers might call the literal truth of the way events "actually happened," but instead used the provided information, be it an oral or written report, to make that information persuasive. When gaps in the available information made it seem weak and incredible, it was the job of the writer, whose goal was the reader's credibility, to fill in those gaps with plausible information that would aid in the overall goal of moral instruction. Probability and verisimilitude were all-important, because the reader had to believe what he was reading before he could be moved by it, and it was generally acknowledged that people acted predictably, according to stereotypes. So by filling the gaps with the kind of information or behavior the reader already expected, presented persuasively, the author was making a "good" text. Good texts and good history were not strictly about what happened or what the author saw with his own eyes. And so the inclusion of supposed material is not about misleading the reader and certainly not about lying, instead it is about

bringing the reader to the "right" conclusion by the accepted rhetorical means.<sup>76</sup>

As objectionable as this initially might sound to modern readers, it is important to understand that rhetoric certainly does not discount the importance of authentic reporting. Indeed, any author trained in rhetoric would have expected "facts" in the texts he read, and he would have sought out "factual" reports, both written and oral, from valued sources like eyewitness reports or reliable testimony, out of which to craft his own texts. There was more to writing than simply recording these accounts as prose. They had to be made believable by the inclusion of information known to the reader, *fama vulgans*, which would make the reader trust the story in its entirety, edifying moral included. But there was a more subtle issue included in rhetorical "truth." Because the writing of texts is an art, writers describing the same event, even those with the same intent in their descriptions, will use words with varying connotations or perhaps dwell on different points. This results in accounts of the same event, based on the same sources and written for the same purpose, sometimes containing different details and appearing to be factually dissimilar. This superficial divergence does not matter at all; the *verba* are external.<sup>77</sup> What matters is that the reader receives the same substantive description of events, the same *res*, because it is

---

<sup>76</sup> R. Ray, "Triumph of Greco-Roman Rhetorical Assumptions in Pre-Carolingian Historiography," in C. Holdsworth and T. Wiseman (eds.), *The Inheritance of Historiography, 350-900* (Exeter, 1986), 67-8.

<sup>77</sup> Roger Ray, "Augustine's *De Consensu Evangelistarum* and the Historical Education of the Venerable Bede," in E.A. Livingstone (ed.), *Studia Patristica*, 16 (1985), 557-63.



the *res* that conveys all of the significance to the reader. The *res* symbolizes the eternal truth, the real message of the text that the author was using his skill to communicate. It matters very little how the reader receives this *res* or the means the author uses to express it. The exact words or the precise details the author uses to elicit the same moral truth, the same *res*, is unimportant.<sup>78</sup>

This was the universal working of rhetoric in the Late-Antique and early-medieval world. For Christian exegetes this could potentially be a problem—although it rarely was—when applied to the Bible. The best example of this, and the one that most clearly shows Bede's opinion of rhetorical practices in texts, is the famous disagreement between Jerome and Augustine concerning Peter and Paul's alleged dispute in Paul's Epistle to the Galatians. In Galatians 2:11, Paul reproaches Peter for having snubbed a table of Gentiles because he was afraid that if he sat with them he would anger the Jewish converts. The Jewish converts, who thought that they still ought to practice circumcision as a sign of their covenant with God, were offended at the Gentiles' resistance to this custom. Paul objected to Peter's leaving the Gentiles' table because the Gentiles could have thought from Peter's removal that they would be better, more authentic Christians if they too were circumcised. Paul told Peter that by giving anyone the impression that a physical action could secure their spiritual covenant with Christ that he was jeopardizing their souls. This episode, minor in itself, had taken on major proportions in Late-Antique scholarly debate. The

---

<sup>78</sup> Ray, "Augustine's *De Consensu Evangelistarum*," 561-3.

problem was that it seemed to show Paul, the inferior disciple who never knew Christ, reprimanding (and even worse, reprimanding correctly), Peter, the very cornerstone of the Church and the disciple whose mission legitimized the papacy itself. This was evidence of an embarrassing rift, however momentary, and was damagingly used by pagans to exploit what they saw as a lack of theological cohesion in the early Church. Jerome's reply to this problem is a landmark of the prevalence and power of rhetoric in Late Antiquity. Jerome wrote that this disagreement between Peter and Paul never occurred; it was a fiction, he said, contrived by Paul, to progress the narrative convincingly to the moving statements of faith that follow it. Jerome says Peter and Paul never really disagreed and feels he has found a satisfying solution when he claims that Paul intentionally fabricated an episode in order to make his text—a text that in Jerome's eyes was the word of God—more persuasive. Jerome defends this assessment against potential critics by saying that a fiction told for a good cause and that urges its readers toward right is morally commendable.<sup>79</sup>

A Father of the Church suggested this solution, despite his tacit awareness of its implication that not all of the books of the Bible were literally true, because the accommodation came in the form of one of the most-respected and venerated literary traditions. The principles of rhetoric had defined the most elevated texts of all time, and were used by the most exalted scholars, and therefore were a fit method with which to make the

---

<sup>79</sup> Ray, *Bede, Rhetoric*, 8. Jerome, *Commentarium in Epistolam ad Galatas*, PL 26, cols. 363-7, as cited by Ray.

biblical text agree. Jerome was not vilified for his suggestion, another testament to the ubiquity of rhetoric in Late-Antique intellectual culture. But Jerome's rhetorical treatment of the text did not go unchallenged. Augustine criticized Jerome not for using rhetorical methodology to study Scripture, but rather because in doing so Jerome had disputed the literal truth of the text. In the instance of this very special text, this was an unusual issue, Augustine said. If Paul did not write the literal truth in this one passage, in the sense that he did not describe events as they happened, when did he? Augustine argued that by this logic one could dismiss all of the Bible as a persuasive text, but one whose veracity is doubtful. But, as Roger Ray notes, Augustine had backed himself into a tight spot; if he did not like the results of Jerome's rhetoric he would have a difficult time finding another acceptable method of analyzing a passage such as this, because none other existed.<sup>80</sup>

This dispute says much about the prominence of rhetoric in Late-Antique intellectual culture, but it is Bede's analysis of Jerome and Augustine's squabble that exposes Bede's own views most clearly: he sided with Jerome.<sup>81</sup> Bede was willing to accept that a passage of the Bible was not literally true, that it did

---

<sup>80</sup> Ray, *Bede, Rhetoric*, 8.

<sup>81</sup> Although Bede sided with Jerome here, Bede disagreed with Jerome on other issues, most notably the acceptability of the use of pagan literature by Christian writers and educators. Jerome thought that the texts of pagan authors should be removed from the curriculum of Christian education and should not be read by Christians. Augustine, and Bede, felt that, as Augustine famously put it, "all truth was God's truth," and that if there was something of worth to be found in texts written by pagan authors they should be read. Indeed, as Bede noted, by *not* knowing pagan texts, especially those concerned with rhetoric and persuasive writing, which were in themselves morally neutral, Christian scholars were leaving all of the best weapons in the hands of their enemies, who happily would use the power of "pagan" arts like rhetoric to persuade others of the folly of Christianity. Ray, *Bede, Rhetoric*, 4.

not describe events as they had actually happened, in order that the biblical text be more theologically unified and persuasive. Bede's values and standards of historical truth were utterly those of a Late-Antique scholar educated in the rhetorical tradition. Bede does not simply agree with Jerome, though: he defends him and reasons why Jerome's rhetorical explanation was acceptable. Bede says that sometimes an author needs to tell a popularly-believed untruth in order to gain the audience's trust so that they will also accept the larger thesis of the work. As his example, Bede used Stephen himself, who intentionally misspoke when he told the Sanhedrin the location of Jacob's tomb.<sup>82</sup> Stephen was well aware of its actual location, but knew the crowd was not. If he had spoken strictly according to the truth, what he knew to be factually correct, he would have lost the credibility of the crowd and they would not have been persuaded to accept his larger point. By expressing the *fama vulgans* Stephen was able to use the tools of rhetoric to gain the trust of his listeners and accomplish his goal. From this example alone it is clear that Bede saw himself as conversing in the same intellectual world as the Fathers, one in which ancient, pagan texts were valued and historical "untruths" used according to the rules of rhetoric were acceptable and even desirable.<sup>83</sup>

---

<sup>82</sup> Acts 7:16 is the source of Bede's example. Ray discusses this example, Ray, *Bede, Rhetoric*, 8. For Bede's full commentary, see Bede *Venerabilis*, "Expositio Actuum apostolorum" in M. L. W. Laistner and D. Hurst (eds.), *Opera exegetica: Expositio Actuum apostolorum. Retractatio in Actus apostolorum. Nomina regionum atque locorum de Actibus apostolorum. In epistulas VII catholicas*, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina, CCSL 121 (1983), 3-99.

<sup>83</sup> There is one scholar whose work disagrees with this view of early-medieval *grammatica* and rhetoric. This work also needs to be mentioned because of the poor quality of the research and, at times, disregard for the evidence, especially concerning the actions of Benedict Biscop and

There is no surviving rhetorical text known to have been in the libraries of Wearmouth or Jarrow during Bede's lifetime.<sup>84</sup> Alcuin wrote that there was a copy of Cicero's *De Inventione* in York twenty years after Bede's death, but despite Alcuin's claim, this assertion has been largely dismissed by modern scholars.<sup>85</sup> This argument against Bede's or any early-medieval Insular writer's knowledge of rhetoric seems weak at best. Considering the Mediterranean teachers that were in England, Benedict Biscop's and Ceolfrith's frequent book-buying trips to Rome, and modern scholars' general ignorance concerning Bede's library,<sup>86</sup> it

---

Ceolfrith, and the texts Bede knew. Janet Coleman, *Ancient and Medieval Memories* (New York, 1992), especially Chapter Nine, "Bede, Monastic *Grammatica* and Reminiscence," 137-54.

<sup>84</sup> Gabriele Knappe, "Classical Rhetoric in Anglo-Saxon England" in *Anglo-Saxon England*, 27 (1998), 5-29. Knappe does not believe that classical rhetoric was known in Anglo-Saxon England. She dismisses Ray's argument that Bede uses rhetorical elements that were from Cicero's *De Inventione*—but that even if Bede somehow did not learn them from Cicero's text, he still knew them from some source. Knappe says that simply because there are rhetorical elements in Bede's texts it does not mean that he knew rhetoric—an astonishing suggestion, considering that she is disregarding both the evidence in Bede's texts as well as Alcuin's explicit statement. Knappe's main evidence is that none of the extant manuscripts of rhetorical texts are known to have come from Anglo-Saxon England. This statement, to the best of my knowledge, has not been challenged, but that hardly adds to its weight. Knappe also differentiates between classical rhetoric and what she terms "grammatical rhetoric," a distinction that does little to counteract Ray's claim that Bede knew Cicero's text directly. Knappe's claim is that Bede may have known grammatical rhetoric, the kind of persuasive argumentation popular in grammatical texts, to which Bede had been heartily exposed. Grammatical rhetoric, in Knappe's distinction, was concerned with being persuasive, but only in terms of following the rules of good *grammatica*, not by indulging in the rhetorical practice of conforming the text to the stereotype—the practice that Bede explicitly supported in the Jerome/Augustine battle over Galatians 2:11. This grammatical rhetoric was a descendant of, but hardly as coherent as, its progenitor, classical rhetoric. Classical rhetoric, in which texts, and speeches, are made persuasive by the rules of rhetoric as outlined in classical texts like Cicero's *De Inventione*, was not the sort known to Bede in Knappe's view.

<sup>85</sup> Knappe, "Classical Rhetoric," Alcuin's claim itself can be found in Alcuin, *Alcuin: The Bishops, Kings, and Saints of York*. P. Godman (ed. and trans) (Oxford, 1982), 125.

<sup>86</sup> Every attempt at this topic has been disappointing, no doubt because it is so extraordinarily difficult. What is known for certain is that, even taking Bede's intelligence as a given, the education he received at

hardly seems outlandish that one of the most basic, respected, and well-known ancient textbooks would have been known in England during Alcuin's lifetime, and indeed, during Bede's.

According to Cicero's *De Inventione*, an historian's task was to tell the events of the past in such a way as to highlight the moral exemplars of the story and to tell the truth as to how things happened. But this truth should be told in such a way that it shaped the reader's understanding of whether events were caused by actions beyond or within the control of humans, and within this evaluation, to examine the characters of the people involved. There was nothing objective about this kind of historian because his goal was, as always, to persuade the reader to his own conclusions. This summary of *De Inventione* is very much like Bede's own statement on history and historians in the *Praefatio* to the *HE*.<sup>87</sup> Not only does Bede's opinion on the purpose of history closely mirror Cicero's, but Bede also used a rhetorical technique explained in no other text but *De Inventione*.<sup>88</sup> If Bede did not have a copy of *De Inventione*, there is no known textual genealogy that could explain how Bede knew such an obscure rhetorical device. If we can accept from this that Bede did have access to a copy of *De Inventione*, much else falls into place. Bede's ideas on the place of history and its

---

Wearmouth and Jarrow placed him in the highest of intellectual circles. In Michael Lapidge's recent book about Anglo-Saxon libraries he is able to devote no more than a few pages on the libraries Bede had access to at Wearmouth-Jarrow, because the evidence is so scarce. M. Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library* (Oxford, 2006).

<sup>87</sup> "Should history tell of good men and their good estate, the thoughtful listener is spurred on to imitate the good; should it record the evil ends of wicked men, no less effectually the devout and earnest listener or reader is kindled to eschew what is harmful and perverse..." *HE, Praefatio*.

<sup>88</sup> Ray, *Bede, Rhetoric*, 6. Also see Ray, "Augustine's *De Consensu Evangelistarum*."

moral purpose, and indeed, instruction on the purpose and methods of rhetoric itself, all parallel this text.

In fact, at what must have been one of the most distressing times of his life and when he wanted to exploit the full power of the words he chose, Bede turned to rhetorical methodology. Bede's *Epistola ad Pleguinam*, the letter in which Bede defended himself against the charges of heresy that had been leveled against him concerning his dating of the ages of the world, is composed as a rhetorical document, meant to persuade the reader both of the correctness of its doctrine and the high-status education of the author.<sup>89</sup> Roger Ray sees the tell-tale markers of rhetorical training in many of Bede's works, and believes that Bede's texts exemplify the three *virtutes narrandi* of rhetorical writing: clarity, brevity and believability.<sup>90</sup> Calvin B. Kendall agrees with Ray that Bede was certainly using the principles and methodology of rhetoric in creating his texts. Kendall argues that Bede must have known Isidore's own text on rhetoric, because Bede lists the parts of rhetoric that Isidore includes. Furthermore, Bede arranged his examples in *De Arte Metrica* in the order in which they were listed in rhetorical texts.<sup>91</sup> In his choice of topics, his willingness to interact with the Fathers, his values and his standards for all texts, including the Bible, as well as his constant authorial stance as a moral judge, Bede

---

<sup>89</sup> Roger Ray, "Bede and Cicero," in P. Clemons (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon England*, 16 (1987), 1-15.

<sup>90</sup> Ray, "Augustine's *De Consensu Evangelistarum*."

<sup>91</sup> Calvin B. Kendall, "Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*: the Rhetoric of Faith," in J. Murphy (ed.), *Medieval Eloquence: Studies in the Theory and Practice of Medieval Rhetoric* (Los Angeles, 1978), 145-172. Incidentally, Kendall is the only modern translator of *De Arte Metrica*.

was a product of the Late-Antique intellectual world in which rhetoric, paired with *grammatica*, was the dominant methodology.<sup>92</sup>

Bede also used the methods and guidelines of the rhetorical tradition, especially when writing the *HE*. This use of the probable and the stereotypical to convince the reader of the truth of the story is Bede's much-debated *vera lex historiae* (based on *fama vulgans*):<sup>93</sup> the method of writing something persuasive, though unrecorded, to promote the ultimate moral point regardless of its "historical" veracity. This is also why Bede asks the reader to forgive him if the reader should find something he wrote (while following the rhetorical principles) to be untrue, or perhaps better put, counterfactual. Bede was not convinced of the factual accuracy of some of his information (although that made it no less fit for *historia*) that he had included to fill in the gaps in his sources and to promote the plausibility of his own narrative. He knew that a later reader might have learned information from a source unknown to him that would show some of the material he used to fill his own sources' gaps as inaccurate. This is also why in the *Praefatio* to the *HE* Bede tells his audience that the purpose of *historia* is to set examples that will support and prove the ultimate moral point of the narrative.

Bede also included another tell-tale marker of his familiarity with the rhetorical tradition in the *HE*: direct discourse of proceedings for which it is nearly certain no written record survived, which, in addition, itself persuades the

---

<sup>92</sup> Ray, *Bede, Rhetoric*.

<sup>93</sup> Roger Ray, "Bede's *Vera Lex Historiae*," *Speculum*, 55.1 (1980), 1-21.



reader by means of the rhetorical method.<sup>94</sup> The best example of this from the *HE* is the dialogue at the Synod of Whitby, which Bede modeled on the paired speeches of Roman rhetorical oratory, a model that does not exist in the Bible.<sup>95</sup> Bede's alleged use of rhetorical principles also has the ability to explain another of the great mysteries of the *HE*—why Book I opens with such a lengthy and, in retrospect, unimportant geographical description of the physicality and characteristics of the island of Britain. This, too, is explained by Bede's use of a rhetorical model. Traditionally, in rhetorical texts, the author would open with a geographical survey and interesting anecdotes about the subject of the text to draw the reader in, especially if the real topic of the text was one that might be too heavy to first entice the reader.<sup>96</sup> This introduction would also have signaled to every contemporary reader that this was a text written according to the principles of rhetoric, and that Bede was well-versed in that tradition.<sup>97</sup>

That Bede would write his own works on the model of rhetorical principles is hardly surprising considering their foundational place in Late-Antique intellectual traditions. But, according to Ray, Bede not only thought that the Bible provided the most plausible stereotype, making it the best rhetorical exemplar, but that the Bible itself was written according to the pretexts of rhetoric.<sup>98</sup> This would place the most celebrated and exalted writers (those who wrote the Bible) in the rhetorical

---

<sup>94</sup> Ray, "Triumph of Greco-Roman Rhetorical Assumptions," 68-73.

<sup>95</sup> Ray, "Bede and Cicero," 8-9.

<sup>96</sup> Ray, "Triumph of Greco-Roman Rhetorical Assumptions," 77.

<sup>97</sup> Ray, "Triumph of Greco-Roman Rhetorical Assumptions," 78-9.

<sup>98</sup> Ray, "Augustine's *De Consensu Evangelistarum*."

intellectual tradition and also make the Bible, as a text, the consummate piece of rhetorical writing. Furthermore, as the Bible was the text with the most urgent moral message, it was also the one most entitled to "fill in the gaps" with whatever verisimilitudes necessary. From this, Bede says that he used the Bible as the model for his own writing, a bold and self-assured step for any early-medieval writer.<sup>99</sup> The goal of rhetoric was to be persuasive, and a text that cannot win the reader's trust cannot change his mind. In order to make the text seem true, the writer must make the contents of his text seem probable. As Bede himself points out, even Stephen knew that he could not contradict the assumptions of his audience on a minor detail if he wanted to convince them of the larger truth of his story. A textual community so concerned with the reader's credibility is a hostile environment for unique situations, and the safest text and the one most certain to succeed is one that deals in stereotypes. In the intellectual world of early-medieval monasteries, the Bible was the ultimate stereotype, the innately truthful tale, and one that every member of the community had heard before. And so the Bible was the consummate exemplar, and one that leached its truth into any other story with which it came into contact.<sup>100</sup>

Roger Ray, who most clearly proposed the view that Bede did know the principles of rhetoric and employed them in his works, believes that Bede might have been even more adept at using rhetoric to persuade his audience than previously recognized.

---

<sup>99</sup> Ray, "Augustine's *De Consensu Evangelistarum*," 557.

<sup>100</sup> Ray, "Triumph of Greco-Roman Rhetorical Assumptions," 69.

Following the principles of rhetoric, Ray claims, Bede wanted to make the *HE* a persuasive text for its contemporary readers, and therefore modeled it on part the most persuasive text, the Bible. Ray has identified the framework of the Acts of the Apostles in the *HE*<sup>101</sup>—the story of the building of a “new church” after the arrival of famous evangelists, all of which culminates in a monumental church council. Ray only draws this comparison in the boldest strokes, but the similarity must have resonated for Bede’s original monastic audience. Perhaps this would have been an audacious rhetorical stereotype on which to model the English Church in the *HE*, but it would have thrust the idea on the reader in the most uncompromising terms. It would leave no doubt in the reader’s mind as to Bede’s larger vision of England as the new and redeemed Israel.<sup>102</sup> Bede intended the *HE* (and very possibly his other texts as well) to be read as persuasive arguments that would lead the reader to certain moral conclusions. We should approach the *HE* expecting to be led, not to be informed. If we are able to find the conclusion Bede meant us to reach at the end of the *HE* then we will have found valuable evidence both of Bede’s method, but even more excitingly, of his purpose in the text. If we can find both how and what he wanted his reader to

---

<sup>101</sup> In fact, Irvine claims that each of Bede’s three grammatical texts corresponds to one of the first three levels of *grammatica* itself. *De orthographica* is *emendatio*, *De schematibus et tropis* is *enarratio*, and *De arte metrica* is *lectio*, with some elements of *enarratio* and *iudicium*. This is certainly an ingenious correspondence, and one very much in line with the celebrated complexities of *grammatica* and Bede’s own holistic view of the text. But I do wonder if Irvine has matched the texts correctly to their corresponding grammatical premise. Irvine, “Bede the Grammarian,” 29.

<sup>102</sup> Ray, “Triumph of Greco-Roman Rhetorical Assumptions,” For another view on this topic, see Andrew P. Schiel, *The Footsteps of Israel* (Ann Arbor, 2004).

think we will have exposed something integral to Bede and to early-medieval literary culture.

#### CONCLUSION

The most important points we can glean from Bede's use of grammatical and rhetorical principles in his writing are things that, perhaps, we should have known all along: Bede was an active member of the highest level of intellectual and literary culture of his day, both as a consumer and as a creator. Bede was, therefore, an heir to the literary and textual culture of Late Antiquity, even if his physical surroundings themselves were exemplary of the changes in Western culture which defined the beginning of the early-medieval period.<sup>103</sup>

This world, in which all texts were saturated with the practices of *grammatica* and rhetoric, was the intellectual culture in which Bede was educated, and in which he clearly thrived. Bede's entire conception of written culture developed within these paradigms. We can say this with exceptional certainty for Bede, in part, because his own texts tell us this explicitly, but it is my contention, and the point of this chapter, that we could be nearly as certain had Bede never written a word. The literary culture described here, the world of *grammatica* and rhetoric, and of endless Scriptural interpretation, was the only way in which the text was imagined in the early-medieval intellectual world. We can talk about Bede

---

<sup>103</sup> For another example of the benefits of studying a text within its Late Antique cultural framework, see Joan M. Peterson, *The Dialogues of Gregory the Great in their Late Antique Cultural Background* (Toronto, 1984).

in comfortable certainties because of his exceptional production, but I contend we can speak just as certainly about any early-medieval literate monk. Consciously or not, and doubtless at widely varying degrees of skill, every early-medieval person who was taught to read was taught within this interpretive system.<sup>104</sup>

---

<sup>104</sup> There were no secular readers as such. For an interesting view of the desire of early-medieval monks to incorporate poetry that was not explicitly based on a religious text into their service, see Bruce Holsinger, "The Parable of Caedmon's *Hymn*: Liturgical Invention and Literary Tradition," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, April (2007), 149-75.

## CHAPTER TWO

### HOW BEDE READ

Much of Bede's scholarly output is composed of biblical commentaries in which he describes his own views on the texts of the Bible and provides suggestions as to how others should form theirs. His study of the Bible was the basis of his contemporary fame, and, in his own estimation, his greatest achievement.<sup>1</sup> Through these biblical commentaries we can see how Bede read texts, and by the very nature of these commentaries, we can also see how Bede wanted others to understand them. These instructions were the guidance he gave his own brethren, whose right understanding so concerned Bede,<sup>2</sup> to show them how to read and comprehend Scripture on all of its levels of meaning.<sup>3</sup>

The purpose of this chapter is to use Bede's own texts to discover how he himself read, as well as how he expected others

---

<sup>1</sup> *HE*, v.24, 567.

<sup>2</sup> Bede expressed this many places, including his "Letter to Plegwin," in Bede, *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, trans. Faith Wallis, *Translated Texts for Historians*, 29 (1999), 405-15.

<sup>3</sup> According to Martin Irvine's analysis of grammatical culture, commentaries seek to "invert the semiotic process" by revealing what was meant to be hidden (or at least difficult to find) in the original text. "A text read as being allegorically encoded will be interpreted in a substitute text, the commentary, which presents itself as the rewriting of the text de-allegorized from its own textuality. Commentary presents itself not as a dependent or non-self-sufficient work, but as the writing of a reading, the object text-as-read, a text validated in its claim to reveal the truth of another text." Irvine, *Making of Textual Culture*, 246. Or again from Irvine, "Religious texts were understood to be constituted by the rhetoric of allegory, of "other-speaking," in which the full content is suppressed through a system of codes and encyclopedic correspondences unknown to non-initiates." Irvine, *Making of Textual Culture*, 249-50. In the view of an adherent of *grammatica*, biblical commentaries further the interpretive chain that the New Testament began by interpreting the Old Testament.

to read.<sup>4</sup> In order to examine Bede's experience as a reader I want to study two texts, both largely overlooked by modern scholars, which show what Bede deemed to be an optimal textual experience for a reader.<sup>5</sup> The first is his *Commentary on Tobias*, in which we are able to read both the text Bede is commenting upon as well as his own observations and conclusions. By pairing together the story of the Book of Tobias with Bede's commentary on this book, we can reconstruct what Bede thought his best contemporary readers should appreciate in the text. The second text I will use to examine Bede's method of reading is *De Schematibus et Tropis* (hereafter *DST*), Bede's text explaining the use of metaphorical and symbolic language.<sup>6</sup> In *DST* Bede deconstructs figurative language for his reader by unraveling biblical examples of symbolic language, exposing the layers of

---

<sup>4</sup> This study of Bede's reading practices and his expectations of his readers' desire and ability exist within the intellectual world of *grammatica* outline in Chapter One. There has also been a substantial body of scholarly work devoted to understanding the experience of medieval readers without focusing exclusively on the workings of *grammatica* on the reader, such as Jesse M. Gellrich, *The Idea of the Book in the Middle Ages: Language Theory, Mythology, and Fiction* (Ithaca, 1985), Suzanne Reynolds, *Medieval Reading: Grammar, Rhetoric and the Classical Text* (New York, 1996), Rita Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages: Academic Traditions and Vernacular Texts* (New York, 1991) and Brian Stock, *After Augustine: The Meditative Reader and the Text* (Philadelphia, 2001).

<sup>5</sup> For more on the textual and cultural sophistication of Bede's local contemporaries, as well as an overview of the extraordinary book culture that flourished in eighth-century Northumbria, see M. Brown, *'In the beginning was the Word': books and faith in the age of Bede* (Jarrow, 2000).

<sup>6</sup> R. B. Palmer, "Bede as Textbook Writer: A Study of His *De Arte Metrica*," *Speculum*, 34 (1959), 573-84. For an example of the surprisingly far-reaching influence of Bede's *DST*, see Veronica Fraser, "The influence of the Venerable Bede on the fourteenth-century Occitan treatise *Las Leys d'Amors*," *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric*, 11 (1993), 51-61.

meaning the text possesses and the ways an able reader could access them.<sup>7</sup>

Bede often wrote on frequently-studied books of the Bible,<sup>8</sup> but some of his commentaries are on more obscure books, such as the Book of Tobias.<sup>9</sup> Bede's *Commentary on Tobias* provides a particularly rich opportunity to examine Bede's style because of its uniqueness in the early-medieval world—Bede was the first to write a commentary on this book of the Bible, and so both the content and structure of the commentary were determined by Bede's own views, not by the pull of a direct exemplar. In this chapter I will argue that Bede read the Book of Tobias the same way, and with the same expectations, that he read all other texts: through the lens of *grammatica*, with the expectation of finding many layers of meaning and seeing a transcendental truth through the most advanced of these layers. This was the view that he promoted and transmitted to his readers, who would have expected it, because they, too, were products of this grammatical intellectual culture.

---

<sup>7</sup> For a broader survey of the uses of symbolic language in Anglo-Saxon England, see Helmut Gneuss, "The study of language in Anglo-Saxon England," in D. Scragg (ed.), *Textual and Material Culture in Anglo-Saxon England: Thomas Northcote Toller and the Toller Memorial Lectures* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 2003), 75-105. For a discussion of symbolic language in the Late Antique world, see R.A. Markus, *Sign and Meanings: World and Text in Ancient Christianity* (Liverpool, 1996).

<sup>8</sup> Books of the Bible about which Bede wrote commentaries (some have several biblical books in a single volume of commentary and others focus on a single biblical book) include: Genesis, 1Samuel, Kings, Proverbs, the Song of Songs, a commentary on "Isaiah, Daniel, the twelve prophets and part of Jeremiah," Ezra and Nehemiah, Habakkuk, Tobias, Mark, Luke, Acts, the Seven Catholic Epistles, and Revelation. In addition to this list are, of course, Bede's many works of summary and extraction, as well as his description of the Temple. *HE*, v.24, 569.

<sup>9</sup> Bede's commentaries have received increased scholarly attention recently, both in the form of new translations, notably Bede, *On Ezra and Nehemiah*, trans. Scott DeGregorio (Liverpool, 2006), and articles, especially those contained in Scott De Gregorio, ed., *Innovation and Tradition in the Writings of the Venerable Bede* (Morgantown, 2006).



I am not the first to see Bede's textual expectations exemplified in his biblical commentaries.<sup>10</sup> Calvin B. Kendall's study of Bede's *Commentary on the Book of Genesis* has shown that Bede thought his responsibility as a biblical commentator covered explication of both the literal and the allegorical senses of the biblical text.<sup>11</sup> Although Kendall differs slightly in how many levels of meaning he believes Bede saw in biblical texts (he thinks Bede saw three rather than the more traditional four, which Bede himself later endorses),<sup>12</sup> Kendall's fundamental point is that Bede wrote his *Commentary on the Book of Genesis* to explain the many layers of meaning he anticipated and found in the biblical text.<sup>13</sup> Kendall shows how seriously Bede took his task as biblical commentator, providing examples of how Bede explains both literal misunderstandings (vocabulary mix-ups) and allegorical depth (the use of specific words to denote spiritual meaning).<sup>14</sup> Although Kendall's discussion of the deeper spiritual meaning Bede found in his *Commentary on Genesis* is based on his belief in Bede's purposeful vocabulary, rather than on the search

---

<sup>10</sup> Nor are Bede's biblical commentaries the only texts that should be studied for this purpose. Eric Jay Del Giacco has shown that Bede's homilies on the Gospel of Luke contain passages very similar to those in Bede's commentary on the same book. Although Del Giacco's study is limited to Luke, it presents a compelling case for a broader study, both of the similarities between Bede's homilies and biblical commentaries, and also on Bede's use of exegetical material throughout his texts. Eric Jay Del Giacco, "Exegesis and Sermon: A Comparison of Bede's Commentary and Homilies on Luke," *Medieval Sermon Studies*, 50 (2006), 9-29.

<sup>11</sup> Calvin B. Kendall, "The Responsibility of Auctoritas: Method and Meaning in Bede's Commentary on Genesis," in Scott DeGregorio (ed.), *Innovation and Tradition in the Writings of The Venerable Bede* (Morgantown, 2006), 101-2.

<sup>12</sup> For a survey of the medieval tradition of the four-fold interpretation of the Bible, see Henri de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture*, trans. E.M. Macierowski (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2000).

<sup>13</sup> Kendall, "Responsibility of Auctoritas."

<sup>14</sup> Kendall, "Responsibility of Auctoritas," 105-8.

for the anagogical meaning of the piece, it does not lessen Kendall's point that Bede consciously sought these multitonal meanings and intended his readers to see them as the highest form of biblical interpretation.<sup>15</sup> So although in this chapter I will look at the many levels of meaning Bede saw in the Book of Tobias only, other scholars have found these many levels in others of Bede's commentaries.

The Book of Tobias, or as some later versions have it, the Book of Tobit, is the story of the pious man of God, Tobias, and his son, also named Tobias (causing some difficulty in historical discussions of the book).<sup>16</sup> As a canonical book of the Bible this text would have been familiar to Bede's contemporaries,<sup>17</sup> but as its popularity has waned with modern readers, it is worth briefly summarizing the narrative here.<sup>18</sup>

The elder Tobias has led a good life despite the dangers that were often associated with his activities: he buries the dead, though doing so nearly leads to the end of his own life. But Tobias continues his almsgiving and good-works despite the danger, even after God tests him by blinding him with falling swallow dung. In despair over his own sins (he had mistakenly suspected his wife of theft) and God's presumed-just punishment

---

<sup>15</sup> Kendall, "Responsibility of *Auctoritas*."

<sup>16</sup> For a discussion of the historical difficulties of this book, including the multiple versions available, see Vincent T.M. Skemp, "Jerome's Tobit: a reluctant contribution to the genre rewritten Bible," *Revue bénédictine*, 112 (2002), 5-35.

<sup>17</sup> R. Marsden, "The survival of Ceolfrith's *Tobit* in a tenth-century insular manuscript," *Journal of Theological Studies*, 45 (1994), 1-23.

<sup>18</sup> Although considered an apocryphal text and excluded from Protestant Bibles, the Book of Tobias was well-known from antiquity through the Reformation and remains part of the Roman Catholic and Orthodox canon. The story of Tobias was familiar enough to the seventeenth-century viewers of Rembrandt's "Tobit and Anna with a Kid" that the subject of the painting was recognizable.

of him, in the form of his blindness, the elder Tobias prays for his own death. At the same moment, a pious young woman, living some distance away, also prays for her own demise. Sara, the only child of just parents (like the younger Tobias), has been given to seven husbands in marriage, only to have each one killed by a devil as he was about to come into her bed. The carnage of her marriages causes her own father's servant to upbraid her, and Sara, moved by her sad fate, prays to God, at the same moment as the elder Tobias, for either assistance or death.

The elder Tobias's and Sara's prayers are both heard by God, and he sends his angel Raphael to aid them. The elder Tobias, certain that he is on his deathbed, asks his son, Tobias, to go retrieve a substantial debt he is owed from years past. The younger Tobias does not know the way, but conveniently meets the angel Raphael, in disguise and calling himself Azarias, who promises to show him the way and return him safely to his concerned parents. Not long after the younger Tobias and Raphael/Azarias depart, young Tobias is attacked by a monstrous fish in the Tigris. Seeking Raphael/Azarias's help during the attack, Tobias pulls the unnatural fish from the river and it dies, panting, on the shore. Raphael/Azarias counsels Tobias on what to harvest from the fish's body for medicinal purposes (and these materials will play an essential role later in the story), and they eat the rest of the fish for the remainder of their journey. Raphael/Azarias leads the younger Tobias, unaware of the angel's motives, to the house of Sara's father, who is, unknown to the younger Tobias, his father's kinsman. The younger Tobias and Raphael/Azarias are received with joy by Sara's father, but

his mood becomes dark when Tobias insists on receiving Sara as his wife, as Raphael/Azarias had advised. Himself counseled by Raphael/Azarias, Sara's father agrees, and so Raphael/Azarias teaches Tobias how to overcome the devils that had killed Sara's previous husbands. Their fault, Raphael/Azarias teaches, had come from their lust for Sara, which had been the very instigator of the marriages. Tobias could conquer this by showing himself more concerned with forming with Sara a union of godly piety, rather than one of the flesh, by spending their first three nights together in prayer. On the first night Tobias was also to burn the liver (in some versions, the heart) of the monstrous fish of the Tigris on the coals of the fire, and the burning liver would cast the devils out of the house and into the desert.

Having little hope of the younger Tobias's survival as his son-in-law, Sara's father has Tobias's putative grave dug early in the morning following his marriage, certain that he had met with the same fate as Sara's previous husbands. Being pleasantly surprised upon hearing of his survival, Sara's father makes a generous marriage settlement on Tobias and urges him to stay to celebrate with them. Anxious as to his own parents' well-being, Tobias sends Raphael/Azarias to collect the debt his father is owed, the original purpose of the journey, which Raphael/Azarias does successfully. With God's will having been completed concerning the marriage of Tobias and Sara, the entourage returns to Tobias's grieving parents. Raphael/Azarias instructs the younger Tobias to apply the gall of the monstrous fish to his father's blind eyes upon their reunion, and promises that it will cure his blindness. Tobias does as the angel instructs him, and

in the joy of his reunion with his parents, the younger Tobias also restores the elder's sight. After such a satisfactory journey, the younger and elder Tobias confer as to how reward the young man who has brought every matter at hand to such a satisfactory conclusion, unaware that they are in the presence of an angel. They offer Raphael/Azarias half of all the younger Tobias has gained on the journey, but Raphael/Azarias instead reveals his true identity, leaving the household in terrified awe. Living lives of even greater sanctity than before, all involved are blessed with long lives, health, and large families to share their joy. Before he dies at the age of 102, the elder Tobias predicts the destruction of their own home, Nineveh, and the restoration of Jerusalem.<sup>19</sup>

This book in itself is a successful narrative and a compelling story. This was a text that even the least-learned listener could understand on its literal level and from which he could gain moral edification. As a book that was comprehensible in itself, this was not a text that was obviously demanding explanation, as opposed to, say, the Song of Songs, which was ripe for theological misinterpretation and needed a sound commentary to guide readers. The Book of Tobias's intelligibility on a literal level, and the concomitant lack of urgency for a commentary, make Bede's decision to write one all the more telling of his own method of reading texts and what he saw as the inner meaning of this text.<sup>20</sup> Bede's opening statement of his

---

<sup>19</sup> Tob 1:1-14:7.

<sup>20</sup> For more on medieval views on the Bible, see Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Notre Dame, 1964), and J. Danielou, *From Shadows to Reality: Studies in the Biblical Typology of the*

*Commentary on Tobias* is one of the most direct statements of Bede's method of reading:

The book of the holy father Tobias is accessible to readers certainly on the beneficial level of the letter, as it abounds in the greatest examples and lessons of the moral life. Yet anyone who knows how to interpret it not just historically, but also allegorically, sees that just as fruits surpass [their] leaves this book's inner sense surpasses its literal simplicity. For if understood spiritually, it is seen to contain in itself the great mysteries of Christ and the Church.<sup>21</sup>

It is extraordinary that Bede follows such a bold and broad statement with a discussion of the minutia of the Book of Tobias, but in the eyes of his audience, who saw the meaning in Bede's choice of minutia, his reading of these details was just as broad and bold as the opening of his commentary.

This opening statement is disarmingly forthcoming: Bede's explanation of the purpose of the commentary is to use his skills to expose the underlying message of the biblical text. But his methods are unspoken, perhaps because Bede could safely assume that any reader with even a minimal training in *grammatica* would be familiar with them. Bede's approaches for identifying the meaning from the biblical text involve the signification of

---

*Fathers*, trans. W. Hibberd (London, 1960); for the treatment of the text of the Old Testament by early medieval writers in particular, see M.L.W. Laistner, "Some early medieval Commentaries on the Old Testament," *Harvard Theological Review*, 46 (1953), 27-46 and R. Marsden, "The Text of the Old Testament in Anglo-Saxon England," *American Historical Review*, 104 (1999), 234.

<sup>21</sup> Bede, *On Tobias*, trans. W. Trent Foley, in W. T. Foley and A. G. Holder (eds. and trans.), *Bede: A Biblical Miscellany*, Translated Texts for Historians, 28 (Liverpool, 1999), 57. "Liber sancti patris Tobiae et in superficie litterae salubris patet legentibus utpote qui maximis vitae moralis et exemplis abundat et monitis et si quis eundem historice etiam allegorice novit interpretari quantum poma foliis tantum interiorem eius sensum videt simplicitati litterae praestare. Maxima namque Christi et ecclesiae sacramenta si spiritaliter intellegitur in se continere probatur." Bede, "In Tobiam," in D. Hurst (ed.), *Opera Exegetica*, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina, CCSL 119B (Turnhout, 1983), 3.

names, the biblical association of words, the pregnant nature of details, and the ubiquitous imminence of sacred history. These mutually-applicable categories outline Bede's interaction with the parts of the biblical text in which Bede identified an "inner sense" beneath the surface of the text.

For Bede, as for any good student of *grammatica* and the Bible, names were significant markers of character.<sup>22</sup> An appropriate name declared the moral character or literary purpose of an individual, and a good creator, either of worlds or texts (which God undoubtedly was) would not forgo an opportunity to cast meaning into his text. In the Book of Tobias, God sends an angel to serve as young Tobias's guide on his journey, ostensibly to collect his father's debt, but actually to cure his father's blindness, rid Sara of her demons, and facilitate her marriage to young Tobias. The angel God sent was named Raphael, whose name, Bede notes in his commentary, "is translated as 'medicine of God.'" <sup>23</sup> For Bede the meaning of Raphael's name, knowledge reserved for those with the linguistic wherewithal to understand its origins, breaks open the meaning of this otherwise rather mundane part of the text. It is the significance of the name Raphael meaning "medicine of God" that reveals how Bede saw even the most seemingly inconsequential aspects of the text:

[In like fashion] was the Lord sent into the world; he said of himself, *A doctor is not needed for the healthy, but for the sick*, (Matt. 9:12) and he redeemed the Jewish people from the darkness of

---

<sup>22</sup> "Linguistic reference thus opens a window onto the whole panorama of correspondences in sacred history, the master narrative which is represented only in a partial and fragmentary form in any given biblical narrative." Irvine, *Textual Culture*, 263. See also Chapter One, above.

<sup>23</sup> Bede, *Tobias*, (3:25), 62. "Raphael qui interpretatur medicina Dei," Bede, *Tobiam* (iii,25), 6.

unbelief and the Gentiles from the bondage of idolatry. Of him the prophet said, *And his name shall be called the Angel of the Great Council* (Isa 9:6).<sup>24</sup>

It would be difficult to imagine a reading more profound. Bede here has taken a tiny detail and has shown that the truth of the text can be teased out from any aspect of it.<sup>25</sup> Raphael, the "medicine of God" descends to the young Tobias just as Christ, the Healer of Souls, descended to mankind. Young Tobias, who faces the challenges of his journey successfully with Raphael's guidance, becomes the healed and the saved, the united Church of both "redeemed" Jews and observant Gentiles that Bede envisions here. Bede's inclusion of the words of Isaiah as the final line of his explication may seem unnecessary, but in both passages angels have been renamed so that they can accomplish the work of God. The chapter of Isaiah from which that verse is drawn is a cornucopia of Christological prefiguration: Isaiah 9 foretells the birth of a son who would redeem Israel, removing the burden from the weary and giving a spiritual light to the righteous—another verse that could aid in casting the younger Tobias as a figure of Christ. For Bede and his reader, Tobias stands as a figure for both Testaments. This is a commentary within a commentary; just as Bede revealed the truth of the meaning of Raphael's name, within his own explanation he left a nugget of further meaning, for those who knew the verse, of the fulfillment

---

<sup>24</sup> Bede, *Tobias*, (3:25), 62. "Missus est dominus in numdum qui de se ipso ait: *Non est opus valentibus medico sed male habentibus*, qui et populum Iudaicum a tenebris perfidiae et gentilitatem ab idolatriae servitute redimeret; de quo dixit propheta, *Et vocabitur nomen eius magni consilii angelus*." Bede, *Tobiam* (iii,25), 6.

<sup>25</sup> Not only does the truth exist in every aspect of the biblical text, but, in the grammatical tradition, the conveyance of that truth is the sole purpose of every other good text. Ray, "Vera Lex Historiae," 1-20.



that such a reading of Raphael's name produced. To understand that the story of young Tobias and Raphael/Azarias and their journey is a prefiguring of The Story—the story of Christ's redemption of mankind—is to see how every piece of the text of the Bible prefigures the Ultimate Narrative. This small example, from a minor detail in the text in a brief work on a single book of the Bible, encompasses the whole of sacred history, but even more important to the task at hand, this truth was transmitted in a way that exposes Bede's thoroughly-grammatical expectations. Bede makes the reference to the verse from Isaiah, but he relies on the reader to know the meaning of the verse and how it enriches and clarifies the passage at hand. Showing the omnipresent truth in each jot of the Bible by explication is accompanied by Bede's own references to the existence of this meaning repeatedly in Scripture. Even as Bede reveals the truth of the Bible to his reader, reading is not a passive activity. Just as the readers are given the meaning of one text, they are shown how, if they know the verse from Isaiah, it possesses endlessly more meaning.

Bede again stresses the significance of names two passages later in his *Commentary on Tobias*, when discussing Raphael/Azarias's answer to the elder Tobias's inquiries as to his parentage. Still in the guise of a mortal man, Raphael/Azarias answers that he is "Azarias, son of the great Ananias."<sup>26</sup> Had the elder Tobias known to think of names critically, he would have seen who this "Azarias" was at once, as Bede writes that "'Azarias' is translated as 'the Lord our

---

<sup>26</sup> Tob 5:18.

Helper'; 'Ananias', as 'the Lord's grace.' " <sup>27</sup> Raphael, the "medicine of God" masquerades as himself: "our Helper" having come from "the Lord's grace." Here, as in the passage from Bede's *Commentary* describing the meaning of Raphael's own name, Bede shows that this detail contains the entirety of sacred history, enriching his readers' understanding of both the Book of Tobias, but also the previous entries of his *Commentary*. We learned in the previous passage that Raphael, as shown through his true name, is a proto-Christ and a reminder of Christ, here again, in his veiled identity, Raphael/Azarias also functions as a type of Christ both unknown and foreshadowed (in the Old Testament) and known and recognized (in the New Testament):

The Lord also deeply impresses the fact upon those believing in him that it is he whose coming the prophet desired when he sings, *You, O Lord, are my helper and deliverer; do not delay* (Ps 70:5 (69:6)); of him the evangelist also says, *We have seen his glory, glory as of the Only-begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.* (John 1:14) <sup>28</sup>

Once again, as in the previous passage, Raphael/Azarias becomes a mnemonic for Christ, recalling his sacrifice through Raphael/Azarias's name. Bede uses the keywords "helper" and "grace" to recall passages from the Bible in which Christ is mentioned as the "helper" and bringer of "grace" to the believer—just as Raphael/Azarias was for young (and eventually old) Tobias. Once again, the passages from the Book of Psalms and the Gospel of John that Bede uses were not haphazard choices on

---

<sup>27</sup> Bede, *Tobias*, (5:18), 63. "Azarias interpretatur adiutor dominus, Annanias gratia domini." Bede, *Tobiam* (v,18), 7.

<sup>28</sup> Bede, *Tobias*, (5:18), 63. "Et dominus his qui in se credunt intimat quia ipse est quem venire desiderans propheta cantabat: *Adiutor meus et liberator meus es tu domine, ne tardaveris; de quo et evangelista: Et vidimus gloriam eius gloriam quasi unigeniti a patre plenum gratiae et veritatis.*" Bede, *Tobiam* (v,18), 7.

his part. Rather, these passages are parallels, both portraying Christ and the circumstances of the text in the same light. What makes them a pair, and perhaps a foil rather than a parallel, is that one of them speaks of the hope of the Savior ("do not delay"), the other of his arrival ("We have seen his glory..."). These two verses, one of which comes from the Old Testament and one from the New Testament, both describe a state of despair in which the only hope is the expected/arrived Lord, and in their single message represent the fulfillment of prophecy, the prefigured accomplished, as the story of Tobias and his guide Raphael/Azarias did for Bede. In Bede's eyes, Raphael/Azarias was a figure of Christ—he tells us this explicitly—and with Raphael/Azarias's names Bede recalls verses in which the New Testament completes the foreshadowed events of the Old Testament. From the meaning of a name Bede is able to see, and show, the breadth of sacred history contained in the text, and to leave the reader in no doubt that names matter.

Several passages later, Bede comments on young Tobias's defeat of the monstrous fish and the meal that Tobias and Raphael/Azarias made from the fish's body. Young Tobias and Raphael/Azarias roasted and ate part of the fish, and they salted the rest for their journey. This seemingly mundane detail is a perfect example of the way in which Bede believed that eternal truths resided in the least likely places, and according to Bede, the ones that should makes the eyes and ears of a good exegete tingle with anticipation because of the lack in the literal narrative. Readers were trained to notice details that a reader uninitiated in the methods of *grammatica* might miss entirely.

Bede and his contemporaries thought these details, from the particulars of the narrative to arcane linguistic connections, were placed in the text as a locus of the highest meaning for those who could interpret them correctly. Bede's understanding of the monstrous fish killed by young Tobias is an example of just such a reading:

The part of the fish that they took with them represents those who were transferred from being the devil's members to Christ's, that is, those who were converted from unbelief to faith. By contrast, the part that they threw out represents those who have heard God's Word yet would rather dwell among their deceiver's dead and rotten members than return to the company of the Saviour. He cooked the fish's flesh in those whom he found to be fleshly-minded, but by the fire of his love he rendered them spiritual and strong. And so the Holy Spirit descended on the Apostles in a vision of fire. "The rest," it says, "they salted" (Tob 6:6). This pertains especially to the teachers to whom it is said, *You are the salt of the earth* (Matt 5:13). Now they (that is Tobias and the Angel) salted because the same *mediator between God and humans* (1Tim 2:5) both humanly taught the apostles by his speech and divinely granted them the salt of wisdom in their hearts.<sup>29</sup>

This example highlights two of Bede's most common approaches as a reader: to find the broadest themes of sacred history explicated in otherwise inconsequential details of biblical stories and to identify a keyword in the story planted to draw out other corresponding biblical texts. Bede reads the history of the saved and the damned in the fate of the fish that young Tobias defeated

---

<sup>29</sup> Bede, *Tobias*, (6:6), 67. "Quicquid ex pisce sibi assumpserunt eos significat qui de membris diaboli in Christi membra transferuntur, id est de infidelitate convertuntur ad fidem, quicquid vero dimiserunt eos e contra demonstrat qui audito Dei verbo malunt inter membra mortua ac putida sui deceptoris residere quam ad societatem saluatoris reverti. Assavit carnes eius in eis quos carnales invenit sed igne sui amoris spirituales ac fortes reddidit. Denique spiritus sanctus in apostolos in ignis visione descendit. *Cetera*, inquit, *salierunt*, quod ad doctores specialiter pertinet quibus dicitur: *Vos estis sal terrae*. Salierunt autem, id est Tobias et angelus, quia idem *mediator Dei et hominum* et humanitatis apostolos loquendo docuit et divinitus eis in corde salem sapientiae tribuit." Bede, *Tobiam* (vi,6), 10.

with Raphael/Azarias's help. The fish in all its parts becomes an allegory for those saved by Christ and those who know the truth but are still in need of the purification of holy fire. Bede also sees in this passage, in which the purifying fire "cooks out" the sin from the "fleshly-minded," the spiritual fire that descended on the apostles, another moment of completion in which the still-earthbound believers received the Holy Spirit, the completion of Christ's earthly mission—the next unacted moment in sacred history is the last. Within the story of this single fish all of the truth of the Bible is revealed.

In this same section of his *Commentary*, Bede also reads significance into the word "salt," much as he saw meaning in the linguistic analysis of names. The "salted" of the fish typology are the teachers, for they are "the salt of the earth" of Matthew 5:13, likely the first verse that would have come to the mind of a reader well-versed in the Bible—and even more importantly, what came to Bede's mind and what he thought *should* come to every reader's mind as well.<sup>30</sup> These "salted" teachers who are the most fundamental are now, in Bede's *Commentary*, conflated with the apostles, receiving the fire of the Holy Spirit so that they might teach all who came to them. Bede himself explicitly endorses this view that he created in his reading by ending the passage saying that the reason that young Tobias and Raphael/Azarias salted the fish was because Christ taught the apostles himself, while a man, by his own speech (the preparation) and then gave them the "salt of wisdom in their

---

<sup>30</sup> "...vos estis sal terrae," Matt 5:13.

hearts" (the fulfillment).<sup>31</sup> Bede here dismisses the literal action of the narrative in favor of the typological meaning; he subordinates all for the spiritual sense just as any good Christian *grammaticus* would have advised. The fire and salt of the fish's preparation are read, in Bede's mind, as the fire of the spirit and the fundamental salt of the teachers that were both granted by "the mediator between God and humans."<sup>32</sup>

Another instance from which Bede reads the ultimate message of sacred history in a small detail is the blinding of the elder Tobias. He had been occupied with burying the dead, a noble but unpopular task, and as he slept, warm swallow dung fell on his eyes and blinded him. This appears to be the epitome of injustice, as Tobias, following God's laws, has been pious and faithful in his duty both to the living and the dead. This is a moment that Augustine might describe as lacking in narrative meaning because its literal meaning is not keeping with the truth and message of Scripture, thereby signaling an able reader, such as Bede, that the purpose of this passage was to transmit a deeper figurative, spiritual message that surpasses the literal narrative.<sup>33</sup> Bede writes that the apparent injustice of old Tobias's blinding should not be surprising, that "the good deeds of humans sometimes figuratively signify an evil thing, while at other times evil deeds signify a good."<sup>34</sup> Bede continues, explaining that the real meaning of something often lies behind,

---

<sup>31</sup> Bede, *Tobias*, (6:6), 67.

<sup>32</sup> 1Tim 2:5.

<sup>33</sup> See above, Chapter One.

<sup>34</sup> Bede, *Tobias*, (2:10-11), 60. "Ne mireris lector quod aliquando bona typice malum aliquando bonum mala hominum facta significant." Bede, *Tobiam* (ii,10/11), 5.

and is at times at odds with, its initial appearance.<sup>35</sup> He reads the story of the blindness of the elder Tobias as an example:

Tobias' [sic] blindness thus represents how, as the Apostle says, *blindness fell partly upon Israel* (Rom 11:25). He grew tired of burying and went blind because one who tirelessly persists in good works is never deprived of faith's light; while the tired one who neglects to *stay awake, stand in the faith, persist manfully, and be strengthened* (1Cor 16:13), lies down and sleeps in spirit. To such a person is that saying of the apostle aptly applied, *Arise, you who sleep, rise up from the dead, and Christ will enlighten you* (Eph 5:14).<sup>36</sup>

Bede has disregarded the literal meaning of this story to such an extent that the elder Tobias exists solely as a figure to illustrate a larger point about sacred history. This does no disservice to the Bible, indeed, Bede sees this as the optimal reading, the one he is recommending in his own *Commentary*. For those readers who knew no better, they would find something

---

<sup>35</sup> Bede's summarizes his views on things that are not what they seem: "If this were forbidden, then one would always have to write *God is light* (1John 1:5) in bright gold and never in black ink. Yet even if you write the devil's name in white chalk, it still signifies infernal darkness." Bede, *Tobias*, (2:10-11), 60.

<sup>36</sup> Bede, *Tobias*, (2:10-11), 60. "Caecitas ergo Tobias designat quia, sicut apostolus ait, *caecitas ex parte contigit in Israhel*. Fatigatus est a sepultura et caecatus quia qui infatigabilis in bonis operibus persistit numquam fidei luce privatur; iacet spiritaliter et dormit fatigatus qui vigilare stare in fide viriliter agere et confortari neglegit. Cui bene congruit illud apostoli: *Surge qui dormis et exsurge a mortuis, et inluminabit tibi Christus*." Bede, *Tobiam* (ii,10/11), 5. Also, just as with the previous example, Bede's choice of biblical quotations in the explanatory verses of his commentary are not random, but are chosen for their own elucidatory purposes. The verse from Romans (11:25) that introduces the figurative value of old Tobias's blindness is not just a convenient wording for blindness. The verse from Romans is about the blindness that will come over Israel until it is delivered by the Gentiles and that the salvation of the Old Testament (and its world of faith) will be the New Testament and the new Chosen People. And although Bede only quotes the latter half of the verse, we already know that he echoed in his other works its sentiment ("For I would not have you ignorant, brethren, of this mystery..." ) (Rom 11:25), and it is hard to imagine that Bede was not thinking of this verse when he composed his own line explaining his exegetical works as having been inspired by his desire to keep his own brethren from falling into error. The other two verses Bede quotes in this passage also complement his larger point – 1Cor 16:13 is about remaining faithful and ready while waiting for a spiritual visitor, and Eph 5:14 concerns being spiritually raised and enlightened in Christ.

edifying in the literal narrative of the elder Tobias, but the real gem of meaning was found in this figurative, typological meaning, available only to Bede and his fellow *grammatici*.

Bede's *Commentary* on Tobias 2:10-11,<sup>37</sup> the story of the elder Tobias's blinding, ends with a note about the significance of the type of dung that blinded old Tobias: swallow dung. Bede writes that:

Because of their breezy flight, swallows represent pride and levity of heart, the impurity of which immediately blinds whom it rules. For one who carelessly subjects the mind to the levity of wantonness and pride sleeps as though under a swallows' nest. Now this blindness greatly prevailed over the people Israel when the Lord's coming in the flesh was imminent, when the yoke of Roman servitude pressed hard upon them and they were violating the divine law's precepts by profligate living.<sup>38</sup>

This passage is entirely in Bede's own words without explicit biblical references. Bede sets up a basic example of allegory: swallows stand for "pride and levity of heart" and bring impurity and blindness. Although this is a well-wrought piece of allegory, it seems an arbitrary association between swallows and these negative characteristics. But to someone who knew the Bible well, Bede's commentary would make a great deal of sense.

Swallows are mentioned only once in the Bible, in Baruch 6:21.<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>37</sup> "Contigit autem ut quadam die fatigatus a sepultura veniens domum iactasset se iuxta parietem et obdormisset. Ex nido hirundinum dormienti illi calida stercora insiderent super oculos eius fietetque caecus. Tob 2:10-11.

<sup>38</sup> Bede, *Tobias*, (2:10-11), 60-61. "Hirundines propter leven volatum superbiam cordisque levitatem figurant quarum immunditia confestim eos quibus dominatur excaecat. Quasi enim nido hirundinum subpositus dormit qui levitati lasciviae ac superbiae mentem incautus subicit. Haec autem caecitas populo Israhel maxime imminente adventu domini in carne praevaluit cum et Romanae servitutis iugo premerentur et legis divinae praecepta pessime vivendo violarent." Bede, *Tobiam* (ii.10/11), 5.

<sup>39</sup> "Owls, and swallows, and other birds fly upon their bodies, and upon their heads, and cats in like manner. Whereby you may know that they are no gods. Therefore fear them not" ("supra corpus eorum et supra caput



This chapter is about the reprehensible ways of idolaters, who waste valuable resources on sin and profligate living, spending their wealth on prostitutes and empty finery, all the while acting proud of their deportment. But their gods are powerless and false because they are unable to defend themselves from decay and damage, and are even subject to the same frailties and ignominies as every other earthly object. The ultimate example of such pollution is owls and swallows alighting on them. Swallows embodied the evils of "pride and levity of heart" found in the Baruch idolaters along with the pollution, and therefore proof, of the idols' impotence. Regardless of whether the verse from Baruch was, in fact, the source of Bede's allegory for swallows, its meaning likely was the basis for his figurative understanding of the elder Tobias's blinding, and one which allowed for the reading of old Tobias as the old Israel of the Old Testament, confused and misguided, plagued by the same blindness that Bede mentions having fallen on Israel, in the words of Romans 11:25,

---

volant noctuae et hirundines et aves etiam similiter et cattae unde scietis quia non sunt dii ne ergo timueritis eos"), Baruch 6:21-22. This is the only instance in the Bible in which swallows are mentioned in the plural. But there are two instances in which a single swallow appears in the Bible, Isaiah 38:14, "I will cry like a young swallow, I will meditate like a dove: my eyes are weakened looking upward: Lord, I suffer violence, answer thou for me" ("Sicut pullus hirundinis sic clamabo meditabor ut columba adtenuati sunt oculi mei suspicientes in excelsum Domine vim patior sponde pro me) and Jeremiah 8:7 "The kite in the air hath known her time: the turtle, and the swallow, and the stork have observed the time of their coming: but my people have not known the judgment of the Lord" ("Milvus in caelo cognovit tempus suum turtur et hirundo et ciconia custodierunt tempus adventus sui populus autem meus non cognovit iudicium Domini"). These seem unlikely sources for Bede's view of swallows as the carriers of either "pride and levity of heart" or any sort of impurity. In these verses the solitary swallow represents the people of God looking for assistance (as in Isa 38:14) or as the symbol of natural awareness to be contrasted with the current ignorance of the people of God (as in Jer 8:7). Despite the superficial similarity of the "weakened" eyes in Isa 38:14, the pious anthropomorphic swallow of Isa 38:14 would contradict Bede's larger point in this passage of his commentary.

only a few lines previous. Bede then blends this allegorical treatment of swallows back into his typological reading of old Tobias's blindness as being not a physical condition, but rather representative of Israel's ignorance of Christ and concomitant disregard for holy law.

After Tobias had married Sara, her father was so certain that the demons had killed young Tobias, just as they had killed all of Sara's other husbands, that he ordered his servants to dig Tobias's grave early in the morning (even before they had proof of his death) to ensure that they would be able to bury him that day. Upon learning of Tobias's survival, Sara's father rejoiced and had the grave refilled. Bede's commentary on this passage is once again entirely in his own words, and, in a turn that seems counterintuitive to a modern reader, focuses on the sound of the crowing cocks as Sara's father ordered the grave be dug. Again disregarding the literal narrative in favor of the figurative meaning, Bede writes that:

The crowing of the cocks is the sound of the preachers who, at morning's [approach], would prophesy to the world that faith's true day was about to come after error's darkness. Some among the Gentiles doubted whether the Lord had truly defeated the ancient enemy and for this reason thought it best to bury and conceal the faith in his name; yet afterwards when the light of truth was made known, which is like day dawning and the spreading abroad of the cocks' song—which is the voice of teachers who were accustomed to rise up in their heart's swift flight toward heavenly desires—the Gentiles drove every cloud of doubt from their minds and at the defeat of the enemy recognized Christ truly as the Holy Church's Bridegroom.<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>40</sup> Bede, *Tobias*, (8:11), 69-70. "Cantus pullorum sonus est praedicantium qui cum mane diemque verum fidei mundo post tenebras erroris adfuturum canerent, erant quidem in populo gentium qui dubitarent an vere dominus hostem vicisset antiquum ideoque fidem nominis eius obruere atque abscondere satius aestimarent; qui tamen postmodum agnita luce veritatis quasi aurora procedente et crebrescente pullorum cantu, id est voce doctorum qui ad superna desideria alacri cordis volatu se levare

Bede combines the powerfully symbolic time of the dawn, the time of the return of Christ,<sup>41</sup> with the lone wakening calls of spiritual teachers, and draws them both into the dawn in which Tobias's future father-in-law unexpectedly found him to be alive, just as the doubting Gentiles were purged of doubt and "recognized Christ." If these associations seem arbitrary, we have missed the point. For Bede and his readers, these pairings reflect and clarify the groupings and associations already formed in the Bible. Bede is here making explicit what was, in his eyes, always present, if obscure, in the text. As Bede later writes in this *Commentary*, concerning a dog that accompanied Raphael/Azarias and plays no part in the narrative of the story, "the figure of this dog who is the angel's messenger and companion should not be taken lightly" because he represents the Church's teachers;<sup>42</sup> an insignificant detail on its own is a signal to a reader who has been trained, as Bede was, to look for the lack of literal relevance to see allegory and typology at work.

When Bede does acknowledge the literal truth of the narrative he always does so to expound on the superiority of the figurative sense. But it is not just a broader, deeper or more spiritual sense that Bede frequently stresses; more often it is the fulfillment of the promise of sacred history that he sees in

---

consuerent, omne nubilum dubitationis sua de mente pepulerunt ac veraciter Christum hoste prostrato sponsum esse sanctae ecclesiae cognoverunt." Bede, *Tobiam* (viii.11), 12.

<sup>41</sup> "Christus est stella matutina, qui nocte saeculi transacta, lucem vitae sanctis promittit et panit aeternam." Bede, *The Explanation of the Apocalypse*, trans. Rev. Edward Marshall, (Oxford, 1878) Book I, Chapter 3.3.

<sup>42</sup> Bede, *Tobias*, (11:9), 73-4. "Non contemnenda est figura canis huius qui viator et comes angeli est." Bede, *Tobiam* (xi,9), 15.

the text. Bede was a master exegete, and the scope of this *Commentary*, so often overlooked by readers of his other commentaries and his "historical" work, is profound. Bede's reading of the passage in which we are told that each of Sara's seven previous husbands had been killed by a demon as soon as he went to her is one example of many:

Sarah signifies figuratively the company of nations all of whose teachers knew so much about life in this world, which is formed in seven days, yet knew nothing to say about life eternal. For this reason the devil held them all hostage, inasmuch as they were sold into idolatry until our Lord the true Bridegroom came. The Lord joined this company to himself by his faithfulness after the enemy had been overcome, just as Tobias took Sarah as his bride by the teaching and assistance of the archangel after the demon had been bound. The angel fittingly signifies our Saviour's divinity; Tobias, his humanity. Nor will one marvel at our saying that two persons—an angel and a human—represent the single person of *the mediator between God and humans* (1Tim 2:5) when one reads in the expositions of the fathers that this single person of the mediator who suffers to save the world is represented by both Isaac, whose father offered him on the altar, and by the ram that was slain. That person in his humanity was slaughtered like a sheep, yet in his divinity remains immune to suffering along with God [his] Father, even as Isaac returned home alive along with his own father. Now if a ram aptly signifies Christ's humanity and a human being his deity, then why might not a human being much more aptly signify his humanity, and an angel his deity?<sup>43</sup>

---

<sup>43</sup> Bede, *Tobias*, (3:7-8), 61-62. "[Sarra] turbam nationum figurate denuntiat cuius doctores cuncti huius tantum saeculi quod septem diebus voluitur vitam noverant de aeterna nil dicere sciebat ideoque sunt mones a diabolo rapti utpote idolatriae mancipati donec verus adveniret sponsus dominus noster qui hanc sibi per fidem hoste superato coniunxit sicut Tobias Sarram alligato daemone sponsam accepit praecipiente et cooperante archangelo per quem divinitas nostri saluatoris non incongrue significatur sicut per Tobiam humanitas. Nec mirabitur hoc quod per duas personas, angeli videlicet et hominis, unam mediatoris Dei et hominum personam dicimus figurari qui in expositionibus patrum venerabilium legerit unam eius personam pro mundi salute patientis in Isaac qui offerebatur a patre in altari et in ariete qui immolabatur esse figuratam qui in humanitate occidebatur ut ovis, in divinitate impassibilis permanet cum Deo patre ut vivens cum suo patre domum revertitur Isaac. Se enim apte aries humanitatem Christi, homo designat deitatem, cur non multo aptius homo humanitatem, angelus deitatem significet?" Bede, *Tobiam* (iii,7/8), 6.

In Bede's reading, Tobias and Sara become symbols, figures, of their people's salvation, and yet this is not a one-for-one substitution but a complex system in which each thing can hold more than a single meaning.

From this *Commentary* we can recognize what Bede valued and found significant, and the kinds of connections he made between texts. What makes this *Commentary*, and indeed all of Bede's commentaries, so valuable as evidence for his reading practices is that Bede intended these texts to serve as guides for his fellow monks. These are not salvaged suppositions or private notes, rather these are the messages that, after much reflection, Bede thought were the most important and worthwhile for a reader to gather from this text. Bede has given us his ideal reading of the Book of Tobias, the experience that the best reader, in Bede's estimation, would have. Within this ideal we see many characteristics: the high value placed on the meaning of names and the significance of single words or short phrases borrowed from the Bible. But more important to Bede was the eternal and unrelenting drive to the end of sacred history—everything bends to this interpretation, even events that bear no superficial resemblance. Again and again, in this brief commentary Bede returns in each passage to the connection between the details at hand and the completion of sacred history, the return of Christ, and the fulfillment of the plan of God. At the end of this *Commentary*, the reader cannot fail to know that there is but one story, and it is the story of the redemption of a Chosen People by the sacrifice of Christ that is the core of it. Bede's own

reading returns to it relentlessly, pulling the *Commentary* back from the narrative to the ultimate, spiritual message that is so powerful and ubiquitous that the literal details of the story fade in its presence. Now we know how Bede read texts, what he valued and what he saw as legitimate and worthwhile meaning, the question becomes whether or not he wrote the way he read—if he saw all of sacred history in the swallows whose dung blinded old Tobias, would he have had a meaningless sparrow fly through Edwin's hall?

Bede's biblical commentaries show us how he himself read and how he thought the Bible should be read, but this was not Bede's only explicit discussion of how to read. Bede also wrote what might be termed a "textbook"<sup>44</sup> instructing how texts, both the Bible and others, should be read.<sup>45</sup> Bede separated this "textbook" into two parts, the first, *De Arte Metrica*, addresses issues of compositions and meter in poetry.<sup>46</sup> Although this first part is instructive in showing how wide a range of authors were available to Bede<sup>47</sup> and the sophistication of his understanding, it is the second part of this textbook, *DST*, that

---

<sup>44</sup> Bede, *Libri II De Arte Metrica et De Schematibus et Tropis*, ed. and trans. Calvin B. Kendall (Saarbrücken, 1991), 15. Hereafter *DST*.

<sup>45</sup> On the potential for studying the dispersion of this text in the early medieval Insular world, see Carl T. Berkhout, "An early Insular fragment of Bede's *De schematibus et tropis*," *Notes and Queries*, 53 (2006), 10-2.

<sup>46</sup> Although the date of composition of Bede's *De Arte Metrica* and *De Schematibus et Tropis* have no effect on the argument of this piece, their place in the chronology of Bede's work has been debated. Carmela Virchillo Franklin, "The date of composition of Bede's *De schematibus et tropis* and *De arte metrica*," *Revue bénédictine*, 110 (2000), 199-203.

<sup>47</sup> Kendall conjectures that the Wearmouth-Jarrow libraries might have contained 600 volumes, *DST*, 17. For a more general account of the books available in Anglo-Saxon England, see, Michael Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library* (New York, 2006). For more on the relationships between Late-Antique and early-medieval Christian writers, texts, and libraries, see Anthony Grafton and Megan Williams, *Christianity and the Transformation of the Book* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2006).

concerns the methodology of reading. In *DST*, Bede analyzes the function of tropes and figures in texts, mostly biblical ones. Bede's purpose in writing was to show students that the "devices of rhetoric"<sup>48</sup> of the ancient world were first found in the Bible, and that the Bible contained all of the literary cleverness and complexity of pagan authors. That Bede knew of these rhetorical devices is powerful proof of his grammatical education, as is his ability and desire to identify them in the text of the Bible. Even more importantly for this study, *DST* shows that Bede was highly sensitive to the workings of language, and the power and purpose of certain textual and grammatical constructions. *DST* is itself divided into two halves, the first dealing with "schemes" and the second with "tropes." The second half of *DST* outlines ways that words can mean something more or other than their literal meaning, or, in Bede's words, "[a] trope is an expression which, either for the sake of ornamentation or from necessity, has been transferred from its proper meaning and understood by analogy in a sense which it does not have."<sup>49</sup> For all of the thirteen types of trope that Bede identifies, he explains the definition of the type (as he has done for all of the "types" in *DST*) and gives an example from the Bible, explaining how the verse satisfies the qualifications of the trope. Bede divides the next-to-last trope, "Allegory," into several subcategories. For the explanation of the third subcategory, "Enigma," Bede, in showing how to uncover the

---

<sup>48</sup> *DST*, 15.

<sup>49</sup> "Tropus est dictio translata a propria significantione ad non propriam similitudinem ornatus necessitatisve causa." *DST*, 183.

meaning within an enigma, reads a single verse in the three higher styles of reading Scripture.<sup>50</sup>

Enigma is a sentence which is made obscure by the fact that the likeness between things is hidden, as in [Psa. 67:14]: "The wings of a dove covered with silver, and the hinder parts of her back with the splendor of gold." This trope signifies the eloquence of the New Testament which is filled with divine light, its inner sense truly shining with the greater grace of heavenly wisdom; and it also signifies the present life of holy Church, which rejoices in the wings of its virtues; and in addition it signifies the future life of the Church, which is in heaven, where it will enjoy eternal glory with the Lord.<sup>51</sup>

Although Bede does not explicitly mention the styles of reading here, any reader minimally familiar with these types would have recognized them immediately. This is a compact synopsis of allegory (typology), tropology, and anagogy, with a brief example of each; this passage could act as a crib for a student of *grammatica* and is not an unreasonable conclusion for a textbook. Later in his explanation of "enigma," Bede writes that there are different kinds of allegory, historical and verbal.<sup>52</sup> An historical allegory is one that conveys its point by the meaning implied onto the historical circumstance. These may seem minute distinctions, and, for most uses, they are. Their value lies in the pithy and compact examples Bede used to illustrate them, because there we can see, laid bare, Bede's most basic view of the correct interpretation of Scripture, here written for the instruction of young scholars. For historical allegory, Bede uses

---

<sup>50</sup> *DST*, 199.

<sup>51</sup> "Enigma est obscura sententia per occultam, similitudinem rerum, ut: "Penne columbae [p. 273] [sic] deargentate, et posteriora dorsi eius in specie auri," cum significat eloquia Scripture spiritalis divino lumine plena, sensum veri eius interiorem maiori celestis sapientiae gratia refulgentem, vel certe vitam sanctae ecclesie presentem, virtutum pennia gaudentem, futuram autem, que in celis est, eterna cum Domino claritate fruituram." *DST*, 194, 199.

<sup>52</sup> *DST*, 201.



as his example Paul's own allegory of the wives of Abraham,<sup>53</sup> one free and one a slave, saying "[t]he women 'are the two testaments,' as the Apostle Paul explains."<sup>54</sup> For verbal allegory, in which the allegory resides in the phrasing only and not in any physical actuality, Bede says it

is found in [Isa. 11.1]: 'There shall come forth a rod out of the root of Jesse, and a flower shall rise up out of this root.' By this is meant that our Savior the Lord was to be born of the Virgin Mary from the race of David.<sup>55</sup>

In this instance, when lengthy theological explanation is not appropriate, we are able to see Bede's method of reading at its most elemental. Bede continues to say that sometimes historical and verbal allegories converge and apply to the same passage, each illuminating an aspect of the truth of the verse. The historical allegory of the First Kings 16:12-13<sup>56</sup> and the verbal allegory of Song of Songs 5:10:<sup>57</sup>

[b]oth signify mystically that 'the Mediator of God and men' (1Tim 2:5) was beautiful indeed in wisdom and virtue, but rosy from the shedding of his own blood, and that the same Mediator was anointed by God the father 'with the oil of gladness above his fellows' (Psa. 44:8).<sup>58</sup>

Here Bede sees an eternal truth, or perhaps part of the Eternal Truth, in the minute details of two verses of the Bible that use similar language. And in explaining the truth that these minute details in two different verses called to mind, Bede then uses

---

<sup>53</sup> Gal 4:22-28.

<sup>54</sup> *DST*, 203, the reference to Paul comes from Gal 4:24.

<sup>55</sup> *DST*, 203.

<sup>56</sup> "Now David was ruddy and beautiful to behold, and Samuel anointed him in the midst of his brethren." *DST*, 203.

<sup>57</sup> "My beloved is white and ruddy, chosen out of thousands." *DST*, 203.

<sup>58</sup> "Quod utrumque mystice significat mediatorem Dei et hominum decorum quidem sapientia et virtute, sed sui fuisse sanguinis effusione roseum, eundemque unctum a Deo Patre "oleo laetitiae pre consortibus suis." *DST*, 196, 203.

two verses from the Bible that in themselves seem to have very little in common, until Bede shows us how he can unite them in explaining sacred truth. The unity of the message of the Scriptures, and the unity of the true message of all creation, is what is able to unite these elements into something mutually illuminating and meaningful. Bede continues:

Moreover, whether allegory is verbal or historical, sometimes it prefigures an event literally, sometimes it prefigures typologically an event in the life of Christ or the Church, sometimes it figuratively expresses a tropological, or moral, principle, and sometimes it figuratively expresses an anagogical sense, that is, a sense leading the mind to higher things.<sup>59</sup>

Bede continues with examples of historical and verbal allegory in which major events of sacred history were prefigured, having stated that these allegorical examples are able to be interpreted through all four filters of meaning. Bede experienced texts able to see all four of these meanings in a verse and desired to connect even seemingly incidental and trivial aspects of the text to the most theologically-dazzling and pivotal moments of sacred history.

Sometimes a single historical or verbal allegory will figuratively reveal a literal sense, a mystical sense concerning Christ or the Church, a tropological sense, and an anagogical sense all at the same time. For example, the temple of the Lord in the literal sense is the house which Solomon built [3 Kgs. 6]; allegorically, it is the Lord's body, of which Christ said [Jn. 2:19]: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up," or his Church, to whom the apostle Paul said [1 Cor. 3:17]: "For the temple of the Lord is holy, which you are;" tropologically, it is each of the faithful, to whom the Apostle said [1 Cor. 3:16; 6:15; 19]: "Know you not, that you bodies

---

<sup>59</sup> "Item allegoria verbis sive operibus aliquando historican rem, aliquando typicam, aliquando tropologicam, is est, moralem rationem, aliquando anagen, hoc est, sensum ad superiora ducentem figurate denuntiat." *DST*, 196, 203.

are the temple of the holy Spirit, who is in you?"; anagogically, it is the joys of the heavenly mansion, for which the Psalmist sighed, when he said [Psa. 83.5]: "Blessed are they that dwell in your house, O Lord; they shall praise you for ever and ever." Another example is the verse of the Psalmist [Ps. 147:12-13]: "Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem; praise your God, O Sion. Because he has strengthened the bolts of your gates, he has blessed your children within you." This trope can rightly be taken as referring literally to the citizens of the earthly Jerusalem, allegorically to the Church of Christ, tropologically to each saved soul, and anagogically to the celestial homeland. I have said that it can be taken "allegorically" in reference to the Church, following the example of that learned commentator, Pope Gregory the Great, who, in his *Moralia*, regularly and properly used the term "allegory" in connection with those verbal expressions and historical events which he interpreted figuratively as referring to Christ or the Church.<sup>60</sup>

From the preceding passages there can be no doubt that Bede was aware of these four kinds of reading, practiced them himself, saw them as part of an educated and enlightened approach to a text, and believed that a single text could sustain all four kinds of reading simultaneously, attesting to his immersion in *grammatica* and giving us a compelling model to follow while reading his own texts.

---

<sup>60</sup> "Nonnumquam in uno eodemque re vel verbo hystoria simul et mysticus de Cristo sive ecclesia sensus et tropologia et anagoge figuraliter intimatur, ut: templum Domini iuxta hystoriam domus quam fecit Salomon; iuxta allegoriam corpus dominicum de quo ait: "Solvite templum hoc, et in tribus diebus excitabo illud," sive ecclesia eius, cui dicitur: "templum enim Domini sanctum est, quod estis vos"; per tropologiam quisque fidelium, quibus dicitur: "An nescitis quia corpora vestra templum est Spiritus sancti qui in vobis est"; per anagogen supernae gaudia mansionis, cui suspiravit qui ait: "Beati qui habitant in domo tua, Domine; in seculum seculi laudabunt te." Simul modo quod dicitur: "Lauda, Hierusalem, Dominum; lauda Deum tuum, Sion. Quoniam confortavit seras portarum tuarum, benedixit folios tuos in te." De civibus terrene Hierusalem, de ecclesia Cristi, de anima quaque electa, de patria celesti, iuxta hystoriam, iuxta allegoriam, iuxta tropologiam, iuxta anagogen recte potest accipi. Iuxta allegoriam de ecclesia diximus sequentes exemplum doctissimi tractatoris Gregorii, qui in libris *Moralibus* ea, que de Cristo sive ecclesia per figuram dicta sive facta interpretabatur, allegoriam proprie nuncupare solebat." *DST*, 198-200, 207.

Bede's *Commentary on Tobias* (and indeed all of his biblical commentaries) show modern readers Bede's understanding of the optimum function of texts. Through this *Commentary*, and Bede's explicit instructions in *DST* as well, we can identify how Bede thought textual language worked. For Bede, the smallest details mattered enormously: names were the key to understanding the genuine nature of characters and the smallest details indicated the omnipresence of eternity. The true significance of a word could be understood either by unraveling its etymology or, more often, by recognizing the connections it held in other texts, and bringing those associations into the text at hand. In all cases, Bede saw the ultimate story of Christian history in the minutia of the text. It seems at times that the more insignificant the detail to the narrative, the more profound the meaning he attributed to it. But these connections were neither flights of fancy nor hubris on the part of Bede. Rather, Bede, in his own eyes, was the explicator, but not the creator, of these meanings in the biblical text. Bede knew that this was how language functioned, and he, as a premier reader, could see the connections that he believed already existed in the text. His advantage over other readers was his vast mental cache of other texts, allowing him to recognize more plentiful, and more insightful, textual relationships.<sup>61</sup> That the smallest details of

---

<sup>61</sup> Bede was certainly an exemplary reader, but he was part of a community, both locally and throughout Christendom, in which he would find readers who could create such readings with him. P. Meyvaert, "Bede, Cassiodorus, and the Codex Amiatinus," *Speculum*, 71 (1996), 827-83. For Meyvaert's own updates of this article, see P. Meyvaert, "The date of Bede's *In Ezram* and his image of Ezra in the Codex Amiatinus," *Speculum*, 80 (2005), 1087-1133 and P. Meyvaert, "Dissension in Bede's community shown by a quire of Codex Amiatinus," *Revue bénédictine*, 116 (2006), 295-309.

the story could recall and represent the most momentous events was a function of the bounty of language, the skills of a good reader, and the benefits of a well-crafted text. Bede's work as the author of an authoritative commentary was to possess the requisite connections so that he could help other, less-learned, readers grasp the same edifying meanings.

Bede's own experience of reading the Book of Tobias (and the experience Bede hoped other readers, taught by his *Commentary*, would have) was one of near-constant wonder. As he read, the words of the Bible would summon other information to his mind that informed and altered his understanding of that biblical text. While reading, Bede repeatedly saw the present text subsumed by the greater narrative it contained. As the literal narrative of the lives of young and old Tobias unfolded, it was also, by virtue of the secondary narrative the words evoked, occurring in the time of sacred history.<sup>62</sup> During each instance in which the words of the story recalled the ultimate narrative of sacred history, time collapsed, both in Bede's experience of the text, and, when he recreated that experience in his *Commentary*, in the *Commentary's* text itself as experienced by Bede's reader.

---

The impact of this kind of reading can be immense. As I brief example, I would like to examine how one story in Bede's *HE*

---

<sup>62</sup> For more on the medieval understanding of the passage of time and the way in which sacred history subsumed earthly chronology, see Malcolm Godden, "The Millennium, Time, and History for the Anglo-Saxons," in R. Landes, A. Gow, and D.C. Van Meter (eds.), *The Apocalyptic Year 1000* (Oxford, 2003), 155-80.

can acquire multiple and previously unknown levels of meaning when approached with the same methodology that Bede used when he read the Book of Tobias. Perhaps the most famous and best-loved scene in Bede's *HE* is the one in which a sparrow flies through Edwin's hall as the king and his advisors confer about converting to Christianity.<sup>63</sup> After his chief priest acknowledges that he has not received suitable rewards from the gods for his exemplary service to them, another of Edwin's advisors agrees to the conversion by noting Christianity's superior knowledge of the afterlife. This advisor then compares the flight of a sparrow through a warm, comfortable hall on a cold, wet night to man's brief period of knowledge in the world and his uncertain past and future. The message to the reader seems to be that the dark night out of, and into which, the bird flies is the equivalent of paganism—unenlightened, unaware, theologically dark. Whatever this metaphor lacks in internal logic it makes up for in efficacy. It fulfills Bede's purpose both of creating a memorable moment in which these chosen Anglo-Saxons, and especially the fatefully-chosen king, Edwin, decide to accept Christianity, simultaneously underscoring Christianity's monopoly on knowledge of the spiritual world.

This story is one of the best known episodes in Bede's *HE*, but this vignette is valued mostly for its charm, and has never been seen as one of Bede's greater moments as an historian.<sup>64</sup> It

---

<sup>63</sup> *HE*, ii.13.

<sup>64</sup> J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People—A Historical Commentary* (Oxford, 1988), 72. It should be noted that in Wallace-Hadrill's brief evaluation of this passage in the *HE* he interprets the story as proposing the brevity of life (rather than the unknown nature of the past and future) as the issue which spurs Edwin

seems uncharacteristic that Bede would put a trivial story at such a pivotal moment in English history, but perhaps such "slips"<sup>65</sup> are the grounds on which to doubt Bede's factual accuracy? Instead I would propose to work on the assumption that this story of the sparrow, describing the first step of the English toward salvation, is in fact one that would resonate with profound meaning for Bede and his readers. To find this meaning, we must attempt to read as Bede, and his audience, would have read.

The literal meaning of the story of the sparrow is that there was a king in a hall with his advisors who saw a bird and

---

and his advisors onto conversion. But most importantly, in this evaluation he notes that the flight of the sparrow mirrors the image in Psalm 83 but does not allow the possibility that this might have echoed meaning to Bede's readers. In Wallace-Hadrill's defense, he does say that this is a "sophisticated" passage, but does not elaborate in what sense. Also, David Rollason in his comprehensive history of Northumbria repeatedly mentions Edwin's conversion, and evaluates the "truth" of the narrative rehashing it in some detail, but entirely ignores the actual text of the story. David Rollason, *Northumbria, 500-1100: Creation and Destruction of a Kingdom* (New York, 2003), 45, 77-8, 88, 118, on "truth," 121. Interestingly, Rollason does discuss a later story involving Paulinus and a crow in some detail, although he concludes that it has little historical value, 78. F.M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 1947), 114. Henry Mayr-Harting discusses the conversation in Edwin's hall without mentioning the story of the sparrow. Henry Mayr-Harting, *The Coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England* (London, 1972), 22-3.

<sup>6565</sup> "Other errors can be detected in Bede's work which are due to slips, or the difficulties of his material." Campbell, "Bede," 166. Perhaps we might see Campbell's "slips" in another light in Martine Irvine's words when speaking of the Bible, "A higher, master narrative is assumed to be interwoven in the text of the biblical narratives and most apparent when the surface narrative is absurd or impossible. The literal level frequently indicates its own insufficiency and incompleteness and, therefore, the necessity of allegory. Indeed, the literal level of meaning clearly reveals its own textuality and insufficiency; the literal level indicates what it lacks, revealing the continual deferral of complete or ultimate meaning." Irvine, *The Making of Text Culture* 257. What Campbell sees as lapses in Bede's narrative, may well be intentional moments of "absurdity" to indicate a much more sophisticated, and much more important, narrative beneath the surface. In fact, concerning Scripture, Origen believed the Logos "inserted certain stumbling blocks... to signal that something beyond the letter is needed" to get the full meaning of the text. Origen, *De principiis*, 4.2.9, as quoted by Irvine, *Textual Culture*, 256.

commented on its flight. Morally, this story instructs the listener to think about how entirely he relies on God for the salvation of his soul—and the fear he would feel without God. Allegorically, each reader can see his own soul in the sparrow, a fragile and lost creature, only briefly in warmth and light, who will soon fly back into the harsh darkness again. The three simplest levels of meaning make it clear that the sparrow is meant to be seen as the human soul, and presumably, therefore, sympathetic to the reader. The sparrow, only briefly in comfort, is every human in the present world. But what would this sparrow bring to the mind of an early-medieval monastic reader?

Considering the rigor with which the psalms were memorized and daily reinforced, Bede would have expected a member of his monastic audience to be able to call a psalm to mind immediately. The image of the sparrow occurs in five psalms, and simply the mention of the sparrow probably would be enough to call these psalms to mind, but that is not the only mechanism at work here. The Latin word for "sparrow" that Bede uses in this story in the *HE* is *passer*,<sup>66</sup> the same word that is used in all five psalms. In fact, the utility of this word and its potential to immediately draw five psalms of the same theme together by means of a single word may well be the reason that Bede chose a sparrow

---

<sup>66</sup> By my count there are five psalms that mention a sparrow or sparrows, all using the word *passer*: Psalms 10, 83, 101, 103, and 123. I am not the first to notice the similarity between Psalm 10 and Bede's story, both Richard J. Schrader, *Old English Poetry and the Genealogy of Events* (East Lansing, 1993), and M.J. Toswell, "Bede's Sparrow and the Psalter in Anglo-Saxon England," *ANQ: A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes, and Reviews*, Winter (2000), 7-12, at 12, mention this. Toswell also notes the presence of the sparrow in Psalms 83 and 101. I have been unable to find any previous scholarship that recognizes the sparrow-imagery in Psalms 103 and 123. It should also be noted that despite Toswell's interest in similar data, her work comes to very different conclusions.



for this story, since any bird would have sufficed for the literal meaning.

Now the reader has read the story of the flight of the sparrow through the hall and has been reminded by the word sparrow of the five psalms that contain the same image and vocabulary.<sup>67</sup> But the effect that this has on the reader is entirely dependent on the content of those psalms, as they will now certainly color the reader's experience of the story. In all of these psalms the sparrow represents the lost faithful who find deliverance and protection in God's house. But this is not the only message in these psalms—in these texts the faithful sparrow who will be saved and protected in God's care represent the faithful of Israel.<sup>68</sup>

All of these meanings would be swimming around in the mind of the reader, and they would inevitably be conflated. The pagan Anglo-Saxons of the story, who are so open and eager for salvation, and who need God's protection, become the chosen, but flawed, Old Testament Israelites who need God's favor. By writing a story with this imagery and vocabulary Bede pulls this episode, and with it a pivotal moment in English history, into sacred history. Anagogically, this story means that the Anglo-Saxons, both individually and collectively, have been delivered into the

---

<sup>67</sup> All five Psalms describe the faithful sparrow as being lost and then finding refuge in God. All of these Psalms also use the imagery of the sparrow either in flight or suffering in the elements to emphasize the sparrow's need for God's protection.

<sup>68</sup> This seems especially apparent in Psalm 103, which discusses the sparrows as roosting in the cedars of Libanus (more commonly known as the cedars of Lebanon, although they might not always refer to the same species of conifer). The cedars serve as a symbol that connects all of sacred history, from the Second Temple (Ez 3.7) to the Second Coming (Eze 17:22). The cedars are also the trees of God (Psa 79) and were planted by Him. This imagery with the sparrow makes a particularly powerful introduction to a theme of inclusion in sacred history.

hands of God the way that the sparrow is in the psalms, and in the way that the Old Testament Israelites also prayed to be. The anagogical meaning here is about the place of English history in sacred time. The English, through the psalm-influenced reading of this sparrow-story, not only become the Israelites, but they surpass them—the Anglo-Saxons are wise and willing, even eager, in their conversion, and in Bede's *HE* they become a people devoted to Christ. Unlike Israel, Bede's Anglo-Saxons see the wisdom of Christianity and the inferiority of their own religion, especially idols, and embrace their new faith enthusiastically. For Bede, they are the Israelites the way the Israelites should have been. This reading speaks ably to the potential multiplicity of meanings in Bede's own texts, but also, implicitly, suggests that Bede crafted his own texts to support and encourage the same style of reading he performed.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### HOW BEDE WROTE

Although every early-medieval monk read texts, relatively few wrote them. As we have seen in the previous chapter, Bede wrote at length about how he thought his fellow monks should read, a universal need in the monastic world, but he was less explicit about how he thought they should go about composing good texts. Nonetheless, it seems likely that, considering his education and textual expectations as a reader, Bede would write texts that functioned according to the standards of *grammatica*. In short, I argue that Bede, as a writer, aspired the same ideals he held as a reader. We would, therefore, do well to expect that Bede wrote texts that contain multiple levels of meaning and convey their innermost significance through the use of biblical allusions. In order to see if this is indeed how Bede constructed his texts, we need to examine his practices as a writer, most especially how he transformed his source material into his own text.

For many of Bede's works, scholars can isolate texts that influenced Bede's style or content, but the resulting work is too far removed from the known sources to suggest a linear connection.<sup>1</sup> But, in the case of Bede's prose *Life of Cuthbert*

---

<sup>1</sup> One instance in which Bede's source at first seems clear is his rendering in the *HE* of Wilfrid's activities during the Synod of Whitby. Although one might initially assume that Bede got his information from Stephen of Ripon's *Vita Wilfridi*, a second look makes this assumption seem less certain. Bede's account of Wilfrid's behavior, although far less flattering than Stephen's, also includes much non-judgmental information that Stephen likely would have included had he known it. J.M. Wallace-Hadrill suggests that Bede and Stephen shared a common

(hereafter VC), the connection between Bede's source material and his finished text is much more direct.<sup>2</sup> Bede acknowledged that the majority of information in his VC came from the Anonymous *Life of Cuthbert* (hereafter VA) written by a monk of Lindisfarne.<sup>3</sup> Bede used the VA not only as a source of

---

source, but that if Bede used Stephen's *Vita Wilfridi* as a source for his own information about Wilfrid, it was secondary at best. Wallace-Hadrill, *Historical Commentary*, 126. For Stephen's *Vita Wilfridi*, see Eddius Stephanus, *The Life of Bishop Wilfrid by Eddius Stephanus*, ed. and trans. Bertram Colgrave (New York, 1985).

<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of the ways in which Bede's use of Cuthbert's miracles in his prose *Life of Cuthbert* differ from his use of the same material in the *HE*, see Karl Lutterkort, "Beda hagiographicus: meaning and function of miracle stories in the *Vita Cuthberti* and the *Historia ecclesiastica*," in L.A.J.R. Houwen and A.A. MacDonald (eds.), *Beda Venerabilis: Historian, Monk & Northumbrian*, (Groningen, 1996), 81-106. For an examination of later attitudes toward Cuthbert in England, see T. Johnson-South, "Changing Images of Sainthood: St. Cuthbert in the *Historia de Sancto Cuthberto*," in S. Sticca (ed.), *Saints: Studies in Hagiography* (New York, 1996), 81-94.

<sup>3</sup> Both Bede's prose *Life of Cuthbert* (hereafter VC) and the Anonymous *Life of Cuthbert* (hereafter VA) are published in *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert*, trans. Bertram Colgrave (Cambridge, 1940). Bede writes of his dependence on the VA when he describes the sources for his passages about Cuthbert in the preface to the *HE*. "In this respect it is to be noted that what I have written about the most holy father Bishop Cuthbert, either in this volume or in his biography, I took partly from what I had previously found written about him by the brethren of the church at Lindisfarne, accepting the story I read in simple faith." ("Inter quae notandum quod ea, quae de sanctissimo patre et antistite. Cudbercto vel in hoc volumine vel in libello gestorum ipsius conscripsi, partim ex eis quae de illo prius a fratribus ecclesiae Lindisfarnensis scripta repperi adsumi, simpliciter fidem historiae quam legebam accommodans.") Bede continues on to attribute his additional information to "reliable witnesses." *HE*, *Praefatio*, 6-7. The anonymity of the Anonymous author in no way compromises his text. The identities of the authors of many medieval saints' *lives* are unknown to modern scholars, and may have been unknown to their medieval readers as well. The point of the *life* was not to stand as a unique creation, but rather to fit its subject into the well-known figure of Christ. Just as the point of the story was to be innately unoriginal, perhaps the particular identity of the author was equally unimportant. Another famous *life* from this period written by an anonymous author is *The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great*, written by a monk at Whitby whose identity is unknown. *The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great*, ed. and trans., Bertram Colgrave (New York, 1985). For a discussion of the writing of early medieval Insular saints' *lives*, see Katja Ritari, "Image of conversion in early Irish saints' *lives*," in O. Merisalo and P. Pahta (eds.), *Frontiers in the Middle Ages: Proceedings of the Third European Congress of Medieval Studies (Jyväskylä, 10-14 June 2003)*, (Louvain-la-Neuve, 2006), 717-27. For more on the possible connections between Bede's VC and his exegetical works, see Eric Knibbs, "Exegetical hagiography: Bede's prose *Vita sancti Cuthberti*," *Revue bénédictine*, 114:2 (2004),

information about Cuthbert's life and miracles, but he also retained the narrative structure, and for the most part, the sequence of events from this earlier text. Bede did gather some new information, but he integrated it into the structure he borrowed from the VA.<sup>4</sup> In this instance, we have both the text that was Bede's main source and the finished product of his own writing process. The amount of material that Bede retained from the VA allows us to isolate Bede's alterations and examine them as representative of his authorial method and goals. This is not an exercise in provenance, but rather in mutation: to examine how Bede transformed material from the VA into his new text.<sup>5</sup>

---

233-52. Knibbs's method seems especially promising. Knibbs believes that Bede was a sophisticated writer and that modern scholars will only fully grasp the significance of Bede's texts when they understand the importance of his exegetical work. Knibbs uses the VC as his example in this instance, and examines the places in the VC where Bede's references to the Bible mirror those discussed in this exegetical works. In theory, this is a clever approach to the text, but sadly not all of the biblical verses Bede used in the VC were the subject of one of his exegetical works. Nonetheless, Knibbs isolates instances in the VC in which Bede refers to biblical verses that would present internal contradictions in Bede's portrayal of Cuthbert in the VC, Knibbs says, were we not to know how Bede explains them in his commentaries. The VA was one of the texts used to illustrate the functions of the Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England Database. Francesca Tinti, "The Anonymous Life of St. Cuthbert and the Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England Database: an exercise in data capturing," *Medieval Prosopography: History and Collective Biography*, 22 (2001), 127-40.

<sup>4</sup> For a helpful discussion on the negligible impact of iconography on the portrayal of saints in early medieval saints' lives, see Wolfert van Egmond, "Saintry images: visions of saints in hagiographical texts," in Mariëlle Hageman and Marco Mostert (eds.), *Reading Images and Texts: Medieval Images and Texts as Forms of Communication. Papers from the Third Utrecht Symposium on Medieval Literacy, 7-9 December 2000*, Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy, 8 (2005), 221-37. For more on the power of Bede's portrayal of Cuthbert, see Walter Goffart, "Bede and the Ghost of Bishop Wilfrid," in *The Narrators of Barbarian History (A.D. 550-800): Jordanes, Gregory of Tours, Bede, and Paul the Deacon* (Notre Dame, 2005), 235-328 and Carole E. Newlands, "Bede and images of Saint Cuthbert," *Traditio: Studies in Ancient and Medieval History, Thought, and Religion*, 52 (1997), 73-109.

<sup>5</sup> For more on Cuthbert's popularity, see Catherine Cubitt, "Universal and local saints in Anglo-Saxon England," in A. Thacker and R. Sharpe (eds.), *Local Saints and Local Churches in the Early Medieval West* (Oxford, 2002), 423-53. Also see, D.W. Rollason (ed.), *Cuthbert: Saint and Patron* (Durham, 1987).

Bede's purpose in writing the *VC* is unclear. Bede was aware of the existence of the *VA*, so he knew a prose *Life of Cuthbert* already existed. Considering how much of the *VA* Bede adopted into his own text, it appears that Bede did not consider the Anonymous's information or organization to be faulty. Walter Berschin argues that Bede undertook his *VC* because, while working on his earlier metrical *Life of Cuthbert*,<sup>6</sup> Bede developed abstract ideas about Cuthbert as the perfect holy man, and these ideas necessitated a prose *Life* for their full realization.<sup>7</sup> Berschin's hypothesis provides no explanation of the amount of the *VA*'s material Bede reused in the *VC*, a central point considering Berschin's emphasis on Bede's supposedly-new conception of Cuthbert that prompted the *VC*'s composition. Any adequate rationalization of Bede's *VC* must account for his extensive appropriation of the Anonymous's materials and organization, along with his determination to write a new prose

---

<sup>6</sup> Bede also wrote another version of Cuthbert's *Life* in metrical verse many years before he composed his prose version. Michael Lapidge provides an excellent discussion of Bede's metrical *Life* and Bede's possible motives in writing it, M. Lapidge, "Bede's Metrical *Vita S. Cuthberti*" in G. Bonner, D. Rollason, and C. Stancliffe (eds.), *St Cuthbert, His Cult and His Community to AD 1200* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 1989), 77-93. Lapidge argues that Bede did not write the metrical *Life* to provide details or create a narrative, but rather to turn the story into a symbol or an exemplar in which everything hinged on the figural. Lapidge sees Bede as heavily inspired by the example of Arator's poetry, and that the purpose of metrical *vitae* in general was to inspire and aid meditation. The linguistic compression so characteristic of metrical *vitae* is therefore essential to its purpose of inspiring readers to think on the spiritual meaning of the text—metrical *Lives* were not supposed to illuminate the reader easily or fully the way prose *Lives* were.

<sup>7</sup> I disagree with Walter Berschin's explanation of Bede's motivation to write the *VC*. W. Berschin, "Opus delibetatum ac perfectum: Why did the Venerable Bede Write a Second Prose *Life of Cuthbert*?" in Bonner, *St Cuthbert*, 95-102. Although I think that Berschin's explanation is without merit, Berschin does make a few peripheral points in this article that are worth further thought, including his observation that Bede organized both his prose and metrical *Lives* into 46 chapters (a perfect number), and more broadly that Bede's modifications in his rewritten text reflect Bede's own agenda.

*Life of a saint for whom one, written in the saint's own monastery, already existed.*

The VA contains more than three dozen allusions to the Bible, some in which the Anonymous explicitly mentions biblical incidents and words, and others in which the words of the Bible are used without note.<sup>8</sup> Broadly speaking, these allusions refer to moments in the Bible that possess a superficial similarity to events in the VA.<sup>9</sup> This is not to suggest that the biblical allusions in the Anonymous's work were meaningless either to the Anonymous or his readers.<sup>10</sup> Their message appears to be a continual reaffirmation that the elements present in Cuthbert's life and miracles also happened in the Bible, and, therefore, that Cuthbert existed in a paradigm of holiness.

As Bede took the majority of his material from the VA, along with its structure and order, it has sometimes been argued that Bede was not rewriting the VA at all, but rather editing a less-talented writer's prose. But if Bede's changes seem cosmetic to modern scholars, they would have been both obvious and

---

<sup>8</sup> The Anonymous's VA contains 38 allusions to the Bible and Bede's VC contains 49.

<sup>9</sup> Benedicta Ward has commented on the "slightly artificial biblical references with which the anonymous author surrounded his account of Cuthbert," as opposed to Bede's more considered selections. Ward, *Venerable Bede*, 98.

<sup>10</sup> For more on the value of examining what medieval writers removed from their sources to understand the conscious construction of medieval writing, see James Fentress and Chris Wickham, "Medieval Memories," in *Social Memory* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1992), 144-72, at 148. Fentress and Wickham see Bede as a writer whose manipulation of his material was purposeful. For a discussion of Bede's ability to alter the tone and style of his prose to fit the need at hand, see R. Sharpe, "The Varieties of Bede's Prose," in T. Reinhardt, M. Lapidge, and J. N. Adams (eds.), *Aspects of the Language of Latin Prose* (New York, 2005), 339-55. It again affirms Bede's immersion in *grammatica* to note that the authors Sharpe identifies as Bede's prose exemplars (Vergil, Jerome, Ambrose, Rufinus, Donatus) were among the foundational authors of Late-Antique/early-medieval grammatical education.

fundamental to his contemporaries. His treatment of the VA's innocuous and one-dimensional biblical allusions is key to understanding Bede's method of writing and his goal for his text. Indeed, as we shall see, Bede entirely realigned the biblical framework of the Anonymous's text. Amazingly, Bede removed all but one<sup>11</sup> of the 38 references to the Bible in the VA, a daunting task considering that these allusions were entwined throughout the Anonymous's prose. Bede removed both explicit and implicit allusions from the VA, a powerful reminder of Bede's ability to spot biblical phrasing regardless of the context. As we will see, Bede did not remove these allusions to the Bible because he felt that biblical allusions in general compromised the text. Rather it was the Anonymous's particular biblical allusions that Bede rejected, because Bede, in his rewriting of the VA, inserted four

---

<sup>11</sup> The one reference to the Bible in the VA that Bede maintains in the VC is to the Book of Tobias. In VA I.IV, the Anonymous describes how young Cuthbert was pained by a swollen knee and was unable to walk. God sent an angel to instruct Cuthbert how to make a healing paste for his knee, and Cuthbert soon made a full recovery. The Anonymous ends his story by noting that Cuthbert had been cured by an angel sent by God "even as He had healed Tobias when he was blind" ("...sicut cecato Tobie... curantem dederat") (VA, I.IV, 68-9). Although Bede added several other biblical allusions to his version of this story (Matt 25:29, 2Macc 11:8), he kept this reference to the healing of old Tobias at the end of his account of Cuthbert's healed knee as well—the sole retention of the Anonymous's biblical references in the VC. In light of the spiritual significance that Bede saw in the story of old Tobias's healing at the end of young Tobias's journey, it is not surprising that Bede would have found the similarity too satisfying to remove. From Bede's own *Commentary on Tobias* it is clear that Bede saw the story of the Book of Tobias, which culminates in the healing referenced here, as evidence of God's involvement in the lives of those he loves, a theme Bede wanted attached to Cuthbert. In the VC, Bede gives his Cuthbert a moment of recognition of the true identity of the angel much like Tobias himself had: "He recognized that he who had given him this advice was an angel, sent by One who once deigned to send the archangel Raphael to cure the eyes of Tobias" ("Agnovitque angelum fuisse qui haec sibi monita dedisset, mittente illo qui quondam Raphaellem archangelum ad sanandos Tobiae visus destinare dignatus est"), VC, II, 160-1.



dozen new allusions to the Bible, both explicit and implicit.<sup>12</sup> In some instances Bede removed the Anonymous's biblical allusion only to replace it with another one of his own choosing at the same point in the text. At other times, Bede inserted biblical material at places in the text where the Anonymous had not made any biblical connections. It is in this consistent filtering the reframing of the Anonymous's material that we can see Bede at work as a writer. Bede's treatment of the sets of biblical associations in the *VA* and the *VC* reveal how heavily Bede's authorial method rested on his management of this biblical material—and how opaque Bede's method would be if we did not possess a copy of the *VA*.

How Bede then went about constructing his own *VC* is even more telling of his intentions. After taking such pains to remove the biblical references from the *VA*, Bede replaced the excised allusions with new biblical quotations and references of his own choosing. After dismantling the biblical scaffolding upon which his source material hung, Bede rebuilt it, referencing an entirely new set of biblical verses. This purge of the biblical associations from the Anonymous's material, combined with Bede's interpolation of scores of new biblical citations, says much about Bede's method of writing, and also perhaps something about writing itself in the early-medieval world. If using much the same material, in similar words but with different biblical references, was a "rewriting," one must wonder how essential

---

<sup>12</sup> The tally of 49 includes the 48 of Bede's own creation and the one he retained from the *VA*.

these references were to the conception of this work as a new piece.

Both the VA and VC are saturated with allusions to the Bible, sometimes in the form of direct quotations and other times in the form of references to biblical imagery. In the VA these references are often explicit, taking the form of a direct comparison between Cuthbert and his actions and an individual or incident from the Bible. These comparisons often highlight some external similarity, and although the Anonymous was perhaps not a masterful author, these practices make it clear that he, like Bede, was trained in the tradition of *grammatica*. For example, in the VA, the youthful Cuthbert is reproved by another child for his frolicking because it was not suitable behavior for one who would someday hold such a distinguished position (see Table 1).<sup>13</sup> Young Cuthbert did not understand the other child's inspired words, but remembered them nonetheless. The Anonymous author wrote that Cuthbert's remembrance of the other child's prophesy (that Cuthbert would someday hold a high office) was much like Mary's recollection of the prophecies she heard, but only partially understood, about her own child.<sup>14</sup> Already the

---

<sup>13</sup> "'O holy Bishop and priest Cuthbert, these unnatural tricks done to show off your agility are not befitting to you or your high office.'" ("'O sancta episcopo et presbiter Cuðberhte, hec tibi et tuo gradui contraria nature propter agilitatem non convenient.'" ) VA, I.III, 64-7. For more on the figure of Cuthbert and episcopal expectations, see Simon Coates, "The construction of episcopal sanctity in early Anglo-Saxon England: the impact of Venantius Fortunatus," *Historical Research*, 71:174, (1998), 1-13.

<sup>14</sup> "...returning home, he kept in mind the prophetic words, just as St. Mary kept in her memory all the words which were prophesied about Jesus." ("Revertensque ad domum suam, prophetiae verba in mente retinens, sicut sancta Maria omnia verba praedicta de Iesu memorans conservabat."), VA I.III, 66-7. "And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was subject to them. And his mother kept all these words in her heart." ("Et descendit cum eis et venit Nazareth et erat

Anonymous's comparison (Cuthbert/Mary) is unusual, to say the least. Instead of focusing on those about whom the prophecies were made (Cuthbert/Jesus), he has instead looked to those who remember half-understood prophecies that predict future spiritual greatness. Although there is nothing objectionable in this comparison, it does little to further the reader's understanding of Cuthbert as a saint or as inhabiting the figure of Christ.

The Anonymous was not content with the Cuthbert/Mary comparison; he then says that God often graciously makes known his chosen ones before their own works declare their holiness,<sup>15</sup> and then quotes the words of the Prophecy of Malachias, "Jacob have I loved but Esau have I hated."<sup>16</sup> The brothers Jacob and Esau, and their respective descendents, received different treatment from God: Esau's descendents were punished justly, but Jacob's children were chosen by God for favor—not because they merited it, in fact they were frequently unappreciative—simply because God chose them. This passage from the Bible highlights

---

subditus illis et mater eius conservabat omnia verba haec in corde suo." ), Luke 2:51. Although the Anonymous makes the comparison explicit by explaining the similarity he saw between the texts, he also has replicated key phrases and words in the verse, "omnia verba" and "conservabat." Even if this does seem like grammatical overkill, it proves that the Anonymous understood the purpose of such verbal echoes and also could execute them well.

<sup>15</sup> "Behold, brethren, how even before he is recognized by the performance of his works, he is shown by the providence of God to be elect;..." ("Videte fratres quomodo iste antequam per laborem operum suorum agnoscat, per providentiam Dei electus ostenditur."), VA I.III, 66-7.

<sup>16</sup> "...even as it is said concerning the patriarch by the prophet: 'Jacob I have loved but Esau have I hated.'" ("Sicut de patriarcha per prophetam dicitur, Iacob dilexi, Esau autem odio habui."), VA I.III, 66-7. "I have loved you, saith the Lord: and you have said: Wherein hast thou loved us? Was not Esau brother to Jacob, saith the Lord, and I have loved Jacob, But have hated Esau? and I have made his mountains a wilderness, and given his inheritance to the dragons of the desert." ("Dilexi vos dicit Dominus et dixistis in quo dilexisti nos nonne frater erat Esau Iacob dicit Dominus et dilexi Iacob Esau autem odio habui et posui montes eius in solitudinem et hereditatem eius in dracones deserti."), Mal 1:2-3.

the unpredictable nature of God's favor, sometimes earned and sometimes given to those who have done little to deserve it. But the snippet that the Anonymous quotes appears to showcase a capricious God, rather than reinforce the Anonymous's point that sometimes the gifted (in this case the prophet Malachias) can see whom God has chosen, even if the subject of God's choice himself remains unaware.

There is nothing in itself inappropriate in the Anonymous using this biblical verse to make this point, but neither is it very effective. For those who knew the verse casually, the point that the Anonymous is laboring over in this chapter might be made: for reasons mankind cannot know, God chooses special people, sometimes clearly marked by God's choice, to carry his message. Those who knew the chapter more thoroughly might be unclear as to why an instance of God punishing those who behaved poorly, and rewarding those who behaved only marginally better, would give insight into any aspect of Cuthbert's story. Cuthbert's behavior is impeccable and his sanctity undeniable; God's choice of Cuthbert requires no explanation.

The Anonymous continues on to say that both Samuel and David were shown to be precious to God while still children, as were Jeremiah and John the Baptist, who were known to be destined for God's work even before their births.<sup>17</sup> The Anonymous included

---

<sup>17</sup> "Samuel and David are both found to have been chosen in their infancy. The prophet Jeremiah too and John the Baptist are said to have been sanctified for the work of the Lord from their mother's womb." (*Samuel quoque et David, utriusque in infantia electi inveniuntur. Hieremias vero propheta, et Iohannes baptista, in officium Domini a vulva matris sanctificati leguntur.*), VA I.III, 66-7. The Anonymous briefly echoes the wording of the calling of Jeremiah. "Before I formed thee in the bowels of thy mother, I knew thee: and before thou camest forth out of the womb, I sanctified thee, and made thee a prophet unto

all of these examples to stress the point that sometimes God's purpose for an especially important individual is present from childhood, perhaps with the concomitant notion that God's plan was determined long ago, and the child Cuthbert was already a saint but for the passage of time. The Anonymous's method and presentation are rendered less effective by the examples he presents in great quantity and little depth. The comparisons to David, Samuel, Jeremiah, and John the Baptist seem excessive, especially when a fuller comparison with John the Baptist might have yielded a cogent commentary on the fated nature of prophets and saints.

The two longer comparisons, between Cuthbert and Mary, and the quotation from Book of Malachias, are more puzzling. Both are connected to the Cuthbert narrative at hand by theme, not meaning—they both address a general topic that occurs in this period of Cuthbert's life, but neither relate to the meaning of these themes in the VA. That Mary and Cuthbert both remembered prophesies, and that God can choose whom he will, be it Cuthbert or Jacob, give little to the reader trying to grasp the sanctity of Cuthbert. These associations are not damaging to the narrative, but register as little more than a record of the Anonymous's biblical knowledge—they are an index for the other

---

the nations." ("Priusquam te formarem in utero novi te et antequam exires de vulva sanctificavi te prophetam gentibus dedi te."), Jer 1:5. The Anonymous follows this with a quotation from Romans about the power of God's choice. "So the teacher of the Gentiles affirmed, saying: 'Whom he did predestinate, them he also called' and so forth." ("Sicut doctor gentium adfirmavit dicens, Quos autem predestinavit, hos et vocavit, et reliqua."), VA I.III, 66-7. "And whom he predestinated, them he also called. And whom he called, them he also justified. And whom he justified, them he also glorified." ("Quos autem praedestinavit hos et vocavit et quos vocavit hos et iustificavit quos autem iustificavit illos et glorificavit."), Rom 8:30.

instances in the which the Anonymous recalled such themes in Scripture.<sup>18</sup>

In the VA, when Cuthbert was traveling near Chester-le-Street he was delayed by a storm and he sheltered in a hut with his horse.<sup>19</sup> They had no supplies, and the hungry horse began to nibble at the thatch of the roof, exposing a packet of food divinely provided for Cuthbert.<sup>20</sup> The Anonymous describes the grass or thatch of the roof that the horse ate in the words of Psalm 128.<sup>21</sup> The phrase is only two words (*foeni/faenum tectorum*), yet they are unusual enough in combination to make it certain that the Anonymous used them intentionally. The psalm from which the words are drawn tells of the strength of the Church of God and the futile actions of her oppressors. Neither Cuthbert nor the English have faced turmoil or oppression as yet in the Anonymous's text (nor has Cuthbert's more abstract spiritual turmoil begun, as his life as a holy man commences two chapters later). The point of this passage was to show that God treated Cuthbert specially, presumably because he was particularly holy and important to God's plan. The theme of Psalm 128 seems wholly unconnected to the action in this chapter of Cuthbert's life on any level; the association rests on the presence of roofing

---

<sup>18</sup> Although the Anonymous's technique pales in comparison to Bede's, this should not be a damning comparison for the Anonymous. Even accounting for the paucity of evidence about his contemporaries, it seems clear that Bede was extraordinary, and that the Anonymous could have been a very formidable scholar indeed.

<sup>19</sup> VA I.VI, 70-1.

<sup>20</sup> "As he was praying to the Lord, he saw his horse raise its head up to the roof of the hut and, greedily seizing part of the thatch of the roof, draw it towards him." ("...oransque sibi ad Dominum, vidit equum capud sursum elevantem ad tecta domunculi partemque foeni tectorum avidè adprehendens traxit ad se."), VA I.VI, 70-1.

<sup>21</sup> "Let them be as grass upon the tops of houses: which withereth before it be plucked up..." ("Fiant sicut faenum tectorum quod statim ut viruerit arescet"), Psa 128:6.

thatch, and the fact that the Anonymous knew a phrase for it with a biblical pedigree. This appears to say more about the breadth of the Anonymous's vocabulary and his desire to showcase his biblical repertoire than any parallels between the texts.

A revealing view of Bede as a writer comes from how he realigned the Anonymous's biblical material, and for a more detailed examination of this I would like to use the two examples from the Anonymous's text that we have already discussed: Cuthbert being rebuked while still a child for his undignified behavior, and Cuthbert finding food that was divinely provided for him during his journey. We have seen that these were both events around which the Anonymous inserted biblical allusions (of questionable quality), and in both cases Bede removed all of these allusions. By examining how Bede restyled these stories in terms of their biblical references we will be able to glimpse how Bede functioned as a writer and how he maneuvered within his own texts to adjust his reader's understanding.

In Bede's version of the *Life*, the story begins with the very young Cuthbert being rebuked by another boy for his childish ways because they were unbecoming to one of his elevated spiritual status (see Table 2).<sup>22</sup> Bede attributes Cuthbert's childish behavior to his ignorance of his future life, but does so using the words of the Bible that describe Samuel's own

---

<sup>22</sup> "'Why, O Cuthbert, most holy bishop and priest, do you do these things so contrary to your nature and your rank? It is not fitting for you to play among children when the Lord has consecrated you to be a teacher of virtue even to your elders.'" ("Quid inquit sanctissime antistes et presbiter Cuthberte haec et naturae et gradui tuo contraria geris? Ludere te inter parvulos non decet, quem Dominus etiam maioribus natu magistrum virtutis consecravit."), VC, I, 154-9.

ignorance of his gifts,<sup>23</sup> removing Samuel's name and substituting Cuthbert's in its place. This is not a comparison, but rather a direct substitution, in which Bede rewrote a verse from the Bible substituting Cuthbert for Samuel. Before the end of this first passage of the VC, Bede already has placed Cuthbert into the mold of an Old Testament prophet-in-the-making. Bede continues his commentary on this story by saying that his readers should not be surprised that the young child who rebuked Cuthbert used such words, because Balaam, the Old Testament prophet, was miraculously rebuked by his own donkey who had been given the power of speech for the purpose of correcting the prophet.<sup>24</sup> Bede again used biblical allusions to create a symmetry not only between Cuthbert and an Old Testament figure, but also between the characters that surround Cuthbert and those who participate in biblical events. Or, put another way, Bede is showing his

---

<sup>23</sup> "For up the eighth year of his age, which is the end of infancy and the beginning of boyhood, he could devote his mind to nothing but the games and wantonness of children, so that it could be testified of him as of the blessed Samuel: 'Now' Cuthbert 'did not yet know the Lord, neither was the word of the Lord yet revealed unto him.' This was spoken as a prelude to the praise of his boyhood, for, when he became older, he was to know the Lord perfectly..." ("Siquidem usque ad octauum aetatis annum, qui post infantiam puericiae primus est, solis parvulorum ludis et lasciviae mentem dare noverat, ita ut illud beati Samuelis tunc de ipso posset testimonium dici. Porro Cuthbertus necdum sciebat Dominum, neque revelatus fuerat ei sermo Domini. Quod in praeconium laudis dictum est puericiae illius, qui aetate maior perfecte iam cogniturus erat Dominum..."), VC I, 154-5. "Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, neither had the word of the Lord been revealed to him." ("Porro Samuhel necdum sciebat Dominum neque revelatus fuerat ei sermo Domini"), 1Sam 3:7.

<sup>24</sup> "Nor need anyone wonder that the wantonness of a child should be checked through a child by the Lord who, when He wished, placed rational words in the mouth of a dumb beast of burden to check the madness of a prophet..." ("Nec mirandum cuiquam parvuli lasciviam per parvulum potuisse Domino agente cohiberi, qui ad prohibendam prophetae insipientiam, ore subiugalis muti rationabilia verba cum voluit edidit..."), VC I, 158-9. "But had a check of his madness, the dumb beast used to the yoke, which speaking with a man's voice, forbade the folly of the prophet." ("Correptionem vero habuit suae vesaniae subiugale mutum in hominis voce loquens prohibuit prophetae insipientiam."), 2Pet 2:16, which itself refers to Num 22:21.



readers that it is not Cuthbert alone who is living within this biblical paradigm, but that both the people and places he inhabits also exist in this same sacred framework.

A few chapters later Bede tells the story of Cuthbert finding food divinely provided for him on the roof of his shelter.<sup>25</sup> In Bede's version of the story, Cuthbert is fasting while on a preaching tour, and stops at the house of a religious woman. She urges him to break his fast and eat before he enters a stretch of sparse habitation.<sup>26</sup> Cuthbert refuses to compromise his fast and goes into the uninhabited area with no prospect of food. Upon finding he could not finish his journey that day, Cuthbert and his horse shelter in a summer hut, resigned to passing a hungry night.<sup>27</sup> But the horse began to eat the straw from the roof, and while the horse ate, a package fell from the straw. When Cuthbert unwrapped the package he found it contained meat and bread, supplied to him from a heavenly source as a reward for his holiness and staunch fasting. That Bede would want to encase this attractive example with biblical similarities is not surprising, but his choice of verses may be. Completely bypassing New Testament food miracles, Bede compares Cuthbert's divine

---

<sup>25</sup> VC V, 168-71.

<sup>26</sup> "The woman received him and kindly and earnestly begged him to allow her to prepare him a morning meal to refresh him. The man of God refused saying, 'I cannot eat yet because it is a fast day.'" ("Suscepit ergo eum mulier benigne, rogavitque sollicitate ut prandium parare atque illum reficere liceret. Negavit vir Domini, Non possum inquiring adhuc manducare, quia dies ieiunii est."), VC V, 168-9.

<sup>27</sup> For a discussion of the function of suffering in Bede's VC, especially in relation to the work of Gregory the Great, see W. Trent Foley, "Suffering and sanctity in Bede's Prose *Life of St. Cuthbert*," *Journal of Theological Studies*, 50:1, (1999), 102-16.

feeding to the divine feeding of Elijah by the ravens,<sup>28</sup> again linking Cuthbert to an Old Testament figure.

At the end of the thatch story Bede refers to a passage from a psalm which observes that God is watching all mankind and that his Chosen Ones are in fact the ones who are always watching back and fear him.<sup>29</sup> With no further commentary, after a rather abrupt end, Bede then tells us that he heard this story from a monk who was now dead. This may well have been true, but Bede also knew this story from the VA because he adopted almost all of his material (minus the biblical allusions) on this story from it, and maintained the order of the story. So while Bede may, indeed, have heard this story from a deceased monk, the point of including that fact may have nothing to do with the story's origins. Bede had just told us, implicitly, that Cuthbert was a new Elijah, or at least a new figure in the tradition of Old Testament prophets. Without any explanation, Bede then refers to

---

<sup>28</sup> "...and from that day he became readier than ever to fast, because indeed he understood clearly that this food had been provided for him in a solitary place, by the gift of Him who once for many days fed Elijah in solitude, with food of the same kind, through the ministrations of birds, there being no man there to minister to him." ("...atque ex illo iam die promptior factus est ad ieiunandum, quia nimirum intellexit eius dono sibi refectionem procuratam in solitudine, qui quondam Heliam solitatum, quia nullus hominum aderat qui ministraret, eiusdem modi cibo per volucres non pauco tempore pavit."), VC, V, 170-1. "And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening, and he drank of the torrent." ("Corvi quoque deferebant panem et carnes mane similiter panem et carnes vesperi et bibebat de torrente."), 1 (3) Kings 17:6.

<sup>29</sup> Immediately following Bede's comparison of Cuthbert's feeding to Elijah's (ending with "...no man there to minister to him") is the excerpt from the psalm. "'His eyes are upon them that fear Him and that hope in His mercy, in order that He may snatch their soul from death and feed them in a time of famine.'" ("Cuius oculi super timentes eum, sperantes autem in misericordia eius, ut eripiat a morte animas eorum, et alat eos in fame."), VC V, 170-1. "Behold the eyes of the Lord are on them that fear him: and on them that hope in his mercy. To deliver their souls from death; and feed them in famine." ("Ecce oculus Domini super timentes eum et expectantes misericordiam eius ut eruat de morte animam eorum et vivificet eos in fame."), Psa 32:18-19.

a psalm in which those who concern themselves with God will be those God chooses for his own. To follow this with an attribution to a now-dead holy monk suggests to the reader that this English monk was one of the holy people whose eyes are on God and the ones we should be thinking about when that psalm crosses our minds.

Bede not only removed and replaced the biblical passages in chapters he adapted from the *VA*, but he also inserted biblical allusions into material which in the *VA* had none.<sup>30</sup> The majority of the material Bede used in his *VC* came from the Anonymous's text, but some of it Bede learned elsewhere, from interviews with those who remembered Cuthbert himself, or stories about him, current in Northumbria.<sup>31</sup> The chapters of the *VC* for which we have no source are peppered with biblical allusions, like those derived from the *VA*. Although in the case of the source-less passages (perhaps containing the information Bede acquired in person or through letters) we cannot trace Bede's method of

---

<sup>30</sup> A good example of this is Chapter XXVII of the *VC*. The content of the chapter is from the *VA* (IV.VIII), but in the *VA* the text contains no allusions to the Bible, or, indeed, to any other text. Bede adopts this story of Cuthbert receiving a vision of Ecgfrith's military loss and death and adds three biblical references.

<sup>31</sup> Bede tells us this both in the *HE* and the *VC*. "...I also made it my business to add with care what I was able to learn myself from the trustworthy testimony of reliable witnesses." ("...partim vero ea quae certissima fidelium vivorum adtestatione per me ipse cognoscere potui, sollerter adicere curavi."), *HE*, *Praefatio*, 6-7. "These things a priest named Ingwald, a monk of our monastery at Wearmouth, related that he had heard from Cuthbert himself, who was then a bishop. This Ingwald now, thanks to a lengthy old age, no longer with carnal eyes gazes on things earthly, but rather, with a pure heart, contemplates things heavenly." ("Haec mihi religiosus nostri monasterii quod est ad hostium Wiri fluminis presbiter nomine Ingwald, qui nunc longe gratia senectutis magis corde mundo coelestia quam terrena carnalibus contemplatur aspectibus, ab ipso Cuthberto iam tunc episcopo se audisse perhibuit."), *VC* V, 170-1. It is curious that Bede would attach this attribution to Ingwald in a chapter of the *VC* so clearly informed by the corresponding chapter of the *VA*. Bede may well have heard this story, about Cuthbert receiving food while sheltering in the hut, from Ingwald, but he also knew it from the *VA*.

writing, we can see that this material was infused with biblical allusions that follow and maintain Bede's agenda throughout the VC.<sup>32</sup>

In the episodes of Cuthbert's unepiscopal behavior and his divinely-given food, Bede found the narrative fully formed in the VA, but this was not so for all of the material Bede adapted. The Anonymous author included passages about Cuthbert's entry into the monastic life in a surprisingly short chapter. The way in which Bede transforms the Anonymous's plain story of the beginning of Cuthbert's monastic life is revealing both as to Bede's methods and his aims.<sup>33</sup> Bede's chapter on Cuthbert's arrival at the monastery and his relationship with his mentor, Boisil, makes for a much longer episode, and one that sets the stage for Cuthbert's later greatness.<sup>34</sup> Bede claims to have heard this story from a priest, Sigfrith, who was a witness to the first meeting of Boisil and Cuthbert.<sup>35</sup> This was a source that the

---

<sup>32</sup> Chapters in the VC which do not have their source in the VA also possess biblical allusions. For example, see VC VIII, IX. There is an uncharacteristic section of the VC, however, stretching from Chapter XXX to Chapter XXXIII. These chapters, which contain content that does not appear in the VA, have no allusions to the Bible, or any other text, and begin the longest stretch without reference to the Bible in the VC (lasting through Chapter XXXVI—although some of the intervening material came from the VA).

<sup>33</sup> The Anonymous opens Book II of the VA saying that Cuthbert had decided "to bind himself by the more rigid rule of life in a monastery" despite the extraordinary holiness in which he lived in the outside world. The rest of this brief chapter describes Cuthbert's personal piety. VA II.I, 74-7.

<sup>34</sup> Bede's description of Cuthbert's entrance into the monastery is not only longer, but attributes an additional motivation to Cuthbert's actions: Boisil's presence. The Anonymous presents a Cuthbert, who, moved by his piety, wants to pursue a more demanding spiritual life. Bede's Cuthbert wants this as well, but he had also been directed to Melrose by a vision and his previous knowledge of the excellence of Boisil, although there were many holy men conveniently at Lindisfarne. VC VI, 172-3.

<sup>35</sup> "Thus is wont to testify that pious and veteran servant and priest of God, Sigfrith, who was standing with others near Boisil himself when he said these words." ("sicut religiosus ac veteranus Dei famulus et

Anonymous (surprisingly) did not know, because it includes an incident of prophesy which it is hard to believe that the Anonymous would have excluded considering his fascination with the child Cuthbert's foreseen greatness. In this episode of the VC, Cuthbert, determined to become a monk, went to Melrose (instead of Lindisfarne) because he wants to meet Boisil. Upon arriving, Cuthbert dismounted and gave his horse and spear to a passing servant before he entered the church to pray. Boisil witnessed Cuthbert's actions on his arrival, and was so struck (by a prophetic notion) that, "foreseeing in spirit how great the man whom he saw was going to be in his manner of life, he uttered this one sentence to those standing by: 'Behold the servant of the Lord!' thereby imitating Him who, looking upon Nathanael as he came towards Him, said: 'Behold an Israelite indeed in whom there is no guile.'" <sup>36</sup> Bede tells the reader that this utterance was in imitation of Christ's own greeting of Nathanael recorded in the Gospel of John, after which Christ explained to Nathanael that he had known him even before they had met—for Nathanael, definitive proof of Christ's holiness. <sup>37</sup>

---

presbiter Sigfridus solet attestari, qui eidem Boisilo haec dicenti inter alios asstabat"), VC I.VI, 172-3.

<sup>36</sup> "Previdensque in spiritu quantus conversatione esset futurus quem cernebat, hoc unum dixit astantibus, Ecce servus Dei, imitatus illum qui venientem ad se Nathanel intuitus, Ecce inquit vere Israelita in quo dolus non est..." VC I.VI, 172-3.

<sup>37</sup> "Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him and he saith of him: Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile. Nathanael saith to him: Whence knowest thou me? Jesus answered and said to him: Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee. Nathanael answered him and said: Rabbi: Thou art the Son of God. Thou art the King of Israel." ("Vidit Iesus Nathanahel venientem ad se et dicit de eo ecce vere Israhelita in quo dolus non est dicit ei Nathanahel unde me nosti respondit Iesus et dixit ei priusquam te Philippus vocaret cum esses sub ficu vidi te respondit ei Nathanahel et ait rabbi tu es Filius Dei tu es rex Israhel."), John 1:47-49.

This biblical allusion in Bede's *VC* is especially interesting because of the similarities it holds with the episode of the child Cuthbert in the *VA*. In that episode, the child Cuthbert remembers a prophecy made about him, just as, the Anonymous notes, Mary remembers prophecies made about the infant Jesus. The Anonymous's likening of the child Cuthbert and Mary was unhelpful—it was not theologically problematic, but neither did it seem to illuminate Cuthbert's character (either as a child or an adult) nor did it introduce a theme of the work. But in the *VC*, Bede's comparison is not fruitless, rather it sets up the rest of the story of Cuthbert and Boisil in which Boisil teaches Cuthbert the Gospel of John and reveals to Cuthbert the details of his future, and about Boisil's own death. Bede's account of Boisil's foresight-filled greeting paints Cuthbert as a very special person in God's eyes, both as a type of apostle coming to learn the faith, and also as a premier Old Testament figure ("an Israelite indeed in whom there is no guile"). Bede's choice of biblical reference makes associations between the text of the *VC* and the Bible that allow those readers who knew the Bible to have a richer understanding of the saint.

At the end of this pivotal chapter of the *VC* in which Cuthbert enters the monastery at Melrose, Bede describes how Cuthbert was fastidious about observing all of the rules of the monastery, in some cases with more zeal than the established brothers.<sup>38</sup> Bede's Cuthbert could not forgo food lest he lose his

---

<sup>38</sup> "And entering this monastery, he sought at once to observe the rules of the regular life equally with the other brethren, or even to excel them in zeal for a stricter discipline, being more diligent in fact in reading and working, in watching and praying." ("Quod ingressus

strength, but he would not drink alcohol, like, Bede reminds us, Samson.<sup>39</sup> But Bede does not simply compare Cuthbert to Samson, instead he refers to him as Samson "who was once a Nazarite." This detail would draw the minds of those who knew the verse from the Book of Judges to the announcement by the angel to Samson's mother that she would bear a son who would be a "Nazarite of God," and that she herself should not drink alcohol and take care as to what she ate.<sup>40</sup> Through this incidental tidbit about Cuthbert, Bede connects the habits of Cuthbert with the habits of

---

monasterium, confestim aequalem caeteris fratribus vitae regularis observantiam tenere, vel etiam artioris disciplinae studiis supergredi curabat, legendi videlicet, operandi, vigilandi, atque orande sollertior." ), VC VI, 174-5.

<sup>39</sup> "Moreover in accordance with the example of Samson the strong, who was once a Nazarite, he sedulously abstained from all intoxicants; but he could not submit to such abstinence in food, lest he should become unfitted for necessary labour. For he was robust of body and sound in strength and fit for whatever labour he cared to undertake." ("Sed et iuxta exemplum Samsonis fortissimi quondam Nazarei ab omni quod inebriare potest sedulous abstinebat. Non autem tantam escarum valebat subire continentiam, ne necessaries minus idoneus efficeretur operibus. Erat enim robustus corpore, et integer viribus, atque ad quaecunque volebat aptus exercitia laboris." ), VC VI, 174-5.

<sup>40</sup> "And an angel of the Lord appeared to her, and said: Thou art barren and without children: but thou shalt conceive and bear a son. Now therefore beware, and drink no wine nor strong drink, and eat not any unclean thing. Because thou shalt conceive, and bear a son, and no razor shall touch his head: for he shall be a Nazarite of God, from his infancy, and from his mother's womb, and he shall begin to deliver Israel from the hands of the Philistines. And when she was come to her husband, she said to him: A man of God came to me, having the countenance of an angel, very awful. And when I asked him whence he came, and by what name he was called, he would not tell me: But he answered thus: Behold thou shalt conceive and bear a son: beware thou drink no wine, nor strong drink, nor eat any unclean thing: for the child shall be a Nazarite of God from his infancy, from his mother's womb until the day of his death." ("Cui apparuit angelus Domini et dixit ad eam sterilis es et absque liberis sed concipies et paries filium cave ergo ne vinum bibas ac siceram ne inmundum quicquam comedas quia concipies et paries filium cuius non tanget caput novacula erit enim nazareus Dei ab infantia sua et ex matris utero et ipse incipiet liberare Israhel de manu Philisthinorum quae cum venisset ad maritum dixit ei vir Dei venit ad me habens vultum angelicum terribilis nimis quem cum interrogassem quis esset et unde venisset et quo nomine vocaretur noluit mihi dicere sed hoc respondit ecce concipies et paries filium cave ne vinum bibas et siceram et ne aliquo vescaris in mundo erit enim puer nazareus Dei ab infantia sua et ex utero matris usque ad diem mortis suae." ), Judges 13:3-7.

a figure of strength from the Old Testament, just as the knowledgeable reader sees that Cuthbert is the beneficiary of an inheritance of strength from, or in the manner of, the Old Testament. Here Bede uses the well-chosen and well-placed reference to Samson's mother's visit from the angel to remind us that Cuthbert's own greatness has been revealed to many, his childhood playmate and Boisil included, just as Samson's birth was foretold by the angel.

The reference to Samson was an explicit allusion to the Bible on Bede's part, but the same passage also contained another, much more subtle biblical reference. Bede explicitly says that Cuthbert willingly abstained from alcohol, like Samson, but says this using the words from the Book of Numbers, a passage in which God tells Moses the way for the people of Israel to be consecrated to the Lord.<sup>41</sup> This is the chapter of Numbers that instructs the Chosen People how to make themselves holy before God, and these are the words that Bede chose to describe Cuthbert's actions. Unlike the reference to Samson, this allusion to the words of Numbers is implicit—if the reader did not know the verse they would assume the prose was Bede's own. Here in a single sentence we can see two of Bede's methods of incorporating biblical allusions, one explicit and the other implicit, and both carrying meaning that enhances the text.

---

<sup>41</sup> "They shall abstain from wine, and from every thing that may make a man drunk. They shall not drink vinegar of wine, or of any other drink, nor any thing that is pressed out of the grape: nor shall they eat grapes either fresh or dried." ("Vino et omni quod inebriare potest abstinebunt acetum ex vino et ex qualibet alia potione et quicquid de uva exprimitur non bibent uvas recentes siccasque non comedent."), Num 6:3. For the similarity, compare Bede's "ab omni quod inebriare potest sedulous abstinebat" with Numbers's "et omni quod inebriare potest abstinebunt."



The dozens of biblical allusions in the *VC* are spread through the text, but there are pivotal moments, like Cuthbert's meeting with Boisil, around which Bede focuses his recasting of Cuthbert's character through sets of shifting biblical allusions. In the middle of the *VC* Bede speaks about Cuthbert's struggle to make the island of Farne inhabitable.<sup>42</sup> Part of Cuthbert's task was to find a source of water on the rocky island, which he does after prayerfully instructing the brothers where to dig.<sup>43</sup> Bede includes in this description a psalm alluding to Moses drawing water from a rock, and, therefore, the power and glory of God,<sup>44</sup> again emphasizing Cuthbert's affinity with an important figure

---

<sup>42</sup> *VC*, XVIII.

<sup>43</sup> "Now his dwelling-place was lacking in water inasmuch as it was built on very hard and almost stony rock. So the man of God summoned the brethren, for he had not yet secluded himself from the sight of visitors. 'You see', he said, 'that the dwelling-place I have chosen lacks a well; but let us, I beseech you, pray Him 'who turns the solid rock into a standing water and the flint into fountains of waters', that, giving 'glory not unto us but unto His name', He may vouchsafe to open to us also a spring of water from the stony rock. Let us dig in the midst of my little dwelling and I believe that He will 'make us drink from the river of His pleasures'.'" ("At vero ipsa eius mansio aquae erat indiga, utpote in durissima et prope saxea rupe condita. Accitis ergo vir Domini fratribus, necdum enim se ab advenientium secluserat aspectibus, Cernitis, inquit quia fontis inops sit mansio quam adii, sed rogemus obsecro illum qui convertit solidam petram in stagnum aquae et rupes in fontes aquarum, ut non nobis sed nomini suo dans gloriam de hac quoque rupe saxosa nobis venam fontis aperire dignetur.") *VC*, XVIII, 216-9.

<sup>44</sup> "Who turned the rock into pools of water, and the stony hill into fountains of waters. Not to us, O Lord, not to us; but to thy name give glory." ("Qui convertit petram in paludes aquarum silicem in fontes aquarum non nobis Domine non nobis sed nomini tuo da gloriam."), Psa 113:8-9, which itself recalls both Exodus 17:6 and Numbers 20:11. "Behold I will stand there before thee, upon the rock Horeb, and thou shalt strike the rock, and water shall come out of it that the people may drink. Moses did so before the ancients of Israel..." ("En ego stabo coram te ibi super petram Horeb percutiesque petram et exhibit ex ea aqua ut bibat populus fecit Moses ita coram senibus Israel"), Ex 17:6. "And when Moses had lifted up his hand, and struck the rock twice with the rod, there came forth water in great abundance, so that the people and their cattle drank..." ("Cumque elevasset Moses manum percutiens virga bis silicem egressae sunt aquae largissimae ita ut et populus biberet et iumenta"), Num 20:11. That Bede should choose a psalm that recalls this verse of Exodus in particular is especially interesting, as this is the verse from Exodus that the Anonymous used in his *VA* and which Bede removed.

from the Old Testament. In the very heart of this story, just as Cuthbert has told the brothers to dig, Bede alludes to another biblical passage. This is from a psalm,<sup>45</sup> which itself refers to passages in Isaiah and Deuteronomy,<sup>46</sup> all of which talk about God hovering over his Chosen People to protect them. If Bede's intention was to imply that Cuthbert was a saint in the mode of an Old Testament figure, then presenting the English as the new Chosen People being protected by God is the logical extension of that reading.<sup>47</sup>

Bede both adapted this story of Cuthbert finding water on Farne from the VA and excised all of the Anonymous's biblical allusions. The Anonymous's version of Cuthbert finding water on

---

<sup>45</sup> "They shall be inebriated with the plenty of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the torrent of thy pleasure." ("Inebriabuntur de pinguidine domus tuae et torrente deliciarum tuarum potabis eos."), Psa 35:9.

<sup>46</sup> "As birds flying, so will the Lord of hosts protect Jerusalem, protecting and delivering, passing over and saving." ("Sicut aves volantes sic proteget Dominus exercituum Hierusalem protegens et liberans transiens et salvans."), Isa 31:5. "He found him in a desert land, in a place of horror, and of vast wilderness: he led him about, and taught him: and he kept him as the apple of his eye. As the eagle enticing her young to fly, and hovering over them, he spread his wings, and hath taken him and carried him on his shoulders." ("Invenit eum in terra deserta in loco horroris et vastae solitudinis circumduxit eum et docuit et custodivit quasi pupillam oculi sui sicut aquila provocans ad volandum pullos suos et super eos volitans expandit alas suas et adsumpsit eum atque portavit in umeris suis."), Deut 32:10-11.

<sup>47</sup> Indeed, this passage in which Bede appears to imply that Cuthbert, as an Old Testament figure, is leading the new Chosen People into God's love, is only one of many in Bede's VC. In the middle of the VC Bede tells of Cuthbert's prayers stopping a fire ("But he said: 'Do not be afraid, mother, be calmer; for this fire, however fierce, will not harm you and yours.'" (At ille, Ne timeas inquit mater, animaequior esto, non enim tibi tuisue haec quamlibet ferox flamma nocebit."), VC, XIV, 200-1.), and says after this act that Cuthbert perfectly embodied a prophecy from the Book of Isaiah ("When thou shalt pass through the waters, I will be with thee, and the rivers shall not cover thee: when thou shalt walk in the fire, thou shalt not be burnt, and the flames shall not burn in thee." ("Cum transieris per aquas tecum ero et flumina non operient te cum ambulaveris in igne non conbureris et flamma non ardebit in te"), Isa 43:2.). The prophecy is about the Chosen People being redeemed by God and that these people will be found at the very ends of the earth—a place that Bede himself said he thought England occupied.

Farne was biblically framed in much the same way as his version of Cuthbert's childhood reproval. In both cases the Anonymous alluded to episodes of the Bible in which the literal events paralleled those of the current action in Cuthbert's life. In this case, as Cuthbert receives water from a rocky outcropping, the Anonymous explicitly mentions two instances in the Bible in which God gives water to holy people in need from unlikely places.<sup>48</sup> The Anonymous has Cuthbert explain to the brothers that his request for water is reasonable because God had twice previously granted such requests, to Moses and Samson. This is indeed accurate, but beyond the superficial similarity, there is little else to link these biblical events. Samson cried to God for water after he had slaughtered the Philistines and destroyed their crops and trees. At the end of this rampage that avenged the loss of his wife, Samson received water from God through the vacated socket of the jawbone of an ass that Samson had used to dispatch the final thousand Philistines he killed, hoping the water would revive him before his enemies could overtake him.<sup>49</sup>

---

<sup>48</sup> "...then after his sermon he began to say: 'Beloved brethren, you know that this place is almost uninhabitable owing to lack of water; so let us pray to God for help and do you dig this rocky ground in the middle of the floor of my dwelling, because God is able from the stony rock to bring forth water for him who asks; for he once gave water to the thirsty people from a rock when Moses struck it with a rod, and he also gave Samson drink, when he was thirsty, from the jaw-bones of an ass.'" ( "...post predicationem cepit dicere, O fratres carissimi, scitis quia locus iste pene inhabitabilis est, propter aquae penuriam. Ideo oremus Domini auxilium, et fodite in medio pavimento domus meae hanc saxosam terram, quia potens est Deus de rupe petrina petenti aquam suscitare. Ille enim olim Moysi percutienti virga, de petra aquam sitiienti populo dedit. Samsonem quoque de maxillis asini sitientem potavit." ), VA, III.III, 98-9.

<sup>49</sup> "Then the Lord opened a great tooth in the jaw of the ass and waters issued out of it. And when he had drunk them, he refreshed his spirit, and recovered his strength. Therefore the name of that place was called The Spring of him that invoked from the jawbone, until this present day." ( "Aperuit itaque Dominus molarem dentem in maxilla asini et egressae sunt ex eo aquae quibus haustis refocilavit spiritum et vires

Moses was facing such unrest from the thirsty people of Israel that he was afraid that they would stone him if he did not provide them with water, and asked for, and received, God's assistance in finding water in a rock in the desert.<sup>50</sup> This is the same event that Bede referred to, but in a different biblical context. The Anonymous chose to refer to the passage in Exodus in which Moses is troubled and in peril. Bede chose the description of this event from the Book of Psalms in which Moses receiving water from a rock was an example of the limitless possibility of God's power. Both of these biblical episodes do indeed portray Old Testament figures adored by God receiving water in from dry sources, but they also both find these figures in considerable distress and fearing for their lives. The Anonymous's Cuthbert had faced neither opposition from the brothers nor any danger, and the water he received on Farne was not to save his life, but rather make the island more hospitable. A reader of the VA would see that God favored some chosen people with miracles, but the desperate situations in which he tended to the needs of Moses and Samson make a weak parallel with the life Cuthbert was trying to create on Farne.

As we have seen, Bede's and the Anonymous author's texts are very close in both their information and arrangement, but I contend that the two authors' use of biblical quotations and

---

recepit idcirco appellatum est nomen loci illius Fons invocantis de maxilla usque in praesentem diem."), Judges 15:19. For the rest of the story of Samson's revenge, see Judges 15:1-20.

<sup>50</sup> "Behold I will stand there before thee, upon the rock Horeb, and thou shalt strike the rock, and water shall come out of it that the people may drink. Moses did so before the ancients of Israel." ("En ego stabo coram te ibi super petram Horeb percutiesque petram et exhibit ex ea aqua ut bibat populus fecit Moses ita coram senibus Israhel."), Ex 17:6. For the people's dissatisfaction with Moses because of their thirst, see Ex 17:1-6.

allusions suggests that the two authors had fundamentally different visions of the place of Cuthbert, and England, in sacred history, and in the purpose and meaning of their texts. The biblical references in the VA restate what the Anonymous has stated explicitly in the text. They back up his point but certainly do not make a new one or nuance the reader's understanding of Cuthbert's character. For Bede, the web of allusions he created with his rewriting, and the new subtexts were a central arena of meaning, but not a meaning that was available to everyone. For Bede the literal meaning of the text was not the sole, or even primary, determinant of meaning, and there was enough breadth in a text that multiple, simultaneous readings could exist without contradiction or confusion.<sup>51</sup> To a grammatically-trained reader who knew the Bible well and could see the connections between the texts of the VC and the Bible, Bede was saying that the saints of England, although doubtless in

---

<sup>51</sup> Indeed, I believe that this is one of many of Bede's intended readings of the VC that was available to those who knew the text of the Old Testament—but I believe that there certainly are others. The most literal interpretation of Cuthbert is clearly as a figure of Christ. But for those in Bede's audience who knew texts other than the Bible, they would have found another possible reading of Cuthbert. Those who knew the *Lives* of Benedict and Anthony would have heard some of the phrasing and imagery from those *Lives* infused into episodes in Bede's VC (Benedict: stopping a fire (VC, XIV and Greg. *Dial.* I.6), birds obey his command (VC, XX and Greg. *Dial.* II.8), superior relics (VC, XLI and Greg. *Dial.* II.16); Anthony: non-washing (VC, XVIII *Vit. Ant.*, 23), tempting by devils (VC, XXII and *Vit. Ant.*, 20), called on by crowd (VC, XXII and *Vit. Ant.*), death gifts (VC, XXXVII and *Vit. Ant.*, 58), burial-place anxiety (VC, XXXVII and *Vit. Ant.*, 58), farewell speech warning of heretics (VC, XXXIX and *Vit. Ant.*, 58)), as recognized by Colgrave, *Two Lives*, 341-59. These connections between two of the most revered saints and Cuthbert would serve to place Cuthbert himself into the company of the most powerful saints in Christendom. Although these readings are overlapping, I want to emphasize I do not think they are contradictory. They are mutually aggrandizing as Cuthbert can be all of these characters at once and be elevated by all of the associations. The most sophisticated reader could grasp them all, and perhaps others, and see the fullness of Cuthbert's, and England's, sanctity. A less skilled reader, though would, nonetheless, still be able to appreciate the enormous holiness of the saint.

the spiritual line of Christ, were simultaneously figures in another tradition—they also lived the model of Old Testament prophets, holy men and warriors of God. For a reader who was sensitive to the presence of biblical allusions, the experience of reading Bede's *VC* must have been shockingly different from that of reading the *VA*.

The place of the English in Bede's conception of sacred history is illuminating, but here it is secondary to the purpose of this example: to expose Bede's method of writing. Using the *VA* as his prime source, Bede removed the Anonymous's biblical fingerprints and added his own. Much of the information in Bede's *VC* is identical to that in the *VA*, but the biblical quotations have been utterly changed; Bede saw his *VC* as a necessary rewrite that offered a new perspective on Cuthbert (and England) and avoided duplicating the Anonymous's work. Biblical allusions provide a lens of interpretation through which the events of a *life* could be seen, and so when the allusions changed, the meaning changed too. By giving the story of Cuthbert's life a coherent system of biblical quotations and allusions, Bede was acknowledging Cuthbert's central role in establishing the English in sacred history. The *VA* told the edifying literal stories of Cuthbert's life, but its texts existed on only one level, and its biblical references were explicit and superficial.

Bede's method of writing is best observed in this fortunate instance in which both Bede's main source and his finished product are known in reliable copies. Bede's process might be best seen in the *VC*, but the shadows of his method remain in all of his other works. And, indeed, other of Bede's texts share

characteristics that prove he wrote them with the explicit intent of using a system of biblical allusions to enhance and supplement the reader's understanding of the text. Such a system is extant, although perhaps not readily apparent, in Bede's homilies. Homilies are a difficult genre, for they are written both for hearing and for reading (although the surviving versions may have been tailored post-delivery to fit the needs of a reading audience). On their most literal level, Bede's homilies appear to be a simplified version of commentary, in which Bede explicates the moral meaning of the verse at hand, often explaining the multiple levels of meaning to be found in the homily's starting verse.<sup>52</sup> Indeed, the connections between Bede's commentaries and homilies have been explored by Eric Jay Del Giacco. Del Giacco postulates that Bede's homilies on the Gospel of Luke share both vocabulary and theme with his *Commentary on Luke*, suggesting that Bede's homilies and commentaries on the Gospels are complementary, and mutually illuminating, texts. Although Del Giacco's study was limited to Bede's texts on Luke, his theory may be more broadly applicable.<sup>53</sup>

In addition to the explicit explanation of the biblical verse that constitutes the narratives of the homilies, Bede's homilies also contain allusions to biblical verses. These allusions are chosen and arranged by Bede to both impart

---

<sup>52</sup> "...there are many hidden mysteries of the divine tidings that the minds of ordinary people do not grasp." Homily II.2 (In Lent), 20. This is reminiscent of Irvine's commentary on writers using the grammatical trope of allegory in their works, "Religious truths were regarded as mysteries to be hidden away and not fully disclosed except to initiates who possessed special interpretive knowledge." Irvine, *Textual Culture*, 245.

<sup>53</sup> Eric Jay Del Giacco, "Exegesis and Sermon: A Comparison of Bede's Commentary and Homilies on Luke," *Medieval Sermon Studies*, 50 (2006), 9-29.

theological depth and reinforce the meaning of the passage. A very brief, but representative, example can be found in a single passage of Bede's homily for Holy Week (II.4). The text for discussion is John 11:55-12:11, which includes the Jews' inquiry as to Jesus's whereabouts, the anointing of Jesus's feet by Mary, and Judas's complaint about the cost of the ointment.<sup>54</sup> Bede opens this Holy-Week homily saying that virtue is to be learned by studying both positive (the women who faithfully remained with

---

<sup>54</sup> "And the pasch of the Jews was at hand: and many from the country went up to Jerusalem, before the pasch, to purify themselves. They sought therefore for Jesus; and they discoursed one with another, standing in the temple: What think you that he is not come to the festival day? 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. Jesus therefore, six days before the pasch, came to Bethania, where Lazarus had been dead, whom Jesus raised to life. And they made him a supper there: and Martha served. But Lazarus was one of them that were at table with him. Mary therefore took a pound of ointment of right spikenard, of great price, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the odour of the ointment. Then one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, he that was about to betray him, said: Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence and given to the poor? Now he said this not because he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief and, having the purse, carried the things that were put therein. Jesus therefore said: Let her alone, that she may keep it against the day of my burial. For the poor you have always with you: but me you have not always. A great multitude therefore of the Jews knew that he was there; and they came, not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. But the chief priests thought to kill Lazarus also: Because many of the Jews, by reason of him, went away and believed in Jesus." ("Proximum autem erat pascha Iudaeorum et ascenderunt multi Hierosolyma de regione ante pascha ut sanctificarent se ipsos quaerebant ergo Iesum et conloquebantur ad invicem in templo stantes quid putatis quia non veniat ad diem festum dederant autem pontifices et Pharisaei mandatum ut si quis cognoverit ubi sit indicet ut adprehendant eum Iesus ergo ante sex dies paschae venit Bethaniam ubi fuerat Lazarus mortuus quem suscitavit Iesus fecerunt autem ei cenam ibi et Martha ministrabat Lazarus vero unus erat ex discumbentibus cum eo Maria ergo accepit libram unguenti nardi pistici pretiosi unxit pedes Iesu et extersit capillis suis pedes eius et domus impleta est ex odore unguenti dicit ergo unus ex discipulis eius Iudas Scariotis qui erat eum traditurus quare hoc unguentum non veniit trecentis denariis et datum est egenis dixit autem hoc non quia de egenis pertinebat ad eum sed quia fur erat et oculos habens ea quae mittebantur portabat dixit ergo Iesus sine illam ut in die sepulturae meae servet illud pauperes enim semper habetis vobiscum me autem non semper habetis cognovit ergo turba multa ex Iudaeis quia illic est et venerunt non propter Iesum tantum sed ut Lazarum viderent quem suscitavit a mortuis cogitaverunt autem principes sacerdotum ut et Lazarum interficerent quia multi propter illum abibant ex Iudaeis et credebant in Iesum."), John 11:55-12:11.



Christ) and negative (the behavior of the Pharisees) examples, a thoroughly grammatical principle and an early iteration of the sentiment that many years later Bede would write as the preface to his *HE*.<sup>55</sup> After the opening, the first two sections of this homily are so heavily saturated with biblical allusions that I would like to focus exclusively on these sections as representative of Bede's authorial methods.

Since the time of our own celebration of the Passover is drawing near [that is, Easter], let us solicitously take care that as it comes close we may approach the Lord's altar sanctified, not so as to eat the flesh of the [paschal] lamb, but so as to partake of the holy mysteries of our Redeemer. *Let us cleanse ourselves of all contamination of body and spirit, working out our sanctification in the fear of God.* Let no one turn the house of prayer into a den of thieves; let no one who is preparing death traps for the members of Christ, no one still abiding in death, presume to approach to receive the holy mysteries of life. *The person who does not love remains in death.* Let us love Christ for himself, let us love him in his members; let us seek the Lord, and our [souls] will live; let us seek him not as the wicked do, in order to kill him, but as believers, in order to enjoy him forever. [John] said, *They were seeking Jesus, and, standing in the temple they conversed with one another, [saying] 'Why do you suppose that he is not coming for the festival day'?* The Jews were seeking Christ, but seeking him with evil intent, that they might put him to death when he came for the festival day. Let us seek him standing in the temple and *persevering with one mind in prayer*, and let us converse with one another in psalms, hymns, [and] spiritual canticles, imploring him, with [the help of his] grace, that he may deign to come to our festival day and illumine us with his presence by sanctifying his gifts for us.<sup>56</sup>

---

<sup>55</sup> *HE*, *Praefatio*, 2-3. For a discussion of the significance of this approach, see above, Chapter One.

<sup>56</sup> Homily II.4, 34 "Curemus sollicite quia paschae nostri tempus adpropriet ut illo iam veniente sanctificati ad altare dominicum accedamus non agni carnes comesuri sed nostri redemptoris mysteria sancta sumpturi. *Mundemus nos ab omni inquinamento carnis et spiritus perficientes sanctificationem in timore Dei.* Nemo domum orationis convertat in speluncam latronum nemo membris Christi mortis laqueos apparatus nemo manens adhuc in morte ad accipienda vitae mysteria praesumat accedere; *qui enim non diligit manet in morte.* Diligamus Christum in se ipso diligamus in membris eius quaeramus dominum et vivet nostra quaeramus autem eum non sicut impii ad occidendum sed ut fideles

When read literally, this passage is about Bede's desire for his readers and listeners to prepare themselves appropriately for the holiness of the coming Easter. This is precisely the kind of message one would expect to find in a homily for Holy Week. If Bede intended this homily to be heard by laypeople, it would have instructed them to come to the Easter service in a devout frame of mind. But when read by someone familiar with the text of the Bible, this homily imparted an additional, and thoroughly complementary, message.

Bede alludes to five verses of the Bible in the two sections quoted above, some explicitly, quoting a full verse, and others implicitly, echoing only a few words.<sup>57</sup> The first of these allusions is a direct quotation from Paul's Second Epistle to the

---

perpetuo fruendum. *Quaerebant, inquit, Iesum et conloquebantur ad invicem in templo stantes: Quid putatis quia non venit ad diem festum? Quaerabant enim Iudaei Iesum sed male quaerebant ut venientem ad diem festum interficerent. Quaeramus autem nos illum stantes in templo Dei et perseverantes unamimite in oratione et conloquamur ad invicem psalmis hymnis canticis spiritalibus in gratia postulantes ipsum ut venire ad diem festum nostrum et sua nos praesentia inlustare sua ipse nobis dona sanctificare dignetur.*" CCSL, 207-8. In this passage I have preserved the CCSL's practice of using italicization to indicate likely quotation.<sup>57</sup> The CCSL lists six biblical references for this section, and one references to Augustine's *Tractates in Iohannes*. Hurst followed the CCSL in his translation. The citation that the CCSL lists that I find questionable is to Psa 68:33 (69:32). The biblical verse is "Videntes mansueti laetabuntur qui quaeritis Deum vivet anima vestra." ("Let the poor see and rejoice: seek ye God, and your soul shall live.") Bede's text is "Diligamus Christum in se ipso diligamus in membris eius quaeramus dominum et vivet nostra..." Hurst, believing that Bede was intentionally recalling this verse, models his translation on the Douay-Rheims translation of this psalm. Although I acknowledge that there are several points of similarity between the verses, Bede's omission of the word "anima" troubles me. Bede's text, read without the expectation of "anima," might suggest that it is not the soul of the believer, but rather Christ himself, who "lives" (perhaps "for us") when he is sought by the faithful. This would be a reading in accord with the idea that Christ is present wherever those faithful to him congregate ("For where there are two or three gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." Matt 18:20). If Bede's intention in fact was to recall Psa 68:33 (69:32), its focus on the praise of those who are poor, but chosen by God, would fit well with Bede's theme of the benefits and responsibilities of community.

Corinthians: "Let us cleanse ourselves of all contamination of body and spirit, working out our sanctification in the fear of God."<sup>58</sup> This verse, in its original context, is part of Paul's statement of the loving spiritual brotherhood he shares with the Corinthians and the unity of their experience of the faith. Bede next alludes to a verse from Matthew, saying, "let no one turn the house of prayer into a den of thieves." This verse appears in Matthew at a moment of division. Christ has just entered Jerusalem to the cries of "hosanna" from his adoring followers. Upon entering the city, Christ's first action was to drive out the vendors who were defiling the Temple precincts.<sup>59</sup> Within a few verses this chapter of Matthew provides the positive and negative examples that Bede promised at the beginning of this homily. But this verse also presents two distinct communities: those who praise Christ, and those upon whom he turns his wrath.

Bede's third allusion in this section of his homily is a quotation from the First Epistle of John ("The person who does not love remains in death.").<sup>60</sup> The point of this verse Bede quotes, and those that surround it, is fraternal affection and the willingness one should feel, in imitation of Christ's own

---

<sup>58</sup> For the sake of clarity I have here maintained Hurst's English rendering rather than using the Douay-Rheims translation of this verse, although the sense is the same: "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of the flesh and of the spirit, perfecting sanctification in the fear of God." ("Has igitur habentes promissiones carissimi mundemus nos ab omni inquinamento carnis et spiritus perficientes sanctificationem in timore Dei."). 2Cor 7:1.

<sup>59</sup> Matt 21:6-13.

<sup>60</sup> "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not abideth in death." ("Nos scimus quoniam translati sumus de morte in vitam quoniam diligimus fratres qui non diligit manet in morte"), 1John 3:14.

sacrifice, to sacrifice oneself for one's brother.<sup>61</sup> The following reference is more explicit, as Bede quotes from the Acts of the Apostles that he and his brethren should worship "preserving with one mind in prayer."<sup>62</sup> This must have been a powerful image for Bede to suggest that he and his brethren replicate. This is the verse that describes the apostles and faithful women listening to the speech of the Risen Christ. It would be difficult to find a more complete picture of fellowship and absolute spiritual peace than this verse of the devout unity of the young Church. The final allusion in this section is placed in Bede's advice to his listeners or readers as to how they should behave with one another: "let us converse with one another in psalms, hymns, [and] spiritual canticles." This verse comes from Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians and encapsulates Paul's advice as to how Christians living in a Christian community should behave.<sup>63</sup>

All of the biblical allusions Bede placed in this verse refer to passages in which the right behavior of individuals in a faithful community is explained and reinforced. These verses speak to the obligations and rewards of living with others in a Christian brotherhood, and the unity that is the core of the brethren's experience. This message is neither surprising nor contradictory to the literal message of the homily, and that is just the point of its presence. Bede was not using these

---

<sup>61</sup> 1John 3:11-16.

<sup>62</sup> "All these were persevering with one mind in prayer with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren." ("Hii omnes erant perseverantes unianimiter in oratione cum mulieribus et Maria matre Iesu et fratribus eius."), Acts 1:14.

<sup>63</sup> "Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual canticles, singing and making melody in your hearts to the Lord." ("Loquentes vobismet ipsis in psalmis et hymnis et canticis spiritualibus cantantes et psallentes in cordibus vestris Domino."), Eph 5:19.

allusions to subvert this narrative, but rather to enrich it for those who could see their presence. For those who could read only the literal narrative, this was a homily about the spiritual evaluation the brothers should conduct upon their own consciences during Holy Week, and also of the joy they should feel as they are brought closer to Christ. For those who read Bede's words aware of the references he was making, this section of the homily was about those same principles, but with the added meaning of knowing that in their lives they were enacting the will of Christ and the apostles, and experiencing the same brotherhood enjoyed by the members of the Early Church. These allusions are thickly spread in this short section, and perhaps Bede did not expect his readers to pause to recall their original context, but rather he anticipated that these allusions would make his readers think on the brotherhood of the Early Church and of all pious Christians, and the privilege they shared by living in a monastic community dedicated to God.

What makes these allusions essential to our understanding is that they show that Bede wrote texts the same way he read them.<sup>64</sup> Unsurprisingly, Bede used the same methods to create his own texts that he used to extract meaning from texts he read.<sup>65</sup> Bede's textual world was a coherent culture of signs in which

---

<sup>64</sup> For a general overview of the relationship of medieval writers to the Bible, see M. Reeves, "The Bible and Literary Authorship in the Middle Ages," in S. Prickett (ed.), *Reading the Text: Biblical Criticism and Literary Theory* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1991), 12-63.

<sup>65</sup> The Bible, although exalted in terms of content, would not have been innately unlike Bede's, or his readers', other textual experiences. In his assessment of Augustine's participation in grammatical culture, Irvine writes that "for Augustine and early medieval culture in general, the Scriptures were not formally different from other texts or other written signs: the Scriptures were understood to be different only in degree, in the fullness or complexity of their meaning." Irvine, *Making of Textual Culture*, 258.

texts were written and read with the expectation that a close reading by an informed reader would disclose important spiritual knowledge.<sup>66</sup> If this was the intellectual world Bede participated in as both a reader and a writer, it is the filter we need to use when we read his texts, or indeed any texts, written in this period.

Now that we have seen how Bede created his texts, and even more importantly, how he expected his readers to read them, then that must also be our perspective if we are to have any hope of understanding them. We will now turn to Bede's most famous text, the *HE*, and, using *grammatica* and rhetoric, attempt to understand how Bede wrote it and how he expected his audience to read and interpret it.

---

<sup>66</sup> Some might wonder about possibility of unintended but spiritually beneficial readings. The grammatical "cultural encyclopedia" would seem to preclude these, but if they should occur, Augustine reassures that they are also valuable. Augustine, *De utilitate credendi*, 4.10, *PL* 42.72, discussed in Irvine, *Textual Culture*, 258.

## VA i.iii

Primum quidem ponimus quod in prima aetate accidisse relatu multorum didicimus, ex quibus est sanctae memoriae episcopus Tumma, qui spiritalem Dei electionem predestinatam a sancto Cuðberhto audiens didicit, et presbiter nostrae aecclesiae Elias dicentes, Dum ergo puer esset annorum octo, omnes coetaneos in agilitate et petulantia superans, ita ut sepe postquam fessis membris requiescebant alii, ille adhuc in loco ioci quasi in stadio triumphans aliquem secum ludificantem expectaret. Tunc congregati sunt quadam die multi iuvenes in campi planicie, inter quos ille inventus est, ioci varietatem, et scurilitatem agere ceperunt. Alii namque stantes nudi versis capitibus contra naturam deorsum ad terram, et expansis cruribus erecti pedes ad coelos sursum prominebant. Alii sic, alii vero sic fecerunt. Interes quidam infans erat cum eis ferme trium annorum qui incipiebat constanter ad eum dicere, Esto stabilis, et relinque vanitatem ioci amare, et iterum megligenti eo verba precepti eius plorans et lacrimans quem pene nullus consolari potuit. Postremo tamen interrogatus quid sibi esset, clamare cepit, O sancte episcope et presbiter Cuðberhte, hec tibi et tuo gradui contraria nature propter agilitatem non conveniunt. Ille vero non plene intellegens, adhuc tamen ioci vanitatem derelinquens, consolari infantem cepit. Revertensque ad domum suam, prophetiae verba in mente retinens, sicut sancta Maria omnia verba praedicta de Iesu memorans conservabat. Videte fratres quomodo iste antequam per laborem operum suorum agnoscat, per providentiam Dei electus ostenditur. Sicut de patriarcha per prophetam dicitur, *Iacob dilexi, Esau autem odio habui*. Samuhel quoque et David, utrique in infantia electi inveniuntur. Hieremias vero

propheta, et Iohannes baptista, in officium Domini a vulva matris sanctificati leguntur. Sicut doctor gentium adfirmavit dicens, *Quos autem predestinavit, hos et vocavit, et reliqua.*

## The Bible

*et descendit cum eis et venit Nazareth et erat subditus illis et mater eius conservabat omnia verba haec in corde suo, Luke 2:51*

*Dilexi vos dicit Dominus et dixistis in quo dilexisti nos nonne frater erat Esau Iacob dicit Dominus et dilexi Iacob Esau autem odio habui et posui montes eius in solitudinem et hereditatem eius in dracones deserti, Mal 1:2-3*  
*Priusquam te formarem in utero novi te et antequam exires de vulva sanctificavi te prophetam gentibus dedi te, Jer 1:5*  
*quos autem praedestinavit hos et vocavit et quos vocavit hos et iustificavit quos autem iustificavit illos et glorificavit, Rom 8:30*

**Table 1.** The chapter of the VA in which the young Cuthbert is reproved for his inappropriate behavior and the biblical text the VA recalls.

**VC i**

Principium nobis scribendi de vita et miraculis beati patris Cuthberti Ieremias propheta consecrat, qui anachoreticae perfectionis statum glorificans ait, *Bonum est viro cum portaverit iugum ab adolescentia sua, sedebit solitarius et tacebit, quia levabit se super se.* Huius namque boni dulcedine accensus vir Domini Cuthbertus, ab ineunte adolescentia iugo monachiae institutionis collum subdidit, et ubi oportunitas iuuit, arrepta etiam conversatione anachoretica, non paucis temporibus solitarius sedere, atque ob sua vitatem divinae contemplationis ab humanis tacere delectabatur alloquiis. Sed ut haec in maiori aetate posset, superna illum gratia ad viam veritatis paulatim a primis iam puericiae incitaverit annis. Siquidem usque ad octavum aetatis annum, qui post infantiam puericiae primus est, solis parvulorum ludis et lasciviae mentem dare noverat, ita ut illus beati Samuelis tunc ipso posset testimonium dici. Porro Cuthbertus *necdum sciebat Dominum, neque revelatus fuerat ei sermo Domini.* Quod in praeconium laudis dictum est puericiae illius, qui aetate maior perfecte iam cogniturus est Dominum, ac sermonem Domini revelata cordis aure percepturus. Oblectabatur ergo ut diximus iocis et vagitibus, et iuxta quod aetatis ordo poscebat, parvulorum conventiculis interesse cupiebat, ludentibus colludere desiderabat, et quia agilis natura atque acutus erat ingenio, contententibus ludo sepius prevalere consueverat, adeo ut fessis nonnunquam, caeteris ille indefessus adhuc si quis ultra secum vellet certare, quasi victor laetabundus inquireret. Sive enim saltu, sive cursu, sive luctatu, seu quolibet alio membrorum sinuamine se exercerent, ille omnes aequivos, et nonnullos etiam maiores a se gloriabatur esse superatos. Cum enim esset parvulus, ut *parvulus sapiebat, ut parvulus*

*cogitabat, qui postmodum factus vir, plenissime ea quae parvuli erant deposuit.*

**The Bible**

*TETH bonum est viro cum portaverit iugum ab adulescentia sua IOTH sedebit solitarius et tacebit quia levavit super se, Lam 3:27-8*

*Porro Samuhel necdum sciebat Dominum neque revelatus fuerat ei sermo Domini, 1Sam 3:7*

*cum essem parvulus loquebar ut parvulus sapiebam ut parvulus cogitabam ut parvulus quando factus sum vir evacuavi quae erant parvuli, 1Cor 13:11*

**Table 2.** The chapter of the VC in which the young Cuthbert is reproved for his inappropriate behavior and the biblical text the VC recalls.



Et quidem divina dispensatio  
 primitus elationem animi perilis  
 digno se pedagogo compescere  
 dignata est. Nam sicut beatae  
 memoriae Trumwine episcopus ab ipso  
 Cuthberto sibi dictum perhibebat,  
 dum quadam die solito luctamini in  
 campoquodam non modica puerorum  
 turba insisteret, interesset et  
 ipse, et sicut ludentium levitas  
 solet contra congruum naturae  
 statum variis flexibus membra  
 plerique sinuarent, repente unus de  
 parvulis triennis ferme ut  
 videbatur accurrit ad eum, et quasi  
 senili constantia coepit hortari ne  
 iocis et otio indulgeret, sed  
 stabilitati potius mentem simul et  
 membra subiugaret. Quo monita  
 spernente, luget ille corruens in  
 terram, et faciem lacrimis rigans.  
 Accurrunt consolaturi caeteri, sed  
 ille perstat in fletibus.  
 Interrogant quid haberet  
 repentinum, unde tantis afficeretur  
 lamentis. At ille tandem exclamans,  
 consolanti se Cuthberto, Quid  
 inquit sanctissime antistes et  
 presbiter Cuthberte haec et naturae  
 et gradui tuo contraria geris?  
 Ludere te inter parvulos non decet,  
 quem Dominus etiam maioribus natu  
 magistrum virtutis consecravit.  
 Audiens haec bonae indolis puer,  
 fixa intentione suscepit, mestumque  
 infantem piis demulcens blanditiis,  
 relicta continuo ludendi vanitate  
 domum rediit, ac stabilior iam ex  
 illo tempore animoque adolescentior  
 existere coepit, illo nimirum  
 spiritu interius eius praecordia  
 docente, qui per os infantis  
 extrinsecus eius auribus insonuit.  
 Nec mirandum cuiquam parvuli  
 lasciviam per parvulum potuisse  
 Domino agente cohiberi, qui ad  
 prohibendam prophetae insipientiam,  
 ore subiugalis muti rationabilia  
 verba cum voluit edidit, in cuius  
 laude veraciter dictum est, quia ex  
 ore infantium et lactantium  
 perfecisti laudem.

*Correptionem vero habuit suae vesaniae  
 subiugale mutum in hominis voce loquens  
 prohibuit prophetae insipientiam, 2Pet  
 2:16*

*ex ore infantium et lactantium  
 perfecisti laudem propter adversarios  
 meos ut quiescat inimicus et ultor,  
 Psa 8:3*

**PART II****CHAPTER FOUR****ENGLAND'S ENTRY INTO SACRED TIME**

Bede's practices, both as a reader and as a writer, all proclaim his immersion in Late-Antique grammatical culture. This was the paradigm within which Bede existed intellectually, as did, even more importantly, all of his readers. If modern historians are to understand Bede's texts as he and his contemporaries did, they must read them using the same practices the text's original readers would have, that is, the same practices that Bede employed and extolled in his texts. This method relied on the reader's knowledge of and reverence for the Bible (and other prestigious texts). The words of the Bible were not meaningless idioms used to turn a pretty phrase; each allusion forced the recollection of a moment of divine significance, not to be evoked idly, and possessing such potent imagery that, once recalled, it could not be dismissed.

The purpose of the following two chapters is to put the theory presented in the previous chapters into practice: to read Bede's *HE* as Bede or his contemporaries would have.<sup>1</sup> As Roger Ray notes, the form and content of the *HE* were determined by its ultimate spiritual message, "the *Historia Ecclesiastica* involves a historiography which selects and molds external details as

---

<sup>1</sup> This is ostensibly the purpose of N.J. Higham's recent book, although I would suggest that Higham's work serves as a condensed recapitulation of the same external view of Bede's intellectual world that has existed for centuries. N.J. Higham, *(Re-)Reading Bede: The Ecclesiastical History in Context* (New York, 2006).

internal aims dictate." <sup>2</sup> This chapter will reexamine passages of the *HE* from the death of Gregory the Great to the completion of the Synod of Whitby. I have chosen the following passages because of their centrality to Bede's program. Some of these episodes have frequently been misread by previous scholars, but others have rarely been treated in modern scholarship. <sup>3</sup> The goal of these chapters is not to provide a full reading of every chapter of the *HE*, nor is it about the particulars of translation. The ultimate goal of this work is to show the potential of approaching this material in the context of its own milieu and the abundant meaning available to the *HE*'s original readers.

The unifying theme of this section of the *HE* is the entry, not only of the English, but of England itself, into a coveted and unique place in God's relationship with mankind. These readings do not suggest that the *HE* is a replication of any particular book of the Bible or of any one biblical story (in fact, this reading counters that assumption). The *HE* does not present the English as reliving the story of any one biblical people, but rather of existing within the framework of the Chosen, living through experiences that contain a significance

---

<sup>2</sup> Ray, "De Consensu," 563.

<sup>3</sup> For example, D. Kirby feels that Bede's purpose in writing the *HE* was to create a comprehensive history of England and events about which Bede is incompletely informed are unfortunate gaps in his evidence. Kirby credits Bede with no agenda beyond the creation of a historical record of the events of English history and feels that the *HE* is fully accessible to the modern scholar. D. Kirby, "Bede's sources," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 48 (1966), 341-71. Kirby's later work on early medieval England relies heavily on the *HE* and reads its narrative literally. D. Kirby, *The Earliest English Kings* (London, 1991). The *HE* has had a readership from the time of its writing, but locating the start of modern, critical Bedan studies is more difficult. The first major advance in the twentieth century, and one that marked a break with Bedan scholarship of the past, is A. Hamilton Thompson (ed.), *Bede: His Life, Times, and Writings* (New York, 1935).

able to be fully expressed only when told in the words of the Bible, the only words that had previously described actions of such profound importance. Therefore, the allusions of the *HE* do not follow a single biblical storyline nor do they come from a single book, because they are not in themselves a retelling. Instead, they are the telling of a new story, the story of the English, in old words—the only words available to a writer telling such a story, because the words of the Bible were the only language that could adequately capture such events. So a reader should not expect the *HE*'s allusions to advance from the Old Testament to the New Testament, or from ignorance to knowledge, or from damnation to salvation, in a linear progression. Instead the English are described in the biblical words or images that best explain to the reader the current state of English salvation.

The following readings function both as individual vignettes and as part of an aggregate program. Individually, they each connect the experiences of the English either with the noble and Chosen Israelites of the Old Testament, or the apostolic faithful of the Gospels.<sup>4</sup> Collectively, these episodes draw the English into sacred history, conflating the events described in the *HE* with those of the most profound divine significance.<sup>5</sup> It

---

<sup>4</sup> Other scholars have suggested that Bede's texts connect Anglo-Saxons to Old Testament Israelites. Judith McClure, "Bede's Old Testament Kings," in P. Wormald, D. Bullough, and R. Collins (eds.), *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society. Studies Presented to J. M. Wallace-Hadrill* (Oxford, 1985), 76-98 and Andrew P. Scheil, *The Footsteps of Israel: Understanding Jews in Anglo-Saxon England* (Ann Arbor, Michigan, 2004).

<sup>5</sup> For two excellent discussions of the ways in which early medieval writers used the past (both the historical and textual pasts) to construct identities, see Rosamond McKitterick, *Perceptions of the Past*

would be a mistake to reduce these connections to mere comparisons or literary artifice. The intensified magnitude that the events of the *HE* acquired in Bede's reader's mind by their association with these biblical events allows Bede's story to impart a meaning of eternal and overwhelming importance, concerning the fate both of England and medieval Christendom.

Bede was aware of the power not only of his choice of words, but also of the way he arranged his information. Book II of the *HE* begins and ends with the deaths of powerful figures in the English Church: Gregory the Great and James.<sup>6</sup> The placement of Bede's reports of these events in Book II is strategic. Bede uses each of these deaths, his accounts shaded by his choice of biblical allusions, to create self-defining moments for the English Church. An educated reader would see these men's deaths as more than tidy bookends; the accounts, as crafted by Bede, inform the reader of the stage of England's advancement in its conversion. Gregory's death, although momentous and worthy of memory in itself, took on another, more weighty, meaning when viewed through Bede's prose. For the *HE*'s literal narrative, the death of James mattered very little, but the significance of the message Bede used his death to convey to his readers was immense.

Gregory the Great's presence in Bede's writings is pervasive. Bede held Gregory's works as the exemplar for his own

---

*in the Early Middle Ages* (Notre Dame, 2006) and Nicholas Howe, *Migration and Mythmaking in Anglo-Saxon England* (Notre Dame, 1989).

<sup>6</sup> For a superb overview of the English Church in Bede's time, see John Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (New York, 2005).

homilies,<sup>7</sup> and saw Gregory himself as the paragon of the papal office, and, most importantly to Bede, as the architect of the Augustinian mission. In Book I Bede has shown the plan for England that Gregory put into motion, and the rest of the *HE* is in many ways the result of the blessedness of Gregory's endeavor. At the beginning of Book II, Bede uses the chronological placement of Gregory's death as a moment to reflect on his great achievement in life, the English conversion, which, as Bede says, deserves pride of place in this *historia ecclesiastica*.<sup>8</sup>

In the final line of this introductory paragraph Bede famously writes of Gregory that the conversion of the English was the "seal of his apostleship in the Lord."<sup>9</sup> This line would have resonated with Bede's readers, because they were the words that Paul used in his First Letter to the Corinthians to describe his connection to those whom he had converted.<sup>10</sup> Bede had made his use of the words of the Bible so explicit here that even the least-learned reader would not fail to notice that Bede was connecting

---

<sup>7</sup> For Gregory's homilies, see Gregory the Great, *Forty Gospel Homilies*, trans. Dom David Hurst (Kalamazoo, Michigan, 2000). For more on the relationship between Gregory's and Bede's works, see P. Meyvaert, *Bede and Gregory the Great* (Jarrow, 1964).

<sup>8</sup> *HE* ii.1, 123.

<sup>9</sup> "We can and should by rights call him our apostle, for though he held the most important see in the whole world and was head of Churches which had long been converted to the true faith, yet he made our nation, till then enslaved to idols, into a Church of Christ, so that we may use the apostle's words about him, 'If he is not an apostle to others yet at least he is to us, for we are the seal of his apostleship in the Lord.'" ("Quem recte nostrum appellare possumus et debemus apostolum quia, cum primum in toto orbe gereret pontificatum et conversis iam dudum ad fidem veritatis esset praelatus ecclesiis, nostram gentem eatenus idolis mancipatam Christi fecit ecclesiam, ita ut apostolicum illum de eo liceat nobis proferre sermonem quia, etsi aliis non est apostolus, sed tamen nobis est; nam signaculum apostolatus eius nos sumus in Domino.") *HE* ii.1, 123.

<sup>10</sup> "And if unto others I be not an apostle, but yet to you I am. For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord." ("Si aliis non sum apostolus sed tamen vobis sum nam signaculum apostolatus mei vos estis in Domino.") 1Cor 9:2.

Gregory's English mission to an apostolic one; and those with a little more learning would have known this passage was part of Paul's larger dialogue about his duties as an apostle.<sup>11</sup>

A few lines before this in the *HE*, just as Bede says the English, in particular, ought to remember Gregory because he was the instigator of the mission, Bede recalls another verse from the Bible. Bede writes that the English were "converted by his efforts from the power of Satan to the faith of Christ" (*gentem de potestate Satanae ad fidem Christi sua industria convertit*).<sup>12</sup> This sentence contains a reference to the Bible that is unlike the famous one just mentioned describing Gregory's relationship to the English. Rather than quoting the biblical words of the entire verse ("To open their eyes, that they may be converted from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a lot among the saints, by the faith that is in me"),<sup>13</sup> Bede here uses only two words verbatim while preserving the grammatical structure of the biblical phrase.<sup>14</sup> The literal meaning of this sentence is that a brief recounting of Gregory's life is appropriate in a history of the English church because of his pivotal role in its founding. The biblical words Bede echoes, however, add a richer layer of meaning to his phrasing. This verse from the Acts of the Apostles is Paul's recounting of Christ's own speech. It was with these

---

<sup>11</sup> 1Cor 9:1-27.

<sup>12</sup> *HE* ii.1, 123.

<sup>13</sup> "Aperire oculos eorum ut convertantur a tenebris ad lucem et de potestate Satanae ad Deum ut accipiant remissionem peccatorum et sortem inter sanctos per fidem quae est in me" (Acts 26:18).

<sup>14</sup> In both instances the subjects of the phrase were supposed to enact a form of the verb *converto* that would bring them *de potestate Satanae ad* either "faith in Christ" or God by the efforts of Christ. Although Bede altered some of the vocabulary of this verse, he left its structure, and a key phrase, intact.

words that Christ commissioned Paul while he traveled on the road to Damascus, telling him to preach to the Gentiles, to turn them "from the power of Satan to God" (*de potestate Satanae ad Deum*).<sup>15</sup> This is the only instance in the Bible in which this phrase appears, and by using it Bede was drawing his reader's mind to this most powerful moment in Christian history, and connecting it to the man who initiated the conversion of England. When viewed through the filter Bede created by the elision of these moments, Gregory's mission to the English becomes the moment when an apostle was sent to a new people: when Christ told Paul to preach to the Gentiles. That association would be sufficient to create a momentous importance in the minds of Bede's readers, but Paul's vision was more than the instructions for a new mission, it was the archetype for all other conversions, both personal and communal. The passage in Acts in which Paul describes Christ's appearance while he traveled on the road to Damascus crystallizes sacred history into a moment — Christ is real and present to a man he had not known while alive, and confers on him the duty of spreading the faith. The evangelizing age, the one in which Bede was so certain he lived, and in which Gregory's mission was a notable triumph, began in this same moment Bede recreates in his reader's mind by means of this allusion in the passage about Gregory's death. Only a few lines into Book II, Bede's most aware readers knew that the England's history had been changed, and that, because of Gregory, England had experienced a moment of revelation on its own road to Damascus.

---

<sup>15</sup> Acts 26:18.



Just as Book II of the *HE* begins with the triumph of one man over the darkness of paganism, so does it end, although in much gloomier circumstances. In the final chapter of Book II, Edwin is killed in battle by Caedwalla and Penda, as is one of his sons and most of his army (his remaining son, who deserted to the enemy, was later treacherously murdered by those who killed his father).<sup>16</sup> After Edwin's death the Northumbrian people and church were attacked by Caedwalla and Penda—two enemies of the faith who were both murderous and cruel—but of a different type. Penda was a pagan who knew little of Christianity, but far worse was Caedwalla, a Christian, but “nevertheless a barbarian in heart and disposition.”<sup>17</sup> The state of Northumbria was so precarious that Paulinus and Æthelburh fled with the remaining members of the royal family. The church that Edwin had started in York was unfinished and nearly deserted when his head was brought there for burial, and it seemed that Northumbrian Christianity might be a lost cause. This would be an excellent dramatic moment in which to present the potential downfall of the Northumbrian church, as Bede had done earlier in the *HE* when Laurence was preparing to leave Britain.<sup>18</sup> But here Bede ends with a note of calm, founded in the knowledge that Paulinus had not left the church of York deserted, but that the deacon James, one of Paulinus's original companions, remained there. Here, in this remote and lonely outpost, James continued his work of preaching and conversion despite the surrounding destruction. Bede ends the

---

<sup>16</sup> *HE*, ii.20, 203-7. For an overview of the political turmoil of this period, see Rollason, *Northumbria, 500-1100*.

<sup>17</sup> *HE*, ii.20, 203.

<sup>18</sup> *HE*, ii.6, 154-7.

Book with James's death, saying that "when he was old and full of days, as the Scripture says, he went the way of his fathers" (*senex ac plenus dierum*).<sup>19</sup> This is a pious idiom to apply to James's passing, and, for any readers or listeners limited to the first level of meaning, this might have implied nothing more than that a good and holy disciple received his reward.<sup>20</sup> But for a reader more familiar with the Bible, this was not simply a euphemism for death, these were the words with which great men of the Old Testament died.<sup>21</sup> These are the words that describe the death of Job, and indeed the words that complete the Book of Job, just as they are in the final sentence of Book II of the *HE*.<sup>22</sup> But it is not only Job who dies *senex et plenus dierum*.<sup>23</sup> Abraham died "having lived a long time, and being full of days" (*aetatis et plenus dierum*),<sup>24</sup> and Isaac was "old and full of days" (*senex et plenus dierum*) at his death as well.<sup>25</sup> Although it was not at David's death, it was when he was "old and full of days" (*senex et plenus dierum*) that he abdicated in favor of Solomon,<sup>26</sup> and again at his death, a few chapters later, David died "in a good age, full of days, and riches, and glory" (*in senectute bona*

---

<sup>19</sup> *HE*, ii.20, 207.

<sup>20</sup> Bede would use this phrase again in Book III to describe the death of Agilbert, a Gaulish bishop who had been studying in Ireland, who was eventually expelled from his West-Saxon bishopric because King Cenwealh wanted a bishop who spoke English. Cenwealh's ill-advised actions led to the appointment of Bishop Wine, himself trained in the Gaulish church, and an unworthy candidate who eventually was himself expelled by the king and simoniously bought the bishopric of London—all of this leaving the West Saxons without a bishop for some time. *HE*, iii.7, 235.

<sup>21</sup> McClure, "Bede's Old Testament Kings," 76-98.

<sup>22</sup> Job 42: 16, *HE* ii.20, 207.

<sup>23</sup> Job 42:16.

<sup>24</sup> Gen 25:8.

<sup>25</sup> Gen 35:29.

<sup>26</sup> 1Chron 23:1.

*plenus dierum et divitiis et gloria*).<sup>27</sup> Joiada, a high priest of Israel in the age of the restored Temple after the Babylonian Exile, "grew old and was full of days" (*senuit autem Ioiadae plenus dierum*) when he died.<sup>28</sup> This is the phrase with which the deaths of Old Testament patriarchs and men who had served inside the very Temple of Solomon are described. Bede chose these words to characterize the death of James, who had kept vigil in the abandoned church at York after Paulinus's departure. For someone who knew these words from their biblical contexts, to see Book II close in such a way must have been a powerful and moving statement of the presence of God in England.<sup>29</sup> Rather than characterizing England as a land abandoned or deficient, this episode depicts an England populated with evangelists who were the counterparts of Old Testament patriarchs—the "young" faith of England was in this instance correspondent with the steadfast piety of Old Testament Judaism. Bede ends Book II with something of a cliff-hanger: just when things look their darkest, out of nowhere, in the very last line of the Book, Bede tells his readers that there is indeed a spark left alive in York, and one which will remain faithful until others come to revive it, because James numbers among the patriarchs of the moment—and by doing this Bede signals England's participation in sacred time.

After the charged ending of Book II, Book III opens with the need for an English revival. Having defeated his enemies, who

---

<sup>27</sup> 1Chron 29:28.

<sup>28</sup> 2Chron 24:15.

<sup>29</sup> The principle upon which these associations function necessitates the collapse of time in the reader's mind, not so that James could become an Old Testament patriarch, but rather so that Bede's readers could see that the chronological gap between the date of the events of the Old Testament and the date of the events of the *HE* is immaterial.

had themselves removed his competition for the throne, Oswald's first priority was to reinvigorate Christianity in Northumbria. He asked for missionaries from the community at Iona, and received Bishop Aidan, the founder of the Columban community. Oswald's request and Aidan's arrival signal the final and complete Christianization of Northumbria. The asceticism and piety of the Columban missionaries trained by Aidan formed the basis of the reputation of Northumbrian sanctity and were the teachers of missionaries who would later fuel continental reforms. The Columban foundations in Northumbria would be the sites of the most exciting and zealous religious thought in early medieval Western Europe, and Bede himself is the best example of how profound their influence was. Yet with Aidan came the theological debate that would preoccupy Bede for much of Book III and confuse scholars for ages—the calculation of the date of Easter.

The divergent practices of the Columban and Roman traditions concerning the calculation of the date of Easter was a major controversy in the seventh century, according to Bede, but his steady focus on this problem and its resolution have been viewed by modern scholars as bizarre and obsessive.<sup>30</sup> This problem will not become Bede's main focus until later in the narrative,

---

<sup>30</sup> This opinion has become so widely accepted that D.H. Farmer expresses this exasperated view in the introduction to Leo Sherley-Price's Penguin-published translation of the *HE*. When explaining the Easter-issue to those new to the *HE*, Farmer writes. "Bede's concern, almost obsession, with this issue shows itself repeatedly in his judgements on Welsh and Irish Christians, even St Aidan (iii. 17). It also explains the great length of his account of the Synod of Whitby, the dramatic centre-piece of the whole work (iv. 25)." D.H. Farmer, "Introduction," in Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, trans. Leo Sherley-Price (New York, 1991), 27. Although Farmer provides a compact example, he is here expressing an opinion that has received general approval.

but the issue looms so large over the entire Columban contingent that Bede addresses it in the same line in which he introduces Aidan: "they sent him Bishop Aidan, a man of outstanding gentleness, devotion, and moderation, who had a zeal for God though not entirely according to knowledge."<sup>31</sup> The subsequent line explains the failings of his methods for calculating Easter. This introduction of Aidan, in which Bede says that he possessed admirable qualities, but he had "a zeal for God though not entirely according to knowledge," could be read literally as Bede's apology for Aidan's now-embarrassing Columban dating and a defense of his other remarkable qualities, which Bede felt obliged to justify.<sup>32</sup> These words with which Bede appears to ask for Aidan's pardon are from Paul's Epistle to the Romans.<sup>33</sup> At this point in Romans, Paul has explained the freedom of God to grant grace to whomever he chooses. Paul describes the Jews as having "a zeal for God though not entirely according to knowledge," saying that they would find salvation if only they acknowledged Christ, because anyone who believes in Christ is saved, and moreover, equal in that salvation.<sup>34</sup> A reader with a

---

<sup>31</sup> "...accepit namque pontificem Aidanum summae mansuetudinis et pietas ac moderaminis virum habentemque zelum Dei, quamvis non plene secundum scientiam." *HE*, iii.3, 218-9.

<sup>32</sup> Bede's fuller discussion of Aidan's piety is in *HE* iii.5, 227-9. Interestingly, in this description Bede tells us that Aidan required all those who traveled with him to study some religious text or learn the psalms. *HE*, iii.5, 227-9.

<sup>33</sup> "For I bear them witness that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge" ("Testimonium enim perhibeo illis quod aemulationem Dei habent sed non secundum scientiam"), Rom 10:2.

<sup>34</sup> A few verses later, Paul continues, "For if thou confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in thy heart that God hath raised him up from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For, with the heart, we believe unto justice: but, with the mouth, confession is made unto salvation. For the scripture saith: Whosoever believeth in him shall not be confounded. For there is no distinction of the Jew and the Greek: for the same is Lord over all, rich unto all that call upon him." ("Quia si confitearis in ore tuo Dominum Iesum et in corde tuo credideris quod

basic familiarity with the text of Romans would know that the phrase Bede used was taken from Paul's description of the piety of Jews, whom he loved enough to bear being cursed for their sake,<sup>35</sup> but also of their folly in not accepting Christ. But a reader who knew the text better would know that this line was the opening of Paul's declaration that faith in Christ is the sole determinant of a Christian, and that having confessed this faith, all are equal in it. Bede could have alluded to a biblical passage about the need to obey rules in all their details and therefore upheld the orthodox condemnation of the entire Columban party. But instead he chose, in describing Aidan, to allude to passage that compromised the position of those who would attack the followers of the Columban calculation of Easter. Aidan and his followers possessed an unchallenged piety and a willingness to evangelize even in the most inaccessible and unwelcoming areas, fulfilling one of the commandments of Christ. Having coupled the Columbans' piety with Paul's own justification of salvation through freely-given grace alone, Bede has more than shielded Aidan from anti-Columban diatribes, he has exalted the faith of Aidan and his companions to such an extent that their

---

Deus illum excitavit ex mortuis salvus eris corde enim creditur ad iustitiam ore autem confessio fit in salutem dicit enim scriptura omnis qui credit in illum non confundetur non enim est distinctio Iudaei et Graeci nam idem Dominus omnium dives in omnes qui invocant illum") Rom. 10:9-12.

<sup>35</sup> "For I wished myself to be an anathema from Christ, for my brethren: who are my kinsmen according to the flesh: Who are Israelites: to whom belongeth the adoption as of children and the glory and the testament and the giving of the law and the service of God and the promises: Whose are the fathers and of whom is Christ, according to the flesh, who is over all things, God blessed for ever. Amen." ("Optabam enim ipse ego anathema esse a Christo pro fratribus meis qui sunt cognati mei secundum carnem qui sunt Israhelitae quorum adoptio est filiorum et gloria et testamenta et legislatio et obsequium et promissa quorum patres et ex quibus Christus secundum carnem qui est super omnia Deus benedictus in saecula amen") Rom 9:3-5.

calendrical unorthodoxies ceased to matter. Read with this passage from *Romans* in mind, this rehabilitation of Aidan is also a condemnation of those who would debate petty details while there was still the work of conversion to be done.

If we understand Bede's introduction of Aidan with the full meaning of the passage from *Romans* behind it, Bede has created a reading which suggests that Aidan, and other Columban missionaries who would accept the most challenging assignments, ought not to be judged harshly for their disagreement over minutia. Bede continues that the reason that Aidan and other followers of the Columban church kept this tradition was because they thought they were rightly following "the writings of the esteemed and holy father" Anatolius, and that "every instructed person can very easily judge whether this is true or not."<sup>36</sup> Colgrave interprets this to mean that Bede knew that the Anatolian documents were a forgery, and presumably, here lamented that the Columbans had been misled.<sup>37</sup> There is no indication in the *HE*, however, that Bede doubted the veracity of the documents, rather, I would argue that Bede's mention of the Columban church's close following of the teachings of Anatolius was made to excuse their unorthodoxy by attributing it to devotion to a textual authority. Bede was telling his readers that these were grammatically-trained scholars who had a textual authority for their calendrical divergence. This was not a matter of renegade missionaries or independent-minded monks, but rather this was a community with a different set of texts to follow, but one that

---

<sup>36</sup> "...peritus quisque facilime cognoscit." *HE*, iii.3, 219.

<sup>37</sup> Bertram Colgrave, *HE*, 218, n. 2.

valued the text because they shared the same grammatical principles as the rest of literate Christendom. Bede's readers would by now have realized that England, blessed with its own triumphant conversion, held steadfast by patriarchs like James, and now populated by apostolic missionaries, occupied a unique place in divine events.

After the Northumbrian king Oswald's enthusiastic efforts to rebuild the Church and his admirable death, his bones were brought to Mercia by his niece, Osthryth, the Mercian queen.<sup>38</sup> The monks of Bardney refused to accept Oswald's bones, despite his sanctity, because the Mercians could not forget the Northumbrians' past victories over them. Barred from the building, the cart with Oswald's bones sat outside the door, rejected by the monks. During the night, a column of light emanated from the cart up to heaven, a column of light so bright that it was visible across the kingdom. Seeing this light, the monks of Bardney knew that they had misjudged Oswald's sanctity, and accepted Oswald's bones into their monastery. After being taken in by the Bardney monks, the bones were washed and the water was poured over some soil, around which the rest of the story revolves. The queen, who had collected this potent soil, gave some of it to an abbess, Æthelhild. After Æthelhild returned to her own monastery, a child arrived who was possessed by demons

---

<sup>38</sup> For more on the significance of Oswald's post-mortem bodily dispersal, see A. Thacker, "Membra disjecta: the division of the body and the diffusion of the cult," in C. Stancliffe and E. Cambridge (eds.), *Oswald: Northumbrian King to European Saint* (Stamford, Lincolnshire, 1995), 97-127. See also David Stocker and Paul Everson, "The Straight and Narrow Way: Fenland Causeways and the Conversion of the Landscape in the Witham Valley, Lincolnshire," in M. Carver (ed.), *The Cross Goes North: Processes of Conversion in Northern Europe, AD 300-1300* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 2005), 271-88.



unresponsive to exorcism. Remembering the blessed soil, Æthelhild had it brought into the room with the troubled boy. As soon as the soil entered the room, his demons seemed to leave him and he became calm, much to the amazement of the gathered crowd. As the boy reclined in silence, the abbess and other onlookers watched, " 'hushed were they all and, fixed in silence gazed' "

(*'Conticuere omnes intentique ora tenebant'*).<sup>39</sup> Here, at the pivotal moment in which the potency of Oswald's sanctity is tested, Bede describes the mood of the room in a phrase borrowed from the *Aeneid*. That Bede would describe a charged moment in a phrase from a powerful text other than the Bible is not as surprising as it might at first seem. Early medieval intellectuals regarded the *Aeneid* as an exemplar of literary achievement; it was also the text that charted the birth of an empire.<sup>40</sup> The phrase Bede used was no throwaway line in Vergil's story—this was the introduction to the story-within-a-story of Aeneas's adventures: "All were hushed, and kept their rapt gaze upon him; then from his raised couch father Aeneas thus began" (*Conticuere omnes intentique ora tenebant. Inde toro pater Aeneas*

---

<sup>39</sup> *HE*, iii.11, 248-9. Peter Hunter Blair suggests that this was a line from the *Aeneid* that all early medieval students would know, but, as J.M. Wallace-Hadrill rebuts, being widely recognized would not necessarily strip this phrase of its original meaning. Peter Hunter Blair, "From Bede to Alcuin," in *Famulus Christi*, 239-60, Wallace-Hadrill, *Historical Commentary*, 105. It is also worth noting that Wallace-Hadrill saw Bede's placement of this quotation from the *Aeneid* as increasing the dramatic tension of the scene: "There can be no doubt that the insertion of the Virgilian line at this point heightens the dramatic suspense that Bede himself feels: will the miracle work?," Wallace-Hadrill, *Commentary*, 105.

<sup>40</sup> For more on Bede's relationship to the *Aeneid*, see N. Wright, "Bede and Vergil," *Romanobarbarica*, 6 (1982), 361-79. For more on Vergil's reception in the Middle Ages, see Domenico Comparetti, *Vergil in the Middle Ages*, trans. E.F.M. Benecke, (Princeton, 1997).

*sic orsus ab alto...).*<sup>41</sup> In the *Aeneid*, these words describe the mood of the room in which Aeneas sits having just been asked by Dido to relate the story of his voyage: the fall of Troy, his flight from the city, and the troubles that led him to her. This was the pregnant moment of bated breath before the second greatest story every monk knew unfolded. When these words were spoken, a reader familiar with the text of the *Aeneid* knew that the story of the founding of Rome was about to be revealed. This audience, "hushed" as they were, was about to be told the beginning of the most epic of non-biblical tales, a story that was beloved by monks, heavily used by Bede, and at times so thoroughly internalized by medieval intellectuals that it influenced their very conception of their own history.<sup>42</sup> As Æthelhild and her sisters watched, Oswald's sanctity was exposed. In Oswald's test, or, perhaps, the revelation of the true degree of his holiness, there was something more at stake for Bede and for his contemporary Northumbrian readers. This was the moment in which they found out if their local saints could match those of the wider Christian world. Oswald, "this king who is now reigning with the Lord,"<sup>43</sup> a Northumbrian king whose own Christianity had been founded in (and founded) the Columban mission, was a thoroughly Northern figure. This was the moment when Bede's readers were going to see if this newly chosen land

---

<sup>41</sup> Vergil, *Eclogues, Georgics, Aeneid I-VI*, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1999), ii.1, 316-7.

<sup>42</sup> Robert M. Stein, "The Trouble with Harold: The Ideological Context of the *Vita Haroldi*," in R. Copeland, D. Lawton, and W. Scase (eds.), *New Medieval Literatures Vol. 2* (New York, 1998), 181-204. Also see, Scott C. McGill, "Other Aeneids: rewriting three passages of the Aeneid in the Codex Salmasianus," *Vergilius: The Journal of the Vergilian Society*, 49 (2003), 84-113.

<sup>43</sup> *HE*, iii.12, 251-3.

could produce royal saints to match those of other, more anciently Christian lands: in Oswald's success as a saint, they would have proof that England, and more to the point, Northumbria, had spiritually come of age.

On a broader stage, Bede used this phrase from the *Aeneid* to make a statement about the place of the *HE* itself. No text could better communicate the epic monumentality and political commemoration to which Bede aspired than the *Aeneid*.<sup>44</sup> All readers knew when Dido and her court hold their collective breath in this line that they are watching the unfolding creation of the greatest empire; they, unaware, are seeing the most heroic tale, both in this story and the actions that will follow its telling, enacted before them. Perhaps Bede wanted the readers of the *HE* to think the same when they read this story. As Æthelhild and her attendants wait upon the proof of Oswald's holiness they are anxiously waiting to see the results of the epic story that has already played out in part, but which has even more extraordinary moments to come in the future—moments that those in the text can only breathlessly imagine, but which Bede's readers already knew. As Dido and Æthelhild watch "hushed," they are about to be shown an awe-inspiring beginning and the start of an empire-making end. As Bede's contemporary readers absorbed this scene, the most able among them might have felt that Bede was suggesting that if his readers had ever thought they were seeing superlative drama in the unfolding of the *Aeneid*, and if they yearned for Rome and antiquity, they should look to their own present, because they were living in the midst of a moment as monumental

---

<sup>44</sup> Ray, "Who Did Bede Think He Was?," 11-36.

in sacred history as the events of the *Aeneid* were for the ancient world.

Bede has, at this point in the narrative of the *HE*, conveyed to the able reader that the English are in fact particularly holy and fortunately situated, so that they are living under the gaze of God. The question, therefore, becomes whether they will now fulfill their role: if, being chosen, the English will enact their piety by undertaking the obligation of evangelization. For Bede's readers, the rest of the *HE* was perhaps not about whether the English were a Chosen People of God, but how they matured into that role, performing tasks and acting out events in the same mold and fulfilling the same function as those especially dear to God had done in biblical times. Much of the power of Bede's allusions now shifts from exhibiting the unique place of the English to exhibiting how their actions correspond to their new role, and how, in debating the issues that faced the apostolic Church, the English reveal their own maturity.

The actions of the English in the *HE* range from the noble intentions of a divinely-favored people to the self-aware piety of a fully-Christian kingdom. The steps the English take in this process of maturity are described by Bede in such a way that, through his use of language and imagery, the English tackle the same difficulties all maturing people of God face (although not necessarily in the same fixed order of the Bible). One such issue is the immateriality of God, the subject of Oswiu's debate with Sigebert. The evangelizing efforts made when Sigebert was king

of the East Saxons started at the behest of the Northumbrian king, Oswiu, a friend of Sigebert and an ardent Christian. Oswiu tried to convince Sigebert of the folly of paganism by convincing him that idols were mere feeble objects. Made by men from earthly and perishable materials, Oswiu argued that idols could not possibly contain the ineffable presence of God.<sup>45</sup>

According to Bertram Colgrave, Bede casts Oswiu's explanation of the uselessness of idols and the majesty of God in echoes of two Old Testament passages: Isaiah 44:9-19 and Psalm 95 (96):13.<sup>46</sup> The first half of Oswiu's argument is that idols, made of earthly materials also used for less exalted purposes, could not create gods. "Neither wood nor stone were materials from which gods could be created, the remnants of which were either burned in the fire or made into vessels for men's use or else cast out as refuse, trodden underfoot and reduced to dust."<sup>47</sup> This image, of the worthless idol made from impermanent materials, would have been familiar to Bede's readers as it does indeed appear in Isaiah 44:9-19.<sup>48</sup> The passage in Isaiah is a

---

<sup>45</sup> *HE*, iii.22, 281-3.

<sup>46</sup> Bertram Colgrave, *HE*, 282, n. 1-2.

<sup>47</sup> "...dei creandi materiam lignum vel lapidem esse non posse, quorum recisurae vel igni absumerentur vel in vasa quaelibet humani usus formarentur vel certe dispectui habita foras proicerentur et pedibus conculata in terram verterentur." *HE*, iii.22, 281-3.

<sup>48</sup> "The makers of idols are all of them nothing, and their best beloved things shall not profit them. They are their witnesses, that they do not see, nor understand, that they may be ashamed. Who hath formed a god, and made a graven thing that is profitable for nothing? Behold, all the partakers thereof shall be confounded: for the makers are men: they shall all assemble together, they shall stand and fear, and shall be confounded together. The smith hath wrought with his file, with coals, and with hammers he hath formed it, and hath wrought with the strength of his arm: he shall hunger and faint, he shall drink no water, and shall be weary. The carpenter hath stretched out his rule, he hath formed it with a plane: he hath made it with corners, and hath fashioned it round with the compass: and he hath made the image of a man as it were a beautiful man dwelling in a house. He hath cut down cedars, taken

lengthy one, in which the writer discusses the ways the same wood from which an idol was made would then be destroyed while fueling a fire or roasting meat for a meal. Bede condenses the biblical argument he places in Oswiu's mouth, but maintains the order of the passage from Isaiah: the material of the idol is also put in the fire, used for the preparation of a meal, and then discarded. In this summarized form Bede was relying on the power of this imagery and the order of the argument to convey the parallel to

---

the holm, and the oak that stood among the trees of the forest: he hath planted the pine tree, which the rain hath nourished. And it hath served men for fuel: he took thereof, and warmed himself: and he kindled it, and baked bread: but of the rest he made a god, and adored it: he made a graven thing, and bowed down before it. Part of it he burnt with fire, and with part of it he dressed his meat: he boiled pottage, and was filled, and was warmed, and said: Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire. But the residue thereof he made a god, and a graven thing for himself: he boweth down before it, and adoreth it, and prayeth unto it, saying: Deliver me, for thou art my God. They have not known, nor understood: for their eyes are covered that they may not see, and that they may not understand with their heart. They do not consider in their mind, nor know, nor have the thought to say: I have burnt part of it in the fire, and I have baked bread upon the coals thereof: I have broiled flesh and have eaten, and of the residue thereof shall I make an idol? shall I fall down before the stock of a tree?" ("Plastae idoli omnes nihil sunt et amantissima eorum non proderunt eis ipsi sunt testes eorum quia non vident neque intellegunt ut confundantur quis formavit deum et sculptile conflagavit ad nihil utile ecce omnes participes eius confundentur fabri enim sunt ex hominibus convenient omnes stabunt et pavebunt et confundentur simul faber ferrarius lima operatus est in prunis et in malleis formavit illud et operatus est in brachio fortitudinis suae esuriet et deficiet non bibet aquam et lassescet artifex lignarius extendit normam formavit illud in runcina fecit illud in angularibus et in circino tornavit illud et fecit imaginem viri quasi speciosum hominem habitantem in domo succidit cedros tulit ilicem et quercum quae steterat inter ligna saltus plantavit pinum quam pluvia nutrit et facta est hominibus in focum sumpsit ex eis et calefactus est et succendit et coxit panes de reliquo autem operatus est deum et adoravit fecit sculptile et curvatus est ante illud medium eius combusit igni et de medio eius carnes comedit coxit pulmentum et saturatus est et calefactus est et dixit va calefactus sum vidi focum reliquum autem eius deum fecit sculptile sibi curvatur ante illud et adoratur illud et obsecrat dicens libera me quia deus meus es tu nescierunt neque intellexerunt lutati enim sunt ne videant oculi eorum et ne intellegant corde suo non recogitant in mente sua neque cognoscunt neque sentiunt ut dicant medietatem eius combusi igne et coxi super carbones eius panes coxi carnes et comedi et de reliquo eius idolum faciam ante truncum ligni procidam."), Isa 44:9-19.

his readers.<sup>49</sup> The second half of Oswiu's argument was somewhat more theological: "God must rather be looked upon as incomprehensible in His majesty, invisible to human eyes, omnipotent, eternal, Creator of heaven and earth and of mankind, who rules over the world and will judge it in righteousness" (*Deum potius intellegendum maiestate incomprehensibilem, humanis oculis invisibilem, omnipotentem, aeternum, qui caelum et terram et human genus creasset, regeret et iudicaturus esset orbem in aequitate*).<sup>50</sup> Colgrave sees this phrase, especially, presumably, its latter half, as a restatement of Psalm 95(96):13: "before the face of the Lord, because he cometh: because he cometh to judge the earth. He shall judge the world with justice, and the people with his truth" (*ante faciem Domini quoniam venit quoniam venit iudicare terram iudicabit orbem in iusto et populos in fide sua*).<sup>51</sup>

Although Bede's phrasing certainly is reminiscent of Psalm 95(96):13, there are other passages in the Bible with which this bears an even closer resemblance. Four other psalms have passages concerning world-wide correction and some similar variation on God "judging the people in justice."<sup>52</sup> All of these psalms, the

---

<sup>49</sup> Bede's choice of vocabulary was not going to cause his readers to make this connection—he uses only one word from the Isaiah passage ("ingi").

<sup>50</sup> *HE*, iii.22, 283.

<sup>51</sup> Psa 95(96):13.

<sup>52</sup> Psa 9:9 "And he shall judge the world in equity, he shall judge the people in justice" ("Et ipse iudicat orbem in iustitia iudicat populos in aequitatibus"), Psa 66:5 "Let the nations be glad and rejoice: for thou judgest the people with justice, and directest the nations upon earth" ("Laetentur et laudent gentes quoniam iudicas populos in aequitate et gentium quae in terra sunt ductor es sempiternus"), Psa 95:10 "Say ye among the Gentiles, the Lord hath reigned. For he hath corrected the world, which shall not be moved: he will judge the people with justice" ("Dicite in gentibus Dominus regnavit siquidem adpendit

one identified by Colgrave and the four others I have found, could be the source of Bede's echo in the *HE*. These verses all speak to the general salvation of the good and the damnation of the wicked, although in such general terms that they could appear anywhere in the Bible. But if these psalms do not make for a productive pairing with this passage of the *HE*, they also were likely not the passage Bede wanted his readers to remember. Oswiu's plea to Sigebert is, but for the changes in tense, the final passage of Acts (17:31): "because he hath appointed a day wherein he will judge the world in equity, by the man whom he hath appointed: giving faith to all, by raising him up from the dead" (*eo quod statuit diem in qua iudicaturus est orbem in aequitate in viro in quo statuit fidem praebens omnibus suscitans eum a mortuis*).<sup>53</sup>

For all that the words of the psalms might have shaded a reader's understanding, Bede's use of Acts would have been unmistakable to anyone familiar with the text.<sup>54</sup> Acts 17 begins with Paul preaching, with varying success, at Thessaloniki and Berea. Having moved on to Athens, Paul waited for Silas and Timothy to meet with him, and, while he waited, he noticed the idolatry in which the people of Athens lived. His spirit could

---

orbem immobilem iudicabit populos in aequitate"), Psa 97:9 "At the presence of the Lord: because he cometh to judge the earth. He shall judge the world with justice, and the people with equity" ("Ante Dominum quia venit iudicare terram iudicabit orbem in iustitia et populos in aequitatibus").

<sup>53</sup> Acts 17:31.

<sup>54</sup> Compare Bede's "Deum potius intellegendum maiestate incomprehensibilem, humanis oculis invisibilem, omnipotentem, aeternum, qui caelum et terram et human genus creasset, regeret et iudicaturus esset orbem in aequitate" to Acts's "Eo quod statuit diem in qua iudicaturus est orbem in aequitate in viro in quo statuit fidem praebens omnibus suscitans eum a mortuis."



not rest having seen this attachment to idols, and so Paul preached about the falsehood of idols at every opportunity. Unlike the harsh Jews of Thessaloniki, the Athenians were eager to hear any new theory, and asked Paul to explain his faith. Paul happily obliged, and focused his preaching on the evil of the idols to which the Athenians were so attached. Paul told them that God was the Creator and Ruler of both heaven and earth, and as such could neither be contained within nor aided by the works of men. This God, Paul argues, is the maker of man, omnipresent and eternal, and cannot be represented in any earthly material crafted by any human art. Paul says that if in the past God has ignored the superstitions of idolatrous men, that time is past, and that, in the words Bede used in the *HE*, there will be a day when he "will judge the world in righteousness."<sup>55</sup>

This passage in the *HE* is, therefore, a rewriting of the chapter in Acts—perhaps not surprising in light of Roger Ray's contention that the whole *HE* is itself modeled on Acts.<sup>56</sup> Bede's ability to link these passages, connecting them with a single phrase, quoted so directly that the link would be clearly identifiable to a learned audience, is a consummate example of grammatical writing. Now read in this light, Bede puts the words of Paul, telling the amiable Athenians of the impotence of their pervasive idolatry, into the mouth of Oswiu, telling his friend Sigebert of the powerlessness of man-made idols and the genuine power of the Christian God. This correlation would have made

---

<sup>55</sup> Acts 17:1-31, with the final quotation mirrored in Bede, *HE*, iii.22, 283.

<sup>56</sup> Ray, "Triumph of Greco-Roman Rhetorical Assumptions."

Sigebert's conversion, already a pivotal moment, a transcendent moment for Bede's readers, and perhaps would make his death a few chapters previous in the *HE* more explicable. Those of Bede's readers who had understood that the English had experienced a revelation on their own road to Damascus in Book II, would then see these subsequent events as evidence of the growth of English piety. England was following the path of Paul's own conversion, both into a Christian body and a premier missionary.

The success of the *HE* was, in part, based on its ability to speak on such a compelling subject to readers at all levels of skill, as any good grammatical text must. After the reference to Acts in the previous episode concerning idolatry, which would have required a significant, although widely attained, level of biblical familiarity, the next chapter contains a simple, explicit quotation from the Bible. In this episode, Cedd received a plot of land from the Deiran king, Oethelwald, on which to build a monastery. Cedd chose the spot for himself, and he picked a place that was isolated and hilly:

So, in accordance with the king's desire, Cedd chose himself a site for the monastery amid some steep and remote hills which seemed better fitted for the haunts of robbers and the dens of wild beasts than for human habitation; so that, as Isaiah says, "In the habitations where once dragons lay, shall be grass with reeds and rushes," that is, the fruit of good works shall spring up where once beasts dwelt or where men lived after the manner of beasts.<sup>57</sup>

---

<sup>57</sup> "Favens ergo votes regis antistes elegit sibi locum monasterii construendi in montibus arduis ac remotis, in quibus latronum magis latibula ac lustra ferarum quam habitacula fuisse videbantur hominum; ut, iuxta prophetiam Isaiar 'in cubilibus, in quibus prius dracones habitabant, oriretur viror calami et vinci', id est fructus bonorum operum ibi nascerentur, ubi prius vel bestiae commorari vel homines bestialiter vivere consueverant." *HE*, iii.23, 286-7, quoting Isa 35:7:

Here Bede both provides the source of the quotation, the full quotation itself, and then interprets its meaning for the reader; this is an example of elementary *grammatica* in the text. For those who knew the rest of this passage of Isaiah, it comes from a description of the justice and peace of the Millennial kingdom. Even for those who knew little more than what Bede included here, the ultimate meaning of this reference would be clear. This time Isaiah spoke of, in which polluted places were made clean, was coming to pass as Cedd created a Christian community in the wilderness. Although the examples of Sigebert's idols and Cedd's plot of land can be read at divergent levels of ability, they both suggest the same conclusion to the reader, that this time in English history was mirroring, perhaps even fulfilling, the text of the Bible. Thus, Bede's reader, whatever his level of grammatical proficiency, could partake in the message of the *HE*.

A few chapters later, Bede returns to the piety of Aidan, but this time it is to introduce a major event in the narrative of the *HE*: the Synod of Whitby.<sup>58</sup> This dispute about the correct calculation of Easter "troubled the minds and hearts of many people who feared that, though they had received the name of Christian, they were running or had run in vain."<sup>59</sup> Bede says

---

"And that which was dry land, shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water. In the dens where dragons dwelt before, shall rise up the verdure of the reed and the bulrush." ("Et quae erat arida in stagnum et sitiens in fontes aquarum in cubilibus in quibus prius dracones habitabant orietur viror calami et iunci").

<sup>58</sup> For an analysis of another early medieval gathering and debate, see James E. Fraser, "St Columba and the convention at Druimm Cete: peace and politics at seventh-century Iona," *Early Medieval Europe*, 15:3 (2007), 315-34.

<sup>59</sup> "Unde merito movit haec question sensus et corda multorum, timentium ne forte accepto Christianitatis vocabulo in vacuum currerent aut cucurrissent." *HE*, iii.25, 296-7, alluding to Gal. 2:2.

that the worry that led to the convening of the Synod of Whitby was based on popular concerns of the efficacy of the faith as taught by clergy practicing the unorthodox calculation of Easter. Bede here uses the words of Paul's Epistle to the Galatians to describe the feelings of those ill at ease as to the state of their own salvation because of this discrepancy. Although Paul's phrasing fits into Bede's narrative nicely, this is perhaps a shocking choice of allusion for Bede, at least for this topic. In Galatians, Paul writes that, after preaching many years, he received a revelation that he should go to Jerusalem. In Jerusalem Paul faced Jews who criticized him for not demanding that Christian converts obey the tenets of Mosaic Law. This is the tension of the passage in Galatians to which Bede refers. Paul has spent the last fourteen years preaching to Gentiles that, if they believe in Christ, they are freed from observance of the Mosaic Law, and need not be circumcised to be fully Christian. This is the same principle over which Peter and Paul fought in the famous episode that caused Augustine and Jerome such trouble, and which arises only a few verses later in Galatians.<sup>60</sup> Paul, as the apostle to the Gentiles, maintains that while observance of the Mosaic Law does not preclude one from being a Christian, believing that this observance is necessary jeopardizes one's very salvation: no earthly act can make one more worthy of, or more a part of, Christ's sacrifice. For a Gentile to believe that he needs to be circumcised to conform to

---

<sup>60</sup> For a fuller explanation of this disagreement, and its implications for Late-Antique and early-medieval grammatical culture, see above, Chapter One, 28-30. For Peter and Paul's debate, see Gal 2:11. For the original argument, see Augustine, *Expositio epistolae ad Galatas*, 15, and Jerome, *In epistulam Pauli ad Galatas*.

Mosaic Law before he can be accepted as a full member of the Christian community so warps Christ's message as to compromise its efficacy. Here, in Jerusalem, in the opening verses of Galatians, Paul finds himself in just this predicament. He is preaching to the leaders of those who want to convince Gentile converts that they must be circumcised to be Christians. Paul has based his missionary life on the unimportance of outward acts, but if he loses this debate and Gentile converts start to obey Mosaic Law, then, he says "perhaps I should run or had run in vain." <sup>61</sup>

Paul uses these words to describe his fears that the message he had preached since his conversion, one in which he believed utterly, might be overthrown by those he saw as less enlightened and bound to a dead law, obsessing over the letter and blind to the spirit of it. Those Bede presents as fearing they had "run in vain" presumably are followers of the Columban tradition, as these concerns arise after Finan's elevation. This is an interesting theological parallel for Bede to make between the embattled Columbans and Paul. This connection casts the followers of the Columban Easter as those who, like Paul, are the more exalted for possessing the spiritual maturity to understand they exist, by Christ's sacrifice, beyond the law. The Columbans take Paul's part in this verse, so well-placed by Bede, that it can be read as vindicating either side of the Easter controversy:

---

<sup>61</sup> "And I went up according to revelation and communicated to them the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles: but apart to them who seemed to be some thing: lest perhaps I should run or had run in vain." ("Ascendi autem secundum revelationem et contuli cum illis evangelium quod praedico in gentibus seorsum autem his qui videbantur ne forte in vacuum currerem aut cucurrissem.") Gal 2:2.

followers of the Roman Easter would, in a more literal reading, see in it the well-founded uncertainty of those practicing this untenable calculation, and Columbans would see themselves in Paul's own hope that others would value their own transcendent faith over obedience to an obsolete detail. This is the grammatical opening to Bede's account of the Synod of Whitby, and it immediately presents the Easter-dating controversy as one that has, perhaps, more than one valid side, but, even more importantly, one that fits the mold of the most pressing debate of the early Church.

Bede's description of the Synod of Whitby is a showcase of rhetorical skill. Bede creates the speeches given by Colman in favor of the Columban dating of Easter and those given by Wilfrid, on Agilbert's behalf, expounding the virtues of the Roman dating. The divergent expectations possessed by Bede's original readers and by their modern counterparts bears repeating. Modern readers approach Bede's account expecting the words Colman and Wilfrid spoke on that day, recorded to the best of the writer's ability. Bede's contemporary readers expected nothing of the sort. They anticipated a well-crafted speech that conveyed the greater moral truth of the episode. *Historia* exists in the grammatical tradition as a means by which truths are conveyed to the reader. The events of the past mattered only to the extent that they could instruct readers in moral matters.<sup>62</sup>

Colman responds to Wilfrid's aspersions saying that he is surprised that Wilfrid would criticize those who hold the apostle John, especially favored by Christ, as their exemplar.

---

<sup>62</sup> See above, Chapter One.

Wilfrid replied, 'Far be it from me to charge John with foolishness: he literally observed the decrees of the Mosaic law when the Church was still Jewish in many respects, at a time when the apostles were unable to bring to a sudden end the entire observance of that law which God ordained in the same way as, for instance, they made it compulsory on all new converts to abandon their idols which are of devilish origin.'<sup>63</sup>

Wilfrid continues to list instances in which apostles of the early Church obeyed the Mosaic law in order to avoid offending Jewish converts. Perhaps this is why Bede focuses so tightly on the debate about Mosaic law in the early Church. He thought that this debate about the dating of Easter at Whitby is the same issue, recast—for the English, Easter is the circumcision argument. He sees the Easter controversy as the pivotal moment in which the two factions of the English Church could split and be damaged, but they debate and decide a single, united solution. For Bede, the events of the Synod of Whitby and the issue it debated act as a sign to those of his readers sufficiently aware to recognize the parallel. For Bede, the very presence of this debate signaled a new level of spiritual maturity achieved by the English. He presented his account of the Synod in such a way that his able readers would recognize it as the landmark of English piety it was. The Synod of Whitby was the result, and therefore the proof, that the English had grown into a new apostolic Church. The issue was the same for the English deliberating about Easter as it was for Paul debating about Mosaic law: does one follow the letter of the law (either Mosaic concerning circumcision or Roman about the calculation of Easter) or does one value the spirit of the law, as Paul commanded? The apostolic

---

<sup>63</sup> *HE*, iii.25, 301.

Church was beleaguered by this, and the fact that the English were plagued by it was a sign that they were the New Church of the Chosen People.

Bede's Wilfrid uses the example of John to prove his point, saying that although some early Christians used to follow the letter of Mosaic law, now such things are banned. But Bede has Wilfrid attempt to make the opposite point, countering the logic of all he has just said. Indeed, Wilfrid argues that John, flawed, and now irrelevant, in his dedication to Mosaic law, was also unclear in his explanation of the calculation of Easter and that the Columban faction has misunderstood. Wilfrid says that by this misstep the Columbans have been following a tradition with no authority behind it, from either Peter or John. Wilfrid ends by again chastising the Columbans, saying, "'Besides, in your celebration of Easter you utterly exclude the twenty-first day, which the law of Moses specifically ordered to be observed.'" <sup>64</sup>

In this passage Bede makes Wilfrid into a contradiction: he first appears to praise John for his observance of the Mosaic law when it was still valid, but then claims that this is no longer so. But Wilfrid does not connect this to the argument at hand about the calculation of Easter by saying that John's attachment to the Mosaic law makes him more or less fit to serve as an exemplar. Instead, Wilfrid says that John was actually correct in his calculation of Easter, but that the Columbans have misunderstood him. With this as the crux of Wilfrid's argument, Bede's decision to attribute to Wilfrid the opening volley about John's observance of the Mosaic law takes on a new significance, as it

---

<sup>64</sup> *HE*, iii. 25, 305.



holds no weight in Wilfrid's superficial point. If Wilfrid's comment about John's observance was unrelated to the point Wilfrid was making in the *HE*, it was central to Bede's goal: Wilfrid ends this passage with an indictment of the Columban Easter's dismissal of Mosaic law, despite his own affirmation of its irrelevance a few lines before. The Wilfrid of the *HE*, like those early Christians who did not want to abandon their tradition of circumcision, obeys the letter of the law, not the spirit of it, and thinks that a physical act of the material world matters more than the way in which the love of Christ is held in the hearts of believers.

Colman's response to Wilfrid's challenge epitomizes the character of the Columban argument as portrayed by Bede. He makes no attempt to argue the specifics of the calculation with Wilfrid, nor does he wish to reexamine the Scriptural basis of Wilfrid's claim. Instead Colman's sole concern is with the chain of authority by which he received this tradition, and even more so, the piety of the holy men who constitute that chain. Colman first invokes the authority of Anatolius—and tries to get Wilfrid to acknowledge the same. Colman says that Anatolius, who existed in the ecclesiastical milieu to which Wilfrid appeals, followed the same tradition as the Columbans, but Wilfrid certainly would not criticize him. Colman then calls upon the authority of Columba and other holy men of the Columban Church, and asks Wilfrid if he thinks that men such as these, who have been proven holy by their miracles, were acting in a way other than according to the Bible. Colman ends with a testimony to his personal faith in these Columban holy men and his declaration to

maintain their traditions.<sup>65</sup> In this response Colman succinctly targets the topics about which the grammatically-educated would have felt most strongly: the authority of inherited tradition. Bede's audience would have been able to recognize Colman as a good scholar and a holy man, and someone whose zeal to preserve tradition should be respected. For an audience familiar with the grammatical premise that it was the *res*, the moral truth, of a matter that was the most important, perhaps this debate over the method of calculation seemed like a trivial matter (obsessing over the *verba*, as it were), whereas the real matter of tradition and authority demanded such a central discussion.

Wilfrid's reply to Colman is both detailed and snide, unlike Colman's own fraternal statement to Wilfrid in which he tried to draw them both into the same, united tradition. Wilfrid says he does respect Anatolius, but cannot see how Anatolius relates to Colman, as the Columbans misunderstand Anatolius's teaching on calculation. Wilfrid inserts Colman into an unflattering dichotomy: either he does not know the truth of Anatolius's orthodox calculation, or, even worse, he does know it and dismisses it. Unlike Colman, whose response was gracious enough to allow Wilfrid room to disagree with honor, Wilfrid has cast Colman as unavoidably wrong. But then Wilfrid becomes more than snide; he says that Colman's reliance on the authority of Columba (and other Columban figures) and their miracles means little, because at the Last Judgment many people who had performed such wonders will be found to be false prophets. Wilfrid here, besides committing an act of disrespect in

---

<sup>65</sup> *HE*, iii.25, 305.

suggesting that Columba himself was a false prophet and unworthy of emulation, also does something else Bede's readers would find it hard to forgive: he impugned tradition and the authority of holy figures from the past. By aligning himself so firmly against Columba, and therefore all of Columban monasticism and asceticism, Wilfrid was choosing to refute a tradition in which acts of piety and personal remembrances (of the sort that constitute much of the *HE*) function as indicators of those deserving veneration.

Wilfrid suggests that Columba and his followers are not suitable models of authority, and that their miracles, rather than providing proof of their sanctity, invite suspicion that they were false prophets:

"I might perhaps point out that at the judgement, many will say to the Lord that they prophesied in His name and cast out devils and did many wonderful works, but the Lord will answer that He never knew them." <sup>66</sup>

Read at the level of literal meaning, this passage was so offensive as to compromise Wilfrid's integrity. If any of Bede's readers had held a favorable view of Wilfrid, his denigration of Columba's sanctity would have injured it. Those reading on a deeper level, however, would have seen Bede's own commentary at work. The words in which Wilfrid suggests that not all those who perform miracles do so in the name of Christ, but are in fact strangers to him, are from the Gospel of Matthew.<sup>67</sup> As Bede's most

---

<sup>66</sup> "...possem respondere, quia multis in iudicio dicentibus Domino, quod in nomine eius prophetaverint et daemonia eiecerint et virtutes multas fecerint, responsurus sit Dominus, quia numquam eos noverit." *HE*, iii.25, 305-7.

<sup>67</sup> "Many will say to me in that day: Lord, Lord, have not we prophesied in thy name, and cast out devils in thy name, and done many miracles in thy name? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, you that work iniquity." ("Multi dicent mihi in illa die

accomplished readers knew, these would not have been the words the historical Wilfrid would have chosen to indict Colman. Not only were crafted speeches characteristic of good grammatical texts, but Wilfrid also would have been wary of these words because of what they might cause a good reader to recall. The verses of Matthew that Bede's Wilfrid quotes are part of Christ's Sermon on the Mount. After Christ's monologue, the chapter ends by recapitulating the reason for the crowd's attraction to Christ: "for he was teaching them as one having power, and not as the scribes and Pharisees."<sup>68</sup> The crowd's perception was that Christ preached with "power" that came from his own person, unlike the Pharisees, the keepers of rules and the law. The words Wilfrid uses to attempt to make his point contradict and condemn him. Bede repeatedly reaffirms this distinction between those possessing personal piety and those who dispassionately follow rules in his biblically-laced descriptions of the Synod of Whitby, undermining the authority of the Roman faction and presenting the Columbans as the true heirs of the apostles.

This episode that has so characterized both Bede and the *HE* does indeed encapsulate both Bede's authorial presence and the aim of this work—just not for the reasons previously thought. Bede's account of the Synod of Whitby follows Eddius Stephanus's in the broadest outlines,<sup>69</sup> but, through Bede's use of biblical

---

Domine Domine nonne in nomine tuo prophetavimus et in tuo nomine daemona eiecimus et in tuo nomine virtutes multas fecimus et tunc confitebor illis quia numquam novi vos discedite a me qui operamini iniquitatem." ) Matt 7:22-3.

<sup>68</sup> "Erat enim docens eos sicut potestatem habens non sicut scribae eorum et Pharisei." Matt 7:29.

<sup>69</sup> Although Bede's account of the Synod of Whitby agrees with Stephanus's in the most general sense, all of the biblical language present in Bede's account in the *HE* is absent from Eddius Stephanus's account in

language, he was able to show his readers the implications of the English participating in such a debate. The Synod of Whitby, as portrayed by Bede in the *HE*, is the battle that existed from the very beginning of the Church between those who followed the spirit and those who obeyed the law. But even more importantly, the fact that this debate took place in England, made this England's inaugural showcase. To have this debate meant that the theological development of England was complete; this newly formed people and this infant Church had miraculously grown into a powerhouse of faith, ready to take its place within, if not at the forefront of, Christendom. From this point on, England would not be the same; it was no longer the island of fledgling Christians always on the brink of apostasy. Instead, having forged its faith through this iconic trial, England would now be the creator rather than the recipient of missionaries. This England, having founded a new center of the Church and christened it with this literally-apostolic debate, was ready to relight the fire of the Continental Church. For however short a time, England was the home of those who had internalized Christ's message, disconnected themselves from the physical world, and been thoroughly consumed by the spirit, to such a degree that they operated their mission just as the first Christians had: freed from the law.

The chapter of the *HE* that follows Oswiu's decision describes the state of England as the Synod attendees dispersed.

---

his *Vita Wilfridi*. Eddius Stephanus, *The Life of Bishop Wilfrid*, 20-3. As an aside, J.M. Wallace-Hadrill mentions his suspicions that Stephan's *vita* of Wilfrid was not Bede's sole, or even primary, source, but rather that Bede and Stephan shared a lost source. Wallace-Hadrill, *Historical Commentary*, 126.

Colman, and other Columbans unconvinced by Wilfrid's arguments, left England. In their absence the extremity of their piety was even more apparent. In his most explicit statement of the Columbans' disregard for the details of the physical world, Bede writes that "the sole concern of these teachers was to serve God and not the world, to satisfy the soul and not the belly."<sup>70</sup> The England that such teachers left was a near-Millennial paradise: the king was pious and humble, monks were respected and austere, and the people eagerly sought religious teaching.<sup>71</sup> Bede closes this laudatory chapter, saying "But enough has been said on this subject" (*sed de his satis dictum*).<sup>72</sup>

To end this chapter saying *satis dictum* would have recalled another chapter that ended with these words, the seventh chapter of the Second Book of Maccabees, the only place this phrase occurs in the Bible.<sup>73</sup> The Second Book of Maccabees is the final book of the Old Testament and one that must have seemed to Bede one bursting with the theology of the New Testament. Chapter Seven, which ends with the words *satis dictum*, tells the story of a mother who sees her seven sons martyred because they would not forsake the laws of Moses. But their obedience is not slavish,

---

<sup>70</sup> *HE*, iii.26, 311.

<sup>71</sup> *HE*, iii.26, 311.

<sup>72</sup> *HE*, iii.26, 311.

<sup>73</sup> "But now there is enough said of the sacrifices and of the excessive cruelties." ("Igitur de sacrificiis et de nimis crudelitibus satis dictum.") 2Macc 7:42. Bede's readers also might have known this phrase from Eusebius's *History of the Church* from the passage in which Eusebius uses this phrase to end his summary of Josephus's texts. One of Eusebius's few substantive comments in this section, and one of his final comments, is that Josephus wrote about the valiant struggles of the Maccabees. Eusebius, *The Church History*, trans. Paul. L. Maier (New York, 2007), X. For a discussion of the Late-Antique and early-medieval tradition of ecclesiastical history, see R. Markus, *Bede and the Tradition of Ecclesiastical Historiography* (Jarrow, 1975) and L.W. Barnard, "Bede and Eusebius as Church Historians," in Bonner, *Famulus Christi*, 106-24.

rather it is done out of the desire to give glory to God and in the certainty that they would be given eternal life by the God they adored. This passage, of Jews willingly sacrificed for the love of God, with their mother, distraught but steadfast, looking on, all the while refusing offers for leniency in return for denying their faith, must have been a satisfying end to the Old Testament for Bede and his brethren. Here, a few chapters from the beginning of the account of their own Lord, early medieval readers found an explicit prefiguration of the Crucifixion. Perhaps Bede and his readers also found here proof that the Jews of this story, who could act in such an illustrious manner, were now able to move on to the second stage of sacred history and that they had attained the level of spiritual maturity necessary to undertake the transformation of salvation. Bede's readers would have encountered this allusion near the middle of the *HE*, and in it seen another people at a pivotal moment in their spiritual development. This story was a model of how to combine literal obedience to the law and extraordinary passion for God, the highest aspiration of the post-Whitby English.

Now that "enough has been said," there is an entirely new story coming that has, finally, been fully prepared by this final act that exposed the courage of the people involved. And so, perhaps, we should read Bede's account of post-Whitby piety not simply as a chapter that ends one dilemma (the Synod of Whitby) and sets the stage for a calamity (the seventh-century plague), but as the end of something much larger. The English, by virtue of their performance at the Synod of Whitby, and by the fact that they were able to tackle such enormous questions that haunted the

early apostolic Church, had shown that they had grown out the first stage of their conversion and were now ready to become, fully, members of the eternal Church—much as Bede would have seen the transformation of the Old Testament Jews into the first Christians, and then into the missionaries who proselytized the rest of the world. For Bede, these words, that “enough has been said” did not simply signal the end of a topic in Second Maccabees, but the end of the first stage of the journey of the Chosen People of God, the journey that the English of the *HE* were replicating in Bede’s own time.

By the end of Bede’s account of the Synod of Whitby the English have advanced through the initial stages of their conversion and reached a more exalted—and more burdensome—stage of holiness. Bede’s readers have followed the English from the infancy of their Christianity, a time during which their innate nobility was signaled by God’s favor. Having been converted, the English, still chosen, exhibited their fitness for sacred history by struggling with the issues that the faithful of the early Church dealt with as well. By embracing the same debates that troubled and challenged the adherents of the apostolic Church, the English have shown themselves capable of handling the more weighty matters of Christian doctrine. The price of this maturity was English serenity. After presenting the final proof of their progression at the Synod of Whitby, the English had shown themselves prepared for the grave responsibilities of preaching to others and perfecting themselves.



**CHAPTER FIVE**  
**THE BURDEN OF BEING CHOSEN**

Bede presented the Synod of Whitby as the stage upon which the English revealed their transformation from blessed to saved. By recognizing and debating the same issues that confused and troubled the apostolic Church, the English had realized their conversion-age promise. After the end of the Synod of Whitby, Bede describes England as a paradise for the pious, an ideal setting for the Church to thrive created by the asceticism of the Columbans. It may seem odd to honor those who had just lost the debate at Whitby, but their loss was, in the *HE*, superficial. The fact that the debate had taken place at all was England's triumph, and that the Columbans left a legacy of steadfast Christians in their wake was their own. Bede ends this chapter with the words that ended a chapter of the Second Book of Maccabees, a chapter in which Bede and his readers learned of a people who had fulfilled their promise and reached the next stage of their spiritual enlightenment.<sup>1</sup> This age of piety, as we shall see, was short-lived, as in the next chapter Bede introduces a devastating plague. Bede was now describing an England that had moved into a new sphere of sacred history that, although privileged, was also burdensome.

From the very first lines of Bede's description of the seventh-century plague, an event that would play such an important role in the second half of the *HE*, he made it clear to his readers that this was an extraordinary pestilence, one which

---

<sup>1</sup> For the full discussion of this example, see above, Chapter Four.

was "raging" (*desaeviens*), a word reserved in the Bible for the wrathful rages of God and the justice administered by the family of David.<sup>2</sup> The first episode of the seventh-century plague in the *HE* occurred in Ireland, although the subjects of the story are Æthelhun and Egbert, both noble-born English monks.<sup>3</sup> These two young men were staying at the monastery of Rathmelsigi, a popular Irish destination for English clerics, when the seventh-century plague left all of their fellow monks either dead from the disease or frightened into flight. Both Æthelhun and Egbert fell ill with the plague, and while Æthelhun languished, Egbert, himself near death, left his bed to find a spot where he could contemplate his past actions in solitude. Finding his past conduct wanting in piety, Egbert was overcome with regret that he would now likely die with his encumbered conscience saturated in sin. Pledging many good works and much self-sacrifice if he were to survive, Egbert prayed that God would allow him to live long enough to atone for his previous neglect. After Egbert had

---

<sup>2</sup> The seventh-century plague was "raging far and wide with cruel devastation and laying low a vast number of people." ("...corripiens atque acerva clade diutius longe lateque desaeviens, magnam hominum multitudinem stravit."), *HE*, iii.27, 311-5. Examples of "desaevio" describing the wrath of God include: "They fell flat on their face, and said: O most mighty, the God of the spirits of all flesh, for one man's sin shall thy wrath rage against all?" ("Qui ceciderunt proni in faciem atque dixerunt fortissime Deus spirituum universae carnis num uno peccante contra omnes tua ira desaeviet."), Num 16:22; "And you have forsaken the Lord to day, and to morrow his wrath will rage against all Israel." ("Et vos hodie reliquistis Dominum et cras in universum Israhel eius ira desaeviet."), Josh 22:18; and Joab's rage against Abner, "And Abner cried out to Joab, and said: Shall thy sword rage unto utter destruction? knowest thou not that it is dangerous to drive people to despair? how long dost thou defer to bid the people cease from pursuing after their brethren?" ("Et exclamavit Abner ad Ioab et ait num usque ad internicionem tuus mucro desaeviet an ignoras quod periculosa sit desperatio usquequo non dicis populo ut omittat persequi fratres suos."), 2Kings (2Sam) 2:26.

<sup>3</sup> The best discussion of the seventh-century plague and the identity of the illness is J.R. Maddicott, "Plague in seventh-century England," in *Past and Present: A Journal of Historical Studies*, 156 (1997), 7-54.

returned to his bed and rested, Æthelhun awoke and asked him 'O *quid fecisti?*', "'What have you done?' ".<sup>4</sup> Æthelhun lamented that the vision he had received told him that Egbert, with whom he hoped, in a final expression of their earthly companionship, to die, would, as Egbert had prayed, survive this illness and live to make amends for his former life.<sup>5</sup> That night Æthelhun died and Egbert recovered, beginning a long life of piety and devotion founded in this moment of spiritual clarity.<sup>6</sup>

The climactic moment of this episode is when Æthelhun awakes, aware of Egbert's survival and their approaching separation, and turns to his friend and asks, "'What have you done?' ". The phrase Bede puts into Æthelhun's mouth, "*quid fecisti?*", appears to be such a simple and conversational piece of language that it could not possibly contain a meaning beyond the literal one. But at this point in our reading of Bede's text, we should not assume that complex meanings can only be contained in complex phrases. Just because a piece of language is both simply constructed and possibly used frequently in casual conversation does not preclude its possession of a sophisticated textual potency.<sup>7</sup> Based on its use in the Bible, the phrase *quid*

---

<sup>4</sup> *HE*, iii.27, 314-5.

<sup>5</sup> For a discussion of the place of visions in early medieval religion, see R. Easting, "Access to heaven in medieval visions of the otherworld," in Carolyn Muessig and Ad Putter (eds.), *Envisaging Heaven in the Middle Ages* (London, 2007), 75-90. For a comparison with continental material, see J. Keskiäho, "The handling and interpretation of dreams and visions in late sixth- to eighth-century Gallic and Anglo-Latin hagiography and histories," *Early Medieval Europe*, 13:3, (2005), 227-48. Also see, Isabel Moreira, *Dreams, Visions, and Spiritual Authority in Merovingian Gaul* (Ithaca, 2000).

<sup>6</sup> For more on the place and power of prayer in Bede's texts, see S. DeGregorio, "The Venerable Bede on prayer and contemplation," *Traditio: Studies in Ancient and Medieval History, Thought, and Religion*, 54, (1999), 1-39.

<sup>7</sup> Any doubt as to the ability of short or simple verbal phrases to carry weighty cultural loads easily can be dispelled by the field of memetics,

*fecisti* may have been just such a phrase: elementary in difficulty, but used in the Bible at such intense moments of revelation that it would have accrued a dramatic tension in the eyes of Bede's readers. In the Bible, *quid fecisti* is not a casual question, but rather one that is always asked in disbelief in the face of the intrusion of the divine into the earthly. *Quid fecisti*, appears at pivotal moments throughout the Bible: it is the phrase God speaks to Cain when he realizes the extent of his crime,<sup>8</sup> the words that Abimelech speaks to Abraham after learning that his capture of Sara angered God,<sup>9</sup> the phrase with which Samuel reproves Saul after he has made peace with the Philistines,<sup>10</sup> the question that Joab asks David after he learns that David has sent away Abner,<sup>11</sup> the question the terrified sailors pose to Jonas after the lots revealed he was the cause of their distress,<sup>12</sup> the incredulous words of Mary when she finds the young Jesus preaching in the temple,<sup>13</sup> Pilate's desperate response

---

the study of the transfer of cultural knowledge through "catch-phrases" or other repeated actions. For a recent example of this theory applied to medieval material, see Michael D.C. Drout, *How Tradition Works: A Meme-Based Cultural Poetics of the Anglo-Saxon Tenth Century* (Tempe, Arizona, 2006). Also, if this phrase, "quid fecisti," seems meaninglessly banal or unavoidably common, consider that it is never appears in the *Aeneid* (despite the frequent need for it).

<sup>8</sup> "Dixitque ad eum quid fecisti vox sanguinis fratris tui clamat ad me de terra" ("And he said to him: What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth to me from the earth"), Gen. 4:10.

<sup>9</sup> "Vocavit autem Abimelech etiam Abraham et dixit ei quid fecisti nobis" ("And Abimelech called also for Abraham, and said to him: What hast thou done to us?"), Gen. 20:9.

<sup>10</sup> "Locutusque est ad eum Samuhel quid fecisti" ("And Samuel said to him: What hast thou done?"), 1Sam (1Kings) 13:11.

<sup>11</sup> "Et ingressus est Ioab ad regem et ait quid fecisti" ("And Joab went in to the king, and said: What hast thou done?"), 2Sam (2Kings) 3:24.

<sup>12</sup> "Et timuerunt viri timore magno et dixerunt ad eum quid hoc fecisti" ("And the men were greatly afraid, and they said to him: Why hast thou done this?"), Jonas 1:10.

<sup>13</sup> "Et dixit mater eius ad illum filii quid fecisti nobis" ("And his mother said to him: Son, why hast thou done so to us?"), Luke 2:48.

to Christ's reluctance to identify himself,<sup>14</sup> the forbidden question that Paul declares to be the equal of men doubting God's plan,<sup>15</sup> and again, the question that no man should dare to ask God, the maker of all things whose judgment should never be doubted.<sup>16</sup> In each of these instances, the function of the phrase is perhaps less to convey a genuine question than to express a moment of textual exclamation, giving voice to the reader's own reaction. Each *quid fecisti* marks a moment of fate, an opportunity in which events could have been different, but because of the guiding plan of sacred history—from Saul's premature peace to the silencing of the forbidden question—events could occur no other way. These are the moments when the will of God comes through the narrative and when divine favor makes the workings of God clear in the text—the sailors may ask Jonas what he has done, but through the calming of the seas the presence of God is clear. When Bede's readers read that Æthelhun announced the answer of Egbert's prayers with *quid fecisti*, they would have known that Egbert's survival was essential to God's plan.

The story of Æthelhun and Egbert is followed by the travails of the English Church and its difficulty in acquiring bishops whose consecrations were beyond reproach. Unfortunately the English cleric sent to Rome for his elevation died before his

---

<sup>14</sup> "Gens tua et pontifices tradiderunt te mihi quid fecisti" ("Thy own nation and the chief priests have delivered thee up to me. What hast thou done?"), John 18:35.

<sup>15</sup> "O homo tu quis es qui respondeas Deo numquid dicit figmentum ei qui se finxit quid me fecisti sic" ("O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it: Why hast thou made me thus?"), Rom 9:20.

<sup>16</sup> "Quis enim dicet tibi quid fecisti" ("For who shall say to thee: What hast thou done?"), Ws 12:12.

consecration, and in response to this tragedy Pope Vitalian sent the Northumbrian king Oswiu a letter. If the version of this letter that exists in the *HE* is an accurate rendering of a papal letter, it must have been a satisfying document for Bede, because it reflects so many of his own interests and opinions. If this letter is a rhetorical composition created by Bede for the *HE* to express the sentiments that he believed Pope Vitalian must have felt at this time, then it is a supremely telling piece in terms of Bede's own views. In either case, or even in the likely situation of a combination of those two scenarios, Bede chose to include this assessment of England in the midst of the endemic seventh-century plague. The letter, in short, uses biblical references and quotations to inform and congratulate the English on their entrance into sacred history and of their elevated place in that plan. Regardless of its authorship, Bede "reproduced" this letter, connecting the conversion and spiritual maturity of the English with the fulfillment of biblical prophecy:

"For your race has believed in Christ who is God Almighty, as it is written in Isaiah, 'In that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people: to it shall the Gentiles seek.' "<sup>17</sup>

This is the first of a series of eight quotations from the Book of Isaiah, the placement of all of which suggest that they are at least partially fulfilled by the conversion and maturity of the

---

<sup>17</sup> "Quia et gens vestra Christo omnipotenti Deo credidit secundum divinorum prophetarum voces, sicut scriptum est in Esaia: 'In die illa radix Iesse, qui stat in signum populorum, ipsum gentes deprecabuntur...' " *HE*, iii.29, 318-9. Here Vitalian's letter quotes Isaiah 11:10. "In that day the root of Jesse, who standeth for an ensign of the people, him the Gentiles shall beseech, and his sepulchre shall be glorious." ("In die illa radix Iesse qui stat in signum populorum ipsum gentes deprecabuntur et erit sepulchrum eius gloriosum"), Isa 11:10.

English.<sup>18</sup> The text is a string of quotations that recall again the geographical distinction held by the English:<sup>19</sup>

And again, 'Listen, O isles, unto me, and hearken, ye peoples from afar.'<sup>20</sup> And a little further on, 'It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the dregs of Israel. I have given thee for a light to the Gentiles that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth.'<sup>21</sup> And again, 'Kings shall see, princes also shall arise and worship.'<sup>22</sup> And immediately after, 'I have given thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth and possess the scattered heritages;<sup>23</sup> that you may say to the prisoners, Go

<sup>18</sup> For another discussion of the use of quotations from Isaiah in Vitalian's letter as reported by Bede, see G. Tugéne, "L'histoire 'ecclesiastique' du peuple anglais. Réflexions sur le particularisme et l'universalisme chez Bède," *Recherches Augustiniennes*, 17 (1982), 129-72.

<sup>19</sup> *HE*, iii.29, 319, quoting Isa. 49:1. Bede already mentioned the significant geography of England during Wilfrid's speech during the Synod of Whitby. Wilfrid told Colman it was unthinkable that the habits of people in the "remotest of islands" could compare to those of the Church at large. "'For though your fathers were holy men, do you think that a handful of people in one corner of the remotest of islands is to be preferred to the universal Church of Christ which is spread throughout the world?'" ("Etsi enim patres tui sancti fuerent, numquid universali, quae per orbem est, ecclesiae Christi eorum est paucitas uno de angulo extremae insulae praeferenda?") *HE*, iii.25, 306-7.

<sup>20</sup> Isa 49:1. "Give ear, ye islands, and hearken, ye people from afar. The Lord hath called me from the womb, from the bowels of my mother he hath been mindful of my name." ("Audite insulae et attendite populi de longe Dominus ab utero vocavit me de ventre matris meae recordatus est nominis mei"), Isa 49:1.

<sup>21</sup> Isa 49:6. "And he said: It is a small thing that thou shouldst be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to convert the dregs of Israel. Behold, I have given thee to be the light of the Gentiles, that thou mayst be my salvation even to the farthest part of the earth." ("Et dixit parum est ut sis mihi servus ad suscitandas tribus Iacob et feces Israhel convertendas dedi te in lucem gentium ut sis salus mea usque ad extremum terrae"), Isa 49:6.

<sup>22</sup> Isa 49:7. "Thus saith the Lord the redeemer of Israel, his Holy One, to the soul that is despised, to the nation that is abhorred, to the servant of rulers: Kings shall see, and princes shall rise up, and adore for the Lord's sake, because he is faithful, and for the Holy One of Israel, who hath chosen thee." ("Haec dicit Dominus redemptor Israhel Sanctus eius ad contemptibilem animam ad abominatam gentem ad servum dominorum reges videbunt et consurgent principes et adorabunt propter Dominum quia fidelis est et Sanctum Israhel qui elegit te"), Isa 49:7.

<sup>23</sup> Isa 49:8. "Thus saith the Lord: In an acceptable time I have heard thee, and in the day of salvation I have helped thee: and I have preserved thee, and given thee to be a covenant of the people, that thou mightest raise up the earth, and possess the inheritances that were destroyed:" ("Haec dicit Dominus in tempore exaudiivi te et in die salutis auxiliatus sum tui et servavi te et dedi te in foedus populi ut suscitares terram et possideres hereditates dissipatas"), Isa 49:8.

forth; to them that are in darkness, Show yourselves.'<sup>24</sup>

Bede's recounting of Vitalian's letter places the English among the people foretold in the Bible. If Vitalian himself did this to encourage faith and flatter Oswiu it does not lessen the letter's worth; for our purposes its importance rests solely in Bede's decision to include it, at length, in the *HE*. Several other biblical quotations follow,<sup>25</sup> along with Vitalian's assurance to Oswiu that "it is clearer than day that it is here foretold that not only you but also all peoples will believe in Christ the Maker of all things."<sup>26</sup>

The latter part of Vitalian's letter informs Oswiu that the cleric sent to be consecrated bishop, Wigheard, has died and Vitalian has not yet found a suitable replacement.<sup>27</sup> Although the

---

<sup>24</sup> Isa 49:9. "That thou mightest say to them that are bound: Come forth: and to them that are in darkness: Shew yourselves. They shall feed in the ways, and their pastures shall be in every plain." ("Ut diceris his qui vincti sunt exite et his qui in tenebris revelamini super vias pascentur et in omnibus planis pascua eorum"), Isa 49:9. "...et iterum: 'Audite insulae, et attendite populi delonge'; et post paululum 'Parum' inquit 'est, ut mihi sis servus ad suscitandas tribus Iacob et feces Israel convertendas. Dedi te in lucem gentium, ut sis salus mea usque ad extremum terrae'; et rursum: 'Reges videbunt, et consurgent principes, et adorabunt'; et post pusillum: 'Dedi te in foedus populi, ut suscitares terram, et possideres hereditates dissipatas, et diceris his qui vincti sunt Exite, et his qui in tenebris Revelamini';", *HE*, iii.29, 318-21.

<sup>25</sup> Isa 49:7-9, Isa 42:6-7.

<sup>26</sup> "...quam luce clarius est non solum de vobis sed etiam de omnibus prophetatum gentibus, quod sint crediturae in Christum omnium conditore." *HE*, iii.29, 320-1.

<sup>27</sup> When discussing the need for a replacement for the deceased Wigheard to be sent to England eventually, Vitalian says the fit person will be sent to "root out, with His blessing, the tares sown by he enemy throughout your island." Colgrave and Mynors note that this is an allusion to Matt. 13:24-30, which I can see in the language of sowing, but I'm not so certain that I can see, so far at least, a close enough parallel that I would have known it came from this particular passage in Matthew and not one of the other "sowing" parables. This one that Colgrave and Mynors think it refers to, is a parable about the kingdom of heaven, so all the sowing and reaping done in this passage refers to the kingdom of heaven. And I am not sure that that means anything in this context, and I think it would be taking it too far to say that Vitalian or Bede was trying to say England was like the kingdom of



English Church seemed to be thriving, and had received the welcome addition of both Theodore and Hadrian, there was still no bishop in Mercia to replace the deceased Jaruman. Wulfhere, unable to overcome Theodore's reluctance to consecrate a new bishop, asked Oswiu if he would send Chad to Mercia. Reluctantly, Chad went and behaved in a predictably exemplary manner, but it was his death in Mercia that interested Bede. Bede writes that after Chad had been in Mercia for two and a half years "divine providence ordained a time such as Ecclesiastes speaks of, 'a time for scattering stones and a time for gathering them together.'" <sup>28</sup> The next line explains the means of this harvest:

A plague sent from heaven came upon them that, through the death of the body, translated the living stones of the church from their earthly sites to the heavenly building. After many from the church of this most reverend bishop had been taken from the flesh, his own hour was at hand when he must pass from this world to be with the Lord. <sup>29</sup>

This description of Chad's death from the plague functions on several levels. The most obvious reference is the explicit one from the Book of Ecclesiastes that opens the description, coming before the plague itself is mentioned. The meaning of this

---

heaven from this very flimsy allusion. The final parts of the letter Bede includes are occupied with Vitalian urging Oswiu to remain steadfast in the faith itself. In this concluding passage, Vitalian quotes Matt 6:33 (Luke 12:31). "Seek ye therefore first the kingdom of God, and his justice, and all these things shall be added unto you." ("Quaerite autem primum regnum et iustitiam eius et omnia haec adicientur vobis"), Matt 6:33. "But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his justice: and all these things shall be added unto you." ("Verumtamen quaerite regnum Dei et haec omnia adicientur vobis"), Luke 12:31.

<sup>28</sup> *HE*, iv.3, 339, quoting Ecclesiastes 3:5. "A time to scatter stones, and a time to gather. A time to embrace, and a time to be far from embraces." ("Tempus spargendi lapides et tempus colligendi tempus amplexandi et tempus longe fieri a complexibus"), Eccl 3:5.

<sup>29</sup> "Supervenit namque clades divinitus missa, que per mortem carnis vivos ecclesiae lapides de terrenis sedibus ad aedificium caeleste transferret. Cumque plurimis de ecclesia eiusdem reverentissimi antistitis de carne subtractis veniret hora ipsius, ut transiret ex hoc mundo ad Dominum," *HE*, iv.3, 338-9.

explicit quotation seems clear, and for a reader who could catch nothing more in this passage, appropriate: mortal and fallible man is subject to all states of being, and just as Chad was born, so too must he die. This is an edifying message for this event, and one that both reminds the reader of Chad's humanity and the universality of God's laws.

For the savvier reader, however, the verse from Ecclesiastes introduces another level of meaning.<sup>30</sup> Bede quotes Ecclesiastes 3:5, the passage about the stones, but had he wanted to talk solely about the inevitability of pious, but mortal, Chad's death, he might have found Ecclesiastes 3:2, "a time to be born and a time to die" somewhat more directly apropos.<sup>31</sup> Bede's choice of Ecclesiastes 3:5 served the double purpose of also introducing the metaphor of gathered stones into the passage. Initially the only stone being "gathered" was, presumably, Chad himself, merely in the sense that he had died and gone to God, who had originally "scattered" him. But Bede then says that the plague "sent from heaven came upon them" and that by the deaths of the victims "translated the living stones of the church from their earthly sites to the heavenly building." With this statement, the stone metaphor has become slightly more complex for those of Bede's readers who could

---

<sup>30</sup> Bede's story of Chad's actions in life in this chapter also reinforces Chad's place as a unifier of sacred time. Bede reports that at every thunderstorm Chad was reminded of the terrors of the Last Judgment, and at every storm prayed for reprieve from God, making every thunderstorm his own emotional Apocalypse. *HE*, iii.3, 343-5. For another view of the unity of the personal and universal [A]pocalypses, see Graham D. Caie, *The Judgment Day Theme in Old English Poetry* (Copenhagen, 1976) and Edward L. Ridsen, *Beasts of Time: Apocalyptic Beowulf* (New York, 1994).

<sup>31</sup> "A time to be born and a time to die. A time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted." ("Tempus nascendi et tempus moriendi tempus plantandi et tempus evellendi quod plantatum est"), Eccl 3:2.

follow it, because the words Bede uses to describe these "living stones" (*vivos...lapides*) recall the *lapidem vivum* and *lapides vivi* of the First Epistle of Saint Peter.<sup>32</sup> Unlike the explicit reference to the cycle of life and death that was the literal reading of the quotation from Ecclesiastes, the "living stone" of First Peter is Christ himself, and the believers who follow him are the "living stones" made into "a spiritual house, a holy priesthood."<sup>33</sup> The connection between those who build the eternal house, and indeed, those out of whom this spiritual house is built, and those chosen by God as his own, runs through both the Old Testament and the New Testament.<sup>34</sup> The verses that follow the "living stones" of First Peter quote the Prophecy of Isaiah, and declare that God is "lay[ing] in Sion a cornerstone, elect, precious."<sup>35</sup> Chad is now no longer a stone representing man's common and inevitable mortality, but the chosen faithful, who, in imitation of Christ, create the living church, both as the body of believers on earth and the bride of Christ in heaven.

---

<sup>32</sup> "Unto whom coming, as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men but chosen and made honourable by God: Be you also as living stones built up, a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." ("Ad quem accedentes lapidem vivum ab hominibus quidem reprobatum a Deo autem electum honorificatum et ipsi tamquam lapides vivi superaedificamini domus spiritalis sacerdotium sanctum offerre spiritalia hostias acceptabiles Deo per Iesum Christum"), 1Pet 2:4-5.

<sup>33</sup> 1Pet 2:4-5.

<sup>34</sup> Not only in 1Pet 2:5, but also Eph 2:21, 2Cor 5:1, Psa 117:22, Isa 8:14, Rom 9:33, Acts 4:11, Matt 21:42, Mark 12:10, and also Isa 28:16.

<sup>35</sup> "Wherefore it is said in the scripture: Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious. And he that shall believe in him shall not be confounded." ("Propter quod continet in scriptura ecce pono in Sion lapidem summum angularem electum pretiosum et qui crediderit in eo non confundetur"), 1Pet 2:6. "Therefore thus saith the Lord God: Behold I will lay a stone in the foundations of Sion, a tried stone, a corner stone, a precious stone, founded in the foundation. He that believeth, let him not hasten." ("Idcirco haec dicit Dominus Deus ecce ego mittam in fundamentis Sion lapidem lapidem probatum angularem pretiosum in fundamento fundatum qui crediderit non festinet"), Isa 28:16.

Bede says that this plague, "sent from heaven," took those, Chad included, who were these stones. Once again, Bede's more-skilled readers could see these allusions as suggesting that God's chosen people, originally the Jews of Israel and then the converts of the early Church, were now joined by the Christian English. This was not a matter of "becoming" Israelites or ancient Christians, but rather using the words and imagery that described their state of being chosen, their closeness to God, to signal that the English now enjoyed just such a relationship.

In the final sentence in this description of Chad's death, Bede says that after many had died from the plague, Chad himself finally died from it. This was obvious from the previous sentences, which said that Chad, and the other "living stones" had already expired, but Bede reiterates Chad's death saying that "after many from the church of this most reverend bishop had been taken from the flesh, his own hour was at hand when he must pass from this world to be with the Lord."<sup>36</sup> When Bede's best readers read that, for Chad, *veniret hora ipsius, ut transiret ex hoc mundo*<sup>37</sup> they certainly would have remembered that, in the Gospel of John, *sciens Iesus quia venit eius hora ut transeat ex hoc mundo*.<sup>38</sup> In John, Jesus knows that his time during which the authorities have no power over him<sup>39</sup> is coming to an end and soon

---

<sup>36</sup> *HE*, iv.3, 339, alluding to John 13:1. "Before the festival day of the pasch, Jesus knowing that his hour was come, that he should pass out of this world to the Father: having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them unto the end." ("Ante diem autem festum paschae sciens Iesus quia venit eius hora ut transeat ex hoc mundo ad Patrem cum dilexisset suos qui erant in mundo in finem dilexit eos"), John 13:1.

<sup>37</sup> *HE*, iv.3, 338.

<sup>38</sup> "Jesus knowing that his hour was come, that he should pass out of this world," John 13:1.

<sup>39</sup> "They sought therefore to apprehend him: and no man laid hands on him, because his hour was not yet come." ("Quaerebant ergo eum

his "hour," in which he will be crucified (and transformed) will come. Bede subtly gives Chad just such a moment, in which he must leave his secular cares "to be with the Lord."<sup>40</sup> It is no shock that Bede presented Chad's experiences as mirroring those of Christ, but the moment that Bede chose to have Chad imitate Christ, and the moment in Chad's life at which the comparison arises, deserves more attention. Bede makes Chad's experiences parallel those of Christ at the moment that sacred history is almost completed; the "hour" that Christ is awaiting, and the one that Chad has of his own, is *the* moment of sacred history that, but for the Last Judgment, fulfills all time. It is a moment of completion, and it would be difficult not to see Chad's "hour," at which he departed this world to go to God, as a moment of completion in which English piety has emerged as conversant with, and capable of engaging in, the most profound moments of holiness.

When Bede returns to the advance of the seventh-century plague the reaches of the disease have become broader, now devastating entire religious houses in England. Barking Abbey was a double monastery over which Æthelburh, the sister of Eorcenwold, the bishop of London, presided as mother abbess. As the first male victims of the plague at Barking were being mourned, Æthelburh asked the women of her community where they wished to be buried after their inevitable deaths. Finding the

---

adprehendere et nemo misit in illum manus quia nondum venerat hora eius"), John 7:30.

<sup>40</sup> Later in this same chapter Bede reiterates this conflation of Chad's death with a moment of sacred time: "Nor it is any wonder that he joyfully beheld the day of his death or rather the day of the Lord, whose coming he had always anxiously awaited." ("Non autem mirum, si diem mortis vel potius diem Domini laetus aspexit, quem semper, usque dum veniret, sollicitus expectare curavit."), *HE*, iii.3, 342-3.

sisters unable to decide about such a matter in their distress, Æthelburh had no plan for the location of the cemetery. But Bede tells us that although the sisters could not provide Æthelburh with an answer, she received one from heaven. A little later, after services, some of the religious at Barking went out to visit the graves of the monks who already had been taken by the plague. As they sang by the graves,

suddenly a light appeared from heaven like a great sheet and came upon them all, striking such terror into them that they broke off the chant they were singing in alarm. This resplendent light, in comparison with which the noonday sun seemed dark, soon afterwards rose from the place and moved to the south side of the monastery, that is, to the west of the oratory. There it remained for some time, covering that area until it was withdrawn from their sight into the heavenly heights.<sup>41</sup>

The light "not only intended to guide and receive the souls of Christ's handmaidens into heaven, but was also pointing out the spot where the bodies were to rest, awaiting the resurrection day."<sup>42</sup> There was one final witness to this light who was not outside that night. An older brother who had stayed in the oratory saw, through the cracks in the windows and the door, that "the rays of light which penetrated the cracks of the doors and windows seemed brighter than the brightest daylight" (*quod*

---

<sup>41</sup> "Ecce subito lux emissa caelitus, veluti linteum magnum venit super omnes, tantoque eas stupore perculit, ut etiam canticum quod cantebant tremefactae intermitterent. Ipse autem splendor emissae lucis, in cuius comparatione sol meridianus videri posset obscurus, non multo post illo elevatus de loco in meridianam monasterii partem, hoc est ad occidentem oratorii, secessit ibique aliquandiu remoratus et ea locus operiens, sic videntibus cunctis ad caeli se alta subdixit." *HE*, iv. 7, 356-7.

<sup>42</sup> "Ut nulli esset dubium quin ipsa lux, quae animas famularum Christi esset ductura vel susceptura in caelis, etiam corporibus earum locum in quo requietura et diem resurrectionis essent expectatura monstraret." *HE*, iv.7, 356-9.

*ingressi per rimas ostiorum vel fenestrarum radii lucis omnem diurni luminis viderentur superare fulgorem).*<sup>43</sup>

This light came to resolve Æthelburh's quandary about the placement of the sisters' cemetery, but it did not provide them with respite from the plague's destruction, nor did any of the monks or nuns at Barking ask for it. Æthelburh was distressed that her nuns might not have a proper place ready for their burial, not that they were going to die. For all that the people of the *HE* prayed for health and safety in other moments, only Egbert prayed to be spared from the plague, and then only long enough to atone for squandering his gifts. This plague, "sent from heaven," could not be resisted but also seemed to choose only the holiest—it took only the "living stones" who were going to be building the heavenly church, those who could not be part of that project (or part of it yet, in Egbert's case) were not taken. Those who were preparing to die from the plague at Barking Abbey received a divine light "to guide and receive the souls of Christ's handmaidens into heaven." Perhaps to die from this plague would be an honor and a proof of the spiritual excellence of the victim, and might act as an impetus for those passed over to make improvements, as it had for Egbert.

This is not the first time Bede's readers would have read about something *veluti linteam magnam* descending from heaven to communicate a message to one of God's chosen people. In the Acts of the Apostles, Peter sits alone praying, hungry, when he sees a vessel come down from heaven like a great sheet, *velut linteam*

---

<sup>43</sup> *HE*, iv.7, 358-9.

*magnum*, filled with animals.<sup>44</sup> A voice told Peter to kill and eat the animals, but Peter refused, saying that they were not clean. The voice rebuked him, saying that he should not call anything purified by God unclean, and Peter and the voice repeated this scenario three times. Soon after this vision disappeared, three men came looking for Peter to bring him to a man who, along with his friends, wanted to hear Peter preach. Peter gladly went with them, and upon the enthusiastic welcome he received, told the assembled crowd that although Jews will not mix with Gentiles, they, as Christians, must not behave in that way because God had showed him that no man is unclean.<sup>45</sup>

This message, which Peter himself already knew but had some difficulty accepting, is one Bede refers to repeatedly. Paul's correction of Peter's behavior around Jewish converts was a famous disagreement between Jerome and Augustine, and one to which Bede returns in the *HE*. When discussing the Synod of Whitby, Bede casts the dispute over the calculation of Easter in the terms of whether or not Christians were obliged to obey Mosaic Laws. This is again, for Peter, the same issue; his instinct, based on his past as an observant Jew, told him not to eat the animals provided by God because they were not ritually clean, just as he felt he should not converse with Gentiles. But the message of his faith, that Peter conveys here and that he received by means of that which is *velut linteum magnum* from

---

<sup>44</sup> "And he saw the heaven opened and a certain vessel descending, as it were a great linen sheet let down by the four corners from heaven to the earth" ("Et videt caelum apertum et descendens vas quoddam velut linteum magnum quattuor initiis submitti de caelo in terram"), Acts 10:11. For the full description, see Acts 10:10-28.

<sup>45</sup> "And the voice spoke to him again the second time: That which God hath cleansed, do not thou call common." ("Et vox iterum secundo ad eum quae Deus purificavit ne tu commune dixeris"), Acts 10:15.



heaven, was that the old laws had passed away and that the new Law was that of Christ's love and the unity of all of his followers. Later in the chapter, Peter reiterates this message that being beloved by God is no longer decided by inclusion in an ethnic group, but by believing in Christ.<sup>46</sup> The Gentiles in Peter's audience here in Acts eagerly believe and speak in tongues, amazing Peter's Jewish companions.<sup>47</sup> The same story is repeated in the next chapter of Acts,<sup>48</sup> with Peter narrating his experience, is a passage even more direct about the meaning of this incident:

And when I had begun to speak, the Holy Ghost fell upon them, as upon us also in the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how that he said: John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost. If then God gave them the same grace, as to us also who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ; who was I, that could withstand God?<sup>49</sup>

That which is *velut linteum magnam* reveals to Peter the principle that all men, created by God, are spiritually clean and that Gentiles are now among God's people. This message of inclusion based on faith may well have jumped to the minds of Bede's readers when the light that was *veluti linteum magnam* descended

---

<sup>46</sup> "And Peter opening his mouth, said: in very deed I perceive that God is not a respecter of persons. But in every nation, he that feareth him and worketh justice is acceptable to him." ("Aperiens autem Petrus os dixit in veritate conperi quoniam non est personarum acceptor Deus sed in omni gente qui timet eum et operatur iustitiam acceptus est illi"), Acts 10:34-5.

<sup>47</sup> "And the faithful of the circumcision, who came with Peter, were astonished for that the grace of the Holy Ghost was poured out upon the Gentiles also. For they heard them speaking with tongues and magnifying God." ("Et obstipuerunt ex circumcissione fideles qui venerant cum Petro quia et in nationes gratia Spiritus Sancti effusa est audiebant enim illos loquentes linguis et magnificantes Deum"), Acts 10:45-6.

<sup>48</sup> Acts 11:5-18.

<sup>49</sup> "Cum autem coepissem loqui decidit Spiritus Sanctus super eos sicut et in nos in initio recordatus sum autem verbi Domini sicut dicebat Iohannes quidem baptizavit aqua vos autem baptizabimini Spiritu Sancto si ergo eandem gratiam dedit illis Deus sicut et nobis qui credidimus in Dominum Iesum Christum ego quis eram qui possem prohibere Deum," Acts 11:15-17.

over the singing mourners at Barking Abbey.<sup>50</sup> This incident in the yard of Barking Abbey that Bede relates in the *HE* establishes England as existing in a trifecta of holiness: the English are ferried by this heaven-sent plague to create the Church-to-Come, receive direct messages from God, via this light from heaven that indicates their chosen status, and, fittingly, as faithful Gentiles who receive enlightenment the same way it descended to Peter, *velut linteum magnam*, are the new Chosen People.<sup>51</sup>

In the description of the light at Barking Abbey, Bede casts the events of the *HE* in terms used for spectacular events of the apostolic Church. But Bede also portrayed the English Church as mirroring some of the more mundane, but no less important, practices of early Christians. Bede relates that Hild lived exactly half of her life in the secular world and then devoted the second half of it to serving God. She lived at several religious establishments before founding a monastery at Whitby, or perhaps only reorganizing it—Bede is not entirely sure.<sup>52</sup> Bede's uncertainty on this point is telling. In the

---

<sup>50</sup> There is one other place in the Bible, other than the one mentioned in Acts, where the word "*linteum*" is used: John 13:4. Here it is a clearly sheet of cloth that is implied (translated in the Douay-Rheims version as "towel"), and one that does not display any divine properties, not descending from heaven but remaining firmly earth-bound. This instance in John contains none of the context of the instance from Acts.

<sup>51</sup> This is only one of several valid readings of the light at Barking Abbey, although it is one that, considering the strength of the pull of the *linteum* quotation, would have been unavoidable. The light is described in imagery that also recalls Paul's revelation on the road to Damascus (Acts 9, Acts 22), and also of the Apocalypse (Matt 24:29, Mark 13:24-27, Luke 21:25-28, Isa 13:10-13, Isa 34:4, Eze 32:7-8, Joel 2:10, Amos 8:9, Rev 6:12-13). Also, when reading that the Barking light was "brighter than the brightest daylight" ("*diurni luminis viderentur superare fulgorem*"), Bede's readers' minds might have turned to the description of the eyes of God being "far brighter than the sun" ("*multo plus lucidiores super solem*"), Sirach (Ecclesiasticus) 23:28.

<sup>52</sup> There is an immense body of historiography on Hild's Whitby. Lawrence Butler, Christopher J. Dunn, and Paul S. Barnwell, "The confusion of

following lines Bede claims knowledge of the daily activities and character of Hild's Whitby monastery, but had such a shaky handle on its origins that he was not certain if Hild founded the monastery herself (an action she had undertaken before, Bede says) or if she came to right the affairs of an established house.<sup>53</sup> Perhaps Bede's familiarity with the habits of the Whitby community had less to do with the actual daily happenings within the monastery's precincts than with the presentation of a more profound spiritual truth.

According to Bede, the Rule Hild created at Whitby focused on "teaching them to observe strictly the virtues of justice, devotion, and chastity and other virtues too, but above all things to continue in peace and charity" (*et quidem multam ibi quoque iustitiae pietatis et castimoniae ceterarumque virtutum, sed maxime pacis et caritatis custodiam docuit*).<sup>54</sup> This listing of virtues is very much like the one in the First Epistle of Paul to Timothy in which Paul describes how Christians, all of whom are servants, should behave: "But thou, O man of God, fly these

---

conversion: Streanæshalch, Strensall and Whitby and the Northumbrian church," in M. Carver (ed.), *The Cross Goes North: Processes of Conversion in Northern Europe, AD 300-1300* (York, 2003), 311-26; Catherine E. Karkov, "Whitby, Jarrow and the commemoration of death in Northumbria," in J. Hawkes and S. Mills (eds.), *Northumbria's Golden Age* (Stroud, 1999), 126-35; Tania Styles, "Whitby revisited: Bede's explanation of Streanaeshalch," *Nomina: Journal of the Society for Name Studies in Britain and Ireland*, 21, (1998), 133-48; Barbara Mitchell, "Anglo-Saxon double monasteries," *History Today*, 45:10, (1995), 33-9; Gillian R. Overing and Clare A. Lees, "Birthing bishops and fathering poets: Bede, Hild, and the relations of cultural production," *Exemplaria: A Journal of Theory in Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 6:1, (1994), 35-65; Peter Hunter Blair, "Whitby as a centre of learning in the seventh century," in M. Lapidge and H. Gneuss (eds.), *Learning and Literature in Anglo-Saxon England. Studies presented to Peter Clemoes on the occasion of his sixty-fifth birthday* (Cambridge, 1985), 3-32; Kenneth Veitch, "The Columban Church in northern Britain, 664-717: a reassessment," *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, 127, (1997), 627-47.

<sup>53</sup> HE, iv.23, 407-9.

<sup>54</sup> HE, iv.23, 408-9.

things: and pursue justice, godliness, faith, charity, patience, mildness" (*tu autem o homo Dei haec fuge sectare vero iustitiam pietatem fidem caritatem patientiam mansuetudinem*).<sup>55</sup> Although all of these virtues are prescribed in the Bible, Bede's grouping reflects the arrangement from First Timothy very closely, connecting these early adherents of Paul's words with the inmates of Hild's first foundation—or rejuvenation—of Whitby. And although all of these virtues are vaguely suggested throughout the Bible, this verse from First Timothy is the only place in the Bible in which the qualities of *iusticia* and *pietas* both appear.<sup>56</sup> Bede continues by noting that in Hild's Whitby "after the example of the primitive church, no one was rich, no one was in need, for they had all things in common and none had any private property."<sup>57</sup> This is the same concern addressed in the passage of First Timothy previous to the one to which Bede's list of virtues alluded: money is divisive and desiring it has compromised the faith of many.<sup>58</sup> But this sentence in the *HE* contains another verbal echo of the practices of the early Church in which poverty was eradicated, as was the temptation of wealth, by the communal

---

<sup>55</sup> 1Tim 6:11.

<sup>56</sup> Although both of these words appear in Baruch 5:4, they are not there representing prescribed virtues. This verse in Baruch describes God's naming of Jerusalem: "For thy name shall be named to thee by God for ever: the peace of justice, and honour of piety." ("Nominabitur enim tibi nomen tuum a Deo in sempiternum Pax iustitiae et Honor pietatis"), Bar 5:4.

<sup>57</sup> "Its ut in exemplum primitivae ecclesiae nullus ibi dives, nullus esset egens, omnibus essent omnia communia, cum nihil cuiusquam esse videretur proprium." *HE*, iv.23, 408-9.

<sup>58</sup> "For the desire of money is the root of all evils; which some coveting have erred from the faith and have entangled themselves in many sorrows." ("Radix enim omnium malorum est cupiditas quam quidam appetentes erraverunt a fide et inseruerunt se doloribus multis"), 1Tim 6:10.

ownership of all goods:<sup>59</sup> when Bede's readers read that at Hild's Whitby "they had all things in common" (*omnibus essent omnis communia*)<sup>60</sup> their minds would have been drawn, even if Bede had not already mentioned the practices of the early Church, to the moment of unity among believers when the Church was new and "all things were common unto them" (*erant illis omnia communia*).<sup>61</sup> With these two lines in the *HE* Bede has drawn powerful connections between Hild's establishment at Whitby and the purity and practices of the early Church. It seems, in fact, that the early Church is just what Hild is building, or interestingly, rebuilding, at Whitby—the site at which the mature English Church was first revealed.

If the events at Whitby represented the possibility of a piety comparable to that of the early Church existing in England, the events at the monastery at Coldingham highlight the potential dangers of this privilege. The monastery at Coldingham was commonly thought to have burned accidentally, Bede reports, but he reveals that "all who knew the truth"<sup>62</sup> could tell that the fire was divine judgment on the monastery's inhabitants "because of the wickedness of those who dwelt there."<sup>63</sup> Here Bede

---

<sup>59</sup> "And all they that believed were together and had all things common. Their possessions and goods they sold and divided them to all, according as every one had need." ("Omnes etiam qui credebant erant pariter et habebant omnia communia possessiones et substantias vendebant et dividebant illa omnibus prout cuique opus erat"), Acts 2:44-5. This passage from the *HE* also echoes Acts 4:32-4.

<sup>60</sup> *HE*, iv.23, 408-9.

<sup>61</sup> Acts 4:32, although the parallels between this section of Acts and *HE* iv.23 continue through Acts 4:34. For more on this theme, also see the *Liber Responsionum*, *HE*, i.27.

<sup>62</sup> *HE*, iv.25, 421.

<sup>63</sup> "About this time, the monastery of virgins at Coldingham, which has previously been mentioned, was burned down through carelessness. However, all who knew the truth were easily able to judge that it happened because of the wickedness of those who dwelt there and especially of those who were supposed to be its leaders. But God in His

explicitly acknowledges that there are two narratives at work: one for the uninitiated who see only the actions of men with earthly eyes and one for those who can spot the workings of God in the events of the world. In the same vein, Bede's attribution of the origin of the fire being in "the wickedness of those who dwelt there" is put in words that reference Psalm 106: the *malita inhabitantium in eo*<sup>64</sup> at Coldingham is very much like the *malitia habitatorum eius*<sup>65</sup> that describes the rewards of the wicked in an otherwise positive psalm of praise on the limitless power of God to provide for those he loves.<sup>66</sup> The inmates of Coldingham had a chance to rescue themselves from the doom of which God warned them, like, Bede notes, the people of Nineveh, but the people of Coldingham were not moved.<sup>67</sup> Although we have not yet been told the story of their debauchery, Bede is making it clear to his readers that just as the holy can fall into sin, so can those who are willing to sacrifice for God's love find repentance and forgiveness in his mercy. Even without hearing the story of Coldingham, Bede's readers already knew that they both

---

mercy did not fail to give warning of approaching punishment so that they might have been led to amend their ways and, by fasting, tears, and prayers, to have averted the wrath of the just Judge from themselves as did the people of Nineveh." ("His temporibus monasterium virginum, quod Coludi Urben cognominant, cuius et supra meminimus, per culpam incuriae flammis absumentum est. Quod tamen a malitia inhabitantium in eo, et praecipue illorum qui maiores esse videbantur, contigisse mones qui novere facillime potuerunt advertere. Sed non defuit puniendis admonito divinitiae pietatis, qua correcti per ieiunia fletus et preces iram a se instar Ninevitarum iusti Iudicis averterent."), *HE*, iv.25, 420-1.

<sup>64</sup> *HE*, iv.25, 421

<sup>65</sup> "A fruitful land into barrenness, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein." ("Terram fructiferam in salsuginem prae malitia habitatorum eius"), *Psa* 106:34.

<sup>66</sup> For more on the uses of psalms in early medieval monastic prayers, see J. Dyer, "The Psalms in monastic prayer," in Nancy Van Deusen (ed.), *The Place of the Psalms in the Intellectual Culture of the Middle Ages* (Albany, 1999), 59-89.

<sup>67</sup> *HE*, iv.25, 421-423. For the verses describing the events in which Nineveh was spared God's wrath because of its piety, see *Jon* 3:5-10.

must be on the watch for the signs of God's disfavor, the kinds of signs that the people of Coldingham apparently received but dismissed. Bede's readers should be all the more watchful because, even though they still do not know the nature of the offenses at Coldingham, they now know that events in England are subject to both the benefits and dangers of participating in sacred history. There must have been a thrilling fear knowing that, on however small a scale, what had happened in Nineveh could happen in England; even though the Ninevites angered God, they also, by their repentance, placated him. Even more excitingly, by their very participation in these events, they were watched by, and were in contact with, God. Bede, even at his most critical of the English Church, presents a breathtaking possibility: that England's piety had attracted God's gaze, as the psalm, which promised that God was always watching those who always watched him, suggested.<sup>68</sup>

Although this story is described by Bede as that of the sins of Coldingham, the first details we receive are about a monk of Coldingham named Adamnan who came to his life in the monastery after he had committed, and repented, a sin.<sup>69</sup> This sin, the memory of which haunted and terrified Adamnan for the rest of his life, is undescribed, and by the horror in which Adamnan holds it, seems beyond description and intentionally universal. Young Adamnan, fearful for his soul, "confessed his guilt and asked

---

<sup>68</sup> This is the sentiment of one of the psalms Bede alluded to in his VC. "Behold the eyes of the Lord are on them that fear him: and on them that hope in his mercy." ("Ecce oculus Domini super timentes eum et expectantes misericordiam eius"), Psa 32:18.

<sup>69</sup> For another view on sin and atonement in early medieval Northumbrian sources, see C.A. Ireland, "Penance and prayer in water: an Irish practice in Northumbrian hagiography," *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies*, 34 (1998), 51-66.

for advice as to how he could flee from the wrath to come."<sup>70</sup> Bede's choice of words here recalls John the Baptist's exhortation against the Pharisees and Sadducees, two groups combined in the gospels as the united face of Judaism attached to Mosaic Law.<sup>71</sup> When John asks the Pharisees and Sadducees "who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?," they are coming to the Jordan to be baptized by him. Their unfitness for John's baptism, and John's scorn, are both founded in their slavish devotion to the letter of the law in their daily lives. The enactment of the law, no matter how carefully performed, is no substitute for the spirit of love that characterizes faith in Christ. This is, I believe, another commentary by Bede on what he saw as the crisis of English Christianity: the prominence of those who obeyed the letter of Church law and, unlike their Columban forebears, did not possess the soul of faithfulness (which was, in itself, as Bede has shown, the most effective argument for conversion). Although never named outright, this nuanced reading suggests that this is, in fact, Adamnan's nameless sin that was so great that he feared damnation for it.

The priest with whom Adamnan consults tells him to pray, fast, and sing the psalms, "so that, when you come before the presence of the Lord with your confession, you may deserve to

---

<sup>70</sup> "Petiitque ut consilium sibi daret quo posset fugere a ventura ira," *HE*, iv.25, 422-3.

<sup>71</sup> "And seeing many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them: Ye brood of vipers, who hath shewed you to flee from the wrath to come?" ("Videns autem multos Pharisaeorum et Sadducaeorum venientes ad baptismum suum dixit eis progenies viperarum quis demonstravit vobis fugere a futura ira"), Matt. 3:7; "He said therefore to the multitudes that went forth to be baptized by him: Ye offspring of vipers, who hath shewed you to flee from the wrath to come?" ("Dicebat ergo ad turbas quae exiebant ut baptizarentur ab ipso genimina viperarum quis ostendit vobis fugere a ventura ira"), Luke 3:7.



find mercy." <sup>72</sup> For those readers who knew the psalms well, they would have recognized that the priest was using the words of a psalm to describe coming into the presence of the Lord. The psalm says, concerning God, that one should "come before his presence with thanksgiving" <sup>73</sup> and continues on to extol the greatness of God, and man's desire to "adore and fall down: and weep before the Lord that made us." <sup>74</sup> Adamnan, like the law-bound Pharisees and Sadducees who, in the face of damnation, sought to find a spiritual leader who would lead them to redemption, is now told that through searching his soul (fasting, praying, and singing the psalms) he will find that which will allow him to stand in the presence of the Lord, and that is, Bede tells us through that reference to the psalm, an overwhelming love for God.

Adamnan then undertakes a regimen of spectacular asceticism in which he spends his nights sleepless in prayer and eats only twice a week. This extreme devotion was supposed to last only a short while until his next meeting with the priest, but when Adamnan's priest was unable to keep their appointment, Adamnan continued in this habit for the rest of his life. The success of Adamnan's transformation from "Pharisee and Sadducee" to the adorer of God described in the psalm can be assessed in Bede's summation of this stage of Adamnan's life: "though he had begun this way of life in the fear of God and in penitence for his guilt, he now continued in it unweariedly for the love of God and

---

<sup>72</sup> "Quo praeoccupando faciem Domini in confessione propitium eum invenire merearis," *HE*, iv.25, 423.

<sup>73</sup> "Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving; and make a joyful noise to him with psalms." ("Praeoccupemus vultum eius in actione gratiarum in canticis iubilemus ei"), *Psa* 94:2.

<sup>74</sup> "Come let us adore and fall down: and weep before the Lord that made us." ("Venite adoremus et curvemur flectamus genua ante faciem Domini factoris nostri"), *Psa* 94:6.

because he delighted in its rewards." <sup>75</sup> It was in this same language that Bede categorized the battle between the Columban and Wilfridian forces over the dating of Easter, between those who kept the law, but not the spirit of the faith, and those who delighted in God. Bede shows the success of Adamnan's efforts in aid of his own salvation in his final story about him. When returning to Coldingham with some other brothers after a journey, Adamnan sees in a vision that the monastery will burn. When questioned by the mother abbess, Adamnan admits that he has had another vision in which he was told by a spiritual visitor that the monastery would come to ruin because of the impious debauchery that took place within.

Bede's account of the story of Coldingham ends with its destruction. After receiving Adamnan's warning in the form of visions he received concerning the monastery's destruction, some of the inmates were moved to penitence, but their efforts were superficial, and, as Bede wrote, "when they said 'peace and safety', suddenly the predicted punishment and vengeance fell upon them." <sup>76</sup> The cry of "'peace and safety,'" which Bede quotes here, is from Paul's First Epistle to the Thessalonians and describes the sudden destruction, in a moment of apparent security that the unprepared will experience when Christ returns.<sup>77</sup> But believers, the verse continues, like the warned

---

<sup>75</sup> "Et quod causa divini timoris semel ob reatum conpunctus coeperat, iam causa divini amoris delectatus praemiis indefessus agebat," *HE*, iv.25, 424-5.

<sup>76</sup> "Et cum dicerent 'Pax et securitas,' extimplo praefatae ultionis sunt poena multari," *HE*, iv.25, 426-7.

<sup>77</sup> "For when they shall say: Peace and security; then shall sudden destruction come upon them, as the pains upon her that is with child, and they shall not escape." ("Cum enim dixerint pax et securitas tunc repentinus eis superveniet interitus sicut dolor in utero habenti et non

inhabitants of Nineveh and Coldingham, should be able to see the signs of the coming wrath and know what they must do to escape it.

Bede learned of the events in the monastery at Coldingham from a priest who had lived there and had then moved to Jarrow after Coldingham's destruction. Again Bede explicitly states his reason for including this episode was so that it might stand as a warning to his readers "about the workings of the Lord and how terrible He is in His dealings with the children of men" (*quam terribilis in consiliis super filios hominum*).<sup>78</sup> In this sentence Bede is quoting the text of a psalm, "who is terrible in his counsels over the sons of men" (*terribilia consilia super filiis hominum*)<sup>79</sup> in which the psalmist recounts the power of God to afflict, but also to protect.<sup>80</sup> This final reference in the story of Coldingham encapsulates the two points of this story effectively: the faithful should be wary of displeasing God and watchful for the signs of his anger, but at the same time, from the truly faithful who regard God with adoration and wondrous delight, it is praise given in loving joy that he finds most pleasing.

I think these latter chapters of Book IV form a turning point in the *HE*. Rather than explaining the profound events of

---

effugient" ), 1Thess 5:3 (which itself references the motto of Roman coins from the imperial period).

<sup>78</sup> *HE*, iv.25, 427, quoting, Psa. 65:5, but also alluding to Psa 106:8, 15, 21, 31.

<sup>79</sup> "Come and see the works of God; who is terrible in his counsels over the sons of men." ("Venite et videte opera Dei terribilia consilia super filiis hominum" ), Psa 65:5.

<sup>80</sup> "Let the mercies of the Lord give glory to him: and his wonderful works to the children of men." ("Confiteantur Domino misericordiam eius et mirabilia eius in filios hominum" ), Psa 106:8. This phrase is repeated three more times in this psalm: 106:15, 106:21, and 106:31.

the English past, Bede was now thinking of the English future. No longer concerned with the stories of conversion and favor, he started to reference biblical passages about the actions, good and bad, of a people already chosen and learning to deal with their exalted state. These references about the early Church show a group of missionaries struggling to establish the practical machinery that can accommodate the breadth of their vision, and the references Bede selected about Old Testament Israelites show the struggles of a people learning both how to be chosen by God and to retain God's favor, and, when necessary, to acquire his mercy. In this example perhaps Adamnan is the model of all Chosen People, who are first chosen by God's grace, being, of course, tainted by sin—even if it is a sin as nebulous and unnamed as Adamnan's.

Directly after the story of Adamnan's sin and Coldingham's destruction, Bede tells of the deaths of two pious men: King Caedwalla in Rome and Archbishop Theodore in Canterbury. Although Caedwalla represents the best elements of English kingship, the more damaging loss here is of Theodore. He was sent to the English Church during its formative period in the mid-seventh century, a period in which, as Bede describes in the *HE*, the English exhibited the characteristics of a people chosen by God. Readers of the *HE* previously had seen the deaths of early leaders of the English Church presented by Bede in the words that described the deaths of patriarchs in the Bible, and Theodore's death is described in the same words by Bede here. Bede says

Theodore died after having been told of his approaching end in a dream, *senex et plenus dierum* ("old and full of days").<sup>81</sup>

After basing his description of Theodore's death on this Old Testament model, Bede says that Theodore and the other archbishops of Canterbury are buried in their church of St. Peter, "'bodies buried in peace but in their name liveth throughout all generations.'" To put it briefly, the English Church made more spiritual progress while he was archbishop than ever before.<sup>82</sup> The verse Bede quotes is from a chapter of Sirach (Ecclesiasticus) in which the writer recounts and praises the legacy of the patriarchs.<sup>83</sup> They are lauded not for their actions alone, but for the good works they set in motion by their own deeds and by their children; they set the stage for their people to live in an age of holiness. The verse Bede quotes comes from a chapter that describes the covenants made between God and these great patriarchs, and the resulting favor God showed to their people. Having such men as elders and founders is the guarantee of blessedness; this is another way that Bede has shown that the English, spiritually fathered by men like Theodore, are living in

---

<sup>81</sup> *HE*, v.8, 473. For an example of this phrase in the Old Testament, see Job 42:16, and for an explanation of its significance in the *HE*, see above, Chapter Four. As mentioned previously, this is not quoting for the purpose of making the reader recall the place where you first knew it and bring this current information back to that, rather this is about locating that previously-known information and pulling it into the current information—this is not about making Theodore a patriarch, but about making patriarchs in the age of Bede's England. This is about pulling the biblical past into the contemporary present, not taking Anglo-Saxon England into the past.

<sup>82</sup> "'Corpora ipsorum in pace sepulta sunt, et nomen/eorum vivet in generationes et generationes'. Ut enim breviter dicam, tantum profectus spiritualis tempore praesulatus illus Anglorum ecclesiae, quantum numquam antea potuere, ceperunt." *HE*, v.8, 474-5.

<sup>83</sup> "Their bodies are buried in peace, and their name liveth unto generation and generation." ("Corpora ipsorum in pace sepulta sunt et nomen eorum vivet in generationes et generations"), *Ecclus* (Sirach) 44:14.

the mold of the Israelites of the Old Testament. To have a leader who lived and died as a patriarch is perhaps the "progress" made by the English Church during Theodore's tenure that Bede writes about—this was one of the factors that allowed the English to ascend into the position they held in sacred history in Bede's eyes.

After Bede tells his readers that England has been home to a new generation of patriarchs, like Theodore, he then tells a story about Egbert that shows there were new prophets to match. Egbert had already been marked as extraordinarily holy in the *HE*, and after surviving the seventh-century plague he resolved to go into exile and preach to any unconverted people. Wishing to go to the place where the need was most urgent, Egbert was determined to preach in Germany, where he knew missionaries were in great demand. As he prepared for his journey, one of the brothers of the monastery in which he was staying began to receive visions. In the visions, the brother was visited by his old abbot, Boisil, Cuthbert's mentor at Melrose. In these visions Boisil told the brother to inform Egbert that he must not go on the journey he proposed, but instead go to Iona to ensure the orthodoxy of those residing there. Uncertain of the veracity of the brother's vision, and even more strongly opposed to canceling his plans, Egbert repeatedly ignored the messages the brother carried from Boisil. But each time that Egbert disregarded Boisil's message, the brother received another vision telling him to stress to Egbert the importance of abandoning his plan for Germany and traveling to Iona instead. Egbert was finally convinced of the authenticity of the brother's vision, but ignored its meaning

nonetheless, and prepared for his continental trip unabated. The packed boat waited days for a good wind, only to be caught in a sudden and destructive storm before it even sailed. When the gale was over, Egbert and his fellow prospective travelers found their belongings intact, but the rest of the cargo lost and the boat itself foundered in the water. Upon seeing this, Egbert said, "quoting the words of the prophet, 'For my sake this great tempest is upon you,'" after which he decided to obey Boisil's request and give up his German mission.<sup>84</sup>

To a reader unaware of the biblical implications of the phrase Egbert just uttered, his sudden willingness to abandon a voyage he had clung to, even in the face of commandments to the contrary, seems inexplicable. But for a reader who knew the Bible, this phrase not only explained Egbert's actions, but, also, by aligning him with the original speaker of these words, made him all the holier. The verse Egbert quoted was spoken in the Bible by the prophet Jonas while he was caught in a storm after disobeying the command of God, "And he said to them: take me up, and cast me into the sea, and the sea shall be calm to you: for I know for my sake this great tempest is upon you."<sup>85</sup> Jonas had been told by God where he should go preach, but, being afraid, Jonas had tried to flee on a ship bound for another city. As the ship was tossed in the divinely-controlled storm, the crew began to suspect, and later came to know, that Jonas's disobedience was the cause of their current danger. Jonas

---

<sup>84</sup> "Tum ipse quasi propheticum illud dicens, quia 'propter me est tempestas haec', subtraxit se illi profectioni, et remanere domi passus est." *HE*, v.9, 478-9.

<sup>85</sup> "Et dixit ad eos tollite me et mittite in mare et cessabit mare a vobis scio enim quoniam propter me tempestas grandis haec super vos," Jon 1:12.

acknowledged his guilt when confronted with the sailors' questions, and he offered himself to be thrown into the waves in order to calm the storm. The sea calmed as soon as Jonas was thrown in, but this was only the beginning of his trial. He was then swallowed by the great fish, and, after praying to God, returned to dry land. Restored to the world, Jonas undertook the mission on which God had originally sent him: to preach to the people of Nineveh. Although on the path to destruction for their sins, the people of Nineveh listened to the preaching of Jonas and repented, and were saved from the horrible fate that had seemed inevitable.

Egbert follows the model of Jonas, the unwilling but ultimately successful prophet, who initially resists God's plan but eventually completes his given task. When Egbert spoke that verse from the Book of Jonas, he was acknowledging the futility of asserting his own will in the face of God's commands and also surrendering his own plans to the greater agenda of sacred history. When Egbert said this, Bede's readers would have known that it did not just mean that Egbert knew God was present and he was no longer going to Germany, but rather that he was like Jonas: a prophet of God, whose services were so special and necessary that God was willing to coax him into his proper role. If, in the example of Coldingham England was shown to have places like Nineveh, in Egbert it had a Jonas, and with him the means for repentance.<sup>86</sup>

---

<sup>86</sup> Also, the parallel between Jonas and Egbert continues in the fates of their would-be companions on their voyages unsanctioned by God. Just as the sailors that had taken Jonas on their ship had to pray and sacrifice to be released from the lingering effects of Jonas's disobedience, so did Egbert's companion find himself on an unsuccessful mission. After



The first line of the next chapter reiterates this view of the events of the *HE*'s present mirroring those of biblical texts: "About this time a memorable miracle occurred in Britain like those of ancient times."<sup>87</sup> This opening ostensibly introduces the story of Drythelm—but the reader does not know that yet because Bede does not name the subject of the story until its very end. Colgrave and Mynors assume that Bede's reasons for withholding the subject's identity until the very end of the story was to increase its dramatic punch and is evidence of Bede's considerable narrative skills.<sup>88</sup> Although the story's structure undeniably showcases Bede's talents, I think that the dramatic impact of withholding Drythelm's name was likely negligible compared to the power of rendering the subject of this story as the anonymous everyman until the very last moment when Bede was forced to reveal his particular identity. The story of Drythelm describes a realization, a coming of age, in which the full potential of English piety is disclosed. This is the moment of awakening, for England, and possibly, for Bede's readers, as well. This was the story, at this critical point in the *HE*, where all of the signs contained in the text coalesce into a coherent revelation of the place of Bede's present.

---

Egbert found he could not go to the continent to preach, one of his companions, Wihtberht, went without him. After two years of failure, he returned and lived the life of a hermit, unable to help others, Bede tells us, but at least able to provide a good example for the people of his own place. It seems that Wihtberht suffered from the same fate as Jonas's sailors: the very voyage was poisoned by the prophet's disobedience, and the whole venture should be abandoned because it can never be righted. *HE*, v.9, 479-81.

<sup>87</sup> "Hi temporibus miraculum memorabile et antiquorum simile in Brittaniam factum est." *HE*, v. 12, 488-9.

<sup>88</sup> *HE*, 498, n. 1.

If the events of the *HE* have shown the English to be living in a present blessed with divine attentions similar to the biblical past, this story, as Bede warns, presents an undeniable parallel. The anonymous Northumbrian, whom we later learn is Drythelm, died of a long illness during the night. At dawn, surrounded by his pious and devoted family, this man came back to life. His terrified family ran, but his adoring wife stayed with him as he explained why he had returned. He said that he had indeed been dead, but that he had come back to life so that he could live differently than he had before. This man prayed until daylight, and then divided his possessions between his wife, his sons, and himself, and then gave his own share to the poor. As soon as he was freed from his worldly life he went to the monastery at Melrose, received the tonsure, and lived a life of isolation and penance.<sup>89</sup> That the dead could be brought back to life in Bede's Northumbria spiritually locates both this time and this place as one in which, as Bede tells the reader from the start, events like those of the Bible could occur. Drythelm is perhaps not brought back to life so much as sent back to the world as an instrument to declare God's will. The miracle of Drythelm's story, ultimately, is not his Lazarus-like return from death, but his account of his experiences while dead; he is less the miracle himself and more the messenger. The experience the still-anonymous Drythelm had while dead is the subject of the rest of this lengthy chapter, and provides a climactic moment for the *HE*.

---

<sup>89</sup> *HE*, v.12, 488-99.

Upon dying, Drythelm found himself " 'guided by a man of shining countenance and wearing bright robes.' " <sup>90</sup> They silently walked toward "the direction of the rising of the sun at the summer solstice" and were then in a deep valley. <sup>91</sup> Drythelm saw two tortuous regions, one of extreme heat and fire and the other of hail and bitter snow. Each side was filled with souls seeking relief from the other side, only to find themselves unable to bear their current condition and leaping back to the torture from which they had so recently escaped. Horrified, Drythelm thought to himself that this must be hell, but his prescient guide told him that it was not.

Being led away from these twinned torments, frightened Drythelm realized that so dense a darkness was surrounding him that eventually he could see nothing but his guide. Bede's Drythelm says that "as we went on 'through the shades in the lone night,' there suddenly appeared before us masses of noisome flame" rising up and falling back into a pit. <sup>92</sup> Abandoned by his guide, Drythelm looked back more closely at the balls of fire he saw that carried with them were the souls of men. Alone in this place of horror and surrounded by the stench rising from the flames, Drythelm heard the sounds of cries and jeers behind him. Eventually the scene Drythelm heard came into view and he saw the evil spirits abusing their human captives, who came from all walks of life. Having dispatched these men and women into the flames, the evil spirits came at Drythelm himself, frightening

<sup>90</sup> "'Lucidus' inquires 'aspectu et clarus erat indumento, qui me docebat.'" *HE*, v.12, 488-9.

<sup>91</sup> "Ut videbatur mihi, contra ortum solis solstitialem;" *HE*, v.12, 488-9.

<sup>92</sup> "Et cum progredieremur 'sola sub nocte per umbras', ecce subito apparent ante nos crebri flammaram tetraarum," *HE*, v.12, 490-1.

and threatening him. But despite their efforts they were unable to harm him. Safe, but unable to escape, Drythelm looked for help and saw his rescuer coming: "and then there appeared behind me, on the road by which I had come, something like a bright star glimmering in the darkness which gradually grew and came rapidly towards me." <sup>93</sup> As the darkness encompasses Drythelm, Bede says he walks "through the shades in the lone night" (*sola sub nocte per umbras*). These are Vergil's words from the scene in the *Aeneid* in which Aeneas, anxious to receive guidance from his dead father, travels to the underworld to speak with him, guided by the Sibyl through the darkness, *sola sub nocte per umbram*.<sup>94</sup>

Having been rejoined by his guide, Drythelm was taken "in the direction of the rising of the winter sun" into a place of open brightness.<sup>95</sup> In front of him was an impenetrable wall infinitely long and tall, upon which they were suddenly standing. From here Drythelm saw a beautiful field filled with the overwhelmingly lovely scent of sweet flowers, and filled with light; "so great was the light that flooded all this place that it seemed to be clearer than the brightness of daylight or the rays of the noontide sun." <sup>96</sup> The field, the Plain of the Blessed, was full of blissful, white-robed people, and as Drythelm walked through the crowds with his guide (apparently having descended from the wall), he thought that this must be heaven, but his guide assured him it was not.

---

<sup>93</sup> "Apparvit retro via qua veneram quasi fulgor stellae micantis inter tenebras, qui paulatim crescens, et ad/me ocius festinans," *HE*, v. 12, 492-3.

<sup>94</sup> "Ibant obscuri sola sub nocte per umbram/ perque domos Ditis vacuas et inanias regna," *Aeneid* vi.268.

<sup>95</sup> "Contra ortum solis brumalem," *HE*, v.12, 492-3.

<sup>96</sup> "Tanta autem lux cuncta ea loca perfuderat, ut omni splendore diei sive solis meridiani radiis videretur praeclarior." *HE*, v. 12, 492-3.

After this field, Drythelm's guide brought him to another, " 'more gracious light than before; and amidst it I heard the sweetest sound of people singing,' " and smelled a more wonderful scent.<sup>97</sup> Drythelm hoped to remain here, but his guide took him away again, pausing to question Drythelm once they were again in the happy field. Upon being asked if he understood all of the things he had seen, Drythelm replied in the negative, and so his guide explained their various destinations to him. The places Drythelm had seen were heaven and hell and their respective waiting areas. The place of alternating heat and cold contained the souls of those who delayed their repentance until the end of their lives. By virtue of their eventual confessions, these souls will come to heaven at the day of judgment, but need to be punished for their wrongdoing until then. The flaming pit of souls was indeed hell, and those who come to that end will remain there for eternity. The white-robed inhabitants of the field are the good and just, who are waiting until the Day of Judgment to enter heaven, which itself was the unreachable light where Drythelm so wanted to stay, where those who die already perfect can immediately enter. His guide then told Drythelm that he must again live on earth, and that, if he used his time wisely, he might be able to join the white-robed souls rejoicing until they are received into heaven. The guide then reveals to Drythelm that he knows that this fate is within Drythelm's reach because during their journey he tested him. When the guide left him at the mouth of hell it was to see how he fared when faced with the

---

<sup>97</sup> "Ante nos multo maiorem luminis gratiam quam prius, in qua etiam vocem cantantium dulcissimam audivi;" *HE*, v.12, 494-5.

evil spirits, and when he saw their reaction to him, then he knew Drythelm's destiny.

Returned to his mortal body and alive again, Drythelm lived austerely as a monk for the remainder of his time, and subjected himself to extreme exertion, only telling his story to those whom he thought would put the knowledge to good use. In the final scene of the story, Bede reveals Drythelm's name. While standing in the freezing water to chastise his body, some less-ascetic brothers call out to Drythelm, using his name, to ask how he can endure such hardship. To this question Drythelm calls out his famous answer, "'I have known it colder.'" <sup>98</sup>

This story is a collage of the biblical imagery that Bede has used consistently throughout the *HE*, but now he has placed it in its ultimate context.<sup>99</sup> The light of the Plain of the Blessed that is brighter than daylight would have been a familiar and moving image for Bede's readers, who would not have had time to forget the light of the same brightness that shone down on Barking Abbey in the previous book. The monks and nuns of Barking Abbey were surrounded by the light that permeates the Plain of the Blessed where the saved wait for the End and their entrance into heaven. When Bede's readers heard that this light was present in the Plain of the Blessed, the lesser stage of Paradise, then their already-full understanding of the events at Barking Abbey would have expanded. Readers knew that the shining countenance that Cuthbert had earlier in the *HE* is that possessed by angelic guides, such as the one Drythelm is led by, whose

<sup>98</sup> "'Frigidiora ego vidi.'" *HE*, v.12, 498-9.

<sup>99</sup> For more on the power of imagery, especially Christian imagery, in the early medieval Insular world, see George Henderson, *Vision and Image in Early Christian England* (New York, 1999).

shining face signals his sanctity.<sup>100</sup> When Drythelm's guide appears on the road "like a bright star glimmering," he does so in words that recall God's declaration to Job of his absolute power, and man's impotence, in the workings of heavenly events.<sup>101</sup> The closeness of the other world at dawn, the time in the *HE* when salvation comes, and the time when Christ will return, is reinforced here as the time when the will of heaven is most likely to intrude onto earthly events.<sup>102</sup> The list here could

---

<sup>100</sup> "So great was Cuthbert's eloquence, so keen his desire to drive home what he had begun to teach, so bright the light of his angelic countenance, that none of those present would presume to hide from him the secrets of their hearts, but they all made open confession of their sins because they realized that these things certainly could never be hidden from him; and they cleansed themselves from the sins they had confessed by fruits worthy of repentance, as he bade them to do" ("Porro Cudbercto tanta erat dicendi peritia, tantus amor persuadendi quae coeperat, tale vultus angelici lumen, ut nullus praesentium latebras ei sui cordis celare prae/sumeret, omnes palam quae gesserant coonfitendo proferrent, quia nimirum haec eadem illum latere nullo modo putabant, et confessa dignis, ut imperabat, poenitentiae fructibus abstergerent.") *HE*, iv.27, 432-3.

<sup>101</sup> "Quasi fulgor stellae micantis inter tenebras," *HE*, v.12, 492. "Shalt thou be able to join together the shining stars the Pleiades, or canst thou stop the turning about of Arcturus? Canst thou bring forth the day star in its time, and make the evening star to rise upon the children of the earth? Dost thou know the order of heaven, and canst thou set down the reason thereof on the earth?" ("Numquid coniungere valebis micantes stellas Pliadis aut gyrum Arcturi poteris dissipare numquid producis luciferum in tempore suo et vesperum super filios terrae consurgere facis numquid nosti ordinem caeli et pones rationem eius in terra"), Job 38:31-3.

<sup>102</sup> The light that comes to the yard at Barking Abbey to show the location for the cemetery and to guide the souls of the departed to heaven. This light arrived "on a certain night when the servants of Christ had finished their mattin psalms," ("Cum enim nocte quadam, expletis matutinae laudis psalmodiis") suggesting that this episode also took place near dawn. *HE*, iv.7, 356-7. Also at Barking Abbey, a nun was sickened with the plague and was near death. She told the sister caring for her to put out the light in her room, because she saw "this house filled with a light so bright that that lamp of your seems to me to be utterly dark." ("quia domum hanc tanta luce inpletam esse perspicio, ut vestra illa lucerna mihi omnimodis esse videatur obscura."). The sister ignored the ill nun's request, and so she said, "Let your lamp burn as long as you like; but be sure of this, it gives me no light; when dawn breaks, my light will come to me." ("Accendite ergo lucernam illam, quamdiu vultis. At tamen scitote quia non est mea; nam mea lux incipiente aurora mihi adventura est."), *HE*, iv.8, 358-9. Bede also remarks on the importance of dawn in his *Commentary on the Apocalypse*. "Christ is the morning star, who when the night of this world is past, promises and discloses the light of eternal

continue, but the conclusion would be the same: this story is a climax of the *HE*, when Bede's readers can see that the events that have happened in England are hints at what is to come, and signals that England, blessed to receive these foretastes, is pivotal in the unfurling of sacred time.

As for the quotation from the *Aeneid* that Bede uses to describe Drythelm's travels in darkness, it would seem at first glance that Bede was simply making a comparison between Drythelm's passage through the land of the dead and another famous wanderer's trip through the underworld. This seems like a hell-for-hell substitution, but instead this is the moment when the weight of history finally descends on Aeneas—this is when he realizes the magnitude of his actions. When he went down into the underworld, he was frightened, obedient Aeneas, faithful but unsure, and when he emerged, knowing the enormity of his journey, he was Aeneas, father of Rome. In his time in the underworld he had seen what was to come of his great deed and how profound the ramifications of his actions would be. He was not making this journey for himself, but for a great cause, so far in the future and on such a grand scale that he could not imagine the results of it: this is the moment that transforms Aeneas. For Drythelm, or, as Bede would still have his reader think of him, the nameless Englishman, the Christian everyman, this is the same journey. And so when Bede uses those words from the *Aeneid*, it is not just to add an impressive phrase from another scene in which a man sees the world after death. Instead, Drythelm, representing

---

life to the saints." ("Christus est stella matutina, qui nocte saeculi transacta, lucem vitae sanctis promittit et panit aeternam"), Bede, *The Explanation of the Apocalypse*, Book I, Chapter 3.3.



English Christianity, or perhaps, Christian England, is on his way to see the future, and realize the enormity of the future of all mankind, and in the process, discover the ultimate destination of his own soul. Drythelm begins his journey thinking only of his own safety, but finds in the afterlife he is witnessing something much grander in scope—a revelation for which Bede has been preparing his readers for the entirety of the *HE*. If Bede's readers understood that the light of divine knowledge and true Christian brotherhood had been shining in England, they had now seen the very light of heaven revealed in their own time. For Bede, and his readers, the parallel between Aeneas's and Drythelm's journeys into the underworld might have meant even more. Aeneas returns to the living not to witness the Empire of which his father told him already in existence, but rather to begin the long and difficult task of the very first steps of the founding of the city. He knows that its most glorious days will be long after his own life. Perhaps Drythelm, or every English Christian hearing his story, could see that they were building the very foundations of an Empire, no doubt a heavenly one, and that though they would not see its full fruition, they were the creators of something great and eternal.<sup>103</sup>

With the present closing in on his narrative, Bede turns to the dispute that has been at the heart of many of the chapters of

---

<sup>103</sup> Although this might seem like a minor point, it is worth noting how Bede portrays the afterlife. If anyone doubted the depth of Bede's immersion in the iconography of the ancient world, this should put their doubts to rest. Although Christianized in details, the world Bede describes in Drythelm's vision of the afterlife would have seemed familiar to Vergil, and is, indeed, much like Vergil's own passage in the *Aeneid*. Bede lived, intellectually at least, far more staunchly in the late antique world than any previous scholars have suggested.

the *HE*: the disagreement over the dating of Easter. But as Bede has shown, this controversy is neither one-dimensional nor primarily about Easter. In this debate Bede sees the disputes of the early Church refought, as the English decide between following the letter of the law or the spirit of it. The sides are not static, and the cold Wilfridians who defended the Roman dating of Easter have since been replaced by those who follow orthodox dating procedure, but have the warm passion of the Columbans, whose love of the spirit of the faith was more important, in Bede's eyes, than the details of dating methods. In these final chapters, Bede chronicles the conversion of the remaining Columban Irish Christians at Iona from the Columban dating to the orthodox, Roman method of calculating Easter. Almost all of the peoples of Britain and Ireland convert to the correct, Roman method of calculating the date of Easter, but they do so not because it is forced upon them by overbearing clerics, but because they are evangelized to by faithful missionaries, such as Egbert.<sup>104</sup>

Besides the British Christians,<sup>105</sup> who abandoned their duty to the Church long before, the final bastion of the Columban method of dating Easter was the monastery on Iona, Columba's own foundation. Egbert, whose sanctity has made him central to several of Bede's most poignant stories, undertook their conversion to the Roman dating of Easter personally, having been sent by God's own command. Because of the quality of Egbert's character the Columbans listened to him, though they had resisted

---

<sup>104</sup> *HE*, v.22, 553-5.

<sup>105</sup> *HE*, v.23, 560-1.

all previous attempts to pry them away from their traditions. Their acquiescence now is certainly in part thanks to Egbert, but may also be a sign of the times to come. After this final task of piety, Egbert, who must by now have been an old man, died on Easter—now celebrated on the correct Roman date, on a date later than any that the Columban calendar could have produced. And so Egbert died in the midst of his own success. Bede says he saw this Easter, the first the Columbans of Iona kept on the orthodox date, and as he died, "he saw it and was glad" (*vidit, et gausus esti*).<sup>106</sup> This simple phrase is a quotation from the Gospel of John, and are the words spoken by Jesus about the patriarch Abraham. In this chapter of John, Jesus has preached to the crowd that he can offer an escape from death and that he himself knows God. The Jews of the crowd answer his claim that he could defeat death with disbelief, for Abraham and the patriarchs all died, and this man could not assume himself greater than them? Jesus responds that he does indeed know God, and that "Abraham your father rejoiced that he might see my day: he saw it, and was glad" (*Abraham pater vester exultavit ut videret diem meum et vidit et gausus est*).<sup>107</sup> This gladness came when Abraham had seen the completion of sacred history in Christ. In this phrase, Bede is not only combining another pious Northumbrian churchman with the figure of the Old Testament patriarch, but he is also recalling the timelessness of the events he describes. Egbert died on Easter having seen the conversion of one of the last uncommunicant peoples in Britain,

<sup>106</sup> *HE*, v.22, 554-5.

<sup>107</sup> "Abraham your father rejoiced that he might see my day: he saw it and was glad." ("Abraham pater vester exultavit ut videret diem meum et vidit et gausus est"), John 8:56.

residing at the ends of the earth, to the orthodox celebration of the most important day in sacred history. The moment in which Abraham saw Christ existed not in earthly time, but in sacred time, where a consistent and reiterated truth replaces the chronology of the human world. Here, at the ends of the earth and at the end of time, participating in an act that declares the truth of the Scriptures, Egbert shares in Abraham's gladness.

## CHAPTER SIX

## OUTSIDE AND AFTER TIME: READINGS AND MISREADINGS OF BEDE AND HIS TEXT

As we have seen, the *HE*, when read through the lens of *grammatica*, is not only a temporal history of England, but is also a sacred history of England. As I have tried to make clear, I do not believe that Bede wanted his readers to think that the holy events taking place in England replicated those of the Bible, but, rather, he strove to show that they were a continuation of that same eternal story. The biblical allusions in the *HE* do not simply follow the order of the books of the Bible or "develop" from the Old Testament to the New Testament, because the English were not reliving these events. Instead, according to Bede, the Christian English had behaved in such a way that they had moved forward the temporal clock of God's plan, and, in doing so had begun to transcend the barrier between worldly time and holy time. These new developments in sacred history that Bede wanted to chart had to be described in the language of the Bible because the Bible was the only text whose words were capable of conveying the significance of all that had transpired in England. The story of the light at Barking Abbey, for example, could have been told in neutral words that recalled no other text, but the listener would have been denied the truth of God's plan. When Bede wanted to inform his readers of the miracles afoot in England, the only adequate lexicon he had was found in the Bible. By using the words of Scripture to imbue meaning into the events he described, Bede was able to signal to

his readers that England itself was now enmeshed in the profound events of the unfolding of Christian history.

One of Bede's more impressive achievements is that these references in the *HE* work slowly upon the reader throughout the text; the function of the biblical material in the *HE* was to gently further the reader's assumptions about England and sacred history. Bede's grammatical method worked by incrementally expanding and reassuring his readers' vague notions about the place of England and their own age in spiritual time. There is no moment in the *HE* that would absolutely alter a reader's worldview, but there are countless moments of minor revelation that, together, bring the reader to the conclusion that he is, indeed, living in a special moment of sacred time. In that sense, this is not a riddle for which there is a single answer, but a plentitude of detailed codes, several of which the reader can miss or ignore, and still be persuaded to Bede's conclusion. It is this potential for multiplicity of biblically-triggered explanations that made the *HE* such a powerful text for its contemporary readers. Ironically, it is this very characteristic which has obscured the work's most profound message from modern scholars.

We should also remember that, for Bede's target audience, the information contained in the literal narrative of the *HE* was unlikely to be new. When Bede tells his readers the name of the monk from whom he heard a particular story, we should perhaps see this less as the disclosure of an informant and more as a reference to a corroborating authority, as the rules of *grammatica* would advise. It would be difficult to believe, in a

world in which there was great contact between monasteries, that monks, in most communities, did not eagerly collect and share such stories. The contacts Bede himself named in the *HE*, as well as the known circulation of the manuscripts, both attest to the close contacts with other religious communities. Much of the joy of having such a visitor likely would have been to hear the stories he knew about saints and miracles. There is every chance that the events of the *HE* are the best old chestnuts of the English monastic circuit. So, although, the information itself was probably not new to Bede's monastic readers, the meaning given to it by Bede's arrangement and presentation would have been. Indeed, for a reader to see such a profound new level of meaning contained in information he already knew must have been thrilling.

It was, moreover, not only English readers who found Bede's *HE* compelling. The demand for copies of the *HE* in the years after Bede's death overwhelmed the scribes of Wearmouth-Jarrow, and the *HE*'s appeal across cultural borders is one of the aspects that ensured its survival.<sup>1</sup> Some of these non-English readers may have been interested in English history, or indeed, simply in a text so well written by one of their favorite exegetes. But there is, I think, more to the *HE*'s popularity outside of England than the presentation of a quality text or a good story. There is a suggestion in the *HE* about the stage of time itself, about the

---

<sup>1</sup> For more on the popularity of the *HE* outside of England, see Benedicta Ward, *The Venerable Bede* (New York, 2002), 136-9. The high number of requests for copies of the *HE* from continental monasteries in the decades after Bede's death says much about the relevance of Bede's work. Ward's *The Venerable Bede*, although often maddeningly-brief on major points, includes what is by far the best-informed, and, I believe, most authentic, reading of Bede's *HE* currently available.

age of the world and the rapidly-approaching End, that would have made this text riveting reading for intellectuals throughout Christendom.<sup>2</sup> The seventh-century plague, in which the holiest were taken to build the heavenly Church, could be read as the manifestation of the incurable plague of the Apocalypse that would attack the faithful.<sup>3</sup> The lights that were revealed at Barking Abbey are described in imagery that recalls the light of the End Times.<sup>4</sup> Even a less-skilled reader would have understood Gregory's explicit warning to Æthelberht that the End was

---

<sup>2</sup> For an extensive assessment of Bede's Apocalypticism, see Gerald Bonner, *Saint Bede in the Tradition of Western Apocalyptic Commentary* (Durham, 1966).

<sup>3</sup> For more on Chad's death, see Chapter Five. Bede, *The Explanation of the Apocalypse*, Book III, Chapter 16.17. This passage in the *Commentary*, in which Bede wrote that the plague of the Apocalypse would be incurable, contains a quotation from Tyconius, an earlier commentator on the Apocalypse, and the writer whose "seven keys" so impressed Augustine in *DDC*, which stated that "all the ungodly will be unhurt by any plague of the body." A reader who knew both of these texts might well have read the pious deaths from the seventh-century plague in the *HE* as a sign that this was indeed the plague of the Apocalypse in England.

<sup>4</sup> For more on the light at Barking Abbey, see Chapter Five. For the similar qualities of the light of the Apocalypse, see Matt 24:29, Mark 13:24-27, Luke 21:25-28, Isa 13:10-13, Isa 34:4, Eze 32:7-8, Joel 2:10, Amos 8:9, Rev 6:12-13. Bede also wrote about the light of the Apocalypse in his *DTR*, "In fact, the heavenly bodies will be darkened, not by being drained of their light, but by the force of a greater light at the coming of the Supreme Judge." Bede, *The Reckoning of Time*, Faith Wallis, trans., (Liverpool, 1999), 244. In his 1966 Jarrow Lecture, Gerald Bonner noted the strong similarity between the image presented by the nun dying of the seventh-century plague at Barking Abbey in the *HE* and the light of the Apocalypse as described by Bede in his own *Commentary on the Apocalypse*. Bonner, *Western Apocalyptic Commentary*, 10. Bonner's argument focuses on the nun crying out that her salvation will come at dawn, " "Let your lamp burn as long as you like; but be sure of this, it gives me no light; when dawn breaks, my light will come to me." " ("Accendite ergo lucernam illam, quamdiu vultis. At tamen scitote quia non est mea; nam mea lux incipiente aurora mihi adventura est." ), *HE*, iv.8, 358-9. The image of this nun's *lux incipiente aurora* is much like the image of Christ returning at dawn, and of Bede's own declaration in his *Commentary on the Apocalypse* that "Christ is the morning star, who when the night of this world is past, promises and discloses the light of eternal life to the saints." "Christus est stella matutina, qui nocte saeculi transacta, lucem vitae sanctis promittit et panit aeternam." Bede, *The Explanation of the Apocalypse*, Book I, Chapter 3.3.



coming.<sup>5</sup> The physical location of England at the "ends of the earth," a point emphasized by Bede, would have resonated with his readers.<sup>6</sup> Every monk knew that one of the human events that would signal the approach of the End of Time was the successful evangelization of the edges of the world.<sup>7</sup> Bede saw the English mission as the fulfillment of that prophecy; he said he and his brothers lived "at the final border of the world and time."<sup>8</sup> The *HE* enthralled non-English readers because, through this text, with England serving as an illuminating example, they could see the benchmarks on the path to the Apocalypse. England, as shown to them through the filter of the *HE*, served as the porous border-land of the world where the signs of the End were exposed; and Bede showed that at the edge of the world the gears of the Apocalypse had begun to grind.<sup>9</sup> This perhaps accounts for Bede's

---

<sup>5</sup> "'Besides, we would wish your Majesty to know that the end of the world is at hand, as we learn from the words of Almighty God in the holy scriptures; and the kingdom of the saints which knows no end is near. As the end of the world approaches, many things threaten which have never happened before; these are changes in the sky and terrors from the heavens, unseasonable tempests, wars, famine, pestilence, and earthquakes in divers places.'" ("Praeterea scire vestram gloriam volumus quia, sicut in scriptura sacra ex verbis Domini omnipotentis agnoscimus, praesentis mundi iam terminus iuxta est, et sanctorum regnum venturum est, quod nullo umquam poterit fine terminari. Adpropinquante autem eodem mundi termino, multo imminent, quae antea non fuerunt, videlicet inmutationes aeris, terroresque de caelo, et contra ordinationem temporum tempestates, bella, fames, pestilentiae, terraemotus per loca"), *HE*, i.32, 112-3.

<sup>6</sup> Merrills, *History and Geography*, 273.

<sup>7</sup> "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world, for a testimony to all nations: and then shall the consummation come." ("et praedicabitur hoc evangelium regni in universo orbe in testimonium omnibus gentibus et tunc veniet consummatio"), Matt 24:14.

<sup>8</sup> "etiam nos in ultimo fine et mundi et saeculi positos." Bede, "In Cantica Cantorum," in D. Hurst (ed.), *Opera Exegetica*, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina, CCSL 119B (Turnhout, 1983), 271. Translation by author.

<sup>9</sup> It may seem odd that Bede would see the signs of the approaching Apocalypse and not mention them outright, or indeed, make it the explicit subject of his text, but such an action would have been both impossible and anathema for Bede and his readers. Every monk would have read of Christ's injunction against predicting the time of the End

castigating of the Church of his own age.<sup>10</sup> He held heightened expectations for his contemporaries because of the place his present time held in the chronology of the world. Such an age required suitable piety on the part of the clergy because the gaze of God was becoming intense. Bede saw his time imbued with such momentous importance that the English Church had to reach—or attempt—an impossible level of spiritual achievement.

This reading of the *HE*, and its implications about Bede's understanding of time, helps us better understand his contemporaries' love of the text. This is more than a compelling story well-told, and explains why the *HE* was so eagerly sought by readers outside England. Even for those who were not in England, who would not have felt they were heirs to the sanctity of Adamnan and Cuthbert, the story of England in the *HE* would have

---

("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." ("de die autem illo vel hora nemo scit neque angeli in caelo neque Filius nisi Pater videte vigilate et orate nescitis enim quando tempus sit"), Mark 13:32-3). But the Apocalypse was a topic that was clearly on the minds of early medieval monks, as scholars can tell by the way they manipulated calendrical calculations to push the contentious year 6000 further into the future. The belief that human history would last 6000 years (the millennarian week) was condemned by theologians such as Augustine. Although there is no text that mentions the continuation of this tradition or its popularity, scholars can tell that it must have been widespread by the way monks recalculated sacred time repeatedly to conclude that the year 6000 was deeper into the future than the previous calculation suggested. None of the computists state their reasoning behind their recalculations, but the date they are taking such pains to avoid is clear. This must have been an issue of which Bede was aware, considering his prominence as a calendrical specialist, and that one of the alleged dates for the year 6000, before it was refigured, was 800 AD. R. Landes, "Lest the Millennium be Fulfilled: Apocalyptic Expectations and the Pattern of Western Chronography, 100-800 CE," in W. Verbeke, D. Verhelst, and A. Welkenhuysen (eds.), *The Use and Abuse of Eschatology in the Middle Ages* (Leuven, 1988), 137-211.

<sup>10</sup> For more of Bede's views on the deficiencies of the Church of his own day, see the letter he sent to Egbert. Bede, "Bede's Letter to Egbert," in J. McClure and R. Collins (eds.), *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People, The Greater Chronicle, Bede's Letter to Egbert* (New York, 1999), 341-57.

told them something essential, and terrifyingly exciting, about their own world. To read a text that conveyed such a message would have heightened any religious community's sense of purpose and zeal. If the first stirrings of the End had already begun around the edges of the world, Bede's readers would know that they themselves were experiencing the chronology of events that would end in the Last Judgment, even if they did not live to see the more dramatic events to come. It would be easy to minimize the impact that such a suggestion would have on Bede's contemporary readers, but to do so would dismiss the central role the End Times played in monastic life.

This central belief of Bede's monastic readers, and their accompanying appetite for miracle stories and information about the End, has long been a source of discomfort for scholars of Bede's work. It often shakes our perception of Bede's precocious historical sensibilities to think that such a model historian could hold such pre-modern beliefs.<sup>11</sup> In *The Coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England*, Henry Mayr-Harting's reasoning for Bede's inclusion of miracles in the *HE* makes an attempt to exculpate Bede:

For many readers of today the chief obstacle to complete sympathy and *rapport* with Bede is his delight in miracles—visions, cures, heavenly lights and many other things besides. Bede had written about the abbots of his own monastery, probably for his own monastery, and had related no miracle in the course of this work. That the miraculous element in the *Ecclesiastical History* reflects the intended wider circulation of the book can be seen in two different ways. First of all the pagan gods had been officially

---

<sup>11</sup> This desire to modernize Bede and distance him from the beliefs of his time is not unlike the desire of many scholars to see in Bede a mirror of themselves. For more on this, see Chapter One and Merrills, *History and Geography*, 231-3.

abolished and it was up to Christianity to show that this could be done without loss of the old benefits, that Christian medicine could work as well as pagan magic, that the earth where King Oswald had shed his blood or the chips of wood from the post against which Aidan had leaned were just as efficacious in drinking water as all the things which pagans dropped into it. Second, Bede had most of his miracle stories from the monks and nuns with whom he had friendly contact and these miracles were often told in connection with saints whose memories were revered or whose shrines were fostered at the particular religious houses. In all these cases the just pride and spiritual prestige of the house were deeply involved in their saints, whose presence and power were felt to be immediate in a way difficult for us to visualize nowadays. In some cases where there was a question of pilgrims to be impressed, their economic interests were involved as well. The *Ecclesiastical History* would have been sent round when it was finished to be read out in the refectories of such monasteries, and their members would no doubt feel particularly gratified to hear their own contributions incorporated into a work of so important and majestic a general theme. It was the principle of clubs reporting on their activities for a college magazine.<sup>12</sup>

Rather than make an apology for Bede's apparent credulity, Mayr-Harting prefers to imagine a calculating and pandering Bede, himself above such foolish superstitions, who used miracles to coax pagans into the fold (although it is difficult to imagine in what circumstances Mayr-Harting thought pagans would be in the audience for a reading) and satiate the juvenile tastes of his contemporaries. Both parts of this explanation discount the very

---

<sup>12</sup> Mayr-Harting, *The Coming of Christianity*, 47-8. After this passage, Mayr-Harting acknowledges that the desire of early medieval people to interpret all literature through a spiritual symbolism was a result of the training of biblical exegesis, and not a practice entirely unworthy. He also says that their preference for divine intervention as a explanation for potentially-natural phenomenon "was not necessarily credulity so much as a focus of attention completely different from our own." Just as Mayr-Harting seems willing to credit Bede's miracle-loving society with some sophistication, he begins the next paragraph saying, "It was in fact the moral aspect of miracles which was primarily important to Bede." Mayr-Harting, *Coming of Christianity*, 48-9. Bede certainly appreciated the ability of miracle stories to speak to moral instruction, as all grammatically-trained exegetes would have, but the primary function of miracles was to declare the presence of God on earth and his interest in the outcome of human affairs.

aspects of the *HE* that made it so valuable to Bede's contemporaries, as well as to Bede himself. It was this sincere hunger for the spiritual that fueled Bede's culture's creation of and desire for texts about the holy.

The assumptions that Bede was both more intellectually advanced than his contemporaries (and the full expression of his genius perhaps stunted by their rustic expectations) and in sympathy with the tastes of modern scholars have been the twin deterrents to understanding Bede's *HE*. Mayr-Harting's discussion of the contents of Book I displays some of these characteristics. As we saw in Chapter One, it was a standard practice of rhetoric to open a work with facts and anecdotes about the central places and subjects of the text to excite the reader's interest. Mayr-Harting's instincts about the *HE* led him to this general conclusion eventually, but only after an explanation that undermines his, and his reader's, understanding of early-medieval textual culture. The particular subject at hand here is Bede's discussion of the absence of snakes in Ireland and the other beneficial properties of that island.<sup>13</sup> Mayr-Harting responds both to Bede's description of Ireland and also to David Knowles's suggestion that Bede puts on the "deceptive appearance of naiveté" in Book I.<sup>14</sup>

The appearance of naiveté here is very deceptive indeed. First of all Bede takes his cue from Isidore of Seville's *Etymologies* which was the standard encyclopaedia of knowledge available in his day. Under *Ireland* Isidore observed that this island had no snakes, few birds and no bees. He then went on to say, in a passage which must have been well known to many of Bede's audience, that if dust or pebbles from

---

<sup>13</sup> *HE*, i.1, 19-21.

<sup>14</sup> David Knowles, *Saints and Scholars* (New York, 1962), 17.

Ireland were sprinkled in a bee-hive, the swarms deserted their honey-combs. Bede's passage is evidently a witty parody of this sort of nonsense. Moreover, it must have been well known to Bede and to many of his audience that in the opinion of some people (like Aldhelm) too many Anglo-Saxons had been going off to study in Ireland, and that, admirable as the best Irish scholarship was, the Irish were filling rather too many leaves of parchment with learning, not all of it entirely free from pedantry or wild fantasy. Bede himself had had occasion, in his own commentaries on the Bible, to correct certain excesses of their scriptural exegesis. What better use, then, for some of these leaves, than that they should be applied to snake-bites?

The whole of this passage seems to imply, on Bede's part, that there will be more serious stuff in the way of miracles later, but meanwhile the reader need not feel, already in the first chapter, that his author is a dull dog.<sup>15</sup>

Indeed, Mayr-Harting's broadest understanding of the point of Book I, that it serves to involve the reader in the subjects of the weightier matters to come, is valid. But, Mayr-Harting, when confronted with material in the *HE* with which he is unable to experience a meaningful reading, attributes views to Bede that are both misleading and anachronistic. In addition to these moments of cultural disconnect, there are other, less startling, moments that puzzle those unaware of Bede's spiritual agenda. We have already seen one such moment in the *HE*: the good death, at the end of Book II, of James the Deacon.

In the *HE*, James was left, after Edwin's death, alone in the abandoned and unfinished church at York. At this moment of apparent despair, Bede tells of James's long evangelical career and of his death, "old and full of days" (*senex ac plenus dierum*).<sup>16</sup> This phrase, which to those who do not know its origins reads like a meaningless platitude, is the biblical phrase with

<sup>15</sup> Mayr-Harting, *Coming of Christianity*, 50.

<sup>16</sup> *HE*, ii.20, 206-7.

which holy men of the Old Testament died.<sup>17</sup> A reader who caught this reference would know that despite its momentary turmoil, the English Church was blessed with men of the ilk of Old Testament patriarchs. To a reader unaware of this connection, this passage, in which James's death is described so long before it happens at the expense of the seemingly more-pressing narrative of the abandonment of the Northumbrian Church, is a nonsensical way for Bede to end Book II. Mayr-Harting struggled with the placement of such a minor figure at such a crucial moment in the *HE*. In his attempt to explain Bede's logic, Mayr-Harting himself unknowingly quotes the biblical line that, when read with its full meaning intact, illuminates the text:

The ending of the second book is more than apt; it is profoundly dramatic. After the clashes between Augustine and the British bishops, the conversions and relapses of the southern kingdoms, the laborious efforts to convert King Edwin, and the final disaster of Edwin's defeat and death and Paulinus's flight from Northumbria, a great calm comes over the last lines. They concern James, the deacon, who remained in Northumbria, baptizing, rescuing prey from the old enemy of mankind, teaching the faithful the Roman custom of singing, in which he was outstandingly skillful, until 'being old and full of days, he went the ways of his forefathers'. Historians sometimes wonder why Bede says almost nothing more about James the deacon, although he lived for over 30 years after Paulinus's flight. May it not be that here he finished a stirring book of movement and cataclysm with the picture of this peace-loving and musical old man, and the effect would be ruined if the deacon appeared on the stage again the next minute performing the humdrum activities of his middle age?<sup>18</sup>

Mayr-Harting's sense, that this information about James somehow neutralizes the negative events that followed Edwin's death, is

---

<sup>17</sup> For more on this phrase, see Chapter Four.

<sup>18</sup> Mayr-Harting, *Coming of Christianity*, 42.

correct, but not for any of the half-hearted reasons he posits here.

Subsequent scholarly works that either attempt to use the "facts" of the *HE* to discover the events of Northumbrian history or endeavor to uncover why Bede wrote this text as he did have replicated Mayr-Harting's struggles (and have often included their dissatisfaction with the placement of James). In his history of Northumbria, *Northumbria, 500-1100: Creation and Destruction of a Kingdom*, David Rollason notices that Bede finds James's presence in York after Paulinus's departure to be significant, but chooses instead to focus on the poor state of Edwin's church in York under James's care.

With regard to the former [the Roman mission], what was the lasting effect, if any, of Paulinus's mission? Bede, while presenting its failure as part of the general debacle resulting from Edwin's death, concedes that one of Paulinus's colleagues, James the Deacon, remained in the church of York, teaching and baptizing. So the Christianity introduced by Paulinus had not collapsed in Northumbria after Paulinus himself had fled, the church of York had remained to some extent functional, and James the Deacon may have had some influence on the subsequent development of the Northumbrian church. Whatever that influence may have been, however, Edwin's church in York seems to have fallen into disuse, and was in such a bad way in Wilfrid's time that it was full of damp and pigeon-droppings.<sup>19</sup>

Although Rollason's text is trained on the political machinations of the Northumbrian elite, this slight misreading, however insignificant to Rollason's point here, has a cumulative impact when considered with its fellow slips. James's fate is perhaps a small detail in Rollason's narrative, but Bede's standards of success and failure are not, as Bede is, for much of Rollason's

---

<sup>19</sup> Rollason, *Northumbria, 500-1100*, 121-2.



text, his main guide. Had Rollason known more of the point Bede was making here, he would have known that the state of the church was perhaps meant to be analogous to the state of Northumbrian Christianity: disheveled, but intact, as shown through the promise implied in James's very presence.

James the Deacon only makes a brief appearance in Rollason's text, but he is a frequent character in N.J. Higham's recent *(Re-)Reading Bede*. Despite the reassessment promised by the avante-garde punctuation of Higham's title, his approach to Bede's material is not new. Higham imagines Bede's practicality as a driving force in his use of James in the text of the *HE*.

But Bede finally closed book II in his final paragraph on a milder note, looking forward to the time of peace which was to come, under Oswald one presumes, within which James the Deacon would continue Paulinus's mission and, in particular, teach sacred music—something which was particularly close to the heart of Bede himself. While insisting that a catastrophe had occurred, therefore, Bede was making some connections between an Edwinian past and the Oswaldian future, at the close of book II, which would be to an extent cemented by virtue of James the Deacon's presence at the Synod of Whitby some thirty years later and via the matter of York's church, which he had already noted that Oswald had had finished following its partial construction up to 633.<sup>20</sup>

Unlike Mayr-Harting, who realized that Bede's inclusion of James's death at this point in the text must be a significant feature in Bede's agenda, Higham sees James's sole function, besides warming Bede's heart with his musical ability, as connective. Higham relegates James to the task of providing a continuation between Edwin's and Oswald's Christianities. This assumption mistakes the purpose of Bede's text; Edwin's unfinished church itself is the object Bede designates as the

---

<sup>20</sup> Higham, *(Re-)Reading*, 136-7.

physical connection between these two eras of Northumbrian Christianity in the *HE*. By the time the reader reaches the Synod of Whitby, there is no longer a gap for James, in his forgettable appearance there, to bridge.<sup>21</sup>

Higham's other substantive mention of James is far more complex and telling of his approach to the *HE*. Higham investigates Bede's reasoning for dividing the *HE* into five books, he himself favoring the classic explanation that Bede did it in imitation of the five books of the Pentateuch.<sup>22</sup> This is, as Higham and countless others have pointed out, a valid suggestion. But it is in Higham's assessment of rival theories that his

---

<sup>21</sup> Another of Higham's mentions of James the Deacon is in a larger discussion about the prominence of the English in the *HE*. Higham suggests that Bede, in an effort to keep the spotlight entirely on the English, did not describe the missionary successes of English clerics on the continent, such as Boniface, despite his likely knowledge of Boniface's activities. "To omit honourable mention of the Irish missionary effort might have been tantamount to surrendering the centrality of Northumbria to the wider story of English conversion, even risking presenting such figures as Oswald, Aidan, Cedd and Chad as agents opposed to the broader story of the English conversion by the true agents of Christ, in the Roman tradition. Focus on such figures as Paulinus, James the Deacon and Wilfrid to the exclusion of the hero-figures of the Scottish/Northumbrian church might have been thought by Bede to have been unsustainable as a thesis capable of delivering the Bernicia-centred narrative which he apparently intended" (N.J. Higham, *(Re-)Reading Bede* (New York, 2006), 145-6.). Higham appears to believe, based on his interpretation of the reasoning he alleges Bede had behind his decision to pass over Boniface, that Bede would have wished, had he been able to manage it, to exclude the Columban mission from the *HE*, but that he did not lest the focus of the story be pulled from Northumbria. This reading of Bede's intentions defies not only the text of the *HE* but all that art history and archaeology have shown us about the cultural unity of the Insular world. It would be a rare reader, I think, who could read Bede's praise of the Columban missionaries and see "honourable mention" or obligation in his praise. It would also be difficult, considering his coining of the term *gens Anglorum* and his relentless focus on the conversion of all of the English, to see Bede's plentitude of knowledge about Northumbria as competing with his main focus which was, in fact, England. Bede's warmth for Cuthbert and his chill for Wilfrid require no specialist study to detect. I cannot conceive of a way in which Bede could have arranged his material that would have resulted in "risking presenting such figures as Oswald, Aidan, Cedd and Chad as agents opposed to the broader story of the English conversion by the true agents of Christ."

<sup>22</sup> Higham, *(Re-)Reading*, 101-9.

misreadings of the *HE* become central. The most innovative theory Higham reviews, and the one with which he takes issue, was put forward by Benedicta Ward. Ward thinks that Bede's organization was influenced by his desire to portray, in each of the Books of the *HE*, the characteristics of the increasingly-mature ages of the world; "Bede's account of the English is therefore a world history in miniature."<sup>23</sup> Although, as Higham notes, the events of the *HE* took place in the sixth age of the world, which Bede, as a calendrical expert, knew, Ward's argument focuses on the progression of the English as mirroring the greater narrative of Christian history. Book II ended appropriately to mirror the characteristics of the second age of the world, the childhood stage, because, in Ward's opinion, "the second book deals with the growth of the English Church and the passing of the first generation of converts, ending with an account of how James the Deacon brought music, the full articulation of words, to York in the conversion of the north."<sup>24</sup> Ward is terse in her reasoning, but accurate in her feeling that the placement of the story of James at the end of Book II was appropriate. After summarizing the traits of each of the Books/ages of the *HE* in review of Ward's hypothesis, Higham becomes skeptical in his analysis:

This [Ward's theory] is arguably the most persuasive theory so far offered to account for Bede's adoption of a fivefold division of his *Ecclesiastical History*, but it is far from certain that it is really appropriate, given the difficulties of penetrating his thought processes. In favour of this type of solution is its strong interconnection with another of his comparatively recent works and with theories of time that Bede clearly had considered deeply and on which he was an authority.... There are, however, several

---

<sup>23</sup> Ward, *Bede*, 116.

<sup>24</sup> Ward, *Bede*, 115.

factors militating against the logic of Ward's case. One is the comparative artificiality of five ages... Another difficulty is the selectivity among stories within the work to establish the characteristics of any one book which is necessary for Ward's thesis to stand. So, for example, it is difficult to justify treating James the Deacon's role as a teacher of chant as the central characteristic of book II, despite its closure on precisely this point, when Paulinus and Edwin play so much greater roles herein. That said, thinking of this kind is likely to have been one factor in Bede's organisation of his *Ecclesiastical History* into five books.<sup>25</sup>

Had Higham read Bede's account of James's death as one of Bede's contemporaries would have he might have seen that such an ending to Book II did indeed characterize that Book and "age" in which the English became one of the Chosen People of God.

Perhaps that which modern scholars have most misjudged in this dour assessment of the intellectual horizons of Bede's monastic contemporaries, both at home and abroad, was the intellectual excitement very much alive in eighth-century monastic communities. There are moments when, for a certain group, the horizon seems truly limitless, and for Bede and his fellow monks, this must have seemed like just such a time. Christianity had spread, in their eyes, to epic proportions, and events were happening that experts argued were of the most astounding importance. To live as a pious monk in such a time must have been spiritually exhilarating; all barriers and former limits to human history were no longer applicable. This view of Bede's intellectual world as steeped with barely-controlled religious fervor matches far better the material remains of this culture. The communities that created the jubilantly, almost

---

<sup>25</sup> Higham, *(Re-)Reading*, 107.

manically, decorated gospel manuscripts of this period spent enormous sums, both in materials and effort, to produce their creations. In these manuscripts perhaps we see the artistic manifestation of the same hectic longing that spurred on the creation and consumption of the *HE*.

Historians have mulled over what Bede thought of the Bible, science, Rome, teaching, history, and indeed, himself. But modern scholars have not read the *HE* the way a contemporary would have, probably because they have never tried. Perhaps it is Bede's own perceived affability or the *HE*'s unique place in the early-medieval canon that makes modern readers assume both he and his text agree with their standards of objective truth. Whatever the reason—Bede's charm, the *HE*'s endurance, or some combination of the two—Bede and his text have masqueraded as effortlessly intelligible for centuries. Like other relics of past societies, neither Bede nor his *HE* is, in fact, so easy to grasp. Or perhaps I should say they are not so easy to grasp in their entirety. Modern scholars surely have understood the *HE* on a variety of levels, but it is humbling to know that Bede and his contemporary exegetes would approve—condescendingly—of our elementary and child-like understanding of a masterful text.

The reading I have here presented of the *HE* is neither definitive nor complete, but rather stands as an example of the kinds of readings that Bede anticipated and that his contemporaries performed. This is how the *HE* was experienced by readers who came to the text with the same perceptions and expectations with which Bede approached other works, and which he prescribed for other writers to use in their own. From this we

can see what a rich, varied, and personalized experience reading was for early-medieval intellectuals. There was no final, complete, or authoritative version of the grammatical experience of this text, nor would early-medieval readers have thought there should be. Instead there were possible readings, made more or less authentic by how strictly they adhere to the prescribed rules of *grammatica*.

Almost twenty years ago, Walter Goffart opened his lament on the state of the "Bede industry" by saying that "Bede, you would think, is just about mined out."<sup>26</sup> Although Goffart went on to prove that undeveloped areas of study remain, his original, rhetorical point was well-made. An enormous scholarly effort has been exerted on Bede and his *HE*, but what has largely been ignored is Bede's presence in his text, or, in Goffart's words, "the task facing us is to restore Bede to his tale, recognizing that the *History* is not a body of natural ore, but a deliberate, conscious creation."<sup>27</sup> This work undertakes that task.

---

<sup>26</sup> Walter Goffart, "The *Historia Ecclesiastica*: Bede's Agenda and Ours," in Robert B. Patterson (ed.), *The Haskins Society Journal*, 2 (1990), 29-45, at 29.

<sup>27</sup> Goffart, "Bede's Agenda," 31.

## Bibliography

### Primary Sources

- Adomnan, *Adomnan's Life of Columba*, Alan Orr Anderson and Marjorie Ogilvie Anderson (trans.). (Oxford, 1991)
- Alcuin. *Alcuin: The Bishops, Kings, and Saints of York*. P. Godman (trans.). (Oxford, 1982)
- Augustine. *De doctrina Christiana*. R.P.H. Green (trans.). (Oxford, 1995)
- Beda Venerabilis. *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, F. Wallis (trans.) (Liverpool, 1999)
- . *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*. B. Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors, (trans.). (Oxford, 1969)
- . "Bede's Letter to Egbert," in J. McClure and R. Collins (eds.), *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People, The Greater Chronicle, Bede's Letter to Egbert* (New York, 1999), 341-57
- . *Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, Lawrence T. Martin (trans.) (Kalamazoo, Michigan, 1989)
- . *Commentary on the Seven Catholic Epistles*, David Hurst (trans.) (Kalamazoo, Michigan, 1985)
- . *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, Leo Sherley-Price, (trans.) (New York, 1991)
- . *The Explanation of the Apocalypse*, Rev. Edward Marshall (trans.) (Oxford, 1878)
- . "Expositio Actuum apostolorum." In *Opera exegetica: Expositio Actuum apostolorum. Retractio in Actus apostolorum. Nomina regionum atque locorum de Actibus apostolorum. In epistulas VII catholicas*, W. Laistner and D. Hurst (eds.), 3-99. Corpus Christianorum Series Latina 121, 1983.
- . *Expositio Apocalypseos*. Corpus Christianorum 121A. Turnhout: Brepols, 2001.
- . *Opera Exegetica*. D. Hurst (ed.). CCSL 119B. Turnhout, 1983.
- . *Libri II De Arte Metrica et De Schematibus et Tropis*. Calvin B. Kendall (trans.). Saarbrucken, 1991.
- . *Homilies on the Gospels- Book One Advent to Lent*, Lawrence T. Martin and David Hurst (trans.) (Kalamazoo, Michigan, 1991)

---. *Homilies on the Gospels- Book Two Lent to the Dedication of the Church*, Lawrence T. Martin and David Hurst (trans.) (Kalamazoo, Michigan, 1991)

*The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great*, Bertram Colgrave (trans.) (Lawrence, Kansas, 1968)

Eddius Stephanus, *The Life of Bishop Wilfrid*, Bertram Colgrave (trans.) (New York, 1927)

Eusebius, *The Church History*, trans. Paul. L. Maier (New York, 2007)

Felix, *Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac*, Bertram Colgrave (trans.) (New York, 1956)

Gildas, *The Ruin of Britain and Other Works*, M. Winterbottom (trans.) (London, 1978)

Gregory the Great, *Forty Gospel Homilies*, Dom David Hurst, (trans.). (Kalamazoo, Michigan, 2000)

Isidore of Seville. *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*. Stephen A. Barney (trans.). (New York, 2006)

Tyconius. *Tyconius: The Book of Rules*. William S. Babcock (trans.). (Atlanta, 1989)

Vergil, *Eclogues, Georgics, Aeneid I-VI*, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough (trans.). (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1999)

### **Secondary Sources**

Auerbach, Erich. *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*. (Princeton University Press, 2003)

Bailey, R.N. *The Durham Cassiodorus* (Jarrow, 1979)

Barnard, L.W. "Bede and Eusebius as Church Historians." In *Famulus Christi: Essays in Commemoration of the Thirteenth Centenary of the Birth of the Venerable Bede*, 106-124

Barthes, Roland. *Mythologies*. (Hill and Wang, 1972)

Bassett, S., ed. *The Origins of the Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms*. (New York, 1989)

Battiscombe, C.F., ed. *The Relics of Saint Cuthbert*. (Oxford, 1956)

Berkhout, Carl T. "A doubtful Old English gloss in Bede's *Vita sancti Cuthberti*." *Notes and Queries* 53, no. 1 (2006): 10.



- Blair, John. *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*. (Oxford University Press, 2006)
- Bonner, Gerald. *Famulus Christi: Essays in commemoration of the thirteenth centenary of the birth of the Venerable Bede*. (S.P.C.K, 1976)
- . *Saint Bede in the Tradition of Western Apocalyptic Commentary*. (Jarrow, 1966)
- Breeze, Andrew. "St Cuthbert, Bede, and the Niduari of Pictland." *Northern History: A Review of the History of the North of England and the Borders* 40, no. 2 (2003): 365-368.
- Brooks, Nicholas. *Bede and the English*. (Jarrow , 1999)
- Brown, Michelle P. *The Lindisfarne Gospels: Society, Spirituality, and the Scribe*. (University of Toronto Press, 2003)
- . *The Lindisfarne Gospels: Society, Spirituality, and the Scribe*. (University of Toronto Press, 2003)
- Brown, Peter. *Authority and the Sacred: Aspects of the Christianisation of the Roman World*. (Cambridge University Press, 1997)
- . "The Decline of the Empire of God: Amnesty, Penance, and the Afterlife from Late Antiquity to the Middle Ages," in C.W. Bynum and P. Freedman (eds.) *Last Things- Death and the Apocalypse in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, 2000)
- . *Power & Persuasion Late Antiquity: Towards A Christian Empire*. (University of Wisconsin Press, 1992)
- . *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity*. (University of California Press, 1989)
- . *The World of Late Antiquity AD 150-750: AD 150-750*. (W. W. Norton, 1989)
- Bux Bosse, Roberta and Norman Hinton. "Cynewulf and the Apocalyptic Vision," *Neophilologus*, 74, (1990)
- Bynum, Caroline Walker, and Paul Freedman. *Last Things: Death and the Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*. (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999)
- Campbell, J. "Bede." In *Latin Historians*, T.A. Dorey (ed.), 1-27. (London, 1986)
- . *Bede's Reges and Principes*. (Jarrow, 1979)
- Campbell, Jackson J., "Adaptation of Classical Rhetoric in Old English Literature," in *Medieval Eloquence: Studies in the*

*Theory and Practice of Medieval Rhetoric*, ed. James J. Murphy (Berkeley, 1978), 173-97.

Carruthers, Leo Martin. "Apocalypse Now: Preaching and the Prophecy in Anglo-Saxon England," *Etudes Anglaises*, (1998).

Carruthers, Mary. *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*. (Cambridge University Press, 2008)

---. *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images, 400-1200*. (Cambridge University Press, 2000)

Carver, Martin, ed. *The Cross Goes North: Processes of Conversion in Northern Europe, AD 300-1300*. (Boydell Press, 2006)

Cavallo, Guglielmo. "Theodore of Tarsus and the Greek culture of his time," in M. Lapidige (ed.) *Archbishop Theodore Commemorative Studies on His Life and Influence* (Cambridge, 1995)

Chaney, William A. *The Cult of Kingship in Anglo-Saxon England*. (University of California Press, 1970)

Charles-Edwards, T. "Bede, the Irish and the Britons." *Celtica* 15 (1983): 42-52.

---. "Language and society among the insular Celts AD 400-1000," in M.J. Green (ed.), *The Celtic World* (London, 1995), 703-36

Coates, Simon, "The bishop as pastor and solitary: Bede and the spiritual authority of the monk-bishop," *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 47.4 (1996)

---. "The construction of episcopal sanctity in early Anglo-Saxon England: the impact of Venantius Fortunatus," *Historical Research*, 71:174, (1998), 1-13

Coleman, Janet, *Ancient and Medieval Memories: Studies in the Reconstruction of the Past* (New York, 1992)

Comparetti, Domenico, *Vergil in the Middle Ages*, trans. E.F.M. Benecke, (Princeton, 1997)

Copeland, Rita. *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages: Academic Traditions and Vernacular Texts*. (Cambridge University Press, 1995)

Corbett, John. "Two Early Anglo-Saxon Holy Men: Oswald and Cuthbert." In *The Anglo-Saxons: Synthesis and Achievement*, J. Douglas Woods and David A.E. Pelteret (eds.), 63-75. (Ontario, 1985)

Crépin, André. "Bede and the Vernacular," G. Bonner, ed. *Famulus Christi: Essays in Commemoration of the Thirteenth Centenary of the Birth of the Venerable Bede* (London, 1976)

- Cronyn, J.M., and C.V. Horie, eds. *St. Cuthbert's Coffin* (Durham, 1985)
- Crosman, Inge, "Reference and the Reader," *Poetics Today*, 4.1, (1983), 89-97
- Cubitt, Catherine. *Anglo-Saxon Church Councils c. 650-c.850*. (Leicester, 1996)
- Cullen, Jonathan. "Presupposition and Intertextuality," *MLN*, 91.6 (1976), 1380-96
- Damon, John Edward. *Soldier Saints and Holy Warriors*. (Burlington, Vermont, 2003)
- Danielou, J. *From Shadows to Reality: Studies in the Biblical Typology of the Fathers*. W. Hibberd, (trans.). (London, 1960)
- Degregorio, Scott. *Innovation and Tradition in the Writings of the Venerable Bede*. (West Virginia University, 2006)
- Del Giacco, Eric Jay. "Exegesis and sermon: a comparison of Bede's commentary and homilies on Luke." *Medieval Sermon Studies* 50 (2006): 2-29.
- Deusen, Nancy Van, and Nancy Van Deusen. *The Place of the Psalms in the Intellectual Culture of the Middle Ages*. (State University of New York Press, 1999)
- Dionisotti, Anna Carlotta. "On Bede, Grammars, and Greek." *Revue Benedictine* XCII, no. 1-2 (1982): 111-41.
- Drout, Michael D.C., *How Tradition Works: A Meme-Based Cultural Poetics of the Anglo-Saxon Tenth Century* (Tempe, Arizona, 2006)
- Dumville, David N. "The importation of Mediterranean manuscripts in to Theodore's England." In *Archbishop Theodore: Commemorative Studies on his Life and Influence*, Michael Lapidge (ed.), 96-119. (New York, 1995)
- Dumville, D., "The origins of Northumbria: some aspects of the British background," in S. Bassett (ed.), *The Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms* (Leicester, 1989), 55-74
- . "English Libraries Before 1066: Use and Abuse of the Manuscript Evidence," in *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts*, ed. Mary P. Richards (New York, 1994), 169-219
- Duncan, Edwin. "Fears of the Apocalypse: The Anglo-Saxons and the Coming of the First Millennium," *Religion and Literature*, Spring 31.1, (1999)

Dyer, J., "The Psalms in monastic prayer," in Nancy Van Deusen (ed.), *The Place of the Psalms in the Intellectual Culture of the Middle Ages* (Albany, 1999), 59-89

Earl, James. "Prophecy and Parable in Medieval Apocalyptic History," *Religion and Literature*, Spring 31.3, (1999)

Easting, R., "Access to heaven in medieval visions of the otherworld," in Carolyn Muessig and Ad Putter (eds.), *Envisaging Heaven in the Middle Ages* (London, 2007), 75-90

Eco, Umberto. *The Role of the Reader*. (Indiana University Press, 1979)

---. *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*. (Indiana University Press, 1986)

---. *The Limits of Interpretation*. (Indiana University Press, 1994)

---. *Theory of Semiotics*. (Indiana University Press, 1979)

Evans, Jonathan, "A Consideration of the Role of Semiotics in Redefining Medieval Manuscripts as Texts," in *New Approaches to medieval Textuality*, in ed. Mickle Dave Ledgerwood, (New York, 1998), 3-38

Farrell, R. (ed.), *Bede and Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 1978)

Fentress, James, and Chris Wickham, "Medieval Memories," in *Social Memory* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1992)

Foley, William Trent, *Images of Sanctity in Eddius Stephanus' "Life of Bishop Wilfrid," an Early English Saint's Life* (Lewiston, New York, 1992)

Foley, W. Trent, "Suffering and sanctity in Bede's Prose *Life of St. Cuthbert*," *Journal of Theological Studies*, 50:1, (1999), 102-16

Foot, Sarah. *Monastic Life in Anglo-Saxon England, c.600-900*. (Cambridge, 2006)

Fraser, James E., "St Columba and the convention at Druimm Cete: peace and politics at seventh-century Iona," *Early Medieval Europe*, 15:3 (2007), 315-34

Fraser, Veronica. "The influence of the Venerable Bede in the fourteenth-century Occitan treatise *Las Leys d'Amors*." *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric* 11 (1993): 51-61.

Gameson, Richard, ed. *The Early medieval Bible: its production, decoration, and use* (New York, 1994)

- Gameson, Richard. *The Role of Art in Late Anglo-Saxon Church* (Oxford, 1995)
- Garrison, Mary. "Letter to a king and biblical exempla: the examples of Cathulf and Clemens Peregrinus." *Early Medieval Europe* 7, no. 3 (1998): 305-328.
- Gellrich, Jesse M. *The Idea of the Book in the Middle Ages: Language, Theory, Mythology, and Fiction*. (Cornell University Press, 1987)
- Gneuss, Helmut. "The study of language in Anglo-Saxon England." In *Textual and Material Culture in Anglo-Saxon England: Thomas Northcote Toller and the Toller Memorial Lectures*, D. Scragg (ed.), 75-105. (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 2003)
- Godden, Malcolm. "The Millennium, Time, and History for the Anglo-Saxons," R. Landes, A. Gow, and D.C. Van Meter, eds. *The Apocalyptic Year 1000* (Oxford, 2003)
- Goffart, Walter. "Bede's "uera lex historiae" explained." *Anglo-Saxon England* 34 (2005): 111-116.
- . "The Historia Ecclesiastica: Bede's Agenda and Ours." *The Haskins Society Journal* 2 (1990): 29-45.
- . *The Narrators of Barbarian History (A.D. 550-800): Jordanes, Gregory of Tours, Bede, And Paul the Deacon*. (University of Notre Dame Press, 2005)
- Grafton, Anthony, and Megan Williams. *Christianity and the Transformation of the Book*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2006)
- Green, Martin. "Man, Time, and Apocalypse in *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, and *Beowulf*," K.O. O'Keefe, ed. *Old English Shorter Poems* (New York, 1994)
- Gurevich, Aaron. *Historical Anthropology of the Middle Ages*. Jana Howlett (ed.). (Chicago, 1992)
- Hamilton Thompson, A., (ed.), *Bede: His Life, Times, and Writings* (New York, 1935)
- Hanning, Robert W., *The Vision of History in Early Britain: from Gildas to Geoffrey of Monmouth* (New York, 1966).
- Harris, Stephen J.. "Bede and Gregory's Allusive Angles." *Criticism* 44, no. 3 (2002): 271-289.
- Hawkes, J., and S. Mills (eds.), *Northumbria's Golden Age* (Stroud, Gloucestershire, 1999)
- Hen, Yitzhak. "The uses of the Bible and the perception of

- kingship in Merovingian Gaul." *Early Medieval Europe* 7, no. 3 (1998): 277-290.
- Higham, N. J. *An English Empire: Bede, the Britons, and the Early Anglo-Saxon Kings*. (Manchester University Press, 1995)
- Higham, N.J. *Re-Reading Bede: The Historia Ecclesiastica In English History*. (Routledge, 2006)
- Holsinger, Bruce. "The Parable of Caedmon's Hymn: Liturgical Invention and Literary Tradition." *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* April (2007): 149-175.
- Howe, N. "From Bede's World to 'Bede's World'." In *Reading Medieval Culture*, R.M. Stein and S. Pierson Prior (eds.), 21-44. (Notre Dame, 2005)
- . *Migration and Mythmaking in Anglo-Saxon England* (Notre Dame, 1989)
- Hunter Blair, Peter. "The Historical Writings of Bede." *Spoletto* 17, no. i (1970): 197-221.
- . *Northumbria in the Days of Bede*. (Llanerch Press, 1997)
- Irvine, Martin. "Bede the Grammarian and the Scope of Grammatical Studies in Eighth-Century Northumbria." Peter Clemoes (ed.). *Anglo-Saxon England* 15 (1986).
- . *The Making of Textual Culture: 'Grammatica' and Literary Theory 350-1100*. (Cambridge University Press, 2006)
- Irvine, Martin, and David Thomson. "Grammatica and Literary Theory." In *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism: Volume 2 The Middle Ages*, A. Minnis and I. Johnson (eds.), 15-41, 2005.
- Johnson-South, T., "Changing Images of Sainthood: St. Cuthbert in the *Historia de Sancto Cuthberto*," in S. Sticca (ed.), *Saints: Studies in Hagiography* (New York, 1996), 81-94
- Karkov, Catherine E., and Nicholas Howe. *Conversion And Colonization in Anglo-Saxon England*. (Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006)
- Kelly, Joseph. "Bede and the Irish Exegetical Tradition of the Apocalypse," *Revue Benedictine*, 92, 1982
- Kendall, Calvin B. "Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*: the Rhetoric of Faith." In *Medieval Eloquence: Studies in the Theory and Practice of Medieval Rhetoric*, 145-172. (Los Angeles, 1978)
- Keskiaho, J., "The handling and interpretation of dreams and visions in late sixth- to eighth-century Gallic and Anglo-Latin

- hagiography and histories," *Early Medieval Europe*, 13:3, (2005), 227-48
- Kirby, D.P. "Bede's Native Sources for the *Historia Ecclesiastica*," D.A.E. Pelteret, ed. *Anglo-Saxon History: Basic Readings* (New York, 2000)
- . "Bede's sources," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 48 (1966), 341-71
- . "Cuthbert, Boisil of Melrose and the Northumbrian priest Ecgberht: some historical and hagiographical connections." In *Ogma: Essays in Celtic Studies in honour of Proinseas Ni Chathain*, Michael Richter and Jean-Michel Picard (eds.), 48-53. (Dublin, 2001)
- . *The Earliest English Kings* (London, 1991)
- Knappe, Gabriele. "Classical Rhetoric in Anglo-Saxon England." *Anglo-Saxon England* 27 (1998): 5-29.
- Knibbs, Eric. "Exegetical hagiography: Bede's prose *Vita sancti Cuthberti*." *Revue Benedictine* 114, no. 2 (2004): 233-252.
- Knowles, D. *Saints and Scholars*. (New York, 1962)
- Laistner, M.L.W. "Some early medieval Commentaries on the Old Testament." *Harvard Theological Review* 46 (1953): 27-46.
- Landes, Richard, Andrew Gow, and David Van Meter. *The Apocalyptic Year 1000: Religious Expectation and Social Change, 950-1050*. (Oxford, 2003)
- Lapidge, Michael, *The Anglo-Saxon Library*. (Oxford, 2008)
- . "The School of Theodore and Hadrian." *Anglo-Saxon England* 15 (1986): 45-72.
- Lapidge, Michael, (ed.). *Bede and His World: The Jarrow Lectures, 1958-1993*. (Variorum, 1994)
- Laynesmith, Mark D., "Stephen of Ripon and the Bible: allegorical and typological interpretations of the *Life of St Wilfrid*," *Early Medieval Europe*, 9 (2), (2000), 163- 82
- Ledgerwood, Mickle D. *New Approaches to Medieval Textuality*. (Peter Lang, 1998)
- Lefkowitz, Lori Hope. "Creating the World: Structuralism and Semiotics." In *Contemporary Literary Theory*, G. Douglas Atkins and Laura Morrow (eds.). Amherst: 1989.
- Lerer, Seth, *Literacy and Power in Anglo-Saxon England* (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1991)

- Lowe, E.A., "A Key to Bede's Scriptorium," *Scriptorium*, 12 (1958), 182-90
- de Lubac, Henri. *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture*. E.M. Macierowski (trans.). (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2000)
- Lucas, Peter J. "Old English Christian Poetry: The Cross in Exodus," G. Bonner, ed. *Famulus Christi: Essays in Commemoration of the Thirteenth Centenary of the Birth of the Venerable Bede* (London, 1976)
- Lutterkort, Karl. "Beda hagiographicus: meaning and function of miracle stories in the Vita Cuthberti and the Historia ecclesiastica." In *Beda Venerabilis: Historian, Monk & Northumbrian*, L.A.J.R. Houwen and A.A. MacDonald (eds.), 81-106. (Groningen, 1996)
- Lynch, Joseph H. "Spiritale Vinculum: The Vocabulary of Spiritual Kinship in Early Medieval Europe." In *Religion, Culture, and Society in the early Middle Ages*, Thomas F.X. Noble and John J. Contreni (eds.), 181-204. (Kalamazoo, Michigan, 1987)
- Maddicott, J., "Plague in Seventh-Century England." *Past and Present* (1997), 7-54
- Markus, R.A. *Signs and Meanings: World and Text in Ancient Christianity*. (Liverpool, 1996)
- Marsden, R. "The survival of Ceolfrith's Tobit in a tenth-century insular manuscript." *Journal of Theological Studies* 45 (1994): 1-23.
- . "The Text of the Old Testament in Anglo-Saxon England." *American Historical Review* 104 (1999).
- Martin, Lawrence T., "Bede's Structural Use of Wordplay as a Way to Teach," in *From Cloister to Classroom: Monastic and Scholastic Approaches to Truth*, ed. Rozanne Elder, (Kalamazoo, Michigan, 1986), 27-46
- . "The Two Worlds in Bede's Homilies: The Biblical Event and the Listeners' Experience," in *De Ore Domini: Preacher and Word in the Middle Ages*, Thomas L. Amos, Eugene A. Green, and Beverly Mayne Kienzle (eds.), Kalamazoo, Michigan, 1989, 27-40
- Mayr-Harting, H.M.R.E. *The Coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England*. (London, 1972)
- . *The Venerable Bede, the Rule of St. Benedict and Social Class*. Jarrow, 1976.
- McCready, William D., *Miracles and the Venerable Bede* (Toronto, 1994)
- McClure, J. "Bede's Old Testament Kings." In *Ideal and Reality*



- in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society*, Patrick Wormald, Donald Bullough, and Roger Collins (eds.), 76-98. (Oxford, 1983)
- McGill, Scott C., "Other Aeneids: rewriting three passages of the *Aeneid* in the Codex Salmasianus," *Vergilius: The Journal of the Vergilian Society*, 49 (2003), 84-113
- McKitterick, Rosamond, *Perceptions of the Past in the Early Middle Ages* (Notre Dame, 2006)
- McNamara, Martin. *The Psalms in the Early Irish Church*. (Sheffield Academic Press, 1998)
- Meens, Rob. "Politics, mirrors of princes and the Bible: sins, kings and the well-being of the realm." *Early Medieval Europe* 7, no. 3 (1998): 345-357.
- Merrills, A. H. *History and Geography in Late Antiquity*. (Cambridge, 2005)
- Meyvaert, Paul. "The date of Bede's In Ezram and his image of Ezra in the Codex Amiatinus." *Speculum*.
- Miller, Joseph M., Michael H. Prosser, and Thomas W. Benson, eds., *Readings in Medieval Rhetoric* (Bloomington, Indiana, 1973)
- Miller, Owen, "Intertextual Identity," in Mario J. Valdes and Owen Miller (eds.), (Buffalo, 1985)
- Moreira, Isabel, *Dreams, Visions, and Spiritual Authority in Merovingian Gaul* (Ithaca, 2000)
- Moreland, J., "Ethnicity, power and the English," in W.O. Frazer and A. Tyrrell (eds.), *Social Identity in Early Medieval Britain* (London, 2000), 23-52
- Murphy, James Jerome. *Medieval Eloquence: Studies in the Theory and Practice of Medieval Rhetoric*. (University of California Press, 1978)
- Nelson, Janet. "Royal Saints and Early Medieval Kingship." In *Sanctity and Secularity: the Church and the World*, Derek Baker (ed.), 39-44. (Oxford, 1973)
- Neuman de Vegvar, C., *The Northumbrian Renaissance: A Study in the Transmission of Style* (Selinsgrove, 1987)
- Newlands, Carole E., "Bede and images of Saint Cuthbert," *Traditio: Studies in Ancient and Medieval History, Thought, and Religion*, 52 (1997), 73-109
- Nordhagen, Per J. *The Codex Amiatinus and the Byzantine Element in the Northumbrian Renaissance* (Jarrow, 1977)

- O Carragain, Eamonn. *The City of Rome and the World of Bede*. (Jarrow, 1994)
- O'Brien O'Keefe, K. *Old English Shorter Poems*. (Garland Science, 1994)
- O'Reilly, Jennifer, "The Library of Scripture: Views from Vivarium and Wearmouth-Jarrow" in P. Binski and W. Noel (eds.) *New Offerings, Ancient Treasures* (Stroud, 2001)
- Ogilvy, J.D.A. *Books Known to Writers from Aldhelm to Alcuin*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1936)
- Olsen, Glenn. "Bede as Historian: the Evidence from his Observations on the Life of the First Christian Community at Jerusalem." *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 33, no. 4 (1982): 519-530.
- Palmer, R.B. "Bede as Textbook Writer: A Study of His De Arte Metrica." *Speculum* 34 (1959): 573-584.
- Parkes, M.B. *The Scriptorium of Wearmouth-Jarrow* (Jarrow, 1982)
- Paul Meyvaert. "Bede, Cassiodorus, and the Codex Amiatinus." *Speculum* 71, no. 4 (1996): 827-883.
- Paxson, James J., "A Theory of Biblical Typology in the Middle Ages," *Exemplaria*, 3.2 (1991), 359-83
- Peterson, Joan M. *The Dialogues of Gregory the Great in their Late Antique Cultural Background*. (Toronto, 1984)
- Pfaff, R.W. "Bede Among the Fathers? The Evidence from Liturgical Commemorations." E.A. Livingstone, (ed.). *Studia Patristica* 28 (1993): 225-229.
- Plummer, Charles, ed. *Venerabilis Baedae Opera Historica*. Oxford, 1896.
- Pohl, Walter. "Telling the Difference: Signs of Ethnic Identity." In *Strategies of Distinction: the Construction of Ethnic Communities, 300-800*, W. Pohl and H. Reimitz (eds.), 17-69. (Leiden, 1998)
- Pope, John C. "Second Thoughts on the Interpretation of *The Seafarer*," K.O. O'Keefe, ed. *Old English Shorter Poems* (New York, 1994)
- Prideaux-Collins, William. "'Satan's Bonds Are Extremely Loose': Apocalyptic Expectation in Anglo-Saxon England during the Millennial Era," R. Landes, A. Gow, and D.C. Van Meter, eds. *The Apocalyptic Year 1000* (Oxford, 2003)
- Ray, R. "Augustine's De Consensu Evangelistarum and the Historical Education of the Venerable Bede." E.A.

- Livingstone (ed.). *Studia Patristica* 16 (1985): 557-563.
- . "Bede and Cicero," in *Anglo-Saxon England*, 16, 1-15
- . *Bede, Rhetoric, and the Creation of Christian Latin Culture*. (Jarrow, 1997)
- . "Bede's Vera lex historiae." *Speculum* 55 (1980): 1-21.
- . "Triumph of Greco-Roman Rhetorical Assumptions in Pre-Carolingian Historiography." In *The Inheritance of Historiography, 350-900*, C. Holdsworth and T. Wiseman (eds.). (Exeter, 1986)
- Reeves, M., "The Bible and Literary Authorship in the Middle Ages," in S. Prickett (ed.), *Reading the Text: Biblical Criticism and Literary Theory* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1991), 12-63
- Reynolds, Suzanne. *Medieval Reading: Grammar, Rhetoric and the Classical Text*. (New York, 1996)
- Ridyard, Susan J., *The Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England* (New York, 1988)
- Riffaterre, Michael. *Semiotics of Poetry*. (Bloomington, 1978)
- Risden, Edward L. *Beasts of Time: Apocalyptic Beowulf* (New York, 1994)
- Ritari, Katja, "Image of conversion in early Irish saints' lives," in O. Merisalo and P. Pahta (eds.), *Frontiers in the Middle Ages: Proceedings of the Third European Congress of Medieval Studies* (Jyväskylä, 10-14 June 2003), (Louvain-la-Neuve, 2006), 717-27
- Rollason, D. W., Gerald Bonner, and Clare Stancliffe. *St Cuthbert, His Cult and His Community to Ad 1200: To Ad 1200*. (Boydell Press, 1995)
- Rollason, David, *Bede and Germany* (Jarrow, 2001)
- . *Northumbria, 500-1100: The Creation and Destruction of a Kingdom*. (New York, 2003)
- Rollason, D.W., (ed.), *Cuthbert: Saint and Patron* (Durham, 1987)
- Scheil, Andrew P. *The Footsteps of Israel: Understanding Jews in Anglo-Saxon England*. (Ann Arbor, 2004)
- Schrader, Richard J. *Old English Poetry and the Genealogy of Events*. (East Lansing, 1993)

Sharpe, R., "The Varieties of Bede's Prose," in T. Reinhardt, M. Lapidge, and J. N. Adams (eds.), *Aspects of the Language of Latin Prose* (New York, 2005), 339-55

Sims-Williams, Patrick. "The settlement of England in Bede and the Chronicle." *Anglo-Saxon England* 12 (1983): 1-41.

Skemp, Vincent T.M. "Jerome's Tobit: a reluctant contribution to the genre rewritten Bible." *Revue Benedictine* 112 (2002): 5-35.

Smalley, Beryl. *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*. (Notre Dame, 1964)

Smith, Lesley, and Benedicta Ward, eds., *Intellectual Life in the Middle Ages: Essays Presented to Margaret Gibson* (London, 1992)

Stein, Robert M. "The Trouble with Harold: The Ideological Context of the Vita Haroldi," *New Medieval Literatures* (volume II, 1998)

Stenton, F.M. *Anglo-Saxon England*. (Oxford, 1947)

Stock, Brian. *After Augustine: The Meditative Reader and the Text*. (Philadelphia, 2001)

Styles, Tania. "Whitby revisited: Bede's explanation of Streanaeshalch." *Nomina: Journal of the Society for Name Studies in Britain and Ireland* 21 (1998): 133-148.

Sutcliffe, E.F. "Quotations in the Venerable Bede's Commentary on Mark." *Biblica Romae* biblical volume 7 (1926): 428-439.

Thacker, Alan, and Richard Sharpe, *Local Saints and Local Churches in the Early Medieval West* (New York, 2002)

Thacker, A., "Membra disjecta: the division of the body and the diffusion of the cult," in C. Stancliffe and E. Cambridge (eds.), *Oswald: Northumbrian King to European Saint* (Stamford, Lincolnshire, 1995), 97-127

Tinti, Francesca, "The Anonymous Life of St. Cuthbert and the Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England Database: an exercise in data capturing," *Medieval Prosopography: History and Collective Biography*, 22 (2001), 127-40

Todorov, Tzvetan. *Theories of the Symbol*. Catherine Porter, (trans.). (Ithaca, 1977)

Tugéne, G., "L'histoire 'ecclesiastique' du peuple anglais. Réflexions sur le particularisme et l'universalisme chez Bède," *Recherches Augustiniennes*, 17 (1982), 129-72

---. *L'idée De Nation Chez Bède Le Vénérable*. Collection des études augustiniennes 37. (Paris, 2001)

- van Egmond, Wolfert, "Saintly images: visions of saints in hagiographical texts," in Mariëlle Hageman and Marco Mostert (eds.), *Reading Images and Texts: Medieval Images and Texts as Forms of Communication. Papers from the Third Utrecht Symposium on Medieval Literacy, 7-9 December 2000*, Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy, 8 (2005), 221-37
- Verbeke, W., and D. Verhelst. *The Use and Abuse of Eschatology in the Middle Ages*. Cornell University Press, 1988.
- Vircillo Franklin, Carmela. "The date of composition of Bede's *De Schematibus et tropis* and *De arte metrica*." *Revue Benedictine* 110 (2000): 199-203.
- Wallace-Hadrill, J. M. *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People: A Historical Commentary*. Oxford University Press, USA, 1993.
- Walsh, Katherine, and Diana Wood, eds. *The Bible in the medieval world: essays in memory of Beryl Smalley* (Oxford, 1985)
- Ward, Benedicta. *Bede and the Psalter*. Fairacres publication 141. Oxford: SLG Press, 2002.
- . *The Venerable Bede*. Cistercian studies series no. 169. Kalamazoo, Mich: Cistercian Publications, 1998.
- . *The venerable Bede*. Continuum International Publishing Group, 2005.
- Wilson, D., *Anglo-Saxon Paganism* (New York, 1992)
- Wormald, Patrick, "Bede, the *Bretwaldas* and the Origins of the *Gens Anglorum*, in *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society*, eds. Patrick Wormald, Donald Bullough, and Roger Collins (Oxford, 1983), 99-129
- . "Engla Lond: The Making of an Allegiance," *The Journal of Historical Sociology*, 7.1, (1994), 1-24
- . "The Venerable Bede and the 'Church of England'." *The English Religious Tradition and the Genius of Anglicanism* (1992): 13-32.
- Wright, Neil, "Bede and Vergil," *Romanobarbarica*, 6 (1981), 361-79
- Wright, J. Robert. *A Companion to Bede: A Reader's Commentary on the Ecclesiastical History of the English People*. (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008)
- Young, Frances, *The Art of Performance: Toward a Theology of Holy Scripture* (London, 1990)