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SAINTS AND SCANDALS: REPRESENTATIONS OF ELITE WOMEN IN THE WRITINGS OF BEDE AND GREGORY OF TOURS

by

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CONTENTS

Declaration…….....i
Abstract……..…….…….....ii
Acknowledgements…….……iii
Abbreviations……...iv

Thesis Introduction……...1

Part One: Central Research Questions and Contexts

Chapter One: Women in Bede and Gregory of Tours: Scholarly Approaches and Thesis Methodology…….5

1.1: Approaches to the Representation of Women in Existing Scholarship on Bede and Gregory
(i) The Individuality of Bede's and Gregory's Representations of Women…….6
(ii) The "Golden Age" Hypothesis and "Dark Age Misogyny": Mainstream Historiography on Medieval Women: 1970s-1990s...…..……...10
(iii) Revisionist Approaches and New Ways of Reading in the Twenty-First Century…….…….....….17

1.2: Thesis Methodology and Frameworks for Interpreting Bede's and Gregory's Representations of Women
(i) Thesis Methodology……...25
(ii) Interpretative Frameworks……31

Chapter Two: Why Bede and Gregory Wrote about Women: the Relevance of Contemporary Crises and Reforming Agendas in the *HE* and the *DLH*...…….36

2.1: Contemporary Crises and Moral Decline in the *HE* and the *DLH*
(i) Secular Crises: Consequences of Moral Decline in Bede's and Gregory's Societies……..….....37
(ii) Ecclesiastical Crises: Consequences of Moral Decline in Bede's and Gregory's Churches.……...…….43

Part Two: Thematic Analyses and Case Studies

Chapter Three: Missions and Marriages: Elite Women in the Secular Life……...49

3.1: Peace-Weavers and Protagonists: The Role of Christian Wives and the Influence of Women
(i) The Role of Christian Wives in Patristic Thought…….50
(ii) The Influence of Women in Christian Historiography……..…….....52

3.2: Queen Converters and Christian Missions: Clotild and Clovis in the *DLH* and Æthelburh and Edwin in the *HE*
(i) Clotild and Clovis in the *DLH*……...……59
(ii) *Æ*thelburh and Edwin in the *HE*……...……65

3.3: Marriage as a Model for Christian Society in the *HE* and the *DLH*: Monogamy and Unity
(i) Monogamous Christian Marriage: Moral and Political Contexts…...……...80
(ii) Christian Marriage and Secular and Religious Unity…...……85

Chapter Four: Elite Women as Good Examples in the Religious Life: Personal Sanctity and Community Leadership…….……....90

4.1: Female Monasteries and Entering the Religious Life
(i) Female Monasteries in Anglo-Saxon England and Merovingian France…....92
(ii) Entering the Religious Life in Bede's and Gregory's Histories…….…..96

4.2: Spiritual Marriage and Personal Sanctity: Virginity and Renunciation
(i) Spiritual Marriage: Chastity and Virginity…….…….106
(ii) Personal Sanctity: Renunciation, Humility and Patience…...……115

4.3: Monastic Leadership and Community: Female Leaders and Teachers
(i) Female Leadership and Episcopal Support……...……...121
(ii) Monastic Rules, Teaching and Instruction……...…….…….129

Chapter Five: Elite Women as Bad Examples in the Religious Life: Scandal, Sin and Penance……..135

5.1: Coldingham and Poitiers as Representations of Contemporary Crises: Scandal, Corruption and Failed Leadership in Monastic Life
(i) Scandal and Corruption in Monastic Life……...…….137
(ii) Failed Leadership in Monastic Life……...…….141

5.2: Sin and Rebellion: Perversion of Monastic Discipline and Rebellion at Coldingham and Poitiers
(i) Perversion of Monastic Discipline as a Reversal of the Values of the Primitive Church.....144
(ii) Rebellion against Profession, Religious Leaders and God…….148

5.3: Punishment, Repentance and Reform: Spiritual Complacency, Divine Punishment and the Urgency for Reform
(i) Spiritual Complacency and Divine Punishment……...……...158
(ii) Eschatological Imminence, Repentance and the Urgency for Reform…...…162

Thesis Conclusion…….……..…..173

Bibliography……...……..179

DECLARATION

This is to declare that the following work is my own and has not been submitted for another degree at any institution. All external sources and references are acknowledged and indicated in the contents. I have read and understood the regulations of University College Cork concerning plagiarism.

Jenny Coughlan

Signed: _____

Date: _____

ABSTRACT

This thesis analyses and compares the representations of elite women in the writings of Bede (c.673-735) and Gregory of Tours (c.538-594), primarily in their histories: Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* and Gregory's *Decem Libri Historiarum*. Bede's and Gregory's representations of women have never been compared in a dedicated full-length study, but comparing their differences and similarities can provide valuable insights into the authors' attitudes towards women and into other key, related issues in their narratives. Bede had read Gregory's history, and this thesis, which prioritises Bede, uses Gregory's history to better understand Bede's concerns. It identifies and investigates common themes in their treatment of secular and religious women. In relation to secular women, the thesis examines the theme of marriage and conversion to Christianity. For religious women, the thesis explores accounts of good behaviour, virginity and religious leadership, and accounts of bad behaviour involving scandal in religious life, sin and punishment. In order to fully understand Bede's and Gregory's representations of women, the thesis examines the authors' contemporary circumstances and their historiographical and exegetical contexts, with particular reference to providential and eschatological frameworks.

This thesis challenges the view that Bede's representation of women was motivated by misogyny or a degree of gendered prejudice. It argues that though writing in patriarchal societies, both Bede's and Gregory's representations of women were primarily driven by pastoral rather than gendered considerations. Bede and Gregory used representations of women (and men) to encourage contemporary moral reform and save souls in the last age of this world. Their message of reform was aimed at both women and men. Bede's and Gregory's histories are very different in tone, and depict women in different ways and in different situations, but their representations of women had a similar urgent positive pastoral function in both authors' narratives.

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ABBREVIATIONS

BHL	*Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina*
BOH	*Baedae Opera Historica*, Charles Plummer (ed.), (Oxford, 1896, repr. 1969)
CCSL	*Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina* (Turnhout, 1953-)
CSEL	*Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* (Vienna, 1866-)
DLH	Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, Ormonde M. Dalton (trans.), *The History of the Franks by Gregory of Tours*, vol 2 (Oxford, 1927)
EE	Bede, *Epistola ad Ecgbertum Episcopum*, Ian Wood and Christopher Grocock (eds. and trans.), *The Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow* (Oxford, 2013)
GC	Gregory of Tours, *Liber in Gloria Confessorum*, Raymond Van Dam (trans.), *Gregory of Tours: Glory of the Confessors*, *TTH* (Liverpool, 1988, repr. with corrections, 2004)
GCS	*Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller*
GM	Gregory of Tours, *Liber in Gloria Martyrum*, Raymond Van Dam (trans.), Gregory of Tours: Glory of the Martyrs, *TTH* (Liverpool, 1988)
HA	Bede, *Historia Abbatum*, Ian Wood and Christopher Grocock (eds. and trans.), The Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow (Oxford, 2013), pp. 22-75
HE	Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, Bertram Colgrave and Roger A. B. Mynors, (eds. and trans.), *Bede: Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Oxford, repr. with corrections 1991)

MGH	*Monumenta Germaniae Historica*
MGH AA	*Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Auctores Antiquissimi*
MGH SRM	*Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores Rerum Merovingicarum*
NPNF	*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Series One and Two
PG	*Patrologia Cursus Completus, Series Graeca*
PL	*Patrologia Cursus Completus. Series Latina*
SC	*Sources Chrétiennes*
TTH	*Translated Texts for Historians*
VC	Bede, *Vita Ceolfridi*, Ian Wood and Christopher Grocock (eds. and trans.), (Oxford, 2013)
VM	Gregory of Tours, *Libri I-IV de Virtutibus Beati Martini Episcopi*, Van Dam, Raymond (trans.), *Saints and their Miracles in Late Antique Gaul* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1993), pp. 199-303
VP	Gregory of Tours, *Liber Vitae Patrum*, Edward James (trans.), *Gregory of Tours: Life of the Fathers, TTH* 1 (Liverpool, 2nd edn. 1991)
VW	Eddius Stephanus, *Vita Wilfridi*, Bertram Colgrave (ed. and trans.), (Oxford, 1927)

Thesis Introduction

This thesis analyses and compares the representations of elite women in the writings of Bede (c.673-735) and Gregory of Tours (c.538-594). Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* and Gregory's *Decem Libri Historiarum*, hereafter referred to as *HE* and *DLH* respectively, provide our main sources on the representations of women in early Anglo-Saxon England and Merovingian France, yet these representations have never been compared in a dedicated study. Bede and Gregory describe women in different ways and comparing their portrayals provides an ideal opportunity to better understand each authors' treatment of women, particularly as their personal circumstances differed but their societies were similar. Bede was given as an oblate to Wearmouth-Jarrow monastery by his kin and spent his life engaged in monastic life and scholarship, while Gregory was a metropolitan bishop, responsible for the dioceses under his care and important royal and ecclesiastical affairs.[1] Bede had read Gregory's history, and this thesis prioritises Bede by analysing the *HE* in the context of the *DLH*. It compares both authors' representations of women by analysing a selection of the most prominent female-centred themes and case studies arising from their histories. This thematic comparison considers Bede's and Gregory's treatment of women alongside their treatment of men. The analysis is not concerned with examining the realities of life for women in these societies but with analysing Bede's and Gregory's textual representations of women, in order to question their attitudes towards them.

There has been a prevailing view in much scholarship on medieval women that the period was characterised by misogyny, and that clerical authors including Bede held negative attitudes towards women. However, revisionist work in studies on medieval women has recently challenged this view, arguing that accusations of clerical misogyny neglect to consider the authorial intentions, narrative techniques, and contemporary audiences of individual texts. The revisionist approach highlights the need to question how and why medieval authors used representations of women in their texts. Building on this research, the present

[1] *HE* 5.24; on the practice of child oblation, see Mayke De Jong, *In Samuel's Image: Child Oblation in the Early Medieval West* (Leiden, 1996); on Wearmouth-Jarrow as a centre for scholarship and book production, see Calvin B. Kendall, 'Bede and Education', in Scott De Gregorio (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Bede* (Cambridge, 2010), pp. 99-112, at p. 104.

study argues that Bede's and Gregory's representations of women form part of their agendas for contemporary moral reform, which both authors sought to articulate through their histories. It also builds on approaches used in wider scholarship on both authors and their texts, which reveal the complexities involved in understanding Bede, Gregory, and their histories. Their methods involve contextualising the authors' texts within their providential world-view, considering their exegetical, eschatological and authorial agendas, and questioning their pastoral and reforming motivations in writing. These methods are not often used in studies on women in Bede's and Gregory's texts, yet their application is essential for understanding the representations of women, and indeed those of men, in the *HE* and the *DLH*. The thesis applies a number of these methods and is rooted in historiography and Bede's and Gregory's own contexts.

This thesis is divided into two parts and five chapters; the first part comprises two chapters which address the central research questions and contexts for comparing Bede's and Gregory's representations of women, and the second part comprises three chapters of thematic and case-study based analyses of their representations. The first chapter engages with historiography on medieval women and Bede and Gregory, examining the key arguments and interpretations, and exploring how revisionist research has challenged mainstream views. The chapter explains the methodologies and interpretative frameworks used in the present thesis for examining both authors' representations of women. Chapter two questions why Bede and Gregory wrote about women by examining the immediate contexts in which the histories were written. It examines Bede's and Gregory's contemporary concerns about moral decline; both authors believed that their respective societies were in crisis, and this chapter examines both secular and ecclesiastical crises. The chapter argues that the histories were written in response to these crises which has important implications for our understanding of the authors' representations of women; Bede's and Gregory's portrayals of women form part of their agendas for contemporary moral reform.

Chapter three begins the thematic analyses of Bede's and Gregory's representations of women, focusing on elite women in the secular life and using the themes of missions and marriages. Bede and Gregory give prominence to the

roles of royal women in Christianisation by describing how they aided in missions through their marriages, and both authors provide ideal examples of Christian wives. Several examples of wives from the histories will be considered and two case studies will be compared, Bede's portrayal of Edwin and Æthelthburh and Gregory's of Clovis and Clotild. These two marriages are frequently referred to in scholarship on medieval women but have never been directly compared; Bede has been viewed as downplaying the roles of wives in the conversion of their husbands, and the chapter challenges this view by comparing both authors. The chapter explores how the behaviour of secular rulers was closely connected to the security of the people in the minds of both authors, who sought to express this message to their audiences through their portrayals of queens. It argues that Bede and Gregory used descriptions of women as narrative *topoi*, illustrating their views on rulers and on society in order to encourage contemporary moral reform.

Chapters four and five analyse Bede's and Gregory's representations of elite women in the religious life. Bede's treatment of religious women is far more detailed than his descriptions of secular women, and he focuses almost exclusively on good examples. Gregory by contrast provides more descriptions of secular women than religious, and prioritises bad examples. This is striking because their societies were similar, and the Anglo-Saxon female houses were modelled on those of Late Merovingian Gaul. Gregory is direct in describing immorality in contemporary monastic life while Bede is indirect, and comparing their accounts elucidates Bede's descriptions. Both authors provide examples of religious women in opposing poles of good and bad behaviour; chapter four examines their good examples and chapter five examines their bad examples. These chapters argue that Bede and Gregory used such examples as juxtapositions, derived not from an anti-woman bias, but from the authors' concerns about moral laxity in religious life. Chapter four investigates the authors' portrayals of female personal sanctity and community leadership, exploring the themes of virginity, asceticism, leadership and teaching. Two of the most prominent religious women in Bede's history, Æthelthryth and Hild, are compared with Gregory's descriptions of Radegund and other key religious women and men from both histories. Chapter five focuses on Bede's account of the monastery of Coldingham and Gregory's of Poitiers as case studies. The chapter investigates the urgent importance placed on repentance and

reform by Bede and Gregory through their accounts of Coldingham and Poitiers, arguing that these accounts were a response to a crisis of religious leadership in the authors' contemporary Church. It highlights Bede's and Gregory's use of eschatological themes and suggests a shared eschatology between Bede, Gregory of Tours and Gregory the Great. The chapter argues that Bede's and Gregory's representations of sinful women were driven by eschatology rather than misogyny, as both authors used the imminence of divine judgement in their accounts of Coldingham and Poitiers to encourage contemporary moral reform.

This study is focused on analysing Bede's and Gregory's textual representations of women, and their writings are therefore essential throughout the thesis. The primary sources were consulted in their original Latin editions and in selected translations; all quotations are in English and quoted directly from the translations stated, except where Latin terms are used and when grammatical changes from the original were necessary. The majority of quotations used in the thesis are from Bede's and Gregory's histories: Colgrave and Mynors were used for the Latin edition and English translation of the *HE*, and the Latin edition of the *DLH* was accessed through the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, using Dalton's English translation.[2] Additional quotations from Bede's and Gregory's other texts, and patristic and contemporary texts, are from selected English translations which are individually indicated. Biblical quotations were accessed through the online edition of the Douay-Rheims Bible.

[2] Bertram Colgrave and Roger A. B. Mynors, (eds. and trans.), *Bede: Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Oxford, repr. with corrections 1991); Bruno Krusch and Wilhelm Levison (eds.), *MGH SRM* 1,1 (Hannover, 1951); Ormonde M. Dalton (trans.), *The History of the Franks by Gregory of Tours*, vol 2 (Oxford, 1927).

Chapter One: Women in Bede and Gregory of Tours: Scholarly Approaches and Thesis Methodology

Introduction

This chapter is concerned with setting out the central aims and objectives of the thesis and consists of two sections. The first section examines approaches to women in existing scholarship on Bede and Gregory. It first considers the individuality of Bede's and Gregory's representations of women and explores recent scholarship on each author's history and their relationship to each other. Scholarship has elucidated the complexities of Bede and Gregory as individual authors, but few have compared their histories or their representations of women. Bede's history is not generally considered to have been influenced directly by Gregory's, but this thesis argues that comparing the authors' representation of women indicates areas where Bede may have been influenced by Gregory. The section then examines scholarly approaches to the topic of women in the early medieval period, elucidating the key arguments and interpretations that have contributed to scholarship on Bede's and Gregory's portrayals of women. These approaches are grouped into two main phases of research; mainstream scholarship on women over the last three decades of the twentieth century are examined first, followed by an exploration of the revisionist scholarship and new methodologies employed in the twenty-first century. It is important to consider this scholarship at the beginning, as the present thesis responds directly to scholarship on the subject by challenging certain arguments and building on others.

The second section outlines the methodologies and interpretative frameworks employed in this study, explaining why specific approaches have been chosen and illustrating how they will be utilised for the thematic analyses. Several of the methods and frameworks have been used in studies on Bede and Gregory individually but have rarely been employed in comparative analyses or in gender analyses of their histories. The chapter argues that applying these methods and frameworks for interpreting Bede and Gregory provides valuable insights into their representations of women, and contributes to a more accurate assessment of their attitudes towards them.

1.1: Approaches to the Representations of Women in Existing Scholarship on Bede and Gregory

(i) The Individuality of Bede's and Gregory's Representations of Women

Bede and Gregory focus on the deeds of men in their histories, but both authors also devote substantial space to women, particularly queens and abbesses. As the period in question produced very few writings from women themselves, and many medieval writers chose not to describe women in any detail, Bede's and Gregory's writings are of paramount importance for our knowledge of women in early Anglo-Saxon England and Merovingian France. In fact, many female individuals and communities, both secular and religious, are only known to us today from their presence in the *HE* and the *DLH*. Considering the sheer importance of Bede's and Gregory's accounts of women, it follows that these accounts deserve very careful analysis. Moreover, these accounts require careful analysis because the *HE* and the *DLH* are complex texts, and Bede and Gregory are individually complex authors. This individuality is one of the primary reasons why comparing their representations of women is beneficial; examining Bede's and Gregory's similarities and differences helps to clarify the authors' purposes in writing and achieve a deeper understanding of their representations of women. This thesis argues that while the *HE* and the *DLH* differ quite sharply in narrative tone, they are remarkably similar in authorial focus and moral agenda, which has significant implications for our assessment of their attitudes towards women. Scholarship has viewed Bede, but not Gregory, as misogynistic, yet Bede's and Gregory's arguments and concerns in their representations of women are very similar; this thesis directly challenges this disparity in scholarship by examining both authors individually and comparatively.

In a biographical sketch at the end of the *HE*, Bede portrayed himself as a detached monk and scholar, simply recording the facts of history; however, the apparent simplicity and positivity of Bede's history has now been viewed in a 'harsher climate' by scholars who have interpreted his political agendas in

writing.[3] Moreover, the advances in scholarship on Bede's exegesis have indicated his pastoral agendas and demonstrated his complexity as an author.[4] Gregory portrayed himself as being a straightforward speaker, simply recording the deeds of people and events in his history, yet scholarship has shown that Gregory was far from straightforward.[5] The complex nature of Bede's and Gregory's histories, their agendas, and the contexts in which they were written, has inspired a wealth of scholarship. There is now a wide range of interpretations of Bede's *HE*, which has prompted debate and resulted in a situation where, in Merrill's words, 'a number of very different Bedes compete for scholarly approval.'[6] Some scholars have argued that the *HE* is motivated by ecclesiastical and secular politics, while others have interpreted the history as part of Bede's agenda for moral reform.[7] Even the first few chapters of the *HE* alone have been alternately understood as Bede's use of exegetical allusion or as Bede's use of the techniques of Cicero and Classical historiography.[8] Scholarly investigations of Gregory's *DLH* have also produced diverse interpretations and considerable debate. Some scholars have viewed Gregory's work as satire and emphasised its political context and motivations, while others have argued that Gregory's intentions for writing were strongly linked to his sense of pastoral duty; still others have argued that Gregory sought to create a community of saints or to sketch an imaginative and poetic spiritual world.[9] These different interpretations are not mutually exclusive, and

[3] Walter Goffart, 'Bede's History in a Harsher Climate', in Scott De Gregorio (ed.), *Innovation and Tradition in the Writings of the Venerable Bede* (Morgantown, 2006), pp. 203-226.
[4] See Alan Thacker, 'Bede's Ideal of Reform', in Patrick Wormald, Donald Bullough and Roger Collins (eds.), *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society: Studies Presented to J. M. Wallace-Hadrill* (Oxford, 1983), pp. 130-153; Jennifer O' Reilly, 'Islands and Idols at the Ends of the Earth: Exegesis and Conversion in Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica'*, in Stéphane Lebecq, Michel Perrin and Olivier Szerwiniack (eds.), *Bède le Venerable: Entre Tradition et Posterité* (Lille, 2005), pp. 119-145.
[5] Ian Wood, 'The Individuality of Gregory of Tours', in Kathleen Mitchell and Ian Wood (eds.), *The World of Gregory of Tours* (Leiden, 2002), pp. 29-46.
[6] Andrew H. Merrills, *History and Geography in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, 2005), p. 232.
[7] For ecclesiastical politics, see Walter Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History (A.D. 550-800): Jordanes, Gregory of Tours, Bede and Paul the Deacon* (Princeton, repr. 2005); for secular politics, see David P. Kirby, *Bede's* Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum: *Its Contemporary Setting* (Jarrow, 1993); for reform agenda, see Alan Thacker, 'Bede's Ideal of Reform'.
[8] For the exegetical interpretation of Britain as Paradise, see Calvin B. Kendall, 'Imitation and the Venerable Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*,' in Margot King and Wesley Stevens (eds.), *Saints, Scholars and Heroes: Studies in Medieval Culture in Honour of Charles W. Jones*, vol. 2 (Minnesota, 1979), pp. 161-190; for the alternative view, arguing for the Graeco-Roman influence, see Roger Ray, 'Who Did Bede Think He Was?', in Scott De Gregorio (ed.), *Innovation and Tradition*, pp. 11-35, at p. 30.
[9] For satire, see Walter Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History*; for political context, see Ian Wood, 'The Secret Histories of Gregory of Tours', *Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire*, 71 (1993), pp. 253-270; for pastoral duty, see Martin Heinzelmann, *Gregory of Tours: History and*

there is now a general consensus in scholarship that any study of Bede's or Gregory's histories requires both a consideration of the contexts in which they were written, and of the agendas of the authors themselves.

It is perhaps because of the complexities involved in examining Bede's and Gregory's histories individually that their portrayals of women have never been compared in a dedicated study. One study examined both Bede's and Gregory's accounts of women but in separate sections rather than comparative analysis.[10] In fact, there have been few studies that specifically compare Bede and Gregory; much scholarship has referred to both histories but is focused on either Bede's or Gregory's, such as Hanning's work on the historiography of England which briefly compared the *HE* to the *DLH*.[11] Both histories were compared in separate sections by Goffart in his *Narrators of Barbarian History*, who commented that 'Bede consulted Gregory of Tours but discloses no self-evident traces of dependence on him.'[12] Goffart stated that Gregory's influence on Bede was small, and Lapidge found only two instances where Bede's knowledge of Gregory can be proven, neither of which are in the *HE*.[13] However, Goffart also suggested that Bede's account of Edwin's conversion in his history was directly influenced by Gregory's of Clovis's, since 'the parallels are so close that the possibility of accidental resemblance seems improbable.'[14] Lapidge confirmed Bede's knowledge of books five and eight of the *DLH*, and while Bede did not cite these books in the *HE*, the present thesis indicates that Gregory's writing may have informed Bede's, especially book five of the *DLH*. This thesis contributes to the question of Bede's use of Gregory by arguing that there are further areas where Bede's history resembles Gregory's, such as their reform ideologies and their use of eschatology, which are elucidated through comparatively analysing their

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Society in the Sixth Century, trans.by Christopher Carroll (Cambridge, 2001); for community of saints, see Peter Brown, 'Relics and Social Status in the Age of Gregory of Tours', in idem, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, 1982), pp. 222-50; Raymond Van Dam, *Saints and their Miracles in Late Antique Gaul* (Princeton, 1993); for spiritual poet, see Giselle De Nie, *Views from a Many-Windowed Tower: Studies of Imagination in the Works of Gregory of Tours* (Amsterdam, 1987).

[10] Dick Harrison examines women in the *HE* and the *DLH* individually, in *The Age of Abbesses and Queens: Gender and Political Culture in Early Medieval Europe* (Lund, 1998).

[11] Robert Hanning, *The Vision of History in Early Britain* (New York, 1966), pp. 67-70.

[12] Walter Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History*, p. 14.

[13] Ibid, p. 244; Michael Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library* (Oxford, 2005), p. 212.

[14] Walter Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History*, p. 304.

representations of women. Comparing the *HE* and the *DLH* side by side can be extremely difficult, and it is useful to focus on particular topics for conducting the analysis; Wallace-Hadrill used this approach to compare Bede's and Gregory's portrayals of kings.[15] The present thesis builds on this approach by focusing on selected topics to compare Bede's and Gregory's portrayals of women.

The difficulties involved in studying the topic of women in general may provide another reason why Bede's and Gregory's portrayals of women have never been compared; sex as a concept for historical analysis is 'particularly vulnerable to anachronism, value-laden interpretations and, perhaps much worse, to preconceptions and assumptions.'[16] The study of women has in many ways been separated from wider studies on Bede and on Gregory, largely because it focuses on methods of analysis and theoretical approaches relating to women and gender rather than those relating to Bede's and Gregory's texts and contexts. The outcome of this is that women are separated from the authors themselves by a lack of comprehensive analysis. The topic of women should not be isolated as a specific study; just as works specialising in Bede's exegesis have benefitted from including his social, political and pastoral contexts, research specialising on women benefits from adopting the same approach, rather than separating Bede's attitude towards women from his wider attitudes and concerns. In scholarship on medieval women Bede in particular has suffered from accusations of misogyny, while Gregory has been afforded a relatively lenient assessment. The present thesis offers a reconsideration of the question of Bede's attitude towards women through comparison with Gregory. Although it is impossible to answer this question with certainty, the conclusions will provide evidence that Bede's attitude towards women was more positive and far more complex than has often been argued, and that Bede's concerns in his portrayals of women are very close to those of Gregory. In order to explain the methodology taken in this thesis, it is necessary first to consider the development of research on medieval women, here examined in two sections: the mainstream historiography of the 1970s-1990s, and revisionist scholarship up to the present.

[15] John M. Wallace-Hadrill, 'Gregory of Tours and Bede'.
[16] Jacqueline Murray, 'Historicizing Sex, Sexualizing History', in Nancy F. Partner (ed.), *Writing Medieval History* (London, 2005), pp. 133-152, at p. 133.

(ii) The "Golden Age" Hypothesis and "Dark Age Misogyny": Mainstream Historiography on Medieval Women: 1970s-1990s

During the 1970s, scholars of medieval women began to establish their own field of research in response to what they viewed as an apparent lacuna in medieval historiography, which tended to be focused almost entirely on male subject matter. It was primarily female scholars who began the task of writing women into medieval history, and within the first few decades of research, this scholarship was oriented on a strong feminist axis; one scholar has recently argued that, 'Women's history has always been feminist history.'[17] The first phase of feminist medieval research was concerned with placing women within the existing historiography through empirical research. This 'women in' approach was followed by a 'women and' approach, which broadened enquiries into the roles of women in medieval society, their place in law and political life, their contribution in socio-economic contexts and the means of production, female monasticism and women and the Church.[18] Scholars became particularly interested in uncovering women's status by focusing on aspects of laws, dowry and marriages.[19] Others conducted broader analyses of women in Anglo-Saxon England and Merovingian France, using the *HE* and the *DLH* alongside other contemporary source material.[20] On the basis of this evidence, scholars developed the concept of public and private spheres, arguing that while men dominated the public sphere, early medieval women in particular could exercise significant power through their domestic roles in the private sphere.[21] However, Nelson cautioned against such a strict division, arguing that for the late Merovingian and Carolingian periods, the supposedly private spaces of the royal wife at court or the nun at a monastery were actually both 'in a

[17] Judith P. Zinsser, 'Women's History/Feminist History', in Nancy F. Partner and Sarah Foot (eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Historical Theory* (London, 2013), pp. 238-265, at p. 238.
[18] Liz James (ed.), *Women, Men and Eunuchs: Gender in Byzantium* (London, 1997), pp. xii-xvi.
[19] See for example, Anne L. Klinck, 'Anglo-Saxon Women and the Law', *Journal of Medieval History*, 8, 2 (June, 1982), pp. 107-21; James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago, 1987); Diane Owen Hughes, 'From Brideprice to Dowry in Mediterranean Europe', *Journal of Family History*, 3 (1978), pp. 262–296.
[20] For Merovingian France, see Suzanne F. Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society: Marriage and the Cloister, 500-900* (Pennsylvania, 1981); Penelope D. Johnson, *Equal in Monastic Profession: Religious Women in Medieval France* (Chicago, 1991); for Anglo-Saxon England, see Christine E. Fell, *Women in Anglo-Saxon England and the Impact of 1066* (Oxford, 1984); Stephanie Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women and the Church: Sharing a Common Fate* (Woodbridge, 1992).
[21] Jo Ann Mc Namara and Suzanne F. Wemple, 'The Power of Women through the Family in Medieval Europe', *Feminist Studies*, 1 (1973), pp. 126-141; repr. in Mary Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski (eds.), *Women and Power in the Middle Ages* (Georgia, 1988), pp. 83-101.

sense public spaces'.[22] Similarly, while Duby had traced this idea of female power through the private sphere to the Roman period, Cooper argued that this view of a private sphere was a 'quasi-Victorian' notion, and such a mutually exclusive division between private and public spheres did not exist in the ancient mind.[23]

Whether women exercised their power through public or private roles, the general consensus that emerged in scholarship on women during the 1990s was a narrative of decline in women's position over the course of the medieval period, with the early medieval West being viewed as a 'Golden Age' for women.[24] In this narrative, women had the power to found and rule monasteries in the earlier period because the Church needed their support for conversion and Christianisation, but once the Church was established, male clerics increasingly circumscribed religious women, leading to the claustration of nuns in the later medieval period.[25] In England, the eleventh century Norman conquest and Gregorian ecclesiastical reforms were considered by several scholars to have had a negative impact on women, leading to misogynistic opinions in both civil and canon law.[26] This narrative of decline arose from studies that compared the experience of women with that of men, which led some to argue that medieval women's history differed so greatly from that of men that the sexes did not share the same historical advances, as expressed in an influential article by Kelly, entitled 'Did Women have a Renaissance?'; Kelly argued that women's opportunities decreased while men's increased in the Renaissance period.[27] During the 1980s and 1990s, and still present in the 2000s, there was an underlying assumption in much scholarship that the Church as an institution gradually subordinated women, and that medieval theologians, following patristic thought, viewed the female sex as naturally weaker

[22] Janet L. Nelson, 'Women and the Word in the Early Middle Ages', in William J. Sheils and Diana Wood, (eds.), *Women in the Church* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 53-78, at p. 74.
[23] Georges Duby, 'Private Power, Public Power', in Philippe Ariès and Georges Duby (eds.), *A History of Private Life*, vol. 2 (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1987), pp. 3-31; Kate Cooper, *The Virgin and the Bride: Idealized Womanhood in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1996), pp. 1-14.
[24] See for example, Suzanne F. Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, pp. 127-188; Mary Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski, 'Introduction', in idem (eds.), *Women and Power*, pp. 1-17, at pp. 5-6.
[25] See Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg, 'Women's Monastic Communities, 500-1100: Patterns of Expansion and Decline', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 14 (1989), pp. 261-292.
[26] See Christine E. Fell, *Women in Anglo-Saxon England*.
[27] Joan Kelly, 'Did Women have a Renaissance?' in idem, *Women, History, and Theory* (London, 1984), pp. 19-50.

and driven by desires of the flesh.[28] Scholars argued that clerical reformers viewed women as symbols of sexual sin and thus circumscribed the position of religious women through increasing proscriptions; in this view, misogynistic opinions increased and reached their peak during the tenth and eleventh centuries, marking the end of the female 'Golden Age'.[29]

The notion that earlier periods in Western Europe, particularly the pre-Christian or newly Christianised societies of non-Romans, were more favourable towards women is common in feminist scholarship. The male-dominated institution of the Church and the writings of male clerics are often perceived as misogynistic, and the effects of ecclesiastical influence are seen as gradually decreasing the position of women over time, changing the originally powerful positions of women in early medieval society. For example, scholars of women in medieval Ireland have viewed this period as one of increasing clerical misogyny, transforming a matriarchal Celtic society into a patriarchal medieval society.[30] This view was influenced by the study of women in native myths and sagas and contributed to the idea that Celtic and Germanic societies were more favourable to women than Romanised and Christianised societies.

Though never interpreted as matriarchal, Anglo-Saxon and Merovingian society has also been understood as having valued women more in their pre-Christian or recently Christianised periods than in the later medieval period, when ecclesiastical culture decreased their power in society. In the context of pre-Christian England, some scholars argued for the greater importance of wives in Anglo-Saxon pagan heroic culture through reference to Old English texts written

[28] For example, Suzanne F. Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*; Stephanie Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women*; Lynda L. Coon, *Sacred Fictions: Holy Women and Hagiography in Late Antiquity* (Philadelphia, 1997); Dyan Elliot, *Fallen Bodies: Pollution, Sexuality and Demonology in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, 1999), pp. 80-106; Catherine Cubitt, 'Virginity and Misogyny in Tenth- and Eleventh-Century England', *Gender and History*, 12 (2000), pp. 1-32.
[29] See for example, Jo Ann Mc Namara, *Sisters in Arms: Catholic Nuns through Two Millennia* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1996); idem, 'The *Herrenfrag*e: The Restructuring of the Gender System, 1050–1150,' in Clare A. Lees (ed.), *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis, 1994), pp. 3–29.
[30] Mary Condren, *The Serpent and the Goddess: Women, Religion, and Power in Celtic Ireland* (San Francisco, 1989); Lisa M. Bitel, *Land of Women: Tales of Sex and Gender from Early Ireland* (New York, 1996).

in the Christian period such as *Beowulf*.[31] Scholars who viewed the early medieval period as a 'Golden Age' argued that the Church initially provided women with increased power and higher importance through their roles in conversion and monastic life.[32] Much of the 'Golden Age' hypothesis is based upon the interpretation of evidence provided by Bede and Gregory, whose histories portray the roles of Christian queens in conversion and described powerful female religious leaders in early medieval England and France. Bede describes 'double monasteries', mixed communities of nuns and monks ruled by abbesses who wielded great power and authority as leaders of both men and women, in foundations which were often royal houses with substantial wealth and influence. During the late eighth century, ecclesiastical synods began to prohibit double monasteries, and their demise is often seen in scholarship as an indication of decline in the power and influence of women.[33]

Bede described several of these double monasteries ruled by powerful women, and scholars had initially acknowledged these descriptions as positive portrayals of women in the *HE*.[34] One of these scholars stated that 'scholarship does not require us to read only, always, and inevitably a history of oppression and exploitation of the female sex. The real evidence from Anglo-Saxon England paints a more attractive and indeed assertive picture.'[35] However, during the 1990s this idea of inevitable oppression became even more frequent, particularly in studies on women in the *HE*, and Bede began to be criticised for deliberately downplaying the importance of women in his history. Hollis argued that clerical hostility towards women was apparent even from the earlier medieval period, and that Bede's writings contributed to this hostility by providing negative portrayals of religious women. The single example of the bad behaviour of women in the religious life, Bede's account of the monastery of Coldingham which will be

[31] Helen Damico, *Beowulf's Wealtheow and the Valkyrie Tradition* (Wisconsin, 1984); Jane Chance, *Woman as Hero in Old English Literature* (New York, 1986).
[32] Joan Nicholson, '*Feminae Gloriosae*: Women in the Age of Bede', in Derek Baker (ed.), *Medieval Women* (Oxford, 1975), pp. 15-30; Suzanne F. Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*.
[33] See Mary Bateson, 'Origin and Early History of Double Monasteries', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 13 (December, 1899), pp. 137-198, at pp. 163-164; Susan J. Ridyard, 'Anglo-Saxon Women and the Church in the Age of Conversion', in Edward B. King, Jacqueline T. Schaefer and William B. Wadley (eds.), *Monks, Nuns and Friars in Medieval Society* (Tennessee, 1989), pp. 105-132, at pp. 110-111; Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg, 'Women's Monastic Communities'.
[34] Joan Nicholson, *Feminae Gloriosae*; Christine E. Fell, *Women in Anglo-Saxon England*.
[35] Christine E. Fell, *Women in Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 21.

analysed in chapter five, has been seen by Hollis as an attempt to scandalise and erode the reputation of double monasteries, and thus ultimately contributed to their later prohibition.[36] As will be argued later in the thesis, this view seems to underappreciate the fact that Bede highly praised several double monasteries, and he therefore must have approved of them. Hollis suggested that Bede was even more misogynistic than his successors, stating that the 'omissions and discernible suppression in Bede's account of female monasticism…go beyond the requirements of orthodox censorship.'[37]

Four years after Hollis's study, Armstrong similarly argued that Bede attempted to marginalise women; arguing against Nicholson's earlier view that Bede's history revealed the major part played by women in conversion, Armstrong stated that Bede de-emphasised the power and influence of women as agents of conversion.[38] Soon after Armstrong, Pelteret argued that while Bede acknowledged the role of women as agents of conversion, he disempowered them by diminishing their agency in his history. Pelteret's study analysed women in the *HE* in order to question the extent of Bede's misogyny; though he contrasted the blatant misogyny contained in a twelfth century text by Marbod of Rennes with Bede's praise of abbess Hild in the *HE*, he argued that Bede also held misogynistic views but expressed them in 'a more covert and insidious' manner.[39] Pelteret concluded that Bede's 'portrayal of women may in general be positive; but we have to screen out much misogyny that is Bede's inheritance from patristic writers.'[40] Pelteret added new insights into Bede's portrayals of women by calling for a deeper analysis of his personal circumstances, such as the psychological impact of Bede's oblation as a child, in order to question how these circumstances can provide an understanding of his attitude towards women. However, he followed mainstream scholarship on medieval women in viewing Bede as a

[36] Stephanie Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women*, pp. 103-104.
[37] Ibid, p. 246.
[38] Dorsey Armstrong, 'Holy Queens as Agents of Christianization in Bede's "Ecclesiastical History": A Reconsideration', *Old English Newsletter* 29, 3 (Spring, 1996), pp. 333-352; see also Joan Nicholson, *Feminae Gloriosae*, p. 23.
[39] David Pelteret, 'Bede's Women', in Constance M. Rousseau and Joel T. Rosenthal (eds.), *Women, Marriage and Family in Medieval Christendom: Essays in Memory of Michael M. Sheehan* (Michigan, 1998), pp. 19-46, at pp. 44-45.
[40] Ibid, p. 46.

product of a culture that was inherently misogynistic, a view derived from the widely held assumption that all medieval clerics harboured misogynistic attitudes.

In the same year as Pelteret's study, Harrison examined the portrayals of women in several medieval histories, including the *HE* and the *DLH*. Harrison argued that the view that all ecclesiastical writers were misogynists is anachronistic, derived from projecting our own stereotypes onto the past, and that accusations of misogyny neglect to consider the differences in individual authors.[41] Harrison used the term 'Dark Age Misogyny' to discuss what he perceived as a widely held assumption about the attitudes of medieval men; just as the incorrect but very common stereotype that the early medieval period was a 'Dark Age' of cultural difference in a negative sense, attitudes towards women in the period had also been stereotyped as being misogynistic.[42]

The standard view that women were viewed as different from men in a negative sense during the medieval period was questioned by Harrison but also by others around this time; Goetz even argued that gender difference was actually unimportant in medieval society.[43] One of the main theoretical frameworks Harrison employed in his study was gender theory, a method of analysis that became popular in the 1990s, shifting the focus from 'women's studies' to 'gender studies' by highlighting the need to consider men alongside women when questioning their roles and position in society, and their portrayals in the sources. This approach was seen as an alternative to the more traditional trend in feminist scholarship which often took the shape of a 'binary division of the sexes', where women were consistently treated as victims of their patriarchal societies because of their inferior sex.[44] Gender studies defined the difference between sex as a biological category and gender as an ideological concept constructed by specific societies, to examine gender roles in medieval society and explore differences between sexual identity and social identity.[45] Scholars began to question how

[41] Dick Harrison, *The Age of Abbesses*, p. 42.
[42] Ibid, pp. 34-35.
[43] Hans-Werner Goetz, *Frauen im Frühen Mittelalter: Frauenbild und Frauenleben im Frankenreich* (Böhlau, 1995), pp. 402-407.
[44] Allen Frantzen, 'When Women Aren't Enough', *Speculum*, 68 (1993), pp. 445-471, at p. 451.
[45] See Joan Scott, 'Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis', *The American Historical Review*, 91, 5 (December, 1986), pp. 1053-1075; Nancy F. Partner, 'No Sex, No Gender', *Speculum*, 68 (1993), pp. 419-443.

medieval texts articulated concepts of gender, much like concepts of race or class, which are socially and culturally defined. Gender analysis involved considering the social and cultural norms and expectations for both men and women, and in order to understand gender roles for women, it was necessary to also question the gender norms and expectations for men and compare with those of women.

Gender theory was used more frequently in general studies on medieval women and men, but there were some who used gender as a tool specifically for analysing women in Bede's and Gregory's writings. Kitchen's study on Merovingian female saints' lives examined Gregory's writings on religious women from the perspective of gender, and like Harrison, Kitchen argued that scholarly generalisations about attitudes towards medieval women did not take authorial individuality into account. Kitchen demonstrated that Gregory's portrayals of holy women were strikingly similar to his portrayals of holy men, and these similarities challenged the current assumptions about sharp gender difference in medieval society.[46] Gender studies brought new insights into social and cultural aspects of the representations of women in medieval texts, though some continued to argue that Bede in particular had a negative attitude towards women. Lees and Overing employed methods of contemporary literary theory in their analysis of Bede's history, investigating the concepts of gender and cultural production, markedly different to Hollis's empirical approach, but they have arrived at the same conclusion; like Hollis, Lees and Overing argue that Bede denigrated the roles of women to promote the achievements of men.[47] Lees and Overing began these arguments in the 1990s but were to expand on them in the 2000s, a decade that witnessed both continuities and changes in scholarly opinions on women.

[46] John Kitchen, *Saints' Lives and the Rhetoric of Gender: Male and Female in Merovingian Hagiograph*y (Oxford, 1998).
[47] Clare A. Lees and Gillian R. Overing, 'Birthing Bishops and Fathering Poets: Hild, Bede, and the Relations of Cultural Production', *Exemplaria*, 6 (1994), pp. 35-65.

(iii) Revisionist Approaches and New Ways of Reading in the Twenty-First Century

In 2001, Lees and Overing first published *Double Agents*, followed by a second edition in 2009. In this study, Lees and Overing set out to explore what they believed to be an absence of women in Anglo-Saxon sources to uncover their real presence, believing that: 'The female agent is a double agent: she moves in this "real" world of Anglo-Saxon society, but we can only perceive her in that penumbral, netherworld to which she is relegated by clerical culture.'[48] Lees and Overing argued that Bede silenced the voice and presence of powerful female figures such as abbess Hild of Whitby by portraying them in passive 'mothering' roles and designating active roles only to men; they believed that 'Hild deserves to be rescued from Bede and afforded her own place in history.'[49] In 2006, Klein's study of Anglo-Saxon queens similarly argued that Bede portrays powerful royal women as having no active roles; Klein believed that Bede intentionally attempted to elide the power and influence of both secular and religious women in order to promote the achievements of men, particularly male clerics.[50] Though Bede highly praised women like Hild, and indeed we only know of some of these women from the *HE*, some scholars were perhaps overly critical of his portrayals of women.

This criticism of Bede derived in part from the assumption that all medieval clerical authors shared a common fear or hatred of women. Karkov argued that Bede's portrayal of the virginal saint and ex-queen Æthelthryth represents the obsession of medieval churchmen with the female body as an object of sin and desire, one which should be renounced and covered for the protection of male chastity.[51] Bede's society was indeed patriarchal, but this does not mean that he held a negative attitude towards women; as Reider has recently pointed out, there is an enormous difference between patriarchy and misogyny, and considering

[48] Idem, *Double Agents: Women and Clerical Culture in Anglo-Saxon England* (Philadelphia, 2001, repr. Cardiff, 2009), p. 2.
[49] Ibid, pp. 32-33.
[50] Stacy S. Klein, *Ruling Women: Queenship and Gender in Anglo-Saxon Literature* (Indiana, 2006).
[51] Catherine E. Karkov, 'The Body of St. Æthelthryth: Desire, Conversion and Reform in Anglo-Saxon England', in Martin Carver (ed.), *The Cross Goes North: Processes of Conversion in Northern Europe, AD 300-1300* (Woodbridge, 2003), pp. 397-411.

them as coterminous is inaccurate.[52] Reider argued that approaching medieval sources with presumptions about clerical male attitudes towards women has led to widespread 'misuses of misogyny' in scholarly interpretations, and it should not be taken for granted that all medieval clerical writers wrote about women from the same perspectives.[53]

These 'misuses of misogyny' and the prevailing notion of decreased opportunities for women in the grand chronological narrative of the 'Golden Age' view began to be questioned from a range of perspectives and methodological approaches, as recent collections of essays devoted to the topics of women and gender indicate.[54] Master narratives, traditional interpretations that group together and define specific historical periods according to sociocultural and political progress, have in general been subject to much recent criticism and debate; the question of how the history of women fits into these narratives generates even more debate, precisely because women's history had traditionally been neglected in research on the medieval period. While many scholars had argued for significant changes for women over the course of the medieval period, others began to emphasise that there were more continuities than changes in both the position of women and attitudes towards them.[55] Mc Namara has suggested that we should consider the first millennium of Western Christendom as one time-frame, marked more by continuities in the lives of both women and men, with significant changes only beginning to take place afterwards.[56] Periodization is helpful but can also hamper our understanding of individual sources; as we will see, though Bede and Gregory are both early medieval authors dealing with remarkably similar topics, they differ quite markedly in their descriptions of barbarian kings and queens, and of Church and society.

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[52] Paula M. Reider, 'The Uses and Misuses of Misogyny: A Critical Historiography of the Language of Medieval Women's Oppression', *Historical Reflections*, 38, 1 (Spring, 2012), pp. 1-18.
[53] Ibid.
[54] See Leslie Brubaker and Julia M. H. Smith (eds.), *Gender in the Early Medieval World: East and West, 300-900* (Cambridge, 2004); Judith M. Bennett and Ruth Mazo Karras (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Women and Gender in Medieval Europe* (Oxford, 2013).
[55] Judith M. Bennett, 'Confronting Continuity', *Journal of Women's History*, 9, 3 (Autumn, 1997), pp. 73-94.
[56] Jo Ann Mc Namara, 'Women and Power through the Family Revisited', in Mary Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski (eds.), *Gendering the Master Narrative: Women and Power in the Middle Ages* (New York, 2003), pp. 17-30.

It is perhaps precisely because scholars were eager to revise the prevailing view of an early medieval 'Golden Age' followed by decline in women's position that some interpreted Bede's portrayals of women as evidence of an earlier decline, such as Hollis's opinion that Bede contributed to the prohibition of double monasteries.[57] The same revisionist drive has led recent scholars of the later medieval period to seek for continued opportunities for women, exploring the complexities of authors and their texts in order to question the viability of the view of a 'Golden Age' followed by later clerical oppression of women. Recent scholarship on women in later medieval England and France has called for a re-evaluation of assumptions of decline in female monasticism and authority.[58] These scholars examined the writings of later medieval churchmen in the context of their nuances and intended audiences, indicating that authors whose language had often been considered as misogynistic were aimed not at women but at men, in order to reform clerical orders.[59] It began to be argued that the writings of reformers used rhetoric about women as indices of the vices or virtues of men, and therefore should not be considered as revealing misogyny but could be considered as indications of masculinity.[60] The reforms of the eleventh and twelfth century Church, traditionally interpreted as motivated by misogyny, have been reinterpreted by scholars who argue that negative rhetoric about women was actually directed towards male audiences.[61] This view emphasises the necessity of questioning why clerical authors used language pertaining to women rather than taking what they said at face-value.

The language used by a specific author needs to be carefully analysed, as there can be great variation in attitudes towards women in the writings of different authors and even in those of the same author. For example, it has been noted that

[57] Stephanie Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women*, pp. 103-104.
[58] Janet Burton, *Monastic and Religious Orders in Britain: 1000-1300* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 85-108; Jennifer Edwards, ''Man Can be Subject to Woman': Female Monastic Authority in Fifteenth-Century Poitiers', *Gender and History*, 22, 1 (April, 2013), pp. 86-106.
[59] Paula M. Reider, 'The Uses and Misuses of Misogyny'.
[60] Conrad Leyser, 'Custom, Truth, and Gender in Eleventh-Century Reform', in Robert N. Swanson, Gender and Christian Religion (Woodbridge, 1998), pp. 75-91; Fiona J. Griffiths, 'Women and Reform in the Central Middle Ages', in Judith M. Bennett and Ruth Mazo Karras (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Women and Gender*, pp. 447-463.
[61] For example, see Maureen C. Miller, 'Masculinity, Reform and Clerical Culture: Narratives of Episcopal Holiness in the Gregorian Era', *Church History*, 72, 1 (March, 2003), pp. 25-52; Fiona J. Griffiths, 'Women and Reform'.

the writings of the Church fathers describe women in complex ways that can seem self-contradictory; from St Paul to Pope Gregory the Great, writings about women reveal what can be considered as both misogynistic biases and gender equality.[62] Medieval authors drew and expanded on the writings of the Church fathers, and portrayals of women in their writings can be just as complex. Recent research on women and gender in late antique and medieval texts has stressed the need to approach the sources as narratives, textual constructions which demand close attention, both to the literary conventions and allusions employed, and to their authorial motivations in writing.[63] It is now understood that historical sources from the pre-modern era should be examined in relation to their dual nature; they are both historical artefacts and textual constructions. According to Partner, the 'constructed nature of narrative' must be considered when analysing women in medieval sources.[64] Partner maintains that these sources are texts, which 'made use of the same techniques of narrative structure, were conscious of their relations with other texts and played with the poetic resources of the language in ways that we associate with works of fiction.'[65] Clark made similar comments on the study of women in late antique and patristic texts, and summarised the difference between this new approach and those of traditional empirical approaches as whether a scholar considers the sources as texts or as documents.[66] This textual approach is aimed at studying 'the *meaning* of the rhetoric pertaining to women' in order to offer a more nuanced understanding of the portrayals of women in these texts, a new departure from the traditional practice of raising women up as agents and victims.[67]

Medieval descriptions of women need to be carefully analysed both individually in their own right, and in the context of an authors' textual inheritance and rhetorical purposes. Women could be represented by the 'male medieval

[62] Helene Scheck, *Reform and Resistance: Formations of Female Subjectivity in Early Medieval Ecclesiastical Culture* (New York, 2008), p. 3.
[63] Elizabeth A. Clark, 'Women, Gender, and the Study of Christian History', *Church History*, 70 (September, 2001), pp. 395-426; idem, 'Engendering the Study of Religion', in Slavica Jakelić and Lori Pearson (eds.), *The Future of the Study of Religion: Proceedings of Congress 2000* (Leiden, 2004), pp. 217-242; Nancy F. Partner, 'Preface', in idem (ed.), *Writing Medieval History*, pp. vi-xvi.
[64] Nancy F. Partner, 'Postmodernism and Historiography', in Margaret Schaus (ed.), *Women and Gender in Medieval Europe: An Encyclopedia* (New York, 2006), pp. 661-663, at p. 662.
[65] Nancy F. Partner, 'Preface', in idem (ed.), *Writing Medieval History*, pp. xiv-xv.
[66] Elizabeth A. Clark, 'Engendering the Study of Religion'.
[67] Idem, 'Women, Gender, and the Study of Christian History', p. 424.

writer as a sign, bearing meanings which have little to do with the actual social roles of individual women.'[68] As Reider pointed out, discourse concerning religious women in particular could be used by different authors for very different purposes; the language could be conventional, employed by authors habitually and uncritically, or could be employed for a variety of complex allusions.[69]

Research on medieval women has in the past focused perhaps too much on issues relating to sex and gender at the expense of considering the complexities of the texts in question, and the varied contexts in which each text was written; there is a danger of placing too much emphasis on the importance of gender, particularly in medieval societies which are so different from our own. Recent work on religious women and men has argued that monastic life was generally similar for both sexes throughout medieval Western Christendom.[70] Other scholars have suggested that religious men and women should be considered as forming one equal class, sometimes referred to as a 'third gender', arguing that while secular women were more defined by their gender because they were sexually active, celibate women were perceived as equal to men in the religious life.[71] Mc Namara argued that Gregory viewed chaste men and women as a 'third gender' in his history and hagiography.[72] This criticism of sexual binaries and the idea of strict gender difference was not confined to studies on religious women; one scholar has recently analysed secular Merovingian women and suggested that concepts of gender actually meant less in this society than did concepts of social status.[73] Gradowicz-Pancer's innovative work has 'de-gendered' a specific area of study relating to women in Merovingian France; the 'phenomenon of female violence'.[74] In this study she analysed female violence along with male violence as a class characteristic of an honour-based society, where both men and women were

[68] Carolyne Larrington, *Women and Writing in Medieval Europe: A Sourcebook* (London, 1995), p. 2.
[69] Paula M. Reider, 'The Uses and Misuses of Misogyny'.
[70] Albrecht Diem, 'The Gender of Religious: Wo/men and the Invention of Monasticism', in Judith M. Bennett and Ruth Mazo Karras (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Women and Gender*, pp. 432-446.
[71] See Jo Ann Mc Namara, 'Chastity as a Third Gender in the History and Hagiography of Gregory of Tours', in Kathleen Mitchell and Ian Wood (eds.), *The World of Gregory of Tours*, pp. 199-210; Jacqueline Murray, 'One Flesh, Two Sexes, Three Genders?', in Lisa Bitel and Felice Lifshitz (eds.), *Gender and Christianity in Medieval Europe: New Perspectives* (Pennsylvania, 2008), pp. 34-51.
[72] Jo Ann Mc Namara, 'Chastity as a Third Gender'.
[73] Nira Gradowicz-Pancer, 'De-Gendering Female Violence: Merovingian Female Honour as an 'Exchange of Violence'', *Early Medieval Europe*, 11, 1 (March, 2002), pp. 1-18.
[74] Ibid.

engaged in the defence of their social status. Newbold's earlier research on interpersonal violence in the *DLH* had also noted that royal women were 'almost equally concerned with norm enforcement, reputation defence and self-enhancement' as their male counterparts.[75] Gradowicz-Pancer uses examples from the *DLH* to argue that descriptions of female violence should be viewed as important public exchanges aimed at defending honour against threats to social standing.

Gradowicz-Pancer's research focused on social and cultural aspects of Merovingian women by examining sources such as the *DLH* in particular; her work was not intended to consider the narrative purposes or personal circumstances of Gregory as an author. Gregory's descriptions of women in the *DLH* had usually been taken at face-value in broad studies of Frankish women; his portrayal of the murderous political expediency of queens like Fredegund were taken as evidence of the power women could exercise through their marriages and their children.[76] Gradowicz-Pancer added a more nuanced understanding of the violent behaviour of queens like Fredegund through her interpretation of the *DLH*, though she also accepts Gregory's descriptions at face-value. Dailey's recent study of women in Gregory's writings challenges the idea that Gregory's descriptions can be accepted as reflecting actual realities, arguing that his portrayals of women were influenced by political factors and authorial agendas, as well as his personal relationships with the contemporary individuals whom he describes; for example, Dailey interprets Gregory's portrayal of queen Fredegund's bad behaviour as a narrative technique intended to present Brunhild, the queen who supported Gregory's episcopacy, in a favourable light by comparison.[77] Dailey's work utilises methodologies and approaches employed by scholars such as Wood, who examine Gregory's political and personal contexts when analysing his history, illustrating how these considerations have a significant impact on how we should interpret Gregory's portrayals of women, and how an understanding of these

[75] Ronald F. Newbold, 'Interpersonal Violence in Gregory of Tours' *Libri Historiarum*', *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, 38 (1994), pp. 3-17.
[76] Suzanne F. Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*; Jo Ann Mc Namara and Suzanne F. Wemple, 'The Power of Women through the Family'.
[77] Erin Dailey, *Gregory of Tours and the Women in his Works*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis (Leeds, 2011); see also idem, *Queens, Consorts, Concubines: Gregory of Tours and Women of the Merovingian Elite* (Leiden, 2015).

portrayals of women can in turn deepen our understanding of the *DLH* as a whole.[78] Dailey also challenged Mc Namara's argument that Gregory believed in a 'third gender' by concluding that Gregory's writings revealed complex notions of femininity and sanctity, pointing out that Gregory provided an interpretation of salvation based on female images, such as the Virgin Mary and the Queen of Sheba.[79]

Interestingly, Mac Carron's thesis on portrayals of women in Bede's history provided a similar argument; Mac Carron argued that Bede used portrayals of women as images of salvation, and that his description of queen Æthelburh's arrival in Northumbria in marriage to Edwin was intended as an image of Northumbria's providential conversion.[80] Dailey's approach utilised methods employed by scholars investigating other areas of the histories and applied them to investigations of women. Mac Carron similarly drew on the methods of scholars such as Thacker and O' Reilly, who foreground Bede's reformist and exegetical impulses when analysing his history, in order to analyse accounts of women in the *HE* from the perspective of Bede's exegesis and patristic inheritance.[81] Scholarly interest in Bede's exegesis has increased dramatically over the last few decades, an interest that both contributed to and arose from the first critical editions of Bede's texts and translations of his wider corpus.[82] Bede's exegetical texts far outnumber his writings in any other genre, and Bede himself gives his biblical commentaries pre-eminence in the list of his works which he appends to the *HE*.[83] Scholars have argued that Bede was first and foremost an exegete and have stressed the need to consider his greater body of exegetical texts alongside the *HE*, as several articles in recent collections on Bede testify.[84] Applying these insights

[78] For example, Ian Wood, *Gregory of Tours* (Bangor, Gwynedd, 1994); idem, 'The Secret Histories of Gregory of Tours', *Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire*, 71 (1993), pp. 253-270.
[79] Erin Dailey, *Gregory of Tours*, pp. 175-177.
[80] Máirín Mac Carron, 'Brides of Christ: Royal Marriage and the Conversion of the English in Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*', unpublished Ph.D. thesis (NUI Cork, 2007).
[81] Máirín Mac Carron, 'Brides of Christ'; idem, 'The Adornment of Virgins: Æthelthryth and her Necklaces' in Elizabeth Mullins and Diarmuid Scully (eds.), *Listen, O Isles, unto Me: Studies in Medieval Word and Image in Honour of Jennifer O' Reilly* (Cork, 2011), pp. 142-155; Alan Thacker, 'Bede's Ideal of Reform'; Jennifer O' Reilly, 'Islands and Idols at the Ends of the Earth'.
[82] Most notably, *CCSL* provided critical editions of Bede's Latin texts, and Liverpool University Press has most recently and prolifically published translations of Bede's exegetical texts in *TTH*.
[83] *HE* 5.24.
[84] See Scott De Gregorio (ed.), *Innovation and Tradition*; idem (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Bede*; Peter Darby and Faith Wallis (eds.), *Bede and the Future* (Farnham, 2014).

into her analysis of women in the *HE*, Mac Carron has revealed the complexities of Bede's portrayals and has argued that he had a positive view of women; her conclusions differ markedly from those who argued that Bede downplayed the roles of women.[85] Foot has similarly provided a more positive assessment of Bede's attitude towards women by examining his portrayals of educated religious women.[86] This recent research has shown that new approaches to Bede's and Gregory's writings are essential for understanding their representations of women, and the present study builds on this research by comparing both authors' texts.

The present thesis is focused on examining Bede's and Gregory's representations of women and questioning their attitudes towards them; it is not concerned with questioning whether or not there was a 'Golden Age' for women and does not intend to comment upon the actual position of women in church and society. The objective is to analyse and compare the portrayals of women in both authors' histories by questioning how and why Bede and Gregory described them in the ways that they did. Bede and Gregory did not write their histories for a modern audience seeking to uncover the active roles for women in the religious life, and their narratives are not primarily concerned with describing the political, economic and cultural impact of women in the Church. We can discern such information from their histories, but only once they have been considered in their own right. The *HE* and the *DLH* are providential histories, universal Christian narratives that foreground divine workings in human history and which place the past, present and future into one continuum that flows towards the end of time. The universality of Christianity allows Bede and Gregory to place their Anglo-Saxon and Merovingian contemporaries in the continuing narrative of providential history, linking them to the Christian past while at the same time considering what their place may be in the future. Both authors were concerned about the Last Judgement and scholars have shown that both had eschatological motives for writing their histories.[87] In the *HE* and the *DLH*, the transience of worldly

[85] For example, Stephanie Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women*; Clare A. Lees and Gillian R. Overing, *Double Agents*; Stacy S. Klein, *Ruling Women*.
[86] Sarah Foot, 'Women, Prayer and Preaching in the Early English Church', in Santha Bhattacharji, Rowan Williams and Dominic Mattos (eds.), *Prayer and Thought in Monastic Tradition: Essays in Honour of Benedicta Ward SLG* (London, 2014), pp. 59-75.
[87] On Bede, see Peter Darby, *Bede and the End of Time* (Farnham, 2012); on Gregory see Martin Heinzelman, *Gregory of Tours*.

concerns is placed in antithesis to the eternal life in heaven, offered to all those who strive to imitate the perfect example of Christ, both men and women. In order to understand the portrayals of women in these histories and compare Bede's and Gregory's representations of women, it is necessary to adopt certain methodologies and interpretative frameworks, which are outlined below.

1.2: Thesis Methodology and Frameworks for Interpreting Bede's and Gregory's Representations of Women

(i) Thesis Methodology

The task of examining Bede's and Gregory's representations of women involves a number of methodological approaches that are necessary for examining their histories, and for addressing the topic of women in the texts; the authors' narrative strategies and techniques will be explored, their use of sources and models questioned, their authorial intentions and motivations for writing considered, and their contemporary contexts and audience expectations elucidated. These methods are collectively oriented towards understanding Bede's and Gregory's portrayals of women in greater detail. The central approach taken in this study employs a basic method of comparison, both in comparing Bede with Gregory and in comparing their portrayals of women with their portrayals of men. A comparison between Bede and Gregory is to compare like with like; both authors were Christian historians who wrote about the conversion of barbarian nations, and both wrote their histories in similar historical, social and cultural contexts. Bede had read Gregory's history before he composed his own, but the *HE* differs quite sharply from the *DLH* in narrative tone and authorial focus, and it is precisely these similarities and differences that reveal their potential for comparative analysis. A comparison between Bede and Gregory would be to the latter's detriment if assessed in the traditional view, which saw Gregory as a naïve chronicler who wrote in barbaric Latin and Bede as an educated scholar who wrote in Classical Latin. Scholarship on Gregory has radically changed traditional views by revealing his sophisticated techniques and complexity as an author, and both Bede and Gregory have had collections of essays and extensive research dedicated to understanding their individuality. The present thesis contributes to our

understanding of both authors individually by comparing their similarities and differences.

In order to compare Bede and Gregory side by side, their representations of women were first examined separately before comparing them under a number of key themes. This thesis uses a thematic approach to examine the representations of women in the *HE* and the *DLH*; each chapter focuses on common themes that arise from Bede's and Gregory's descriptions of women. Both authors' representations of women are compared with their representations of men, questioning whether Bede and Gregory describe men in the same terms as women, in order to investigate their attitudes towards them. Scholarly investigations of women in Bede's and Gregory's writings have almost exclusively focused on gendered roles, examining the activities in which women are prominent, such as marriages and motherhood, topics which are also dealt with in the present thesis; however, this thesis incorporates wider themes and issues that are present in Bede's and Gregory's representations of women, such as their concerns about their contemporary Church and society. It will be argued that both authors described women in the context of broader themes which also applied to men, which has significant implications for our assessment of Bede's attitude towards women; scholars have argued that Bede was misogynistic, but this thesis demonstrates that Bede's arguments and opinions in relation to women are very similar to Gregory's, who in contrast has not been seen by scholars as misogynistic.

'Saints and Scandals' has been chosen as the title for this thesis because it defines the approach taken in this study. The overarching themes of good and bad behaviour, saints and scandals, runs throughout Bede's and Gregory's histories and was applied in their portrayals of both women and men. This thematic approach facilitates the comparison of representations of women in the *HE* and the *DLH*, and more importantly, it elucidates the prominent themes that Bede and Gregory themselves wished to convey through their accounts of women. Some of these themes are explicit but others are implicit, particularly in the case of Bede; comparing both authors helps to reveal these implicit themes and issues. In order to locate the most prominent female-centred themes, I tabulated Bede's and Gregory's accounts of women in the *HE* and the *DLH*, investigating both the

frequency of these accounts, and the words and phrases used by the authors in their descriptions of women. The same method was used to tabulate accounts of men in the *HE* and the *DLH*, for the purpose of comparing Bede's and Gregory's treatment of women with their treatment of men. This indicated the most prominent narrative themes in relation to women in both texts and revealed certain similarities and differences between Bede's and Gregory's portrayals of women; marriages and missions, saints, virginity and female leadership, and scandal and monastic disobedience are explored in three separate chapters. The tabulation also facilitated the comparison of descriptions of both men and women using the same criteria, following the premise of gender analysis by questioning if Bede's and Gregory's themes in relation to women applied also to men. Both secular and religious women are treated under these themes, but as this study prioritises analysis of the *HE* by using Gregory's text to understand Bede's, religious women are given extended consideration because they are given more prominence than secular women in the *HE*.

The men and women described by both Bede and Gregory almost exclusively belong to an elite social class. It is therefore important to place Bede's and Gregory's histories in their social and cultural contexts, and to consider the concepts of social status and gender when interpreting their descriptions of women. This thesis raises the question of the importance and relevance of class distinction, asking whether notions of social class transcended notions of gender, which will be especially relevant in analysing the *DLH*. Scholars such as Gradowicz-Pancer and Goetz have argued that in Merovingian and Anglo-Saxon society, men and women from different geographical or political regions and ethnic groups were all defined by their social status; individuals in medieval texts were usually distinguished by their class rather than by gender.[88] It has been argued that in medieval descriptions of women, 'their class precludes their acting as representatives of their sex.'[89] Bede's and Gregory's texts frequently refer to

[88] See Nira Gradowicz-Pancer, 'De-Gendering Female Violence'; Hans-Werner Goetz, *Frauen im Frühen Mittelalter*; idem, '*Gens*: Terminology and Perception of the "Germanic" Peoples from Late Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages', in Richard Corradini, Maximilian Diesenberger and Helmut Reimitz (eds.), *The Construction of Communities in the Early Middle Ages: Texts, Resources and Artefacts* (Leiden, 2003), pp. 39-61.
[89] John Flood, *Representations of Eve in Antiquity and the English Middle Ages* (London, 2011), p. 49.

men and women in terms of their class or occupations, as kings and queens, abbots and abbesses, bishops and virgins. These men and women are not described according to their gender but to their social or religious function, suggesting that these factors mattered more to Bede and Gregory than did factors of sex and gender. The women given the most extensive treatment by both authors are those of royal class, particularly queens, several of whom enter the religious life. It is of particular interest that Bede and Gregory place even greater emphasis on the high social status of royal women who enter the religious life; both authors amplify the secular status of these women in juxtaposition to their religious status in order to construct antithetical comparisons in their histories, aimed at edifying their readers. Social status therefore was not just significant for the societies that Bede and Gregory described, but also to the authors themselves; both authors highlight social status in their descriptions of women as a narrative technique.

In order to place the histories in their respective cultural and intellectual milieux, this thesis uses intertextual analysis, exploring the sources and models that may have influenced Bede and Gregory. Several contemporary and near contemporary texts will be used both to contextualise and to compare with Bede's and Gregory's texts. Considering certain areas where Bede and Gregory differ from their contemporaries, for example, information about events and individuals that Bede and Gregory leave out from their histories but which are attested in other contemporary texts, can help to reveal what the authors' prioritised in their own texts. Several patristic and late antique texts that were used by both authors will be examined to investigate their influence on Bede and Gregory. Relevant historiographical texts, particularly concerning the influence of providential history on Bede and Gregory, are considered in order to contextualise their portrayals of women. This providential influence will be examined in greater detail in the following chapter, but it is important to note here that both authors use people and events in history for allegorical and typological purposes, and Bede in particular employs symbolic techniques in writing.[90] For example, Bede uses a queen's marriage to symbolise national conversion and Gregory used typological

[90] On Bede's use of literal, allegorical and typological interpretation, see Martin Irvine, *The Making of Textual Culture: 'Grammatica' and Literary Theory, 350-1100* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 262-296; for Gregory's use of typology and allegory, see Martin Heinzelmann, *Gregory of Tours*, pp. 148-151.

references and strategic set-pieces in his narrative. Both authors used these techniques to articulate their views to their audiences; as Dailey has pointed out, 'Gregory used reported speech to express ideas that were in fact his own.'[91] Bede's and Gregory's descriptions of both men and women must be analysed as narrative constructions in order to elucidate the meanings Bede and Gregory wished to convey through their histories.

The framework of the present study may appear to be literary in its focus on representations and themes, but these texts are both literary and historical in nature, and require such frameworks as tools for analysis. Scholars have shown that medieval histories were written with the literary techniques and narrative structures that are associated in the modern mind with contemporary fiction, but history and fiction should not be taken in binary opposition when dealing with medieval sources.[92] Ray called for a philosophical method of analysis that goes beyond tracing concrete borrowings from antiquity to 'probe for what may be deep-running patterns of thought' in medieval historiography.[93] Partner argued that descriptions of women are often part of the authors' rhetorical strategies and contain layers of meaning that could be applicable to both secular and religious audiences.[94] In order to understand Bede's and Gregory's rhetorical strategies in their histories it is important to place them in the context of the authors' wider corpus. Gregory describes several women in his hagiographical writings, texts which have become integral to studies on the *DLH*.[95] Recent studies on Bede have also pointed to the importance of placing the *HE* in Bede's wider corpus; as De Gregorio has stated, scholarship 'has always privileged the *Ecclesiastical History*, and it is now time to see Bede's works in a more integrated and holistic way, recognizing in his collective output a carefully structured body of knowledge

[91] Erin Dailey, *Gregory of Tours*, p. 12.
[92] For example, see Roger Ray, 'Medieval Historiography through the Twelfth Century: Problems and Progress of Research', *Viator* 5 (1974), pp. 33-59; Monika Otter, 'Functions of Fiction in Historical Writing', in Nancy F. Partner (ed.), *Writing Medieval History*, pp. 109-130; Gabrielle M. Spiegel, 'Historical Thought in Medieval Europe', in Lloyd Kramer and Sarah Maza (eds.), *Companion to Western Historical Thought* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 78-98.
[93] Roger Ray, 'Medieval Historiography', pp. 55-58.
[94] Nancy F. Partner, 'Preface', in idem (ed.), *Writing Medieval History*, pp. xiv-xv.
[95] See for example, Giselle De Nie, *Views from a Many-Windowed Tower*; Raymond Van Dam, S*aints and their Miracles*; Isabel Moreira, *Dreams, Visions and Spiritual Authority in Merovingian Gaul* (Ithaca, 2000).

whose interconnections are deliberate and therefore essential for interpreters to grasp.'[96]

De Gregorio, Thacker, O'Reilly, and more recently Darby, have shown that Bede's exegetical works reveal his urgent concern for contemporary reform, and can be seen as part of Bede's pastoral agenda behind the *HE*, which he articulates more directly in the *Epistola ad Ecgbertum Episcopum*, his letter to archbishop Ecgbert of York written in 734.[97] This approach has been used most frequently in recent studies on Bede, but even forty years ago Ray pointed out the importance of Bede's exegesis, arguing that his biblical commentaries and his history are inseparable.[98] Bede's writings number nearly fifty works in a variety of genres, but he particularly wanted to build upon the study of the Scriptures and to explain their mysteries through exegesis, both as a spiritual exercise and for the instruction of others, an activity that he believed was done in the service of God.[99] Much of Bede's writings were exegetical texts, aimed at instructing contemporary monastic audiences, but he was also concerned with applying Christian teaching to elite secular audiences, primarily through the *HE*.[100] At the end of his history, Bede separated his own works by genre, but the distinction between his exegetical and historical writing is somewhat superficial, as spiritual allusions underscore much of Bede's historical writing. This has significant implications for interpreting the representations of women in his history; as will be argued later in this thesis, Bede drew on his own exegetical work and used spiritual allegories in his portrayals of both secular and religious women.

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[96] Scott De Gregorio, 'Preface', in idem (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Bede*, pp. xv-xvii, at p. xvi.
[97] Scott De Gregorio,, 'Bede's *In Ezram et Neemiam* and the Reform of the Northumbrian Church', *Speculum*, 79 (2004), pp. 1-25; idem, 'Visions of Reform: Bede's later writings in Context', in Peter Darby and Faith Wallis (eds.), *Bede and the Future*, pp. 207-232; Alan Thacker, , 'Bede's Ideal of Reform'; Jennifer O' Reilly, 'Introduction', in Seán Connolly (trans.) and Jennifer O' Reilly (intro.), *Bede: On the Temple*, *TTH* 21 (Liverpool, 1995), pp. xvii-lv; Peter Darby, *Bede and the End of Time*.
[98] Roger Ray, 'Bede, the Exegete as Historian', in Gerald Bonner (ed.), *Famulus Christi: Essays in Commemoration of the Thirteenth Centenary of the Birth of the Venerable Bede* (London, 1976), pp. 125-140.
[99] Calvin B. Kendall, 'Bede and Education', pp. 110-112.
[100] See Nick J. Higham, 'Bede's Agenda in Book IV of the 'Ecclesiastical History of the English People': A Tricky Matter of Advising the King', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 64, 3 (July, 2013), pp. 476-493.

The interconnectedness of Bede's writings and his use of patristic conventions and allusions in his descriptions of people and events in the past are the reason why this thesis's methodology incorporates a consideration of Bede's exegesis.[101] It also considers Bede's patristic influences and exemplars; as we will see, Augustine and Gregory the Great stand out as two patristic authors that were highly influential on Bede's thought.[102] Bede's and Gregory of Tours's use of providential themes and exegetical allusions were not simply imitations of the writings of their predecessors but were fully utilised as narrative tools by the authors to influence their present audiences. As a recent study on hagiography in Merovingian France pointed out, moral standards promoted in medieval texts 'were made with reference to religious tradition but also to contemporary social contexts.'[103] The *HE* and the *DLH* must be placed within these contexts, and certain interpretative frameworks are necessary in order to do so.

(ii) Interpretative Frameworks

The present thesis examines Bede's and Gregory's representations of women both within the context of Christian tradition and their own contemporary contexts, in order to understand their authorial agendas. Both authors set out with specific intentions in writing, and a key to understanding their agendas can be seen in the prefaces to their histories. Gregory stated that because no writer had come to the fore to describe recent events, he was moved 'to hand down the memory of the past to future generations, in no wise leaving untold the conflicts of the wicked and those who lived in righteousness.'[104] The preface does not address anyone in particular, but it is implied that this work will be for a wide audience, and at the end of the *DLH*, Gregory makes a plea to keep his books intact for posterity.[105] Bede's history is addressed to the contemporary king of Northumbria, Ceolwulf, and praises the king's zeal and enthusiasm in wishing 'to see my *History* more widely known, for the instruction of yourself and those over whom divine

[101] Scholars have noted the necessity of considering Bede's exegesis alongside analyses of the *HE*; for example, see Alan Thacker, 'Bede's Ideal of Reform'; Jennifer O' Reilly, 'Islands and Idols'; Scott De Gregorio,, 'Bede's *In Ezram et Neemiam*'.
[102] See Alan Thacker, *Bede and Augustine of Hippo* (Jarrow, 2005).
[103] Jamie Kreiner, *The Social Life of Hagiography in the Merovingian Kingdom* (Cambridge, 2014), p. 16.
[104] *DLH* preface.
[105] *DLH* 10.31.

authority has appointed you to rule.'[106] Bede's preface aims directly at the king and his court, suggesting that his history was specifically intended to teach secular leaders how best to conduct themselves as Christian rulers.[107] However, Bede's work was also intended for a wide audience, elite secular individuals but also an ecclesiastical readership, who could benefit from the *HE*'s accounts of the history of the Church in Britain, its great successes and its failings. Bede's view of the application of history as a moral teaching device is encapsulated in his preface; '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'.[108] Gregory similarly stated that he would tell of recent events, both good and bad.[109] Though Bede and Gregory were writing history, their intention was to use the examples of the past to inform their present audiences and persuade them to deliberate on what choices they should make to determine their future fate. In order to understand Bede's and Gregory's use of examples of women from the past it is important to question the immediate context in which their histories were written, ask why they chose to write at a particular time, and why they wrote about particular subjects.[110]

Bede and Gregory had differing personal contexts but their contemporary concerns were very similar. Bede's experiences would have differed quite markedly to Gregory's; as a monk and scholar, Bede generally remained in the vicinity of Wearmouth-Jarrow, while Gregory's duties as a metropolitan bishop required him to travel between royal courts and dioceses in Gaul. Gregory was from a distinguished Gallo-Roman family and his ancestors were of senatorial rank who also became important members of the Church, several of whom were saints.[111] Gregory's mother Armentaria is a prominent presence in his writings, and Armentaria's great-grandfather, bishop Gregory of Langres, is given his own

[106] *HE* preface.
[107] Nick J. Higham, *Bede as an Oral Historian* (Jarrow, 2011), p. 19.
[108] *HE* Preface.
[109] *DLH* Preface.
[110] See Martin Kempshall, *Rhetoric and the Writing of History, 400-1500* (Manchester, 2012), p. 250.
[111] Gregory's father, Florentius, and grand-father, Georgius, were senators and his mother's grand-father, Tetricus, and great-grand-father, Gregory, had both been bishops of Langres; see Martin Heinzelmann, *Gregory of Tours*, pp. 10-35.

vita in Gregory's hagiography.[112] As one of the eleven metropolitan bishops of Gaul, Gregory communicated with prominent individuals at royal courts and was himself directly involved in several royal and ecclesiastical disputes during his episcopacy. Though Gregory had official pastoral responsibilities in his diocese, Bede also provided pastoral guidance and advised ecclesiastical leaders, even warning bishop Ecgbert of York in a letter to take the duties of his office more seriously by instituting reform; in the letter, Bede recommended that Ecgbert enlist the aid of king Ceolwulf, the dedicatee of the *HE*.[113]

Bede therefore had some contact with secular rulers, but Gregory seems to have had far more direct contact than Bede, and certainly more personal interactions with queens. Gregory's own episcopal election was sponsored by two powerful queens, Brunhild and Radegund, and Gregory himself presided over Radegund's funeral.[114] Dailey has argued that Gregory's personal contact with these women helps to explain the ways in which he portrays them, and that his close relationship with his own mother impacted on Gregory's views on topics such as widowhood.[115] There is no evidence that Bede interacted directly with royal women, but he certainly was in contact with at least one female religious, a 'beloved sister and virgin of Christ', dedicatee of one of Bede's exegetical works, and possibly a Northumbrian abbess.[116] Whoever this woman was, Bede thought of her as a spiritual sister, and both Bede and Gregory were concerned with providing moral guidance and spiritual advice to both men and women.

Gregory provided far more extensive treatment of secular elite women than Bede. This disproportion may be representative of the authors' experiences and circumstances; Gregory was surrounded by secular affairs at royal courts and throughout his dioceses, and was involved in several political and judicial matters. Though both authors describe similar societies and are concerned with similar issues and intentions, their own life experiences would have been very different, and this may be why the *DLH* gives so many descriptions of secular figures and

[112] *VP* 7.
[113] *EE*.
[114] Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmina*, 5.3, in Frederic Leo (ed.), *MGH AA* 4.1 (Berlin, 1881).
[115] Erin Dailey, *Gregory of Tours*; idem, *Queens, Consorts, Concubines*.
[116] Bede, *In Canticum Abacuc Prophetae*, David Hurst (ed.), *CCSL* 119B (Turnhout, 1983), pp. 377-409; see Benedicta Ward S. L. G., *The Venerable Bede* (London, 1998), p. 77.

events while the *HE* gives so little. On a personal level, Gregory's close relationship with his mother may help to explain his treatment of motherhood and pious widowhood in the *DLH*. As an oblate, Bede is unlikely to have had any such relationship in his life, and while Gregory describes pious widows who remain in the world, the majority of Bede's holy widows enter monasteries. Consequently, Bede's examples of the patronage and power of secular elite women are almost exclusively women who enter royal foundations themselves. Bede's monastic surroundings and life experiences led him to prioritise religious elite women, a focus which, as we will see, also owes much to Bede's patristic influences.

Bede and Gregory differ in several ways in their emphasis, descriptions and interpretation, and these differences help to elucidate certain aspects of each authors' narrative focus. In contrast to Gregory, Bede does not directly criticise any contemporary rulers, and focuses almost entirely on examples of good behaviour from the past. Gregory's descriptions of contemporary royal feuds and political assassinations are direct and explicit, as are his descriptions of the corrupt clergy and sinful nuns of his day, resulting in a picture of crisis in Gregory's contemporary Church and society. Bede also described these issues, but he approaches them in more indirect and discreet ways than Gregory; whether through restrictions placed upon Bede by royal and ecclesiastical considerations, or because he himself chose to, Bede decided that an indirect method would be the most effective way to address these issues. Bede had to take royal reaction into account since his history was dedicated to the contemporary Northumbrian king; though we do not know how much input the Northumbrian royal family had into Bede's completed history, it has even been suggested that the *HE* may have been a gift to Ceolwulf, showing Wearmouth-Jarrow's support of the reigning king and acknowledging his kingship.[117] Gregory's history was not addressed to any ruler and he was far more directly critical of royal behaviour than Bede. However, there is perhaps more to Bede's subtleties than contemporary restrictions alone; Bede's method was to carefully disperse information and allusions within his history in such a way that the reader may work out his contemporary concerns.

[117] Victoria Gunn, *Bede's* Historiae*: Genre, Rhetoric and the Construction of the Anglo-Saxon Church History* (Woodbridge, 2009), p. 161.

Bede prioritised good behaviour to such a degree that the *HE* has become known as a 'gallery of good examples', all drawn from the early English Church.[118] Bede used didactic examples of good behaviour for edificatory purposes, while Gregory used shock tactics by detailing immoral behaviour, also for the purpose of edification. As Thacker has noted, Bede's style sticks to an elevated tone and only rarely details depraved behaviour for a specific didactic purpose, while Gregory's technique was 'satirizing the depravity of this fallen world.'[119] Bede's authorial choice in describing good examples almost exclusively from the past was intended as a narrative strategy to draw more focus on the present; if the majority of praise-worthy characters were to be found in the past, then the present was surely lacking.[120] However, Bede's focus on positive edification also points to an optimistic view that the present Church and society could reform themselves with guidance; Bede provides his audience with this guidance through his history.

This thesis considers portrayals of women in the histories from the perspectives of the authors themselves, paying particular attention to their agendas and contemporary concerns. Bede and Gregory follow in the footsteps of their predecessors, but they also adapt Christian history to suit their own particular concerns, especially those relating to moral reform. Recent scholarship has highlighted the moral and reformist impulses of both authors individually but not comparatively, and these insights have rarely been applied to examining their representations of women. The following chapter examines the histories as narrative responses to contemporary crises, providing the immediate context in which Bede and Gregory wrote and illustrating how and why this is intimately related to their descriptions of women.

[118] James Campbell, *Essays in Anglo-Saxon History* (London, 1986), p. 25.
[119] Alan Thacker, 'Bede and History', in Scott De Gregorio (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Bede*, pp. 170-190, at p. 173.
[120] Walter Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History*, p. 254.

Chapter Two: Why Bede and Gregory Wrote about Women: the Relevance of Contemporary Crises and Reforming Agendas in the *HE* and the *DLH*

Introduction

This chapter investigates why Bede and Gregory wrote about women by focusing on the authors' immediate concerns about their respective Churches and societies. It argues that these concerns are a major driving force behind their representations of women. Bede and Gregory believed that moral decline in both the secular and religious life had led to crises of leadership, weakened military defences, monastic abuses and the secularisation of religious life; reform was urgently required. Bede tackled these issues obliquely in the *HE* but openly in other texts including his letter to Ecgbert. Analysis of his concerns features in much scholarship on the *HE* but rarely in studies of women in the *HE* or in comparison with the *DLH*. A comparison with the *DLH* is valuable; Wood and Grocock recently suggested that the issues Bede raised in his letter to Ecgbert resemble those raised by Gregory in the *DLH*.[121] Sims-Williams argued that Bede's letter to Ecgbert should be viewed as a form of monastic polemic, written by monks who followed a stricter form of monastic life than those whom they criticised, and thus should not be taken at face value.[122] This interpretation was challenged by Wood and Grocock, and the present chapter builds on their argument by illustrating how the issues described in Gregory's history are similar to those described by Bede in his letter to Ecgbert, indicating that Bede was in fact writing about real current issues. This thesis prioritises Bede and compares with Gregory as a means of better understanding the *HE* and associated Bedan texts.

This chapter examines Bede's and Gregory's responses to current crises in two sections: the first considers secular crises and the second ecclesiastical crises. However, many of the issues overlap as Bede and Gregory perceived that they were caused by conflicts between secular and religious life, where women feature as active participants. Since the letter to Ecgbert is of fundamental importance in establishing the dual nature of the crisis in Northumbria, and may owe something

[121] See Ian Wood and Christopher Grocock, *The Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow*, pp. lii-liii.
[122] Patrick Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England: 600-800* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 126.

to Gregory's *DLH*, its essential points are briefly summarised here. Bede's letter stated that the greed and negligence of bishops and clergy resulted in the failure of pastoral care; that wealthy lay men purchased land from kings under the guise of founding monasteries, in which they lived completely secular lives with their wives; that this practice monopolised land which could otherwise be given in return for military service, and therefore reduced the number of secular forces available to defend Northumbria.

2.1: Contemporary Crises and Moral Decline in the *HE* and the *DLH*

(i) Secular Crises: Consequences of Moral Decline in Bede's and Gregory's Societies

Bede's history focused on kings from the seventh century, who predominantly fought against rulers from other Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, the Picts and the Britons; in contrast, the Northumbrian kings of the eighth century appear to have spent most of their time engaged in internal conflicts.[123] The instability of the Northumbrian throne is evident by the fact that there had been five kings from 700 to the 730s.[124] Bede was writing the *HE* at a time of continued political instability; according to the continuation of the *HE*, in 731 king Ceolwulf of Northumbria was briefly deposed and forcibly tonsured. Bede chose the year 731 as the completion date for the *HE*'s historical narrative, though it is believed that he continued to amend his text after this time.[125] It is therefore possible that Bede knew about these recent troubles when writing the *HE*; Bede may in fact point to them in the penultimate chapter, the only chapter in the *HE* where he recorded contemporary history, by making the following comment about Ceolwulf: 'Both the beginning and the course of his reign have been filled with so many and such serious commotions and setbacks that it is as yet impossible to know what to say about them or to guess what the outcome will be.'[126] Bede chose not to include Ceolwulf's deposition and forced tonsuring, perhaps because Ceolwulf was the

[123] Barbara Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms of Early Anglo-Saxon England* (London, 1990), p. 87.
[124] Ibid, p. 89.
[125] Alan Thacker suggests that Bede may have been amending and adding to the draft up until 734, 'Bede and History', p. 176.
[126] *HE* 5.23.

dedicatee of the *HE*, and the king had read and commented on the text at his own request prior to publication.

In contrast to Bede's history, Gregory's was not dedicated to any ruler, and the *DLH* was not made public during Gregory's lifetime.[127] This may explain why Gregory's history focuses on and criticises his contemporary society while Bede's is relatively silent; Campbell noted this contrast between Bede's and Gregory's histories, stating that with Gregory, 'The more he knew the more he wrote', but 'with Bede the more he knew the less he wrote.'[128] Bede's letter to Ecgbert, which is far more directly critical of the contemporary Northumbrian Church and society, helps to shed light on Bede's concerns when compared with the *HE*; comparing the *HE* with Gregory's history, which draws similarities with Bede's letter to Ecgbert, increases our understanding of both authors' concerns about their contemporary societies and how they used representations of women as a response to their concerns.

Bede's letter to Ecgbert outlined serious contemporary issues: political instability and a lack of pastoral care was leading to a crisis of leadership in both secular and religious life, compounded by the prevalence of religious houses which Bede considered to be false monasteries. In the letter, Bede stated that these places existed because aristocratic men 'give money to kings and buy estates for themselves under the guise of building monasteries in which they can indulge more freely in their lust', land grants which they held in hereditary perpetuity.[129] Bede warned that because royal land grants used to be given in return for military services but were now being alienated by the false monasteries, idle and landless men 'leave their fatherland, on whose behalf they ought to have been soldiers, and travel overseas', which prevented the provision of 'soldiers and helpers for the secular powers who might defend our people from the barbarians'. [130] In the

[127] Pascale Bourgain, 'The Works of Gregory of Tours: Manuscripts, Language, and Style', in Alexander Callander Murray (ed.), *A Companion to Gregory of Tours*, pp. 141-188, at p. 143.
[128] James Campbell, 'Bede I', in idem, *Essays in Anglo-Saxon History*, pp. 1-28, at p. 15.
[129] *EE* 12; see Patrick C. Wormald, 'How Do We Know So Much About Anglo-Saxon Deerhurst?', in idem, *The Times of Bede, 625-865: Studies in Early English Christian Society and its Historian* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 229-248, at pp. 231-232; Patrick C. Wormald, 'Corruption, Decline and the 'Real World' of the Early English Church: Aristocrats as Abbots', in idem, *The Times of Bede*, pp. 249-266, at. p. 253; John Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, pp. 106-107; Susan Wood, *The Proprietary Church in the Medieval West* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 152-154.
[130] *EE* 11.

penultimate chapter of the *HE*, Bede said that many Northumbrians had 'laid aside their weapons…preferring that they and their children should take monastic vows rather than train themselves in the art of war. What the result will be, a later generation will discover.'[131] This has been interpreted as a 'veiled reference' to the false monasteries Bede denounced in the letter to Egcbert, and when compared with the letter's warnings about soldiers leaving the country, it suggests that Bede was concerned that Northumbria was undefended from attack by outsiders.[132]

In the first book of the *HE,* Bede described how the post-Roman Britons were beaten by his own pagan ancestors; citing the sixth-century British historian Gildas, Bede explained that the Britons brought destruction upon themselves through their military and moral weaknesses.[133] In the last book of his history Bede indicated that the Anglo-Saxons might fall into the same error as the Britons before them. In the penultimate chapter, Bede related that the Saracens had ravaged Gaul but were beaten in the same kingdom, usually understood as a reference to Charles Martel's victory at Tours/Poitiers.[134] 'Saracens' was a term used by Christian writers including Bede to refer to the Muslim Arabs.[135] Bede understood the Saracens as a savage barbarian people, describing them as 'hateful and hostile to all' in his *In Genesim*, which also mentioned their presence in parts of Europe during Bede's own time.[136] This suggests that Bede was concerned that the advance of Saracen armies could be a potential threat, and by mentioning their attack on Gaul in close proximity to his 'veiled reference' to false monasteries in the *HE*, Bede sought to warn his audience of the dangers that could result from Northumbria's military weakness. Alongside his references to the Saracens, Bede also pointed to uncertain outcomes by making the ominous statement about the

[131] *HE* 5.23.
[132] John M. Wallace-Hadrill, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, p. 200.
[133] *HE* 1.22; Gildas, *De Excidio Britanniae*.
[134] Charles Martel's victory occurred in 732, a year after the official completion date of the *HE*, but was possibly inserted by Bede during his revision of the text; see John M. Wallace-Hadrill, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People: A Historical Commentary* (Oxford, 1988), p. 199; David P. Kirby, *Bede's* Historia Ecclesiastica, p. 3; Walter Goffart, 'The *Historia Ecclesiastica*: Bede's Agenda and Ours', in Robert B. Patterson (ed.), *The Haskins Society Journal: Studies in Medieval History* (London, 1990), pp. 29- 45, at p. 41.
[135] Katharine Scarfe Beckett, *Anglo-Saxon Perceptions of the Islamic World* (Cambridge, 2003), p. 95.
[136] Bede, *In Genesim*, Book 4, 16:12, in Calvin B. Kendall (trans. and intro.), *Bede: On Genesis, TTH* 48 (Liverpool, 2008), p. 279; see idem, 'Bede and Islam', in Peter Darby and Faith Wallis (eds.), *Bede and the Future*, pp. 93-114.

uncertain reign of the contemporary Northumbria king Ceolwulf; Bede intentionally placed this comment in his penultimate chapter in order to provide a warning to his audience of contemporary elites that these were dangerous times.

Bede made it clear that this instability did not begin during Ceolwulf's reign; the letter to Ecgbert dated the practice of false monasteries back thirty years to the death of king Aldfrith in 705, and the *HE* stated that Northumbria's fortunes began to decline even earlier, after the death of Aldfrith's predecessor Ecgfrith in 685. It is important to consider Bede's portrayal of Ecgfrith's death as he regarded this disaster as the start of present crises. After Ecgfrith was killed by the Picts, Bede said that 'the hopes and strength of the English kingdom began to ebb and fall away.'[137] The quote 'ebb and fall away' echoes Virgil's *Aeneid,* which Bede may have known at first hand.[138] In Virgil's epic it related to the declining fortunes of the Greeks, and Bede quoted it here to describe Northumbria's decline.[139]

According to Bede, Ecgfrith's defeat occurred as divine punishment for his attack on the 'harmless race' of the Irish, as well as his later decision to attack the Picts against the advice of his friends and advisors, the monk Ecgbert and bishop Cuthbert of Lindisfarne.[140] Despite the fact that Ecgfrith had donated the land for Bede's own monastery, Bede chose to record and denounce his devastation of a 'harmless' people, with armies that 'spared neither churches nor monasteries'.[141] This disrespect for the Church and its consequences is also a theme in Gregory's portrayals of the bad behaviour of secular rulers. In the *DLH* Gregory directly contrasted the behaviour of contemporary kings with their forebears, stating that 'the fathers enriched the monasteries and churches; the sons demolish and destroy them.'[142] In his *Life of St Martin*, Gregory related that king Charibert died as divine punishment for attempting to seize an estate belonging to the Church;

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[137] *HE* 4.26.
[138] Neil Wright, 'Bede and Virgil', *Romanobarbarica* 6 (1981), pp. 361-379; Martin Irvine, *The Making of Textual Culture*, pp. 278-279.
[139] Virgil, *Aeneid*, 2.169, in H. R. Fairclough and Rev. G. P. Goold, (ed. and trans.), *Virgil, vol. 1: Eclogues; Georgics; Aeneid 1-6* and *Virgil, vol 2: Aeneid 7-12; Appendix Vergiliana* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2000).
[140] *HE* 4.26.
[141] *HE* 4. 26; Bede mentions Ecgfrith's land grants in *HA* 1.
[142] *DLH* 4.48.

speaking directly to his audience, Gregory said 'Listen to this story, all you who exercise power…do not steal from others…do not harm the churches! For God swiftly avenges his servants.'[143] Both Bede and Gregory were interested in warning their audiences that God's judgement loomed for the sinful, particularly the secular leaders who were responsible for their people.

Though not in the same direct manner as Gregory, Bede also contrasted kings with their predecessors in the *HE*. Bede's portrayal of king Oswald of Northumbria was particularly positive, emphasising the king's role as protector of the Church and his ability to heed wise counsel from ecclesiastical advisors such as bishop Aidan. Bede contrasted Oswald's behaviour with his son Ecgfrith mentioned above, who not only neglected to heed the advice of his ecclesiastical advisors but also allowed his band of soldiers to attack Church buildings.[144] It has been argued that Bede was here following the literary convention of associating a ruler's personal conduct with his defeat at enemy hands.[145] If Bede was following literary convention, he had the writings of Pope Gregory to draw on for this specific *topos*; as Wallace-Hadrill has noted, Pope Gregory's letters stated that a king's personal life should be an example to his subjects.[146] Wallace-Hadrill also linked Pope Gregory's views to Gregory of Tours's, citing the latter's portrayal of the bad behaviour of king Chilperic.[147] There is a connection between Bede's and Gregory's portrayals of kings but also in their portrayals of women, who feature as key components of both Bede's and Gregory's narrative strategies to a greater extent than many of their forebears. They employed these strategies not to denigrate women but to reform both women and men in their societies.

Bede and Gregory both understood that a king's personal behaviour was paramount for the welfare of his people. Since the personal lives of rulers were important for their subjects, their sexual unions were put under close scrutiny and their marriages were the most visible marker of their behaviour. Bede's description of king Edwin's marriage to Æthelburh and Gregory's of king Clovis's

[143] *VM* 29, in Raymond Van Dam (trans.), *Saints and their Miracles in Late Antique Gaul* (Princeton, 1993), p. 221.
[144] *HE* 4.26.
[145] Victoria Gunn, *Bede's* Historiae, p. 163.
[146] John M. Wallace-Hadrill, 'Gregory of Tours and Bede', p. 101.
[147] Ibid, citing Pope Gregory's letter to king Reccared.

marriage to Clotild, explored in a case study in chapter three of the present thesis, promoted an ideal of Christian marriage and peaceful unity. The importance of marital concord for a man's public image was understood in Roman culture and extended to both the pagans and Christians of Late Antiquity.[148] In Western medieval culture, the reputation of a king was an important factor in both internal and external affairs; scandalous behaviour was detrimental not just to the king himself but to his subjects and the entire kingdom.[149] In the *DLH*, Gregory warned contemporary kings that their behaviour was causing internal wars, which would lead to the fall of their armies and their kingdoms being 'overborne by hostile nations.'[150] Bede's letter to Ecgbert also pointed to the potential threat to Northumbria from outsiders; twice in the letter Bede referred to rumours about abuses in his contemporary Church and society, indicating his concern that enemies would discover the military and spiritual weaknesses of the Northumbrian kingdom through scandalous rumours being spread at home and abroad.[151]

Bede's sentiments in the letter to Ecgbert were paralleled by the Anglo-Saxon missionary Boniface in his letter to king Æthelbald of Mercia in 746. Boniface criticised Æthelbald's refusal to take a lawful wife and his decision to engage in sexual unions with multiple women, warning the king that rumours of his behaviour being noised abroad could result in the destruction of the English race by barbarians such as the Saracens. Boniface said that because the king's behaviour was a bad example to his subjects, they would 'neither be strong in secular warfare nor stable in faith, neither honoured by man nor loved by God.'[152] Boniface's words here echo Bede's in the letter to Ecgbert, where he warned that the false monasteries were 'neither of use to God nor men'.[153] Bede believed that taking back the land alienated by false monasteries for the provision of soldiers

[148] See Kate Cooper, *The Virgin and the Brid*e.
[149] Rob Meens, following Mayke de Jong, has pointed to the close connection between scandal and the well-being of the realm in the Carolingian period; see Rob Meens, 'Sanctuary, Penance, and Dispute Settlement under Charlemagne: The Conflict between Alcuin and Theodulf of Orleans over a Sinful Cleric', *Speculum*, 82, 2 (April, 2007), pp. 277-300; Mayke De Jong, '*Sacrum Palatium et Ecclesia*: L'autorite Religieuse Royale sous les Carolingiens (790-840)', *Annales: Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, 58 (2003), 1243-1269.
[150] *DLH* 5 Preface.
[151] *EE* 4 and 7, in Christopher Grocock and Ian Wood (eds. and trans.), *The Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow*, pp. 128-129 and 134-135.
[152] Boniface, *Epistola* 57, Dorothy Whitelock (trans.), *English Historical Documents, 500-1042* (London, 2nd edt. 1979), pp. 816-822, at p. 818
[153] Ibid.

would strengthen Northumbria's defences in the secular world, but he also believed that new bishoprics could be created from the reclaimed land to deal with Northumbria's ecclesiastical crises.[154] Bede urged Ecgbert to enlist the help of Ceolwulf to carry out the task, envisaging that the king would play a key role in the moral reform of both people and clergy, in cooperation with good interventionist bishops.[155]

(ii) Ecclesiastical Crises: Consequences of Moral Decline in Bede's and Gregory's Churches

The ecclesiastical crises facing Bede's and Gregory's Churches involve a lack of pastoral care and proper leadership, sinful behaviour in monasteries, and issues with the alienation of land and Church property, controlled by high status families through hereditary succession. This thesis argues that both authors in part addressed these issues through descriptions of female monasteries in their histories, providing examples of both bad and good behaviour to encourage their audiences to reform. In the letter to Ecgbert, Bede emphasised that the monastic discipline and pastoral care that was shown by the members of the early English Church had to be imitated in order to save it from deteriorating from its great beginnings. Bede used the *HE* to provide a solution for contemporary moral decline; by describing didactic models of virtuous secular Christians who supported the Church, monastic communities who followed apostolic discipline, religious leaders who took their pastoral roles seriously, and individual saints of the early English Church, Bede intended to encourage the reader to imitate their examples. Gregory similarly hoped to edify readers with exemplary models like Radegund, the founder of Poitiers, but he focused far more on bad behaviour to provide warnings to his audience. Bede prioritised examples of good behaviour; nevertheless, he also provided a serious warning through his description of the sinful nuns at Coldingham.

Bede's description of Coldingham and Gregory's of the revolt of the nuns at Poitiers, which are compared in a case study in chapter five of this thesis, provide

[154] *EE* 12; *EE* 10.
[155] *EE* 9.

a warning to their audiences about the consequences of bad behaviour in monastic contexts. Both authors also provided contrasting examples of the good behaviour of women in monasteries, such as Gregory's portrayal of Radegund and Bede's of Æthelthryth. Radegund and Æthelthryth had been queens in their secular lives and both authors emphasised how these women relinquished worldly ties and ruled over communities with exemplary leadership. A failure to relinquish worldly ties was one of the root causes behind both Bede's analysis of the sinful behaviour at Coldingham and Gregory's of Poitiers. Both authors were careful to stipulate that this failure happened without good leadership; the revolt of the nuns at Poitiers occurred after Radegund's death and Coldingham received divine punishment for the community's sins only after the death of its abbess Æbbe, sister of king Oswiu of Northumbria. It is important to question what Bede and Gregory considered different about the original royal foundations which they praised, and those of the contemporary elites which they criticised.

The royal foundations described by Bede were passed down through female family members; Hild, a relative of king Edwin, was abbess of Whitby monastery which was subsequently ruled by Eanflæd and Ælfflæd, the wife and daughter of Edwin's successor Oswiu.[156] Æthelthryth was succeeded at Ely by her sister, Seaxburh, and Bede highly praised both as exemplary abbesses.[157] Since Bede praised these monasteries in the *HE*, it would seem that hereditary succession was acceptable to Bede; Wood and Grocock suggested that it is perhaps even possible to view Bede's own monastery as the sort of family house that he denounced in his letter to Ecgbert, the false monasteries that were controlled by hereditary succession.[158] Benedict Biscop, the first abbot of Wearmouth-Jarrow, had selected members of his family as co-abbots; Eosterwine was his cousin and Ceolfrith is also believed to have been a relative, though this information is not provided by Bede.[159] Bede may appear contradictory then, when he praised monasteries which were ruled by successive members of the same family such as Whitby and his own

[156] *HE* 4.26.
[157] *HE* 4.19; Seaxburh was later succeeded by her daughter Eormenhild.
[158] Ian Wood, 'The Gifts of Wearmouth and Jarrow', in Wendy Davies and Paul Fouracre (eds.), *The Languages of Gift in the Early Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2012), pp. 89-115, at p. 96; Sarah Foot, *Bede's Church* (Jarrow, 2012), p. 23; Christopher Grocock and Ian Wood (eds. and trans.), *The Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow*, p. lvii.
[159] See Ian Wood, 'The Gifts of Wearmouth and Jarrow', p. 97, n. 44.

Wearmouth-Jarrow; however, closer analysis and comparison with Gregory reveals the complexities of Bede's thought on the issue, and how this relates to his portrayals of women as models and as warnings in the *HE*.

In the *History of the Abbots*, Bede emphasised that abbots at his monastery were chosen on the basis of their spiritual qualities alone, which has prompted Wood and Grocock to argue that one of Bede's main aims in the work was to make Wearmouth-Jarrow as different as possible from the false monasteries of his letter to Ecgbert.[160] The present thesis argues that one of the main aims of both Bede's and Gregory's histories was to portray women's monasteries like Whitby and Poitiers as ideal examples with which to judge the failures of contemporary monasteries. Bede denounced contemporary false monasteries because they were controlled by hereditary right without the requisite qualities for spiritual leadership. This was an important distinction to Bede, since he stated in the *History of the Abbots* that both Benedict and Ceolfrith warned the community not to consider family relationships when appointing their successors but to elect on the basis of spiritual qualities alone, in line with the statutes of the Rule of St Benedict.[161] According to Gregory, Radegund similarly warned her community to respect Agnes, whom she had appointed as abbess; in a letter recorded by Gregory, Radegund stated that after Agnes's death 'an abbess shall be appointed out of our congregation, who shall find favour in God's sight, who shall safely guard the Rule, and in nothing diminish the intent of holy living'.[162]

Gregory's copy of Radegund's letter related that she obtained protection for her monastery from outside interference; writing to seven bishops Radegund stated that 'if any person, were it even the bishop of the city, shall seek to claim, by new privileges over and above those enjoyed by his predecessors or any other persons in my lifetime, either power in the monastery or over its property…or if any prince or bishop or other powerful person, or any of the sisters, shall with sacrilegious intent diminish or appropriate the property…may they through my prayer and the

[160] Christopher Grocock and Ian Wood (eds. and trans.), *The Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow*, p. lviii.
[161] *HA* 11; *HA* 16; Benedict of Nursia, *Regula*, 64, Rev. Rudolph Hanslik (ed.), *CSEL* 75 (Vienna, 1977); see Ian Wood, 'The Gifts of Wearmouth and Jarrow', p. 96.
[162] *DLH* 9.42.

will of Christ in such wise be confronted with God's wrath'.[163] This indicates that monasteries in Gregory's time, particularly those with substantial wealth and property, could be at risk of being despoiled by powerful individuals; indeed, Gregory provided several examples of this in his history, such as his account of the monastery for women in Tours. According to Gregory, the abbess Ingitrude begged her daughter Berthegund to abandon her husband and become her successor, but when mother and daughter later quarrelled, Ingitrude appointed her niece as successor instead, which prompted Berthegund to petition the king and claim possession at Tours.[164] Berthegund and a band of hired thugs stripped the walls of the monastery bare, much to Gregory's disgust and disapproval.

Similar issues may lie behind Bede's portrayal of his own monastery; Bede said that both Benedict and Ceolfrith acquired papal privileges which gave the community freedom from outside interference.[165] As Wood has pointed out, this could conceivably include lay family members who might attempt to claim ownership rights.[166] The anonymous *Life of Ceolfrith* said that Benedict 'had a brother who was close to him by the blood ties of the flesh, but who was very far from him because of the worthlessness of his heart.'[167] Both Wood and Foot have suggested that Benedict's family may have attempted to claim some ownership over the monastery after his death.[168] Bede never mentioned Benedict's brother, nor did he relate any disputes concerning family succession in monasteries in the *HE*; however, comparison with other relevant texts helps to shed light on his concerns. The Anglo-Saxon charters contain references to disputes about monastic land and hereditary rights, and one example of a female monastery is Withington; its abbess Dunne had assigned the monastery to her infant granddaughter Hrothwaru, but Hrothwaru's mother, a married lay woman, attempted to obtain the land herself by pretending the land charter was stolen.[169] Gregory's descriptions of

[163] Ibid.
[164] *DLH* 9.33; *DLH* 10.12.
[165] *HA* 6 and 15; *Homilia* 1.13, 12.
[166] Ian Wood, 'The Gifts of Wearmouth and Jarrow', p. 97.
[167] *Vita Ceolfridi* (anon.), 16, in Christopher Grocock and Ian Wood (eds. and trans.), *The Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow*, pp. 95-97.
[168] Ian Wood, 'The Foundation of Bede's Wearmouth-Jarrow', in Scott De Gregorio (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Bede*, pp. 84-96, at pp. 88-89; Sarah Foot, *Bede's Church*, p. 23.
[169] S 1429, S 1255, in Peter H. Sawyer (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Charters: An Annotated List and Bibliography* (London, 1968).

such disputes in the *DLH* are explicit and violent, like his account of the behaviour of Berthegund when she attempted to seize her mother's monastery. Although we have no evidence of similar behaviour from Bede's history, his letter to Ecgbert denounced the aristocratic lay men who founded monasteries with their wives, continued to produce children and controlled the land through hereditary succession.[170]

In Bede's and Gregory's churches, it appears that the issue was not specifically with hereditary succession, but that monasteries could be appropriated by lay people; Hrothwaru's mother and Berthegund were married women, and Bede's letter to Ecgbert stated that contemporary laymen 'ask for places to build monasteries, as they themselves put it, for their wives, who in equal foolishness, although they are laywomen, allow themselves to be abbesses of the maidservants of Christ.'[171] The monastic character of such places was surely lacking, and the sources indicate sexual misconduct in relation to women; Bede's letter to Ecgbert said that contemporary landless soldiers 'do not refrain even from virgins sacred to God', and according to Boniface, the rumours about king Æthelbald's sexual unions included nuns.[172] It is evident that similar problems had already occurred on the Continent over a century earlier, since Gregory related that king Chilperic's son Theudebert also fornicated with nuns and defiled women in monasteries.[173] In the context of these issues, Bede's and Gregory's emphasis on topics such as virginity, marriage and entering the religious life in their representations of women can be understood as part of a reforming strategy, aimed at both men and women in their contemporary societies. Bede and Gregory both clarified what they believed were good or bad monasteries, and invariably the monasteries that they criticised were those that were run or inhabited by individuals and communities that refused to relinquish their secular lives. Bede and Gregory intended to inform their audiences in doing so, and both authors chose to use examples of women to achieve these aims.

[170] *EE*, 12.
[171] Ibid.
[172] *EE* 11; Boniface, *Epistola* 57.
[173] *DLH* 4.47.

Conclusion

In the letter to Ecgbert Bede directly criticised moral decline in his contemporary Church and society, and he provided a solution to current crises in his history through focusing on ideal examples from the past. Gregory on the other hand provided his solution by focusing on explicit examples of contemporary sin and punishment to warn his audience. Bede's and Gregory's representations of women diverge and their histories are very different in tone, but both authors had a similar agenda when they wrote about women. Bede's contemporary concerns as outlined above help to explain the *HE*'s interest in good secular and ecclesiastical rulers as examples and bad or negligent examples as warnings. The following chapters of thesis will examine this interest in detail in relation to Bede's treatment of women, using case studies with integrated comparative analysis of *DLH*.

Chapter Three: Missions and Marriages: Elite Women in the Secular Life

Introduction

This chapter examines Bede's and Gregory's representations of women in the secular life, focusing on the most prominent themes arising from their descriptions of secular women in the *HE* and the *DLH*; their roles in Christian missions and in royal marriages. Both authors described the roles of royal women in Christianization, and by far the most striking role is that of the Christian queen who attempts to convert her pagan husband. Bearing in mind that the *HE* and the *DLH* are concerned with the conversion of barbarian populations, the presence of proselytizing queens is vital; according to Bede and Gregory, the first conversions of pagan kings of the Anglo-Saxons and Franks to Christianity occurred following their marriages to Christian queens. Both authors give such emphasis to the image of conversion via marriage to Christian queens that no study of the Merovingian Franks and Anglo-Saxon English neglects to mention these 'queen converters'.[174] Bede's and Gregory's portrayals of the conversions of kings through their marriages to Christian wives has helped to shape the scholarly idea of early medieval 'domestic proselytization'.[175] However, Bede's and Gregory's portrayals cannot be taken at face value, and must be carefully analysed as textual constructions before considering their attitudes towards women.

In order to understand how and why Bede and Gregory emphasised this particular role for Christian wives, this chapter will first investigate their textual models by examining the role of wives in patristic thought and Christian historiography. The influence of women on men and their ability to persuade and preach to their husbands were important aspects of late antique and patristic representations of wives. These models provided examples of how wives could influence their husbands, which were used in Christian contexts to articulate conversion narratives. This is followed by a case study that explores how the model of conversion by marriage was developed by Bede and Gregory. Bede's

[174] Stephanie Hollis uses the term 'queen converters' in *Anglo-Saxon Women*, p. 208.
[175] See Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg, *Forgetful of their Sex: Female Sanctity and Society, ca. 500-1100* (Chicago, 1998), who devotes a chapter to the topic of 'marriage and domestic proselytization', at pp. 177-209.

account of Northumbria king Edwin and his wife Æthelburh, and Gregory's account of king Clovis and his wife Clotild are compared as a case study, as they provide the most complete example of conversion by marriage, but other examples from the *HE* and the *DLH* will also be used for comparison. Finally, this chapter analyses how and why Bede and Gregory use marriage as a model for Christian society. Both authors highlighted the peace and unity brought by ideal examples of marriage, illustrating how they benefit both the Church and society.

3.1: Peace-Weavers and Protagonists: The Role of Christian Wives and the Influence of Women

(i) The Role of Christian Wives in Patristic Thought

Patristic authors believed that a celibate life was the most meritorious, but marriage was also considered as a divine institution for the faithful.[176] Patristic thought on Christian marriage was firmly grounded in Scripture; God's command to Adam and Eve to go forth and multiply was understood as meaning that marriage was instituted for the propagation of the human race.[177] In God's creation of Eve from Adam's rib, Genesis proclaimed that 'man shall leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they shall be two in one flesh'.[178] The New Testament contained Jesus' own teachings on marriage, and the Gospels quote this passage from Genesis, explaining that because the union of a man and woman became one, marriage was indissoluble.[179] Christian marriage differed sharply to Roman marriage, particularly in relation to divorce and remarriage, and several patristic authors contrast Roman secular law with the divine law of God in their writings.[180] While in Roman law a man could divorce his wife and only the wife could be deemed an adulteress, in Christian law a man

[176] See Augustine, *De Bono Coniugali*, *CSEL* 41; Jerome, *Adversus Jovinianum*. *PL* 23, 211-338.
[177] Genesis 1:28.
[178] Genesis 2:24.
[179] Matt. 19:4-6; Mark 10:6-9.
[180] For example, Ambrose, *Expositio Evangelii Lucae 8*, *CSEL* 32, 4; Augustine, *De Nuptiis et Concupiscentia*, 1, *CSEL* 42; Jerome, *Epistle 77 (Ad Oceanum)*, 3, *CSEL* 55; John Chrysostom, *Homilia 5, I Thess.*, 2, PG 62, 425; idem., *Propter Fornicationes Uxorem*, 2, PG 51.214. For discussion, see Philip Lyndon Reynolds, *Marriage in the Western Church: The Christianisation of Marriage During the Patristic and Early Medieval Periods* (Leiden, 1994), pp. 121-141; Elizabeth A. Clark, 'Early Christian Women: Sources and Interpretation', in Lynda L. Coon, Katherine J. Haldane and Elisabeth W. Sommer (eds.), *That Gentle Strength: Historical Perspectives on Women in Christianity* (Virginia, 1990), pp. 19-35.

could also be charged with adultery. The Church fathers rejected divorce and sequential marriage in order to promote a Christian ideal of marriage as an eternal and indissoluble union.[181] The only situation in which a marriage could conceivably be dissolved was in the case of fornication, and mixed marriages between a pagan and Christian could be considered as such; there was a danger that the Christian could be corrupted to idol worship. Tertullian considered that Christians married to pagans were guilty of fornication, and Augustine believed that marriages could be dissolved on the grounds of idolatry. However, Augustine also stated that this was only permitted by the Lord, not commanded, for the unbeliever could embrace the faith of the believer through their union.[182]

Augustine based his argument on the writings of the apostle Paul, an authority on marriage for patristic theologians, who stated that 'the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the believing wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the believing husband: else were your children unclean; but now they are holy'.[183] To patristic authors, this notion suggested that Christian wives could convert their husbands and that their children would also be saved.[184] Augustine only once specified exactly how this could be achieved, relating that if the believing wife provided an example of faith and good works to her unbelieving husband, he would thus be attracted to this same way of life and convert to the faith.[185] Mixed marriages therefore provided the opportunity to bring the unbeliever to God, and both Augustine and Jerome had written letters explaining that women could bring about conversion and strengthen the Christian values and morals of members of their households.[186] However, Cooper has made an important point about the danger of reading these documents too conclusively, arguing that the 'topos of womanly influence' was given disproportionate importance because it was a useful narrative technique.[187] The technique had been used by Classical historians like Plutarch and Sallust, who often portrayed women

[181] See Kate Cooper, *The Fall of the Roman Household* (Cambridge, 2007).
[182] Tertullian, *Ad Uxorem*, 2.3; Augustine, *De Sermone Domini in Monte*.
[183] 1 Cor. 7.14.
[184] For example, Augustine, *De Sermone Domini*; idem, *De Adulteriis Coniugis*; Jerome, *Epistle 107*.
[185] Augustine, *De Sermone Domini*, 2.2.7.
[186] See for example, Augustine, *Epistle 2*, *CSEL* 88; *Epistle 27*; *CSEL* 34; *Epistle 262*, *CSEL* 57; Jerome, *Epistle 107*, *CSEL* 55; On the historiographical problems of using these letters as evidence of 'home evangelization', see Kate Cooper, 'Insinuations of Womanly Influence'.
[187] Kate Cooper, 'Insinuations of Womanly Influence', pp. 162-163.

persuading and dissuading men. The purpose in doing so was usually to convey either positive or negative characterisations of the men to whom these women were connected; most commonly, a man's inability to resist the dangerous persuasions of a bad wife reflected his lack of self-control and inherent weakness.[188] Sallust describes both positive and negative descriptions of the influence of women in his *Bellum Catilinae*, a work which Gregory certainly knew, as he quotes from it in the *DLH*.[189] The characters of Fulvia, an informant on the conspiracy, and Sempronia, a member of the conspiracy, are key elements on either side of the conspiracy of Caitline.[190] Significantly, Sallust tells the reader that Catiline used the influence of wives, stating that by 'the influence of these females, Catiline hoped to gain over the slaves in Rome, to get the city set on fire, and either to secure the support of their husbands or take away their lives.'[191] While it may not be necessary to deny the historicity of Sallust's claims, it is important to note that he used a specific narrative technique, the use of female influence on men, not specifically to defame Roman women but to illustrate the moral decline of Roman men.

(ii) The Influence of Women in Christian Historiography

Christian historiography inherited and transformed this 'topos of womanly influence', mainly for the purposes of narrating accounts of male conversion. In Rufinus's continuation of Eusebius's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Constantine's mother Helena discovered the cross of Christ in Jerusalem and was described as 'a woman matchless in faith, devotion, and singular generosity, the sort of person whose son Constantine would be'.[192] The implication was that Helena's faith and devotion provided an example to Constantine; though this was a mother-son relationship, the image is similar to Augustine's comments on the influence of a wife's good example for her unbelieving husband. However, Rufinus's continuation also

[188] Ibid, pp. 150-164.
[189] *DLH* 4.13; *DLH* 7.2.
[190] Sallust, *Bellum Catilinae*, 23, 25 and 28.
[191] Ibid, 24, in Stanley A. Handford (trans. and intro.), *Sallust: The Jugurthine War and the Conspiracy of Catiline* (London, 1963).
[192] Rufinus, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 10. 7, in Philip R. Amidon (trans.), *The Church History of Rufinus of Aquileia: Books 10 and 11* (Oxford, 1997), p. 16; for a discussion of Rufinus' translation see Mark Humphries, 'Rufinus' Eusebius: Translation, Continuation, and Edition in the Latin *Ecclesiastical History*', *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 16, 2 (2008), pp. 143-164.

provides a more concrete example of female influence in his account of the conversion of the king of the 'barbarian' Georgian peoples, located in the region known in antiquity as Eastern Iberia, modern-day Georgia.[193] Rufinus relates that the Georgian queen was cured of a grave illness by a Christian female captive and subsequently urged her husband to accept Christianity. The king was reluctant to do so until out of necessity he turned to his wife's God for aid, after which he converted to Christianity and spread the faith throughout his kingdom.[194] As we will see, the elements of this account, the queen's attempt to persuade her husband, the king's reluctance, and divine proof of God's power, are all found in Bede's and Gregory's accounts of the conversion of kings. Significantly, the Georgian king first comes to know of Christianity through his wife, who attempts to persuade him to accept the new religion. This story, concerning gentile conversion in a remote place, may have appealed to Bede and Gregory when writing their own conversion narratives.

Rufinus's continuation also includes a negative example of the persuasion of an elite woman; the Arian Empress Justina, whom Rufinus refers to as a 'Jezebel'.[195] According to Rufinus, she 'went about the churches chattering noisily and trying to rouse and kindle discord among the people'.[196] The account of Jezebel, the wife of king Ahab of Israel, appears in the Book of Kings, which relates that the queen persuaded her husband to abandon his faith in God and return to idolatry.[197] Late antique Christian writers used the example of Jezebel to describe idolatrous and apostate women, or those who were an immoral influence on their husbands, and the comparison continued into the medieval period. Brunhild, a key figure in the *DLH*, was compared to Jezebel by Jonas of Bobbio and Fredegar.[198] These works appear in the mid-seventh centuries and provide an

[193] On the region in antiquity, see David Braund, *Georgia in Antiquity: A History of Colchis and Transcaucasian Iberia, 550 BC–AD 562* (Oxford, 1994).
[194] Rufinus, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 10. 11; this couple is commonly known as king Mirian III and queen Nana, while the captive woman who cured the queen is known as St Nino. On the Latin sources and native traditions concerning Nino and the conversion of the Georgians, see Andrea Sterk, 'Mission from Below: Captive Women and Conversion on the East Roman Frontiers', *Church History*, 79 (March, 2010), pp. 1-39; Christopher Haas, 'Mountain Constantines: The Christianization of Aksum and Iberia', *Journal of Late Antiquity*, 1 (Spring, 2008), pp. 101-126.
[195] Rufinus, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 11.15.
[196] Ibid.
[197] 1 Kings 16-22; 2 Kings 9.
[198] Jonas, *Vita Columbani* 1.18; Fredegar, *Chronicarum quae Dicuntur Fredegarii Scholastici Libri IV cum Continuationibus*, 4.36.

image of Brunhild that differs greatly from Gregory's more positive presentation of the queen.[199] Similarly, while Bede does not mention king Ecgfrith of Northumbria's wife queen Iurminburh, his near contemporary Stephen of Ripon compared her to Jezebel in his life of Bishop Wilfrid, claiming that she turned the king against Wilfrid by slandering the bishop.[200] Again, the comparison with Jezebel was made in reference to the wife's negative influence on her husband. Stephen wrote that Iurminburh shot 'poisoned arrows of speech from her quiver into the heart of the king', but also stated that the queen was influenced by 'the persuasions of the devil'.[201] The same sequence was found in the ultimate example of negative female influence in Christian history, that of Eve, who was persuaded by the devil to influence Adam to sin, leading some patristic authors to believe that she was the cause of the fall of humanity.[202] However, in Pope Gregory's *Libellus Responsionum*, a series of questions and answers inquired by Augustine to the pope in c. 601 and recorded by Bede in the *HE*, the pope stated that the first sin of humanity was caused by the devil's suggestion, carried from the serpent to Eve who delighted in it, to Adam who consented to it.[203] This view can be found elsewhere in the pope's writings, one of which was used by Bede in a homily, where he spoke of the 'three degrees of evil thoughts' as the idea of sin, delight of sin and the deliberate choice to sin.[204] In this reasoning, it was Adam's consent to Eve's persuasion that brought the sin into action; Eve influenced Adam but it was Adam who made the decision to sin, much like the examples of womanly influence used in Classical texts to illustrate the bad decisions of men.

Bede and Gregory do not make any reference to Jezebel in their histories, but both authors provide examples of the negative influence of women. Bede only provides one example of negative female influence in the *HE*, the unnamed wife

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[199] See Emma Jane Thomas, 'The 'Second Jezebel': Representations of the Sixth-Century Queen Brunhild', unpublished Ph.D. thesis (University of Glasgow, 2012).
[200] *VW* 24.
[201] Ibid, in Bertram Colgrave (ed. and trans.), *The Life of Bishop Wilfrid by Eddius Stephanus* (Cambridge, repr. 1985), p. 49.
[202] For example, Tertullian, *De Cultu Feminarum*, 1.1.2.
[203] *HE* 1.27, quoting Matt. 19:5 and Lev. 18:7; See Bill Friesen, 'Answers and Echoes: the *Libellus Responsionum* and the Hagiography of North-Western European Mission', *Early Medieval Europe*, 14 (2006), pp. 153-172.
[204] Bede, *Homeliarum Euangelii*, John 16:23-30; Hurst, David (ed.), *CCSL* 122; Lawrence T. Martin and David Hurst (trans.), *Bede the Venerable: Homilies on the Gospels*, 2 *(*Kalamazoo, Michigan, 1991), *Homily* 2.12.

of Rædwald, king of the East Angles, who persuaded her husband to return to paganism.[205] Bede said that Rædwald had been converted in Kent but on returning home was 'seduced by his wife and by certain evil teachers' to idol worship; the king decided to behave 'in the manner of the ancient Samaritans' by worshiping both Christ and pagan gods at two altars within the same temple.[206] This account draws parallels with other accounts of apostasy which Bede places near to each other in his narrative.[207] The conversion of king Edwin of Northumbria is placed in between these accounts of apostasy, and as we will see, one of the key themes that Bede highlights in his account of Edwin is the king's inner conversion to Christianity. Bede's aim was to illustrate Rædwald's apostate behaviour, and he used the negative influence of his wife to achieve this aim, much like his Classical and Christian predecessors. Though scholars have argued that Bede's account of Rædwald's wife was derived from an anti-woman bias, it may be suggested that Bede was here using a traditional narrative technique that had little to do with disparaging women.[208] Further to this, Bede also related the positive influence of Rædwald's wife, stating that she persuaded the king to keep his promise to Edwin, who at that time was an exile in Rædwald's kingdom. According to Bede, Rædwald's wife persuaded the king not to yield to the threats and bribes of Edwin's enemy Æthelfrith, warning him 'that it was in no way fitting for so great a king to sell his best friend for gold when he was in such trouble, still less to sacrifice his own honour, which is more precious than any ornament, for the love of money.'[209] This episode may reflect the honour-based character of Anglo-Saxon warrior culture, as embodied in the epic poem *Beowulf*; women in *Beowulf* such as Wealtheow also used their speech to influence political dissension and succession.[210]

[205] *HE* 2.15.
[206] Ibid.
[207] *HE* 2.5; *HE* 3.1.
[208] Stephanie Hollis argued that Bede's description of Rædwald's wife portrays queens as 'actively hostile to the conversion', in *Anglo-Saxon Women*, at p. 177; Klein argued that Bede portrayed closeness between the sexes as the cause of apostasy, portraying conversion as a 'movement away from women', in Stacy S. Klein, *Ruling Women*, p. 41.
[209] *HE* 2.12.
[210] See Michael J. Enright, *Lady with a Mead Cup: Ritual, Prophecy and Lordship in the European Warband from La Tène to the Viking Age* (Dublin, 1996), pp. 38-42.

The account of Rædwald's wife may be considered as indicative of Germanic culture, and it draws parallels with accounts suggestive of warrior culture in the *DLH*. For example, Gregory's account of Amalaberg, niece of Theoderic, king of the Goths and wife of Thuringian king Hermanfrid, relates that she roused her husband to attack his brother by laying only half the king's dinner table, claiming that a 'king who is deprived of half his kingdom deserves to find half his table bare.'[211] The episode points to the importance of honour and status within a warrior society; by shaming her husband and questioning his honour and status as a king, Amalaberg incited him to make war against his brother.

Gregory provides examples of both the positive and negative influence of individual women simultaneously. Queen Fredegund, the most prominent example of secular female bad behavior in the *DLH*, both incited others to violence and gave orders to murder her enemies.[212] However, Gregory also records Fredegund beseeching her husband Chilperic to repent their sinful greed in direct speech, positively influencing the king to burn their previous tax demands.[213] Clotild's exhortations to her husband Clovis to convert to Christianity are the most prominent example of positive female influence in the *DLH*, but Gregory also provides accounts of her negative influence, both of which appear during her widowhood. In the first example, Clotild appealed to her sons to avenge her parents, whom Gregory had earlier related were killed by Clotild's uncle Gundobad, king of the Burgundians.[214] There has been speculation about the historicity of this claim, and it has been suggested that Gregory reported the killing of Clotild's parents to create a revenge motive for Clotild's otherwise unjustifiable actions.[215] However, as Monroe has argued, Gregory is in general uncomfortable with the notion of human vengeance, believing that it is for God alone to punish the wicked.[216] Clotild's appeal was successful and her sons marched against Burgundy where her son Chlodomer was killed in battle leaving behind three young sons, whom Clotild took under her care; the second example of her negative

[211] *DLH* 3.4.
[212] *DLH* 4.51; *DLH* 6.23.
[213] *DLH* 5.34.
[214] *DLH* 3.5; *DLH* 2.28.
[215] See Ian Wood, 'Gregory of Tours and Clovis', p. 253; Erin Dailey, *Gregory of Tours*, pp. 45-46.
[216] William S. Monroe, '*Via Iustitiae*: The Biblical Sources of Justice in Gregory of Tours', in Kathleen Mitchell and Ian Wood (eds.), *The World of Gregory of Tours*, pp. 99-112.

influence occurs in this context. Gregory tells us that Clotild's other sons Childebert and Chlothar, fearing their mother was planning to raise Choldomer's sons to the throne, summoned their nephews, seized them and sent Clotild an ultimatum; either the boys would have their hair cut short or they would be killed. The Merovingian kings wore their hair long as a mark of status and royal power, and according to Gregory, Clotild replied that her grandsons would be better dead than have their hair cut.[217] Though Gregory related that Clotild regretted the response she gave in emotional haste, the account points to the importance of honour and shame in these societies, as relevant to women as it was to men.[218]

These indications of the character of Merovingian and Anglo-Saxon culture in Bede's and Gregory's histories are important in understanding their portrayals of secular royal women, but rather than reflecting the realities of their lives, the descriptions of women often have a function within the narratives. The connection between women and concepts of honour and shame had also been important in Classical and Late Antique culture, where both pagan and Christian writers used the influence of women to cast either honour or shame upon the male subject.[219] Bede's portrayal of the positive and negative influence of Rædwald's wife should be seen as an attempt to cast shame upon Rædwald rather than the queen herself. Rædwald's and Ecgfrith's decisions to make unwise decisions involving the advice of others contrasts sharply with the wise counsel taken by kings like Edwin and Oswald. In this sense, descriptions like that of Rædwald's wife are sophisticated narrative techniques which Gregory also used in his history. Gregory's lengthy descriptions of Fredegund's bad behaviour reflects badly on her husband king Chilperic, and this authorial choice may have been influenced by the current political situation; as Wood pointed out, Gregory criticised Chilperic directly only later in his history after the king had died, and most of Chilperic's

[217] *DLH* 3.18; see Averil Cameron, 'How did the Merovingian Kings Wear their Hair?', *Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire*, 43, 4 (1965), pp. 1203-1216; Simon J. Coates, 'Scissors or Sword? The Symbolism of a Medieval Haircut', *History Today* (May, 1999), pp. 7-13; Maximilian Diesenberger, 'Hair, Sacrality and Symbolic Capital in the Frankish Kingdoms', in Richard Corradini, Maximilian Diesenberger and Helmut Reimitz (eds.), *The Construction of Communities in the Early Middle Ages: Texts, Resources and Artefacts* (Leiden, 2003).
[218] For discussion of female honour as an 'exchange of violence' in Merovingian society, see Nira Gradowicz-Pancer, 'De-gendering Female Violence'.
[219] Kate Cooper, 'Insinuations of Womanly Influence', p. 160.

negative behaviour was instigated by Fredegund in Gregory's narrative.[220] Though Gregory's history was not dedicated to any ruler and he severely criticised contemporary rulers as a collective, he was careful when criticising individual contemporary elites, especially those who may have been dangerous. Gregory's descriptions of Fredegund's negative influence on her husband's behaviour may have been a skilful technique to protect himself from potential danger, but it was also a technique well attested in the writings Gregory had read, both Classical and Christian.

The rich literary inheritance available to Bede and Gregory influenced how they constructed their own histories, but both authors develop the role of Christian women in the conversion of their husbands in greater detail than any of their predecessors. In the writings of their predecessors, Bede and Gregory could have drawn on examples of women which were negative, but they chose to be influenced more by the positive examples; Bede and Gregory placed women in very important roles in Christianisation, the primary theme of their histories. In the account of the conversion of the Georgian king, Rufinus related that the queen preached to her husband, using the verb *praedico*, which Gregory also uses to describe Clotild's exhortations to Clovis. Though Bede does not explicitly relate in the *HE* that queens preached to their husbands, he certainly believed that women could preach; as Thacker has shown, Bede's *In Ezram et Neemiam* indicates that Bede envisaged women as preachers by stating: 'It is proper also that, along with the male singers, female singers should be included on account of their female sex, in which there are many people found who not only by the way they live but also by preaching enkindle the hearts of their neighbours to the praise of their Creator'.[221] Bede recalls the sentiments of patristic authors on the positive influence of secular Christian women on their husbands, households and neighbours. As we will see, the language Bede used here is echoed in Pope Boniface's letter to Æthelburh, which Bede reproduced in the *HE*.

The following section analyses Bede's and Gregory's most prominent examples of womanly influence, the positive role of Christian wives in converting

[220] Ian Wood, 'The Secret Histories of Gregory of Tours', p. 255.
[221] Bede, *In Ezram et Neemiam*, Ezra 2.65, in Scott De Gregorio (trans. and intro.), *Bede: On Ezra and Nehemiah*, p. 32.

their pagan husbands, focusing on a case study. In the *DLH*, the conversion of Clovis, the first king to wield sole rule over the Franks, was brought about following his marriage to Clotild.[222] The significance of Clovis's adoption of Christianity was highlighted by Gregory, who describes how the Franks went from worshipping idols to Christ following Clovis's conversion. Similarly, in the *HE* Bede highlights the importance of the conversions of the first Christian Anglo-Saxon king, Æthelberht, and the first Christian Northumbrian king, Edwin. In both cases, they also converted following their marriages to Christian women. The notion of the believing wife and the role of Christian wives in conversion are highlighted in these accounts; as Bede had read Gregory's *DLH*, Gregory's description of Clotild's role in persuading her pagan husband will be explored first, in order to compare with Bede's account of Æthelburh. Each account will be explored in their wider context, in order to assess the use of the image of the Christian wife in the narrative of the king's conversion.

3.2: Queen Converters and Christian Missions: Clotild and Clovis in the *DLH* and Æthelburh and Edwin in the *HE*

(i) Clotild and Clovis in the *DLH*

Gregory introduced the Franks as a nation that had always followed idolatrous practices, taking the opportunity to launch into a polemic against paganism; through a series of biblical quotations from the Old Testament, he denounced the worship of idols, made by human hands from corruptible material, in contrast to God's creation of the heavens and earth.[223] The futility of idol worship and the powerlessness of heathen gods are contrasted with God's omnipotent power.[224] Gregory used authorial intervention to link themes and reiterate his points in the *DLH*; his statements about and refutation of idols were expanded in his account of Clovis's marriage to Clotild. Gregory's historical veracity in his account of Clovis

[222] For the political circumstances of Clovis's reign see Ian Wood, 'Gregory of Tours and Clovis', *Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire*, 63 (1985), pp. 249-272.
[223] *DLH* 2.10; The quotations are: Ex. 20:3-5, 32:4; Deut. 6:13; Ps. 95:5, 97:7, 106:30, 135:15, 135:18; Hab. 2:19-20; Jer. 10:11, 14:22; Is. 44:6-20, 45:18. On the Franks before Clovis, see Hans-Werner Goetz, '*Gens*, Kings and Kingdoms: The Franks', in Hans.-Werner Goetz, Jörg Jarnut and Walter Pohl (eds.), *Regna and Gentes: The Relationship between Late Antique and Early Medieval Peoples and Kingdoms in the Transformation of the Roman World* (Leiden, 2003), pp. 307-344, at pp. 308-319.
[224] See Adriaan H. B. Breukelaar, *Historiography and Episcopal Authority* (Göttingen, 1994), p. 71.

has been questioned extensively, as contemporary evidence, particularly epistolary sources such as Cassiodorus and Avitus of Vienne, provide a different image of Clovis than that portrayed by Gregory.[225] Gregory's account should be considered in the context of his agenda; for Gregory, Clovis's conversion to Christianity was preordained, and he presents Clovis as a model for contemporary kings. The behaviour of Clovis's descendants is sharply contrasted with the reign of Clovis in Gregory's presentation; he has been referred to as Gregory's 'one and only hero' and Clotild as an 'ideal bride' in the *DLH*.[226] Gregory's presentation of Clovis and Clotild is styled to suit his aims in the narrative, and this determines the ways in which Gregory constructs Clovis's conversion to Christianity; his account of Clotild in this process should also be considered in this context.

Clotild features in Gregory's history as a pious and charitable queen, who helped to build up the Church at Tours before her death in c. 544. Gregory tells us that Clotild was given in marriage to Clovis in c. 493 by her uncle Gundobad, king of the Burgundians, who had previously killed her parents, according to Gregory.[227] Gregory may here have been setting up a background for his later accounts of Clotild's revenge motives, but it has also been suggested that Gregory wanted to portray her marriage to Clovis in epic or hagiographical terms, presenting her as an orphaned princess, as he does later in his description of the Thuringian princess Radegund.[228] Radegund's father was also killed by his own brother, leaving her orphaned until her uncle was beaten in battle by Clovis's sons Theuderic and Chlothar, the latter of whom took Radegund home as war booty and later married her.[229] Gregory may be adding a dramatic tone to his account of Clotild, but there is a crucial difference; Clovis did not take Clotild home as war booty, but requested her hand in marriage from her uncle Gundobad.[230] If Gregory is portraying any particular theme in Clotild's entrance into the narrative it is the

[225] See Ian Wood, 'Gregory of Tours and Clovis'; William Daly, 'Clovis: How Barbaric, How Pagan?', *Speculum*, 63 (1994), pp. 619-664; Danuta Shanzer, 'Dating the Baptism of Clovis: the Bishop of Vienne vs the Bishop of Tours', *Early Medieval Europe*, 7 (March, 1998), pp. 29-57.
[226] For Clovis, see Yitzhak Hen, 'Clovis, Gregory of Tours, and Pro-Merovingian Propaganda', *Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire*, 71 (1993), pp. 271-276, at p. 271; for Clotild, see Erin Dailey, *Gregory of Tours*, p. 62.
[227] *DLH* 2.28.
[228] Eve Mac Donald, *Representations of Women in Sidonius Appolinaris and Gregory of Tours: Coniuges et Reginae*', unpublished Ph.D. thesis (University of Ottawa, 2000), p. 129.
[229] *DLH* 3.7.
[230] *DLH* 2.28.

theme of providential guidance, as he immediately turns to her Christian faith, describing her as continually urging her husband to give up his false gods and convert to Christianity.[231] Gregory relates her exhortations in a direct speech to Clovis; Clotild urged him to give up his pagan gods, denouncing the uselessness of manmade idols, who 'cannot aid either themselves or others, seeing that they are images carved of wood or stone, or metal', and proclaiming that Clovis 'should rather serve Him, who at His word created out of nothing the heaven and earth, the sea and all therein'.[232] The similarities with Gregory's polemic against paganism mentioned above are striking; since Gregory himself constructed Clotild's speech, it must be seen as an authorial intention to link these narrative sections in order to highlight the message that pagan gods were useless. For Gregory, Clotild's speech concerning the futility of idols functions as a set piece within his account of Clovis, linking the themes he wished to portray in the conversion of the first Christian king of the Franks.

Gregory tells us that Clovis would not believe Clotild's exhortations, claiming that his own gods had created all these things and not Clotild's, because 'he is not even proven to belong to the race of gods.'[233] It is significant that Gregory stipulated that Clovis's reason for not believing Clotild was that he had no proof of God's power, and his portrayal of Clovis's insistence on concrete evidence of divinity is further expanded when he describes the births of the couple's first two children. Gregory related that Clotild decided to have their first child baptised in the hopes that Clovis might be brought to faith through the ceremony, but the child died immediately after baptism; while Clovis reproached Clotild and believed their son would have lived if he had been dedicated in the name of his gods, Clotild gave thanks to God for welcoming her child into the heavenly kingdom.[234] Gregory's intention here was to highlight the superior nature of Christianity and the transience of earthly life, pointing out that eternal salvation transcended temporal life. However, Gregory also made sure to provide an example of God's power to grant temporal life; the second child that Clotild brought to be baptised became sick, and Clovis again blamed Clotild's God, but

[231] *DLH* 2.29.
[232] Ibid; citing Psalms 146:6.
[233] *DLH* 2.29.
[234] Ibid.

through her prayers their child miraculously recovered.[235] Though Gregory does not quote the passage, he may be alluding to the second dictum in 1 Cor. 7:14: 'otherwise your children should be unclean; but now they are holy'.[236] However, bringing salvation to their children was only one part of Clotild's role; as the believing wife, she could also save her husband.

Gregory related that although Clotild continued to pray that her husband would convert, nothing could persuade him until war broke out with the Alamanni and Clovis's troops were being defeated.[237] Again using direct speech, Gregory related that Clovis proclaimed 'I have called upon mine own gods, but here is proof that they have withdrawn themselves from helping me; wherefore I believe that they have no power, since they come not to the succour of their servants.'[238] Clovis's realization of the futility of his pagan gods proves the points made by Gregory on idols, in his own speech and through Clotild's. Clotild's role is again highlighted by Gregory when he relates that Clovis appealed to Christ, 'proclaimed by Clotild Son of the Living God….If Thou grant me victory over these enemies, and experience confirm that power….then will I also believe on Thee and be baptised in Thy name.'[239] A similar sequence appears in the account of the Georgian king and queen in Rufinus; Rufinus related that the queen attempted to persuade her husband to convert, but the king refused until he became lost while hunting, and 'near to losing hope of being saved, he thought that if the Christ preached by his wife by the woman captive were really God, he might now free him from this darkness so that he could from then on abandon all the others and worship him.'[240] As has been noted, both Rufinus and Gregory use the verb *praedico* to describe the preaching of the queens; Rufinus relates 'quem uxori suae captiva *praedixerat*', and Gregory 'quem Chrotochildis *praedicat esse*'.[241] It is possible that Gregory is here directly echoing Rufinus, and at the very least, the parallels between the two accounts indicates that Gregory may have used

[235] *DLH* 2.30.
[236] 1 Cor. 7:14.
[237] Ibid; for the Alamanni, see Ian Wood (ed.), *Franks and Alamanni in the Merovingian Period: an Ethnographic Perspective* (Woodbridge, 1998).
[238] *DLH* 2.30.
[239] Ibid.
[240] Rufinus, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 10.11, in Philip R. Amidon (trans.), *The Church History of Rufinus*.
[241] Ibid; *DLH* 2.30.

Rufinus's account as a direct model. However, the account of Constantine recorded earlier in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* was also influential on Gregory and perhaps provides the most immediate model; his description of Clovis's victory against the Alamanni draws parallels with Eusebius's account of Constantine's victory at the decisive battle of Milvian Bridge, where the emperor had called on Christ for divine aid.[242]

Gregory makes a direct comparison of Clovis to Constantine at the pivotal moment of the king's baptism. Gregory related that Clotild ordered Bishop Remigius to instruct Clovis on the Christian faith, and though he was now prepared to convert, the king believed that his subjects would not give up their own gods; but when Clovis went to meet them, 'the divine power had gone forth before him' and all proclaimed that they would follow Christ.[243] Again, Gregory highlights divine intervention and the providential nature of the king's conversion. When Clovis stood at the baptismal pool, Gregory describes him as a 'new Constantine' who was ready to 'blot out the former leprosy, to wash away in this new stream the foul stains borne from old days.'[244] Gregory here appears to be drawing on legends of Constantine; he also compares Remigius to Saint Silvester, who baptised and cured the emperor of leprosy in a fifth century life which was later recorded in the *Liber Pontificalis*.[245] However, Gregory may be receiving the comparison directly from another source, and it has been argued that he possibly used a life of Remigius or letters from Remigius himself.[246]

Gregory next records a letter by Remigius to Clovis on the death of his sister Albofled, consoling Clovis and reassuring him that because she had been baptised, they could now look up to her instead of mourning her.[247] Gregory is here making a point about Christian baptism and salvation, linking Albofled's

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[242] Eusebius-Rufinus, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 9.9.
[243] *DLH* 2.31.
[244] Ibid.
[245] Hans A. Pohlsander, *The Emperor Constantine* (New York, 2nd edn. 2004), p. 27; Garth Fowden, 'The Last Days of Constantine: Oppositional Versions and their Influence', *Journal of Roman Studies*, 84 (1994), pp. 146-70.
[246] Ian Wood argues that Gregory did not see Constantine as a model to uphold and thus must have received the comparison from another source, in 'Gregory of Tours and Clovis', pp. 250-252; see also Yitzhak Hen, 'Clovis, Gregory of Tours, and Pro-Merovingian Propaganda', who argues that Gregory may have used Gallo-Roman letters, possibly those of Remigius and Nicetius, for the Constantine comparison.
[247] *DLH* 2.31.

death and the consolation letter to his description of Clotild's consolation at the death of their baptised son. The description of their son's white robes also pointed to the cleansing effect of baptism, which Gregory used again to describe the washing away of Clovis's sins at the baptismal pool. Gregory tells us that over three thousand members of Clovis's army were baptised, a possible allusion to Acts 2:41.[248] Acts 2:41 relates the baptism of three-thousand Jews at Pentecost, who had realised the true faith, just as the Franks came to the same realisation in Gregory's account of the baptism of Clovis. Within the account of Clovis's conversion, Clotild features as a crucial element of Gregory's main themes; the futility of idols and salvation through baptism.

As Dailey has pointed out, the efforts that Gregory took to emphasise Clotild's exhortations are made even more apparent by the fact that the letter of Avitus of Vienne to Clovis, written on the occasion of the king's baptism, does not even mention her.[249] In c. 564, Nicetius of Trier sent a letter to Clotild's granddaughter Chlothsind, in which he stated that her grandmother had led Clovis to the faith.[250] Gregory may have been influenced by previous models of conversion through marriage, but his focus on Clotild's role is far more detailed than any predecessors, and scholars have noted the recognition that Gregory gives to Clotild in leading Clovis to Christianity.[251] The coverage that Clotild receives, particularly in the direct speech and exhortations to Clovis, have resulted in her name being virtually synonymous with the topic of early medieval conversion. In contrast to Gregory, Bede's portrayals of 'queen converters' have been criticised for not attributing enough recognition to the role of wives in conversion. Bede does not portray queens explicitly exhorting their husbands to convert, but his techniques are different to Gregory's, and comparing both authors helps to reveal these differences and the subtle variations in Bede's accounts.

[248] Erin Dailey, *Gregory of Tours*, p. 60.
[249] Ibid, p. 61; Avitus of Vienne, *Epistulae*, 46.
[250] Nicetius of Trier, *Epistolae Austrasicae*, 8,
[251] Lisa Bitel, *Women in Early Medieval Europe: 400-1100* (Cambridge, 2002), p. 117; Jo Ann Mc Namara, '*Imitatio Helenae*: Sainthood as an Attribute of Queenship in the Early Middle Ages', in Sandro Sticca (ed.), *Saints: Studies in Hagiography* (Binghamton, 1996), pp. 51-80, at pp. 60-61.

(ii) Æthelburh and Edwin in the *HE*

Before analysing Bede's account of Edwin and Æthelburh, it is helpful to consider his account of the first English king to convert in the *HE*, king Æthelberht of Kent, whose conversion occurs in the context of the Roman mission sent by Pope Gregory and led by Augustine in 597.[252] To Bede, the mission represented the extension and fulfilment of the apostolic mission of conversion, and he names Pope Gregory the 'apostle' of the English.[253] Bede casts the conversion of Æthelberht in providential terms, explaining that the king ruled over all provinces south of the river Humber.[254] Though Æthelberht was pagan, Bede stated that 'Some knowledge about the Christian religion had already reached him because he had a Christian wife of the Frankish royal family whose name was Bertha.'[255] The Frankish queen Bertha was the great granddaughter of Clovis and Clotild, but neither Bede nor Gregory elaborate on Bertha's familial significance. Gregory simply said that she married a son of a king in Kent, but as the *DLH* was completed in c. 591, he was not in a position to know about the papal mission to England.[256] Bede related that Bertha was of the Frankish royal family and was given to Æthelberht by her kin.[257] Bede may have neglected to mention her relation to Clovis and Clotild because he sought to emphasise the role of the Roman mission in conversion more than the Frankish; Bede stated that Bertha was accompanied by her own Frankish bishop, Liudhard, but his account only records the Roman missionaries as preaching conversion to the king.

[252] *HE* 1.25. On the mission, see Robert A. Markus, 'Gregory the Great and Papal Missionary Strategy', *Studies in Church History*, 6 (1990), pp. 29-38; Ian Wood, 'The Mission of Augustine of Canterbury to the English', *Speculum*, 69 (1994), pp. 1-17; idem, 'Some Historical Re-identifications and the Christianization of Kent', in Guyda Armstrong and Ian Wood (eds.), *Christianizing Peoples and Converting Individuals* (Turnhout, 2000), pp. 27-23; Richard Gameson (ed.), *St. Augustine and the Conversion of England* (Gloucestershire, 1999).
[253] *HE* 2.1; *HE* 1.26.
[254] *HE* 2.5; on Bede's list of *imperium*-wielding kings, see Steven Fanning, 'Bede, Imperium, and the Bretwaldas', *Speculum*, 66 (January, 1991), pp. 1-26; on Æthelberht's rule, see David P. Kirby, *The Earliest English Kings* (London, repr. 2000), pp. 23-30; Nick J. Higham, *An English Empire: Bede and the Early Anglo-Saxon Kings* (Manchester, 1995), pp. 47-52.
[255] *HE* 1.25.
[256] *DLH* 9.26.
[257] *HE*.25; Erin Dailey argues that Bede's *a parentibus* could be translated not as 'by her parents' but 'by her kin', and that Bertha's father was dead by the time she was given in marriage, in *Gregory of Tours*, pp. 42-43.

When the missionaries arrived from Rome, Bede related that Æthelberht agreed to listen to their preaching, but decided that because their words were 'new to us and doubtful, I cannot consent to accept them and forsake those beliefs which I and the whole English race have held so long.'[258] Hollis has argued that here Bede deliberately downplayed Bertha's role in her husband's conversion by saying that these words were 'new' and 'doubtful' to Æthelberht.[259] However, Bede had said that some knowledge had reached the king through Bertha; he therefore could not have been implying that these words were new to Æthelberht because of Bertha's failure to tell him about the faith. Further to this, when Bede related that Æthelberht gave the missionaries a base at Canterbury where they first began to meet, preach and baptise, Bede stated that it was at the ancient church of St Martin, 'in which the queen who, as has been said, was a Christian, used to pray.'[260] By mentioning Bertha's Christian presence at the king's court, Bede points to her role in facilitating the conversion of her husband.

Bede does not tell the reader when the dedication of this Church took place, but it is possible that Bertha and Liudhard are connected to it; Martin died in 397 and it is unlikely that the dedication dated from before the sixth century.[261] In the *DLH*, Gregory tells us that Bertha's mother Ingoberg left legacies to the cathedral of Tours and St Martin's church.[262] Bede makes no mention of anyone at this church apart from Bertha, but by mentioning that this was an ancient church he points to a past Romano-British presence; Bede was linking the Anglo-Saxon present to the British past through mentioning this church, and with its dedication to St Martin, he also connected England to Gaul and its conversion. In Bede's portrayal however, neither the Frankish presence nor the native Britons brought Christianity to the Anglo-Saxons; the missionaries from Rome, these 'worthier heralds of the truth', brought Christianity to Britain in order to convert the pagan Anglo-Saxons.[263] According to Bede, Æthelberht was baptised because he was

[258] Ibid.
[259] Stephanie Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women*, p. 223; Stacy S. Klein, *Ruling Women*, p. 24.
[260] *HE* 1.26.
[261] Roger Collins and Judith Mc Clure, 'Rome, Canterbury and Wearmouth-Jarrow: Three Viewpoints on Augustine's Mission' in Simon Barton and Peter Linehan (eds.), *Cross, Crescent and Conversion. Studies in Memory of Richard Fletcher* (Leiden: Brill, 2008) pp. 17-42, at p. 39.
[262] *DLH* 9.26; See Ian Wood, 'Augustine and Gaul', in Richard Gameson (ed.), *St Augustine*, pp. 68-82, p. 72.
[263] *HE* 1.22.

attracted by the pure lives and miracles of the Roman missionaries; by comparing the missionaries to the apostles, Bede was alluding to gentile conversion and placing his account in a providential scheme.[264] Bede's concern is not to downplay Bertha's role in conversion because of her sex, but possibly because she was Frankish, as he wished to focus solely on the Roman role in the conversion. We know from papal correspondence that assistance was given by Frankish royal and ecclesiastical leaders to the English mission; Pope Gregory sent letters to important individuals who could assist his plans to Christianise Britain, a route which had to go through Gaul. In 596, Pope Gregory sent a letter to queen Brunhild requesting her to receive Augustine on his mission to the English, and to give the missionaries support and royal protection.[265] Brunhild must have done as she was asked, for Pope Gregory gives thanks to her for her help in the mission in a later letter.[266]

Bede does not include any of the Brunhild letters, but the bulk of Bede's account of Æthelberht's conversion is made up of eight letters from Pope Gregory, giving enormous prominence to the Roman mission.[267] One of these was a letter sent to Æthelberht in 601 and is concerned with urging the king to increase his zeal and propagate the Christian faith through his kingdom.[268] Gregory gives Æthelberht the image of Constantine as a model to aspire to: 'It was thus that Constantine, the most religious emperor, converted the Roman State from the false worship of idols…So it came about that he transcended in renown the reputation of former princes and surpassed his predecessors…And now let your Majesty hasten to instil the knowledge of the one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, into the kings and nations subject to you, that you may surpass the ancient kings of your race in praise and merit'.[269] By including this letter Bede illustrates to the reader that Anglo-Saxon kings, like Constantine, would be protected by God and

[264] *HE* 1.26; for a discussion on Bede's use of the term 'primitive church', see Glenn Olsen, 'Bede as Historian: The Evidence from his Observations on the Life of the First Christian Community at Jerusalem', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 33 (October, 1982), pp. 519-530.
[265] Gregory the Great, *Epistle* 6.57, in Ewald, Paul and Hartmann, Ludwig M. (eds.), *MGH Epistolae*, 1 (Berlin, 1891-1899).
[266] Gregory the Great, *Epistle* 8.4, in Ewald, Paul and Hartmann, Ludwig M. (eds.), *MGH Epistolae*, 2.
[267] See Nicholas Howe, 'Rome: Capital of Anglo-Saxon England', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 31, 1 (Winter, 2004), pp. 147-172, at p. 153.
[268] *HE* 1.32.
[269] Ibid.

would gain greater reputation than their predecessors. The letter also places Æthelberht's conversion in the context of providential history; God provided for Constantine's sole rule of the Empire, allowing Christianity to spread to diverse peoples in fulfilment of Christ's promise of universal salvation. The progress of Christianity, as highlighted in the accounts of both Constantine and Clovis, is continued and extended in Bede's account of Æthelberht.

Pope Gregory had also sent a letter to Bertha in 601, though Bede did not include it in the *HE*. In the letter, Gregory praised Bertha's charity and assistance to the Roman missionaries, telling her that God 'has been mercifully pleased to reserve the conversion of the nation of the Angli for your reward', attributing the queen with a major role in the conversion of the English.[270] However, the letter also contains a degree of reprimand, for not having instilled greater zeal in her husband; Gregory sees it as her duty to influence Æthelberht so that she can achieve 'retribution' for 'what has been neglected', urging her to 'strengthen by continual hortation the mind of your glorious husband in love of the Christian faith'.[271] Pope Gregory links Bertha to Helena, saying that 'through Helena of illustrious memory, the mother of the most pious Emperor Constantine, He kindled the hearts of the Romans into Christian faith, so we trust that He works in the nation of the Angli through the zeal of your Glory.'[272] By linking Bertha to Helena, Gregory was comparing her to a distinguished Roman Empress; he tells her that her good works had even reached the ears of the emperor at Constantinople. The model of Helena in Bertha's letter reinforces the model of Constantine in Æthelberht's, and both letters are paired ideologically, using imperial language that is characteristic of Pope Gregory's correspondence.[273] Bede and Gregory both relate that Helena found the true cross, but the only other information provided about Helena by both authors is that she was the concubine of Constantine's father Constantius [274] It is perhaps her status as a concubine that

[270] Gregory the Great, *Epistle* 11.35, Paul Ewald and Ludwig M. Hartmann, Ludwig M. (eds.), *MGH Epistolae*, 2; Philip Schaff & Rev. Henry Wallace (eds. & trans.), *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series, vol.* 13 (New York, 2007).
[271] Ibid.
[272] Gregory the Great, *Epistle* 11.35.
[273] Robert A. Markus, 'Gregory the Great on Kings: Rulers and Preachers in the *Commentary on I Kings*', in Diana Wood (ed.), *The Church and Sovereignty*, at p. 17.
[274] Helena and the true cross: *DLH* 1.36; *HE* 5.16; Helena as a concubine: *HE* 1.8; *DLH* 1.36; see also Bede, *Chronica Maiora*, 4290.

helps to explain why Bede and Gregory refrain from linking Helena to their portrayals of proselytising wives, and the extent of their use of the model of Constantine has also been questioned.[275] In general terms, the model of Constantine and Helena as Christian secular rulers was influential on Bede and Gregory, and Bede reproduced Æthelberht's letter which directly compared him to Constantine, but he did not include Bertha's accompanying letter.

The fact that Bede neglects this letter is even more surprising given that Pope Boniface's letters to Æthelburh and Edwin were also sent as a pair and Bede chose to include them both; either Bede did not know Bertha's letter, or he chose not include it. Bede relied on Albinus and Nothelm for sources for the mission, and he tells us that Nothelm copied papal letters from Rome.[276] Bertha's letter may not have reached Bede, but some scholars believe that he intentionally omitted the letter to Bertha to downplay her role in conversion; Klein argues that Bede omitted the letter to Bertha in order to 'drive a sharp wedge between Bertha and the conversion of Kent', deriving from his negative attitude towards women.[277] However, Mac Carron has provided an entirely different interpretation, arguing that Bede's omission was prompted not by 'a slighting attitude to women but his sustained teaching objectives'.[278] As will be discussed shortly, Pope Boniface's letter to Æthelburh, which Bede recorded in full, is deeply concerned with the threat posed to Christian wives who are married to unbelievers. Mac Carron argued that because Pope Gregory's letter to Bertha does not contain these concerns, including it would have 'undermined Bede's attempt to teach his readers about the sanctity of marriage throughout the *HE*.'[279]

Mac Carron's interpretation is relatively rare in scholarship on women in Bede, where there is still a prevailing view that his portrayals are derived from an anti-woman bias. Throughout the account of the mission to the English, Bede highlights Pope Gregory's role, telling us that 'Æthelberht had attained to the

[275] See Ian Wood, 'Constantinian Crosses in Northumbria', in Catherine E. Karkov, Sarah L. Keefer and Karen L. Jolly (eds.), *The Place of the Cross in Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge, 2006), pp. 3-28; idem, 'Gregory of Tours and Clovis', pp. 249-272.
[276] *HE* Preface.
[277] Stacy S. Klein, *Ruling Women*, p. 24.
[278] Máirín Mac Carron, 'Brides of Christ', p. 77.
[279] Ibid.

knowledge of heavenly glory by Gregory's own labour and industry'.[280] Bede intended to promote Pope Gregory's role in the conversion of the English above anyone else, but he also clearly sees that Bertha, as a Christian wife, facilitated some knowledge about the faith to her husband. In comparison to Clotild in the *DLH*, whom Gregory describes as constantly urging her husband, Bertha is not portrayed as exhorting Æthelberht; however, the element of divine aid in battle, present in both Eusebius's account of Constantine and Gregory's account of Clovis's battle against the Alamanni, is also absent from the description of Æthelberht's conversion. Divine power is evidenced through Augustine and his missionaries in their performance of miracles, but this emphasises the missionaries' imitation of the primitive church.[281] Bede's agenda was to portray this conversion in light of Paul's mission to the gentiles broadly and Pope Gregory's mission to the English in particular. The element of reluctance is used briefly to describe how Æthelberht initially met the missionaries with his retainers and stated that he could not forsake the beliefs of his peoples.[282] In the very next chapter, Bede simply tells the reader that the king believed and was baptised. The conversion of Æthelberht is a short account, recorded by Bede within these two chapters, and perhaps his account of Bertha and Æthelberht is somewhat condensed in order to focus on the apostolic theme of conversion. Bede's account of the conversion of Edwin of Northumbria is longer and contains a far more revealing picture of his understanding of the role of Christian wives.

The conversion of Bede's own Northumbria is given prominence in the *HE* and it occurs in the context of king Edwin's marriage to Æthelburh, the daughter of Bertha and Æthelberht of Kent. Bede tells us that Æthelburh was given in marriage to king Edwin of Northumbria in 625, and that Edwin was baptised in 627.[283] To form his account Bede again makes use of papal letters, Pope Boniface to Edwin and another to Æthelburh, which are placed in the centre of his account of Edwin's conversion.[284] Surrounding the papal letters there are three main passages concerning Edwin's conversion which give a remarkable account of

[280] *HE* 1.32.
[281] *HE* 1.26.
[282] *HE* 1.25.
[283] *HE* 2.9; *HE* 2.14.
[284] *HE* 2.10; *HE* 2.11.

Edwin's reluctance to convert. Colgrave and Mynors have said that the account is 'somewhat confused' because Bede was attempting to combine three circulating traditions about Edwin's conversion, and thus 'makes Edwin hesitate' in order to record them all.[285] However, other scholars have argued that the structure of Bede's account is deliberate; he characterises Edwin as reluctant in order to portray his conversion as being preordained, and to address spiritual themes.[286]

Scholars focusing on women tend to interpret Edwin's reluctance as deliberately downplaying Æthleburh's role, and argue that Bede's account 'has evidently not taken its cue from the encouragement of Popes.'[287] However, this argument appears to overlook the fact that it was Bede who included the papal letter to Æthelburh, and he uses it in the history to highlight her role in conversion. Bede's focus on Edwin's reluctance was not aimed at denigrating Æthelburh's role, but to emphasise his inward decision to convert to Christianity. Bede characterises Edwin as 'a man of great natural sagacity' who 'would often sit alone for long periods in silence, but in his innermost thoughts he was deliberating with himself as to what he ought to do and which religion he should adhere to.'[288] Bede wanted to portray Edwin's conversion as motivated by true belief, arrived at only after careful consideration.

Edwin's internalised anguish of not knowing what to do when his friend tells him of Rædwald's intention to break his promise is again underlined by Bede, when he tells us that Edwin 'remained long in silent anguish of spirit and consumed with inward fire '.[289] The quote from Virgil, 'consumed with inward fire', '*caeco carperetur igni*', illustrates the intensity of Edwin's internal distress. Rowley notes that '*caecus*' also refers to lack of light or blindness, and suggests that Bede may be portraying Edwin as 'the stereotypical blind man, ready to be

[285] Bertam Colgrave and Roger A. B. Mynors (eds. and trans.), *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, p. 182, n.1.
[286] On being preordained: John Edward Damon, *Soldier Saints and Holy Warriors: Warfare and Sanctity in the Literature of Early England* (Aldershot, 2003), pp. 37-38; on spiritual themes: Sharon Rowley, 'Reassessing Exegetical Interpretations of Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*', *Literature and Theology*, 17, 3 (September, 2003), pp. 227-243; Julia Barrow, 'How Coifi Pierced Christ's Side: A Re-Examination of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, II, Chapter 13', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 62 (October, 2011), pp. 693-706.
[287] Stephanie Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women*, p. 225; see also Stacy S. Klein, *Ruling Women*, p. 31.
[288] *HE* 2.9.
[289] *HE* 2.12; Bede echoes Virgil, *Aeneid*, 4.2.

enlightened by grace'.[290] In Christian thought, darkness and blindness are linked to the unbelief of pagans and heathens.[291] Concerning the paganism that Paulinus faced in Northumbria, Bede quotes 2 Cor. 4:4, stating that 'as the apostle says, 'the god of this world blinded the minds of them that believed not, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ should shine on them.''[292] Here, Bede explains that Northumbrians were blinded by Satan in their pagan beliefs, remaining in darkness as they cannot see the light of the true God, and perhaps his use of the word '*caecus*' in the description of Edwin is linked to this. In Pope Boniface's letter to Edwin, the pope refers to heathen gods by quoting Ps. 113 (115), 'Eyes have they but they see not', in order to illustrate that idols fashioned from human hands were powerless, and we have seen above how Gregory used the same language to highlight the futility of idols. According to Bede, both pagans and the idols themselves are blind; until Edwin realised the truth of God, he and his Northumbrian subjects would remain in darkness.

Rowley expands on Bede's use of Virgil further, arguing that as this passage in the *Aeneid* describes Dido revealing her secret love for Aeneas to her sister, Bede uses it to refer 'to a moment of revelation and the ultimate legibility of a famous secret.'[293] Bede's citations of Virgil certainly appear to have been intended to form an intertextual link between the two texts; Wallace-Hadrill argued that Bede quoted the *Aeneid* in a description of one of Oswald's miracles in order to heighten the dramatic suspense.[294] Rowley also believes that Bede's quotation heightens the dramatic tone of his account of Edwin, and she links this to Boniface's letter to Edwin, where he tells the king that God's 'secret inspiration pours into the human heart a revelation of Himself.'[295] She points out that this emphasises 'the secrecy of the inner heart' and the 'internal nature of the new covenant', arguing that Bede uses the authority of the papal letter to reinforce his account of Edwin's reluctance to convert.[296] Whether Bede drew inspiration for his account of Edwin and his prolonged reluctance from the papal letter, or makes

[290] Sharon M. Rowley, 'Reassessing Exegetical Interpretations', p. 238.
[291] Blindness was used as an allegory for heresy and spiritual maladies.
[292] *HE* 2.9
[293] Sharon Rowley, 'Reassessing Exegetical Interpretations', p. 238.
[294] John M. Wallace-Hadrill, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, p. 105; *HE* 3.11.
[295] *HE* 2.10.
[296] Sharon Rowley, 'Reassessing Exegetical Interpretations', p. 238.

use of it to give authority to his own narrative strategy, the focus on reluctance suggests that Bede had a particular aim in his account of Edwin's conversion.

Bede begins his account by stating that Northumbria was brought to Christianity because its king had accepted the Christian faith through the preaching of bishop Paulinus, one of the original Roman missionaries. Bede again casts the king's conversion in a providential light, stating that Edwin's earthly power had increased as an augury that he was to become a Christian.[297] Bede next relates that Edwin's conversion was brought about by his marriage to Æthelburh, highlighting her role from the beginning. According to Bede, Edwin's proposal was initially refused by Æthelburh's brother, Eadbald, because he said that it was 'not lawful for a Christian maiden to be given in marriage to a heathen for fear that the faith and mysteries of the heavenly King might be profaned by such a union'.[298] Bede here draws on the patristic thought on marriage discussed earlier, particularly on the concerns and issues raised about mixed marriages.[299] It is significant that Bede states it was Eadbald who said that the marriage would be unlawful; Bede had earlier related that Eadbald 'was polluted with such fornication' that he married his own stepmother, though he soon gave up his unlawful wife in fear of divine punishment.[300] A few chapters before this, Bede recorded the *Libellus Responsionum*, in which one of Augustine's questions to Pope Gregory concerned marriages within the second and third degrees, which included step-mothers; Pope Gregory makes it clear that such unions were considered unlawful, quoting Matthew 19:5, 'Thy twain shall be one flesh', to illustrate that a man who marries a woman that had become one flesh with his father was committing a grave sin.[301] Eadbald came to realise the seriousness of his sin, and held such reverence for God's laws thereafter that he only agreed to

[297] *HE* 2.9; for a discussion of the religious and political circumstances at this time, see Nick J. Higham, *The Convert Kings: Power and Religious Affiliation in Early Anglo-Saxon England* (Manchester, 1997), pp. 133-200.
[298] *HE* 2.9.
[299] See for example, Tertullian, *Ad Uxorem*, 2.3; Augustine, *De Sermone Domini*, 44-47.
[300] *HE* 2.5; *HE* 2.6. The missionary Laurence was preparing to leave Britain and give up on the mission when St Peter appeared to him and severely chastised him; Laurence showed the marks to Eadbald, prompting his fear of God's punishment.
[301] *HE* 1.27, quoting Matt. 19:5 and Lev. 18:7.

give his sister in marriage on the condition that she could practice her faith unhindered.

Bede tells us that Paulinus was consecrated bishop to accompany Æthelburh to Northumbria. Bertha had also been accompanied by her own bishop Liudhard, and this arrangement is highlighted by Bede; no such condition is related by Gregory in Clotild's marriage to Clovis, though she does receive the aid of bishop Remigius. Bede here points to a concern for the spiritual well-being of Christian maidens, but he also portrayed the arrival of Æthelburh and Paulinus in providential terms; though Paulinus was outwardly bringing together a marriage of the flesh, 'more truly his whole heart was set on calling the people to whom he was coming to the knowledge of the truth; his desire was to present it, in the words of the apostle, as a pure virgin to be espoused to one husband, even Christ.'[302] Bede is here directly relating an earthly marriage as a figure of the relationship between Christ and the Church, an allegorical interpretation which is prevalent in Bede's own exegesis.[303] In his commentary on Genesis 2:24, 'man shall leave father and mother and shall cleave to his wife, and they shall be two in one flesh', he explains that Christ left his mother, the Synagogue of the Jews, and clove to his wife, the Church.[304] Bede's commentary on the Song of Songs also interprets the literal relationship between husbands and wives as an allegory for the relationship between Christ and the Church, made up of all believers.[305] As Gunn has noted, Christian historians like Bede could change narrative emphasis from literal to allegorical to make the event relevant to both secular and religious audiences.[306] Bede described Paulinus's arrival with Æthelburh in this double meaning; Paulinus would bring together a marriage of the flesh, but also the marriage of Northumbria's newly converted Christians to Christ.

Paulinus's preaching however, was not immediately successful, and Edwin was still pagan when Bede next relates an assassination attempt, sent by the king of the West Saxons at Easter. Edwin was saved and on the same night Æthelburh

[302] *HE* 2.9; 2 Cor. 11:2.
[303] For a thorough exploration of Bede's exegetical interpretations of marriage, see Máirín Mac Carron, 'Brides of Christ', 2007.
[304] Bede, *In Genesium*, 1, 2.24.
[305] Bede, *In Cantica Canticorum Allegorica Expositio*.
[306] Victoria Gunn, *Bede's* Historiae, p. 19.

gave birth to his daughter Eanflæd; Paulinus thanked Christ, explaining to Edwin that it was through God that their daughter was delivered safely. Bede may here be alluding to the salvation of children through the faith of the believing wife, like Gregory in his portrayal of Clotild baptizing her infant children.[307] Bede tells us that Edwin promised if this God would grant him victory over the West Saxons, he would renounce idols and serve Christ, and as a pledge, he gave Eanflæd to be baptised; she was baptised on the day of Pentecost, with eleven others of Edwin's household.[308] That the number was twelve suggests that Bede had in mind the twelve apostles, who went out into the world preaching the word and baptised the first Jews on the day of Pentecost.[309] As Holder has pointed out, Bede's commentary on the Apocalypse interprets the twelve gates and twelve foundations of the heavenly city of the New Jerusalem as representing the twelve apostles.[310] The theme of the apostolic mission of conversion is present throughout the *HE*, but Gregory's allusion to Pentecost at the baptism of Clovis may have influenced Bede; by alluding to Pentecost at the pivotal moment of Clovis's and Edwin's baptism, both authors give these events enormous significance. The day of Pentecost represents for Bede the gift of the Holy Spirit, which fills believers with the knowledge of God; this image is prevalent in Pope Boniface's letters to Edwin and Æthelburh.[311]

Boniface opens his letter to Edwin by stating that human speech can never explain the invisible power of God, and that 'no wisdom can comprehend or express how great it is…He opens the doors of the heart so that He may enter, and by His secret inspiration pours into the human heart a revelation of Himself.'[312] Rowley has suggested that this passage relates directly to Bede's description of Edwin's reluctance, crafted by Bede to reflect the grace and revelation of God.[313] Boniface states that through the Holy Spirit, God melts 'the frozen hearts of races even in the far corners of the earth to knowledge of Himself'.[314] Boniface may be

[307] 1. Cor. 7:14.
[308] *HE* 2.9.
[309] Acts 2.41.
[310] Bede, *Explanatio Apocalypsis*, 21, 9-14; Arthur G. Holder, 'Bede and the New Testament', in Scott De Gregorio (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Bede*, pp. 142-155, at p. 151.
[311] *HE* 2.9; *HE* 2.10.
[312] *HE* 2.10.
[313] Sharon Rowley, 'Reassessing Exegetical Interpretations', p. 238.
[314] *HE* 2.10.

alluding to ideas about the remote Atlantic archipelago; Gildas had used classical topoi to describe Britain as cold and dark, inhabited by barbarous peoples at the edge of the world.[315] Gildas said that the island of Britain was 'stiff with cold and frost…in a distant region of the world, remote from the visible sun' but through conversion, Britain 'received the beams of light, that is, the holy precepts of Christ, the true Sun'.[316] The link between the idea of barbarian coldness and lack of true faith is highlighted by Bede in the figure of Cædwalla, who 'although a Christian by name and profession, was nevertheless a barbarian in heart and disposition'.[317] In the letter, Boniface urges Edwin to 'come to the knowledge of Him who created you' so that God may 'bestow heavenly rewards upon you', highlighting that his wife's brother, Eadbald had converted.[318] Boniface points out both the temporal and spiritual rewards that conversion would bring, but he also makes it clear to Edwin that he ought to convert, as he had a Christian wife who was of 'one flesh with you'.[319] Boniface quotes this passage and uses the same imagery in his letter to Æthelburh.

Boniface's letter to Æthelburh presents the queen's role in providential terms; he tells her that God had preordained her conversion so that 'He could the more easily inflame with His love not only the mind of your illustrious husband but of all the nation that is subject to you.'[320] Boniface praises Æthelburh's piety and her devotion to aiding the spread of Christianity in Northumbria, but urges her that she must also help to convert her husband; he instructs Æthelburh to 'Pour into his mind a knowledge of the greatness of the mystery in which you have believed', and to 'Inflame his cold heart by teaching him about the Holy Spirit', and, 'through your frequent exhortations, kindle his understanding.'[321] Cædwalla's heart was described as 'barbarian' with these ideas in mind and Boniface had used the same imagery in his letter to Edwin to express the frozen hearts of unbelievers. To Bede, these words also allude to Pentecost, specifically the Holy Spirit; in his

[315] For a discussion on classical and medieval perceptions of the Atlantic archipelago and its inhabitants, see Jeremiah (Diarmuid) A. Scully, 'The Atlantic archipelago from antiquity to Bede'.
[316] Gildas, *De Excidio Britanniae,* 8, in Michael Winterbottom (ed. and trans.), *Gildas: The ruin of Britain, Gildas: The Ruin of Britain and Other Works* (London, 1978).
[317] *HE* 2.20.
[318] Ibid.
[319] *HE* 2.10; Matt. 19:5.
[320] *HE* 2.11.
[321] Ibid.

commentary on the Acts of the Apostles, Bede said that the Holy Spirit 'appeared in fire and in tongues because all those whom he fills he makes simultaneously to burn and to speak – to burn because of him, and to speak about him.'[322] Boniface urges Æthelburh to give Edwin knowledge of the faith and sees it as her duty to do so, reminding her that Edwin is of 'one flesh with you'; if she performs her duty, 'the testimony of holy scripture will be clearly and abundantly fulfilled in you: 'The unbelieving husband shall be saved by the believing wife''.[323] Boniface clearly understood the role that a Christian wife could have in the conversion of her husband, and Bede highlights this role by including the papal letter to Æthelburh within his narrative. In his *In Ezram et Neemiam,* Bede used similar language to that of Boniface's letter to state that Christian women could 'by preaching enkindle the hearts of their neighbours to the praise of their Creator'.[324] This indicates that Bede thought positively about women and their ability to convert and to preach the Christian faith to unbelievers.

Klein has argued that Æthelburh's role was envisioned as follows: 'for Boniface, the queen would ideally teach her husband Christian doctrine and open his heart to conversion; for Paulinus, she will symbolise national conversion; and for Bede, she will have no role at all.'[325] But it was Bede who recorded the papal letter and Bede who described Paulinus's arrival in symbolic terms; therefore, Bede envisioned these roles for Æthelburh, and it should be remembered that he is our only source for these events. The view that Bede downplayed Æthelburh's role in Edwin's conversion often cites his neglect to record any of the queen's preaching and his emphasis on the king's reluctance to convert. However, Bede's reasons for portraying Edwin's reluctance were far more complex than a supposed desire to denigrate Æthelburh's ability to convert her husband; these reasons need to be elucidated, and comparing Gregory's accounts with Bede's helps to achieve this. Gregory described Clotild's exhortations to Clovis in detail, but he also stated that the king refused to convert, and like Gregory's Clovis, Bede's Edwin believed

[322] Bede, *Expositio Actuum Apostolorum*, 2.3a, in Lawrence T. Martin (trans. and intro.), *The Venerable Bede, Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (Michigan, 1989).
[323] *HE* 2.11; 1 Cor. 7:14.
[324] Bede, *In Ezram et Neemiam*, Ezra 2, 65, in Scott De Gregorio (trans. and intro.), *Bede: On Ezra and Nehemiah*, p. 32; on Bede's view of women as preachers, see Alan Thacker, 'Bede's Ideal of Reform', pp. 130-153.
[325] Stacy S. Klein, *Ruling Women*, p. 31.

in God only after he gained success in battle against the West Saxons, but would not be baptised until he had consulted the matter with his men.[326] While Gregory briefly highlighted divine intervention when relating Clovis's meeting with his men, Bede adopted a different approach, developing themes of divine inspiration, revelation, and inner conversion.

Bede provided a story that has since became famous, about one of Edwin's men who related that life on earth was but a sparrow's flight through the hall, a brief moment of shelter before proceeding back out into the unknown; he advised the king that if Christianity can give more information about the unknown, they should all accept it.[327] Bede here implies the transience of life and the spiritual rewards of Christianity, portraying Northumbria's conversion as one that was not motivated by divine temporal rewards alone but by inner motivation for salvation. Bede gives the chapter a dramatic finale, relating how Coifi, the chief of the pagan priests, profaned the first pagan shrine by casting a spear into it, a description which has been seen as an inversion of the soldier that pierced Christ's side, from which humanity was saved.[328] Bede's commentary on Genesis links Christ's Redemption to celestial marriage; just as Eve was created from Adam's side, the sacraments would come from Christ's side, 'from which his bride, the Church, would be founded.'[329] The model that Bede presented in Paulinus bringing Æthelburh to marriage at the beginning of the account had been achieved; Bede had a clear spiritual framework for Edwin's conversion, in which Æthelburh plays a central role.

In Bede's account of Edwin's conversion, the theme of the king's reluctance serves a spiritual purpose, as does his use of marriage imagery; in this light, Æthelburh functioned as one of several factors that influenced Edwin's decision to convert, but it must be realised that she was a central aspect of Bede's account. In

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[326] *HE* 2.13.
[327] For interpretations of this story, see Donald K. Fry, 'The Art of Bede: Edwin's council', in Margot H. King and Wesley M. Stevens (eds.), *Saints, Scholars and Heroes*, vol. 1, pp. 191-207; Danuta Shanzer, 'Bede's style: a Neglected Historiographical Model for the Style of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*?', in Charles D. Wright, Frederick D. Biggs and Thomas N. Hall (eds.), *Source of Wisdom: Old English and Early Medieval Latin Studies in Honour of Thomas D. Hill* (Toronto, 2007), pp. 329-352.
[328] Julia Barrow, 'How Coifi Pierced Christ's Side', p. 703.
[329] Bede, *In Genesium*, 2.20-22, in Calvin B. Kendall (trans. and intro.), *Bede: On Genesis*.

describing the role of Christian queens in the conversion of pagan kings, Bede was influenced by Gregory's account of Clotild and Clovis, particularly as a historiographical model that articulated the process of a king's conversion. However, being far more influenced by material in the papal letters and his own exegesis, Bede's account takes on a spiritual framework that differs from the *DLH*; to Bede, the marriage of Æthelburh and Edwin is a figure for the marriage of all Christians to Christ.

Klein has argued that Bede uses 'the *HE* to construct a powerful counterdiscourse to the model of conversion by marriage', and in doing so he 'underscores how much force that model must have had within in early medieval culture.'[330] However, it is important to note that Bede's is the earliest Anglo-Saxon account of the model of conversion by marriage; the Anonymous *Life of Gregory the Great* relates Edwin's conversion and exile at Rædwald's court, but never mentions his wife.[331] The work was produced at Whitby under the rule of abbess Ælfflæd, daughter of Eanflæd and granddaughter of Edwin and Æthelburh, yet Æthelburh is not even named. Klein's argument assumes that the model was prevalent in works that Bede had read; the only text that specifically articulated this model was the *DLH*, and Bede followed Gregory's example by linking the conversion of kings to their wives. Bede used Pope Boniface's letter to point out the queen's role, and the importance of this transcription should not be underestimated; Bede attached considerable prestige and authority to papal documents, and by using a letter from the pope in Rome directly instructing an Anglo-Saxon queen, Bede intended to give Æthelburh's role greater importance than if he had described it himself.[332] Bede picked up themes used in Boniface's letter and combined them with exegesis, constructing his account through subtle allusions to facilitate spiritual interpretation. Bede emphasised inner conversion in his account of Edwin, which was relevant to Bede's contemporary concerns;

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[330] Stacy S. Klein, *Ruling Women*, p. 51.
[331] Anonymous *Vita Gregorii*, in Betram Colgrave (ed. and trans.), *The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great*; See Alan Thacker, 'Memorializing Gregory the Great: the Origin and Transmission of a Papal Cult in the Seventh and Early Eighth Centuries', *Early Medieval Europe*, 7 (1998), pp. 59-84.
[332] For the relationship between Insular clerics and papal Rome, see Éamonn, Ó Carragáin, *The City of Rome and the World of Bede* (Jarrow, 1994); idem, 'The Periphery Rethinks the Centre: Inculturation, 'Roman' Liturgy and the Ruthwell Cross', in Claudia Bolgia, Rosamond Mc Kitterick and John Osborne (eds.), *Rome Across Time and Space: Cultural Transmission and the Exchange of Ideas, c. 500-1400* (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 63-83.

comparing Bede's accounts with Gregory's helps to elucidate a shared aim in their accounts, to present Christian marriage as a model for contemporary society. The following section explores how Bede and Gregory used their descriptions of secular royal women as a vehicle for articulating their views to their audiences.

3.3: Marriage as a Model for Christian Society in the *HE* and the *DLH*: Monogamy and Unity

(i) Monogamous Christian Marriage: Moral and Political Contexts

Bede and Gregory present Christian marriage as a divine institution for the propagation of the human race, but both also understood the moral dimension of marriage unions; marriage provided an acceptable carnal union for those who could not abstain. St Paul had stated that marriage was not commanded but only granted by way of indulgence, for those that cannot contain themselves.[333] Augustine believed that Christian marriage helped to repress the lusts of the flesh, and that 'the marriage of the faithful is a better thing than impious virginity.'[334] John Chrysostom wrote that the only reason for marriage was for 'the prevention of indecency and licentiousness'.[335] Bede and Gregory were influenced by patristic thought and both understood that Christian marriage as a monogamous bond helped to contain the sexual temptations that might strike secular Christians. In his *Vitae Patrum*, Gregory praised his great grandfather Gregory of Langres, for marrying only 'for the sake of having children…and never, as is so often the case in the ardour of youth, did he lust after another woman.'[336] In his letter to Ecgbert, Bede asserted that landless elite men were becoming licentious, forming unlawful sexual unions even with nuns, because they neither had a commitment to continence nor a wife.[337]

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[333] 1 Cor. 7:6-9.
[334] Augustine, *De Bono Coniugali*, 8; for discussion of Augustine's thought on marriage, see Danuta Shanzer, '*Avulsa a Latere Meo*: Augustine's Spare Rib: Confessions 6.15.25', *Journal of Roman Studies*, 92 (2002), pp. 157-176.
[335] John Chrysostom, *De Virginitate*, 19, *SC* 125.232.
[336] *VP* 7.1; Edward James (trans.), *Gregory of Tours: Life of the Fathers TTH* 1 (Liverpool, 2nd edn. 1991).
[337] *EE*.

Christian marriage provided a lawful institution that could limit this sinful behaviour, but it also prevented another danger to society in Northumbria; Bede believed that because these men had no wives or property, they 'leave their homeland for which they ought to be fighting in order to go overseas'.[338] Gregory's descriptions of violent queens often concern those who were threatened by other women involved with their husbands, and he clearly states that the sequential marital practices of several Merovingian kings directly led to civil war; Gregory warned contemporary kings that their lascivious behaviour would also lead to weakened defences against external enemies.[339] The ideal examples of Christian marriage in the *HE* and the *DLH* are a response to Bede's and Gregory's concerns about behaviour which threatened their contemporary Church and society.

The barbarian Franks and Anglo-Saxons engaged in sequential marriage unions, and as Christian authors, Bede and Gregory were concerned with instructing readers about the lawful institution of Christian marriage. The *DLH* gives far more examples of sequential marriages than the *HE,* and Gregory emphasises the licentiousness of Frankish kings and repeatedly condemns adultery.[340] In Gregory's presentation, the practice of taking multiple partners resulted in civil war caused by issues of succession among siblings who were half-brothers, and this may be the reason why Gregory promotes the marriage of Clovis and Clotild as an ideal royal union.[341] As Dailey has pointed out, Gregory skilfully minimised the fact that before Clovis married Clotild, he already had a son Theuderic with an unnamed concubine, who appears only once in the *DLH*.[342] Gregory had to record that Theuderic was Clovis's son prior to his marriage to Clotild and the subsequent births of their sons, but he also made the distinction that this previous woman was a concubine while Clotild became Clovis's only wife.[343] Gregory presents their marriage as a monogamous lifelong union, stating

[338] Ibid.
[339] *DLH* 5 Preface.
[340] See Danuta Shanzer, 'History, Romance, Love and Sex in Gregory of Tours' *Decem Libri Historiarum*', in Kathleen Mitchell and Ian Wood (eds.), *The World of Gregory of Tours*, pp. 395-413.
[341] Erin Dailey, *Gregory of Tours*, p. 62.
[342] *DLH* 2.28; Erin Dailey, *Gregory of Tours*, p. 63.
[343] For a discussion of the distinctions between queens and concubines in Merovingian sources, see Pauline Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers: The King's Wife in the Early Middle Ages*

that when Clotild died, she was buried at her husband's side in Saint Peter's church in Paris.[344]

Bede had a similar agenda in his presentation of Edwin and Æthelburh; like Gregory's treatment of Clovis's concubine, Bede only briefly mentions Edwin's previous relationship with Cwenburh, daughter of king Ceorl of the Mericans, with whom he had two sons prior to his marriage to Æthelburh. It is not clear whether Cwenburh was a wife or a concubine, but as a Mercian princess, Edwin may have taken her as a wife in a political marriage alliance. The single mention of this woman occurs after Edwin's conversion, where Bede tells us that among those baptised were 'Osfrith and Eadfrith, sons of king Edwin, their mother being Cwenburh, daughter of Ceorl, king of the Mercians; they were born while he was in exile.'[345] Bede relates the story of Edwin's exile in Rædwald's court, but this is the only information he tells us about Edwin prior to his marriage to Æthleburh.[346] There is no mention of Cwenburh other than here, and her name only appears in order to tell the reader that Osfrith and Eadfrith were Edwin's sons.[347] Perhaps like Gregory with Clovis's son Theuderic, Bede had to record that Osfrith and Eadfrith were not sons of Æthelburh, constrained by contemporary knowledge that Æthelburh had not given birth to them. The fact that they were born while Edwin was in exile may suggest that the relationship ended because of his exile, but Bede gives us no information about when or why Edwin's relationship with Cwenburh ended. Bede focuses only on Æthelburh and she is the only woman whom Bede refers to as wife of Edwin and queen of Northumbria.

Bede portrays Edwin and Æthelburh as an example of an ideal royal marriage in the same way that Gregory portrayed Clovis and Clotild, but he chose not to follow Gregory's focus on prioritising examples of bad royal behaviour. Gregory's account of Clovis and Clotild is followed by lengthy descriptions of the bad behaviour of their sons, particularly Clothar, who had seven sons by his

(Georgia, 1983); Ruth Mazo Karras, 'The History of Marriage and the Myth of Friedelehe', *Early Medieval Europe*, 14 (2006), pp. 119-151.

[344] *DLH* 4.1.

[345] *HE* 2.14.

[346] *HE* 2.12.

[347] Nick J. Higham argues that Edwin was protected for a time by the Mercian king and that Edwin's marriage to Cwenburh and the birth of their sons took place during this time, in *An English Empire*, pp. 144-146.

various wives, two of whom were sisters.[348] Gregory's portrayal of these multiple partnerships has led several scholars to conclude that Merovingian kings practiced polygyny.[349] However, Dailey has argued that Merovingian kings took sequential wives and that Gregory was intentionally ambiguous, implying polygamous behaviour in order to present a moral lesson about royal marriage and fidelity. [350] Gregory's technique of linking licentious behaviour to the destruction of peace and social order had been used by historians like Sallust, Augustine, and Orosius; like Sallust's *Bellum Catilinae*, the *DLH* relates how the corruption of morals, particularly the vices of *luxuria* and *avaritia*, lust and greed for wealth, lead to discord, internal conflict, and the destruction of the people.[351] The term *luxuria*, which in general denotes the desire for luxury and wealth, but more particularly licentiousness and sexual misconduct, is prevalent in Gregory's histories and he uses the term to describe Clothar's motivations for marrying his current wife's sister.[352] Gregory cited Virgil's *Aeneid* in his description of Clotild's exhortations to Clovis, where she ridicules the pagan gods by citing the licentiousness of Jupiter, in particular his incest with his sister.[353] Gregory associated licentiousness with paganism and Clothar's sin in committing incest contradicted the laws of God, but also, as Gregory explains later, the king's actions resulted in civil war between his sons competing against one another, ending in the abominable sin of fratricide.[354] Gregory portrays sexual misconduct as a major vice that leads to internal warfare; by highlighting the chaos that resulted from Clovis's sons' and

[348] Chlothar was also married to Radegund, who left her marriage to found a female monastery in Poitiers which will be examined in the following chapter.
[349] For example, Suzanne F. Wemple, *Women in the Frankish Church*, pp. 38-41; Jacqueline Murray, 'Hiding Behind the Universal Man: Male Sexuality in the Middle Ages', in Vern Bullough and James Brundage (eds.), *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality* (New York, 1996), pp. 123-152, at pp. 129-130; Ruth Mazo Karras, *Unmarriages: Women, Men, and Sexual Unions in the Middle Ages* (Pennsylvania, 2012), p. 33.
[350] Erin Dailey, *Gregory of Tours*, pp. 98-99; see also Janet L. Nelson, who suggested that Merovingian kings practiced 'serial monogamy', in *Politics and Ritual in Early Medieval Europe* (London, 1986), p. 7, n. 27.
[351] *DLH* 5 Preface; Sallust, *Bellum Catilinae*, 5; see Guy Halsall, 'The Preface to Book V of Gregory of Tours' Histories: Its Form, Context and Significance', *English Historical Review*, 122, 496 (April, 2007), pp. 297-317.
[352] *DLH* 4.3; Gregory uses the phrase '*cum esset nimium luxoriosus*' to explain that Clothar was extremely licentious; see Danuta Shanzer, 'History, Romance, Love, and Sex', p. 398.
[353] *DLH* 2.28; Virgil, *Aeneid*, 1. 46-7.
[354] *DLH* 4.22; *DLH* 4.50; see Erin Dailey, *Gregory of Tours*, pp. 65-66; on Merovingian laws against incest, see Ian Wood, 'Incest, Law and the Bible in Sixth-Century Gaul', *Early Medieval Europe*, 7, 3 (November, 1998), pp. 291-303; Mayke De Jong, 'An Unsolved Riddle: Early Medieval Incest Legislation', in Ian Wood (ed.), *Franks and Alamanni*, pp. 107-125.

grandsons' multiple unions, Gregory teaches his readers that marriage unions should be taken seriously.

The bad behaviour of Clothar's son Chilperic, who ordered the murder of his royal wife Galswinth so that he could take back his previous partner Fredegund, is in stark contrast to Clovis's monogamous marriage to the Burgundian princess Clotild. Fredegund appears to have been of low social status, while Galswinth was a Visigothic princess, the sister of Brunhild who was married to Chilperic's brother Sigibert. The sisters whom their father Chlothar married, Ingund and Aregund, had been servants, and another of Chlothar's sons, Charibert, also married a pair of sisters, Merofled and Marcovefa, who had been servants of his first wife Ingoberg.[355] As Dailey has pointed out, Gregory regularly describes wives of low social status as poor choices for kings, while the kings themselves may have intentionally chosen these women because the marriage lacked any ties that could have restricted the king's political considerations.[356] Gregory's main concern was to highlight the necessity of monogamous marriage as the only lawful union in Christian society, but he also wanted to illustrate how monogamous marriage was essential for both spiritual and temporal concerns; Clotild's marriage to Clovis both led to the king's conversion and to his consolidation of royal power. In Merovingian and Anglo-Saxon society, royal marriages were used to create future heirs for the throne and to secure political alliances with other kingdoms. Anglo-Saxon scholars in particular have emphasised the 'peace-weaving' role played by royal women, ensuring peace through their marriages to kings of neighbouring or rival kingdoms.[357] Bede provides several examples, most notably, Edwin and Æthelburh, whose marriage allied Northumbria to the kingdom of Kent. Bede said that there was such great peace in Edwin's dominion that 'a woman with a new-born child could walk throughout the island from sea to sea and take no harm.'[358] In Bede's presentation, the marriage of Edwin and

[355] *DLH* 4.26.
[356] Erin Dailey, *Gregory of Tours*, pp. 77-82.
[357] The role of the queen as a '*frithuwebbe*', 'peace-weaver', is present in Anglo-Saxon poetry and literature, as seen in Beowulf; see Jane Chance, *Woman as Hero in Old English Literature* (New York, 1986); Christine Fell, *Women in Anglo-Saxon England*; Helen Damico and Alexandra Hennessey Olsen, *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature* (Bloomington, 1990); Katherine Bullimore, 'Unpicking the web: the divorce of Ecgfrith and Æthelthryth', *European Review of History: Revue Europeenne d'histoire,* 16, 6 (2009), pp. 835-854.
[358] *HE* 2.16.

Æthelburh brought an alliance that ensured peace throughout the country, but this was not to last, as Æthelburh had to flee Northumbria with her children in the violent aftermath of Edwin's death.[359]

(ii) Christian Marriage and Secular and Religious Unity

Both authors present Christian marriage as a model for society, describing how the correct behaviour expected of secular Christians brought peace and unity both to the Church and society. Although Æthelburh had to flee Northumbria, Bede related that the alliance between Northumbria and Kent was again cemented when Eanflæd, daughter of Edwin and Æthelburh, was given in marriage to Oswiu.[360] This marriage was given substantial attention by Bede, who particularly emphasises Eanflæd's role as a peace-weaver. Oswiu was from the Bernician branch of Northumbria, who were exiled when the Deiran king Edwin assumed sole power of Northumbria.[361] Eanflæd traces Edwin's direct lineage back to Northumbria in her marriage to Oswiu, again uniting Bernicia and Deira, and also maintaining political alliance with the kingdom of Kent. However, one of the reasons why Oswiu was able to rule over both Bernicia and Deira was because he ordered the murder of the Deiran ruler Oswine. Bede again emphasies Eanflæd's role, perhaps using the *topos* of womanly influence, by recording that she urged her husband to expiate himself for his unjust killing of Oswine by giving Trumhere a site to build a monastery at Gilling.[362] A *wergild*, a compensatory gift usually of land, was given in Anglo-Saxon society by the injurer to the injured party, and was promoted by Churchmen as it replaced the blood-feuds which occurred in barbarian societies.[363] By advising her husband, Eanflæd possibly prevented a blood-feud from arising while also teaching Oswiu that he must redeem himself from his sins, in order to attain salvation. Oswiu and Eanflæd's daughter Ælfflæd also became an agent of alliance, not with an earthly king but with God; in order to achieve divine aid in battle against king Penda of Mercia,

[359] Ibid.
[360] *HE* 3.15.
[361] On the two royal Northumbrian houses of Bernicia and Deira, see Barbara Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms*, pp. 77-82.
[362] *HE* 3.24
[363] See Geoffrey Mac Cormack, 'Inheritance and Wergild in Early Germanic Law, Parts 1 and 2, *The Irish Jurist*, n. s. 8 (1973), pp. 143-163, and n. s. 9 (1974), pp. 166-183.

Oswiu dedicated his infant daughter Ælfflæd to the church in lifelong service of God. As Higham pointed out, the practice of giving female kin to the church to cement an alliance with Christ paralleled secular dynastic marriage alliances.[364] Ælfflæd was given to Hild, a niece of king Edwin, who ruled as abbess over Whitby, which became an important monastery for both the Deiran and Bernician branches of the Northumbrian royal family. Whitby became the final burial place for both Edwin and Oswiu, and as will be discussed in further detail later, Ælfflæd ruled over Whitby with her widowed mother Eanflæd after Hild's death.

Bede demonstrates the unity of Northumbria and its alliance with Kent through the marriages of both Æthelburh and Edwin and Eanflæd and Oswiu. Bede was interested not only in emphasising political unity but also spiritual unity; in the marriage of Edwin and Æthelburh, Bede highlighted the potential threat posed to Æthelburh in her marriage to a pagan, but Edwin's conversion ensured spiritual unity. Bede used a similar narrative focus in the marriage of Oswiu and Eanflæd; though Oswiu was already Christian, he followed the Irish observance of Easter, whose dating system was different to the Roman custom followed by his wife. Bede emphasised the disunity that this caused by relating that 'Easter was celebrated twice in the same year, so that the king had finished the fast and was keeping Easter Sunday, while the queen and her people were still in Lent and observing Palm Sunday.'[365] In order to address the issue, an ecclesiastical synod was held at Whitby in 664, attended by leading secular and religious individuals.[366] Bede's description of the Synod of Whitby is one of the longest dedicated accounts in the *HE*, and contains substantial direct speech from each side of the Easter debate.[367] Wormald has argued that one of the reasons why Bede gives such importance to the Synod was to emphasise the unity of the English Church.[368] This narrative focus on unity is exemplified in the marriage of Oswiu and Eanflæd; after the Synod, Oswiu accepted the Roman custom followed by his

[364] Nick J. Higham, *The Convert Kings*, p. 36.
[365] *HE* 3.25.
[366] On the Synod of Whitby, see Benedicta Ward S. L. G., *A True Easter: The Synod of Whitby, 664 AD* (Oxford, 2007).
[367] For discussion of Bede's presentation of the Synod of Whitby, see Clare Stancliffe, 'British and Irish Contexts', in Scott De Gregorio (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Bede*, pp. 69-83, at pp. 73-76.
[368] Patrick Wormald, 'The Venerable Bede and the 'Church of the English'', in idem, *The Times of Bede*, pp. 207-228, at p. 211.

wife, uniting the married couple in Catholic faith. Bede here again portrays how wives could bring unity through marriage, and Eanflæd's role as a pious Christian wife is emphasised in Pope Vitalian's letter to Oswiu, which Bede also reproduces in his narrative. The pope praises Eanflæd's 'pious zeal' and her many good works before bestowing the queen with a gift of a cross with a golden key, made from the chains of the apostles Peter and Paul.[369] In contrast to the other four books of the *HE*, which each contain several chapters of copied documents, especially letters, the letter to Oswiu is the only primary document included in book three.[370] It is significant that Bede chose to omit part of the letter but included the praise of Eanflæd and the closing description of her gift; Bede could have omitted these details, but he included them to portray Eanflæd's role as a pious follower of Roman Christianity and to emphasise through her portrayal the unity of the English with Rome and the wider Christian world.

Gregory also described how Christian marriages brought religious unity, not only in Gaul but also in Spain, through his descriptions of unions between Catholics and Arians. While the Franks were Catholic, Gregory portrays most of the royal Visigoths of Spain as Arian heretics, and marriages between the Franks and Visigoths provided an ideal opportunity to convert Arians to Catholicism. Gregory related that the Visigothic princess Brunhild was converted to Catholicism by the request of her Catholic husband, the Frankish king Sigibert.[371] The marriage of Sigibert and Brunhild not only created spiritual unity in Gaul but also facilitated conversion in Spain through their daughter Ingund, whom they gave in marriage to the Visigothic prince Hermangild. Hermangild's father, king Leuvigild was married to his brother Athanagild's widow Goiswinth, who was Brunhild's mother and therefore Goiswinth was both Ingund's grandmother and step-mother-in-law. Regardless of these familial ties, Gregory related that Ingund endured through much violence and abuse from the Arian Goiswinth who wanted her to renounce her Catholicism and become Arian.[372] Ingund resisted and brought her husband to the Catholic faith, and though this resulted in Hermangild's exile, and later his death at the hands of his own father, Gregory celebrated this victory

[369] *HE* 3.29.
[370] Nick J. Higham, *(Re-)Reading Bede*, pp. 129-130.
[371] *DLH* 4.27.
[372] *DLH* 5.38.

for the Catholic faith.[373] Scholars have argued that Gregory sought to create a unified identity for the Catholic Church by recording the triumphs of Catholicism over Arianism.[374] Gregory achieved this aim through portraying the religious unity gained through Christian marriages.

Both authors illustrated how monogamous royal marriage facilitated peace and unity. Bede juxtaposed the peace and security of Edwin's reign, where women and children could walk throughout the kingdom in complete safety, with the chaos following Edwin's death. Bede said that Æthelburh fled Northumbria and sent her children to Gaul because she feared their uncle Eadbald, and though he did not stipulate why, the comment insinuates that Eadbald may have assassinated his own nephews, a situation that Gregory would have related in explicit detail. Bede's style is more indirect and suggestive; each sentence has been carefully crafted so that the audience may work out what Bede is saying without him having to overtly say it. Bede's aim in doing so was to warn contemporary rulers that peace and prosperity was brought only through the dominion of a Christian king who followed the tenets of the faith. Bede's examples of good and bad behaviour are from the past, but they are firmly aimed at contemporary rulers. As Higham has pointed out, Bede's use of the '*glorioissime*' of Edwin's rule reflects his dedication at the beginning of the *HE* which addresses Ceolwulf as '*glorioissimus*', highlighting the lessons that Ceolwulf could learn from his predecessor.[375] Gregory's portrayal of the civil wars of contemporary Frankish kings are in sharp contrast to the reign of Clovis, when wars were predominantly fought against foreign powers. Bede and Gregory both decided to promote unity as a major narrative theme and were concerned with portraying examples of good behaviour for secular Christians to imitate, and examples of bad behaviour to avoid.

[373] *DLH* 5.38; *DLH* 8.28.
[374] See Avril Keely, 'Arians and Jews in the *Histories* of Gregory of Tours, *Journal of Medieval History*, 23, 2 (1997), pp. 103-115.
[375] *HE* 2.20; *HE* Preface; Nick J. Higham, *(Re-)Reading Bede*, p. 151.

Conclusion

Bede and Gregory sought to increase the inner conversion of their own societies, and as these were ruled by elites, the representations of kings and queens are the most significant. In their accounts of 'queen converters', Bede and Gregory describe how both queens and bishops were involved in the conversions of kings, but the evidence of God's power is the driving force of the narrative. Both give prominence to the conversion of pagan kings through Christian wives and the efficacy of the wife's exhortations should not be considered in terms of failure and success; if they were portrayed as immediately successful, Gregory would not have been able to focus on the power of God in Clovis's change of mind, and Bede would not have been able to focus on the Gregorian mission and the inner conversion of Edwin. Considering the particular aims in Bede's and Gregory's accounts, the presence of Christian queens as key components in the narratives highlights their roles and suggests that these authors had a positive attitude towards women. Christian royal women were understood by both authors as having a significant role in at the beginnings of conversion through their marriages to pagan husbands.

For both Bede and Gregory, the union of man and woman provided a model for unity, an image of the Christian ideal of marriage for contemporary readers. Although Bede presents his history in more universal and spiritual terms than Gregory, it was no less concerned with his particular society, and Bede's desire for reform was firmly based in his contemporary setting. Though Bede's account is more indirect than Gregory's, his aim in portraying positive images of kings and queens was explicit; Bede sought to edify contemporary readers through illustrating a golden age, where the reign of good Christian rulers brought peace and prosperity. In their representations of Christian wives, Bede and Gregory provide models for contemporary queens while also making it clear that peace and prosperity, in both temporal and spiritual terms, was to be found in unity.

Chapter Four: Elite Women as Good Examples in the Religious Life: Personal Sanctity and Community Leadership

Introduction

This chapter examines the good examples of elite religious women provided in the *HE* and the *DLH*, analysing Bede's and Gregory's portrayals of exemplary nuns and abbesses and exploring how and why they praise religious women in their histories. Both authors drew on patristic and hagiographic traditions relating to women in the religious life, particularly on the subject of virginity, and those that may have influenced Bede and Gregory in their portrayals of religious women will be considered. Relevant contemporary writings will also be examined, such as tracts on virginity, monastic rules and church laws pertaining to religious women, in order to locate Bede's and Gregory's descriptions within their cultural and intellectual milieu.

The chapter is divided into three sections which deal with different aspects of female religious life as portrayed by Bede and Gregory. The first examines the types of female monasteries described in the histories and explores Bede's and Gregory's portrayals of women entering the religious life. This elucidates the potential issues involved in wives leaving secular society for the religious life and questions how they factored into Bede's and Gregory's portrayals. The second section explores the themes of spiritual marriage and personal sanctity, focusing on the virtue of virginity and the ideal of renunciation. It first explores the nuances of Bede's and Gregory's views on chastity and virginity, revealing that both authors interpreted chastity in more complex ways than physical virginity alone. It then examines how Bede and Gregory use celestial marriage imagery to portray virgins as brides of Christ; Bede's portrayal of Æthelthryth, the queen of Northumbria who preserved her virginity throughout two marriages, will be especially important here. It investigates Bede's and Gregory's portrayals of the personal sanctity of religious women, focusing on the monastic ideals of renunciation and humility. The final section deals with the more collective aspects of female religious life, examining female leaders, monastic rules, teaching and instruction. Bede's portrayal of abbess Hild of Whitby monastery and Gregory's portrayal of Radegund, founder of the female community at Poitiers, will be the

two main examples examined here. It argues that, while Bede and Gregory believed abbesses needed the support of episcopal figures, both viewed women as more than capable of leading and teaching both men and women.

The most prominent religious women in the *HE* are Æthelthryth and Hild, and these two women have attracted a lot of attention in scholarship, not only because of their prominence but also because Bede's characterisations of them are very different. In the *HE,* Bede gives more space to describing Hild's community at Whitby and her impact on the outside world than Æthelthryth's at Ely, but he provides more information on Æthelthryth's personal sanctity than Hild's. This has been viewed as a dichotomy by scholars focusing on women in Bede's *HE,* leading some to argue that Bede downplayed Hild's active role in the outside world, while others suggest that his account of Æthelthryth is characteristic of an ecclesiastical obsession with the female body as an object of sexual desire.[1] However, as Gunn pointed out, Bede's characterisations of Æthelthryth and Hild provided models of both personal and public devotion, serving as a composite image of an ideal abbess.[2] Gunn argued that this was a narrative technique to avoid repetition, but there is also a spiritual dimension to his authorial choice; both authors wished to provide different aspects of female religious life in order to articulate models of ideal individuals and communities for their contemporary Church to imitate. While their aims were similar, we will see that Bede's and Gregory's portrayals differ due to their differing personal contexts. Above all, an important distinction needs to be highlighted from the outset; Bede's good examples of religious women were all from the past, while Gregory's were near contemporary. Bede would not have known Æthelthryth and Hild personally, as they died in 679 and 680 respectively, when Bede was only a few years old. Gregory on the other hand knew Radegund personally; she supported Gregory's appointment as metropolitan bishop of Tours and Gregory conducted her funeral in 587.[3]

[1] On Hild: Clare Lees and Gillian R. Overing 'Birthing Bishops'; on Æthelthryth: Catherine E. Karkov, 'The Body of St. Æthelthryth; Virginia Blanton, *Signs of Devotion: The Cult of St Æthelthryth in Medieval England, 695-1615* (Pennsylvania, 2007), pp. 19-63.
[2] Victoria Gunn, *Bede's* Historiae, p. 178.
[3] Venantius Fortunatus relates that Radegund supported Gregory's appointment in C*armina* 5.3; Gregory describes Radegund's funeral in *GC* 104.

4.1: Female Monasteries and Entering the Religious life

(i) Female Monasteries in Anglo-Saxon England and Merovingian France

Bede and Gregory both describe female monasteries in their histories, but there were certain organisational differences between monasteries in Anglo-Saxon England and Merovingian Gaul that must first be noted. The female monasteries of Bede's day were double monasteries, communities of both nuns and monks ruled by abbesses, which began to be founded in the mid to late seventh century and were modelled on the double monasteries of Gaul.[4] Double monasteries feature also in Ireland and Spain in the early medieval period, but the foundations of England appear to have been directly influenced by those of Gaul. Bede tells us that in the first few decades following the arrival of Augustine and the Roman missionaries, there were so few monasteries in Britain that men, and particularly women, went abroad to join religious communities in Gaul, such as Jouarre, Chelles and Andelys-sur-Seine.[5] These double monasteries appear in Gaul only in the early seventh century and thus do not feature in Gregory's history. Gregory's descriptions of female communities were urban convents founded in cities and made up exclusively of female members, such as the convent attached to St Martin's in Tours run by Ingitrude and Radegund's foundation of Sainte Croix in Poitiers. It is unsurprising that the first Merovingian female monasteries were located in cities, as the diocesan structure in Gregory's day located sees in the Roman cities of Gaul. The female monasteries mentioned by Gregory are located in cities, often serving as a female counterpart to an established Church or episcopal see, such as Ingitrude's foundation in Tours. This meant that churchmen were available to the nuns for sacramental functions and clerical support. The diocesan structure in England was more fluid and sprawling, thus the double monastery was a useful way to ensure that nuns could receive this support. A certain degree of regional variation was acceptable to the Church, as can be seen in the *Penitential of Theodore*, a handbook of penance dating from the early eighth

[4] For a discussion of the early female foundations, see Barbara Yorke, *Nunneries and the Anglo-Saxon Royal Houses* (London, 2003), pp. 17-36; see also Sarah Foot, '*Flores Ecclesiae*: Women in Early Anglo-Saxon Monasticism' in Gert Melville and Anne Müller (eds.), *Female* Vita Religiosa *between Late Antiquity and the High Middle Ages*: *Structures, Developments and Spatial Contexts* (Berlin, 2011), pp. 173-185, at pp. 176-181.
[5] *HE* 3.8.

century and attributed to the rulings of Theodore of Tarsus, archbishop of Canterbury, which ruled that, though it is not permissible among the Greeks for monastic men and women to live together, 'we shall not overthrow that which is the custom in this region.'[6] This is thought to be a reference to the Anglo-Saxon double monasteries.[7]

The term 'double monasteries' is not a medieval but actually a scholarly one, and Mc Namara has cautioned against viewing it as a defined system, arguing that these monasteries should be considered as convenient arrangements in the more frontier areas of Christianity.[8] The convenience of having priests resident in the same community to administer the sacraments may provide a reason for the arrangement. The Rule of Caesarius followed by the all-female community at Poitiers forbade men from entering the confines of the monastery, with the exception of those who provided the nuns with sacramental office.[9] Communities of religious women could never be completely autonomous as they required religious men for sacramental duties and the double monasteries may be a response to these requirements. In the sources there are no clear definitions of how double monasteries were organised, however, most indicate that the sexes were not mixed together with no divisions but lived in the same monastery in separate areas for the nuns and monks. In Ireland, Cogitosus described the division of the sexes at St Brigit's double monastery in Kildare, detailing that monks and priests had quarters on the right side of the building while the abbess and nuns were on the left side.[10] In Anglo-Saxon England there appears to have been similar separation of the sexes; Aldhelm's poem to Bugga, daughter of king Centwine of the West Saxons and abbess of an unnamed double monastery in her father's kingdom, revealed that the monks and nuns at her monastery sang in separate

[6] Theodore of Tarsus, *Liber Poenitentialis Theodori*, 2, 6.8, in John T. Mc Neill and Helena M. Gamer (eds. and trans.), *Medieval Handbooks of Penance: a Translation of the Principal 'Libri Poenitentiales' and Selections from Related Documents* (New York, 1990), p. 204; see Allen Frantzen, *The Literature of Penance in Anglo-Saxon England* (New Jersey, 1983), p. 63.
[7] Stephanie Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women*, p. 51.
[8] Jo Ann Mc Namara, *Sisters in Arms*, p. 145.
[9] Caesarius, *Regula Virginum*, 39.
[10] Cogitosus, *Vita Brigitae*, 32.2-3.

choirs.[11] In the *HE*, Bede said that at the translation of Æthelthyrth's body, the brothers at Ely stood on one side and the nuns on the other.[12]

In both Merovingian France and Anglo-Saxon England monasteries were dominated by the elite and were often founded by or for female members of royal and aristocratic families. Bede portrays the double monastery of Whitby as an important centre for both political and religious affairs and also a centre of unity; it was the location of the synod of Whitby and it was also a mausoleum for Northumbrian royalty, housing the remains of both the Deiran king Edwin and the Bernician king Oswiu.[13] Female monasteries also functioned as power bases for saint's cults, housing relics and producing hagiographical texts in order to provide a focal point for worship and to promote the cult. Saint's relics were immensely popular in Merovingian Gaul and Anglo-Saxon England and were believed to work miracles through harnessing divine power.[14] Bede and Gregory highlight the industry of both secular and religious women in procuring and donating important relics; in the *HE,* Bede related that it was queen Osthryth who procured the relics of her sainted uncle Oswald, and Gregory praised Radegund's determination in obtaining the relics of the Cross in two of his works.[15] The relics of female saints and the miracles worked through them are also mentioned by Bede and Gregory, such as Æthelthryth's at Ely and Monegund's at Tours.[16]

Another double monastery that Bede marked out for its sanctity was Barking, where he related that the relics of the abbess Æthelburh and her successor Hildelith worked miracles. Bede dedicated four chapters in the *HE* to describing the miracles at Barking, citing as a source a book which is thought to be a lost life of Æthelburh of Barking.[17] In addition to the lives of the nuns at Barking, Bede provides two lives of female saints within the pages of his history in his accounts of Æthelthryth and Hild. Hagiographical texts were an essential component of

[11] Aldhelm, *Carmina Ecclesiastica* 3.
[12] *HE* 4.19.
[13] *HE* 3.24.
[14] On relics in Merovingian Gaul, see Peter Brown, *Relics and Social Status*; on Anglo-Saxon England, see David Rollason, *Saints and Relics in Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1989).
[15] *HE* 3.11; *DLH* 9.40; *GM* 5.
[16] *HE* 4.19; *VP* 19.
[17] *HE* 4.6-10; see Betram Colgrave and Roger A. B. Mynors, *Bede: Ecclesiastical History*, p. 356, n. 2.

fostering a saint's cult; both Bede and the anonymous author of the lives of Cuthbert bolstered his sanctity at the monastery of Lindisfarne.[18] Radegund was also the subject of two hagiographical lives, one penned by the renowned Christian poet Venantius Fortunatus in 600, and the other written ten years later by Baudonivia, a nun at Poiters. These two lives, combined with her procurement of exceptionally powerful relics as recounted by Gregory, ensured Radegund's veneration as a saint and cemented the power of her community after her death. The death of a powerful founder and leader could threaten the status of a monastery and fostering a saint's cult was a way to both create and continue a monastery's reputation for sanctity.

Bede and Gregory both created a reputation for sanctity in several of their accounts of female monasteries, but Bede in particular emphasised the flourishing of female monasticism in his history; as Foot has pointed out, almost one third of the chapters of book four of the *HE* directly relate to religious women and their monasteries.[19] Bede even gave us the name of the first Northumbrian woman to take monastic vows, Heiu, who founded her community at Hartlepool in the 640s.[20] Gregory praised Radegund's community at Poitiers, but he devoted more space to describing the bad behaviour of female communities in his history, particularly during the revolt at Poitiers led by two royal nuns after Radegund's death. By Bede's and Gregory's day, the Church had become so intertwined with aristocratic culture that religious men and women married, had children, and bequeathed Church property and possessions to their relatives in the same manner as secular households. As outlined in chapter two, both authors sought to reform their contemporary Church and bring back the higher standards of monasticism and leadership that it had witnessed in the past. Chapter four argues that Bede prioritises good examples of religious women and their communities from the past in order to encourage reform.

[18] On the creation of the cult of St Cuthbert, see Alan Thacker, 'Lindisfarne and the Origins of the Cult of St Cuthbert', in Gerald Bonner, David Rollason and Clare Stancliffe (eds.), *St Cuthbert, His Cult and His Community to 1200* (Woodbridge, 1989), pp. 103-122.
[19] Sarah Foot, '*Flores Ecclesiae*', p. 175.
[20] *HE* 4.23.

(ii) Entering the Religious Life in Bede's and Gregory's Histories

In chapter three I argued that Bede and Gregory provided exemplary models of monogamous Christian marriage, and both authors had positive attitudes towards wives and mothers. Considering that Bede and Gregory praised Christian marriage as an institution that should never be dissolved, it may be surprising that two of the most prominent religious women in both histories had actually left their marriages to enter the religious life; for Bede, queen Æthelthryth and for Gregory, queen Radegund. Bede and Gregory dealt with this inherent narrative tension very carefully in their histories. Some scholars have argued that Bede glorified the perpetual virginity of Æthelthryth because he disapproved of married women entering the religious life.[21] The issue of marital separation was addressed by episcopal and papal authorities in Bede's and Gregory's contemporary Church.

In Anglo-Saxon England, the issue is dealt with in the *Penitential of Theodore*. There are six rulings in this text which deal directly with spouses, both men and women, who wish to leave their marriages and take religious vows.[22] Consent is a major factor in the penitential, which states that a woman should not take a vow without the consent of her husband and that if either spouse wishes to take vows while the other does not, they may separate only with mutual consent.[23] However, the author of the penitential states that while either may give the other permission to enter a monastery, it was not canonical for a married couple to separate, and it was accepted only as it was a custom 'according to the Greeks'.[24] Pope Gregory had recommended a conciliatory approach to the Roman missionaries when dealing with new Anglo-Saxon Christians, and in the *Libellus Responsionum*, he advised Augustine that he need not follow strictly the customs of the Roman Church but could gather customs from various churches carefully selected on the basis of their usefulness to the Anglo-Saxon Church. This has been viewed as part of the Pope's belief in 'diversity within unity', but it also calls to

[21] Stephanie Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women*, pp. 65-74; Marie-Françoise Alamichael, *Widows in Anglo-Saxon and Medieval Britain* (Oxford, 2008), p. 56.
[22] Theodore of Tarsus, *Liber Poenitentialis Theodori*, 1 14.7; 2, 12.6, 12.8, 12.11, 12.13 and 12.14.
[23] Ibid, 1, 14.7 and 14.13.
[24] Ibid, 2, 12. 8, in John T. Mc Neill and Helena M. Gamer (eds. and trans.), *Medieval Handbooks of Penance*, p. 209.

mind Theodore's ruling above, where a custom may not be canonical, but may be permitted in regions where it was necessary and of benefit to the faithful.[25]

On this specific topic however, Pope Gregory recommended that if a husband or wife wished to leave their spouse for the religious life, both should enter monasteries. Concerning a married man's desire to enter a monastery at Palermo, Pope Gregory wrote to the abbot Urbicus stating that the man is permitted to enter the monastery only if his wife also wishes to enter the religious life; because they are two in one flesh, they should not be separate in manner of life.[26] In his letter to Emperor Maurice's sister Theoctista, Gregory again proclaimed that leaving a marriage for the religious life is not permitted if the spouse remains in the secular world.[27] Ideally, both partners should convert to the religious life, and this view is articulated by Gregory of Tours particularly in his *GC*, where he provides four accounts of chaste marriages, couples who adopted the religious life together.[28] Gregory describes their unions as joined in honourable spiritual love, both husbands and wives were devoted to chastity, giving alms and engaging in vigils. In two of these accounts, Gregory relates that the chaste couples were buried in a single tomb.[29] Two of these husbands were bishops, who upon taking their episcopal office were required by conciliar legislation to take a vow of sexual continence. Merovingian Church councils referred to the wives of bishops as *episcopae*, and permitted their existence once they ceased from marital relations.[30] In line with the decree of the Council of Tours held in 567, Gregory describes the relationship between these bishops and their wives as that of a brother and sister.[31] It would appear that Gregory was similar to his papal namesake in believing that both spouses should adopt the religious life rather than separating, though as we will see later, Gregory also knew that bishops and their wives could become a source of scandal. We know that for Bede, Pope Gregory

[25] On Pope Gregory's 'diversity within unity', see Paul Meyvaert, 'Diversity within Unity, a Gregorian Theme', *Heythrop Journa*l, 4, 2 (1963), pp. 141-162; Robert A. Markus, *Gregory the Great and His World* (Cambridge, 1997), p. 73.
[26] Gregory the Great, *Epistle 6.49*, CCL 140; cf. *Epistle 11.30*, CCL 140A.
[27] Gregory the Great, *Epistle 11.27*.
[28] *GC* 31, 41, 74 and 75.
[29] *GC* 41 and 74.
[30] See Brian Brennan, '"*Episcopae*": Bishops' Wives Viewed in Sixth-Century Gaul', *Church History*, 54, 3 (September, 1985), pp. 311-323; pp. 314-315.
[31] *Concilium Turonense* (567), 13 (12); the council specified that after accepting episcopal rank, bishops and their wives were to become brothers and sisters.

was a supreme authority on Christian life, and in his account of king Sebbi of the East Saxons, Bede highlights the fact that when the king gave up his throne to enter a monastery, his wife joined him.[32] Why then do Bede and Gregory describe, and indeed praise, certain women who left their husbands to enter the religious life, when Pope Gregory's writings on the matter, and indeed much of their own writings, appear to recommend that wives should not leave their spouses if they remained in the world.

Widows entering the religious life did not pose the same problem as wives who still had living spouses, and holy widowhood was highly praised by both Bede and Gregory. Almost all of Bede's accounts of religious women were those who entered monasteries and became abbesses only after their husbands had died. For example, Bede tells us that Eanflæd, wife of king Oswiu of Northumbria, entered the religious life after her husband's death and became abbess of Whitby along with her daughter Ælfflæd; Ælfflæd herself had never been married, as she was dedicated to the religious life as an infant by her father Oswiu in fulfilment of his vow to God for granting him victory in the battle of Winwaed.[33] Another royal abbess who entered the religious life in widowhood was Seaxburh, wife of king Eorcenberht of Kent, who succeeded her sister Æthelthryth as abbess of Ely. Bede does not clarify the marital status of other royal abbesses in the *HE* such as Hild of Whitby and Æbbe of Coldingham, perhaps because they were never queens; however, Bede does indicate that these women entered monasteries later in life, such as Hild whom he says lived for thirty three years in the secular life.[34]

In the *DLH*, Gregory strongly disapproved of the actions of Berthegund, who abandoned her husband and children to join her mother Ingitrude at Tours, with a view to succeeding her there as abbess.[35] As the bishop of Tours, Gregory asserted his authority by commanding Berthegund to return home and citing the Council of Gangra, which ruled against any woman who would forsake her

[32] *HE* 4.11.
[33] *HE* 3.24.
[34] *HE* 4.23.
[35] *DLH* 9.33; *DLH* 10.12.

husband and condemn marriage.[36] Berthegund later returned to her mother's monastery taking much of her husband's possessions with her, prompting her husband to forcibly remove her from Tours.[37] It would appear from this account that Gregory disapproved of wives leaving their husbands; however, Gregory praised other wives who had abandoned their husbands for the religious life, such as Radegund and especially Monegund, the only female saint in his life of the fathers. The account of Monegund offers parallels with the account of Berthegund; Monegund abandoned her husband for the religious life, first entering a cell near her home in Chartres and later entering a room attached to the basilica of St Martin in Tours, from which she was forcibly removed by her husband.[38] However, the circumstances of these two women diverged sharply; while Monegund turned to the religious life after the death of her children, Berthegund abandoned hers; Monegund's husband sought to bring her back to her original cell to harness her spiritual power and miracle working, while Berthegund's husband sought to take back his wife and mother of his children along with the possessions she had stolen from him. Gregory's attitude towards wives leaving spouses depended upon the circumstances and above all the motivations of the individual.

It is necessary to carefully consider how Bede and Gregory portray Æthelthryth's and Radegund's entrance into the religious life, two queens who left their husbands but are highly praised as saints in the histories. In Bede's description of Æthelthryth, he clarifies from the outset that, though she was married twice, she preserved her virginity through twelve years of married life. Bede tells us that Æthelthryth married an ealdorman named Tondberht who died shortly after, and was then given in marriage to king Ecgfrith of Northumbria; according to Bede, Ecgfrith offered bishop Wilfrid 'estates and money if he could persuade the queen to consummate their marriage', but Wilfrid refused.[39] Bede uses Wilfrid's testimony to give credence to the fact that Æthelthryth remained a virgin, but it also deflects disapproval of her actions in leaving her husband since their marriage was never consummated in the first place. In Gregory's portrayal of

[36] *DLH* 9.33; *Concilium Gangrense*, canon 1 and 14; for the dating of the Council to c. 355, see Timothy D. Barnes, 'The Date of the Council of Gangra', *Journal of Theological Studies*, 40, 1 (1989), pp. 121-124.
[37] *DLH* 9.33.
[38] *VP* 19.
[39] *HE* 4.19.

Radegund, his technique is to avoid discussion of her marriage and focus on her life as founder and leader of Sainte-Croix, her monastery for women in Poitiers. Gregory related that Radegund had been taken from her Thuringian homeland as war booty and married to king Chlothar, who later sent assassins to murder Radegund's brother, after which she turned to God, took the habit of a religious and built a nunnery in Poitiers.[40] Gregory's decision to quickly move past Radegund's separation from Chlothar may indicate his reluctance to deal directly with the issue, but the fact that he linked Radegund's departure to the murder of her brother may also have been an attempt to justify her actions in leaving the king. Chlothar evidently did not have much difficulty with her departure as he funded Radegund's monastery in Poitiers, and he went on to take subsequent wives, two of whom were sisters, as mentioned in chapter three. Radegund was not required to be a royal wife, and neither was she a mother, as their marriage produced no children. As Elliot has pointed out, none of the three main sources for Radegund's life, Gregory, Fortunatus and the nun Baudonivia, claimed that her marriage was unconsummated, and as will be seen below, Fortunatus's descriptions of Radegund's ascetic activities are suggestive of penitential acts for sexual sins.[41] From the *HE* there is no doubt that Æthelthryth and Ecgfrith's marriage was unconsummated. Although we cannot say the same for Radegund in the *DLH*, both women had produced no heirs for the throne and both were given permission to leave their marriages by their husbands.

Bede and Gregory appear to be uncomfortable with the idea of men and women entering the religious life when they still had dependents and responsibilities in the world. Monegund became a religious only after the death of her children, and in Gregory's account of his uncle, Gregory of Langres, he specified that it was only after the death of his wife that Gregory turned to God and was consecrated bishop of Langres.[42] Both authors emphasised the importance of mutual consent when a wife or a husband wished to leave their marriages. Bede related that Æthelthryth continually asked Ecgfrith if she could leave their marriage to enter the monastic life and only gained his permission 'at length and

[40] *DLH* 3.7.
[41] Dyan Elliott, *The Bride of Christ Goes to Hell: Metaphor and Embodiment in the Lives of Pious Women, 200-1500* (Pennsylvania, 2012), pp. 79-83.
[42] *VP* 7.2.

with great difficulty'.[43] Consent to leave marriages was also required of men, and Bede stated that when king Sebbi desired to relinquish his throne and enter a monastery, his wife 'obstinately refused to be separated' until he at last 'obtained her reluctant consent'.[44] Bede may have remarked that king Sebbi's wife was obstinate but he also made it clear that the king reigned for thirty years before getting his wife to agree by telling her that, 'since neither of them could enjoy or serve the world any longer, they should devote themselves to the service of God.'[45] Bede describes several kings who, in Stancliffe's words, 'opted out' by relinquishing their thrones to enter the religious life.[46] Bede praises these men for their decision but he also clarifies that they abandoned their thrones only later in life and with the provision that another ruler would replace them; for example, when describing king Sigeberht of East Anglia, Bede said that 'at last he resigned his kingly office and entrusted it to his kinsman Ecgric, who had previously ruled over part of the kingdom.'[47] King Æthelred of Mercia also abdicated his throne to become an abbot and though Bede provides very little information about it, neglecting to even name the monastery which Æthelred ruled over, he made it clear that the king had made Cenred king in his place.[48]

Scholars have pointed out that Bede, following Pope Gregory's thought, perceived Christian kings as divinely appointed to rule and viewed active kingship as of paramount importance to Christian society.[49] These scholars argued that Bede's views on active kingship were essential to his understanding of reform; Bede envisaged that king Ceolwulf would work jointly with bishop Ecgbert by using his secular power and authority to reform the Northumbrian Church. After Bede's death, Ceolwulf relinquished his throne to enter the monastery of Lindisfarne in 737, but Bede was alive when the king had been captured and

[43] *HE* 4.19.
[44] *HE* 4.11.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Clare Stancliffe, 'Kings Who Opted Out', in Patrick Wormald, Donald Bullough and Roger Collins (eds.), *Ideal and Reality*, pp. 154-176.
[47] *HE* 3.18.
[48] *HE* 5.19; it has been suggested that Æthelred became abbot of Bardney monastery, see Susan J. Ridyard, 'Monk-Kings and the Anglo-Saxon Hagiographic Tradition', in Robert B. Patterson (ed.), *The Haskins Society Journal: Studies in Medieval History*, 6 (1994) (Woodbridge, 1995), pp. 13- 28, at p. 17.
[49] Judith Mc Clure, 'Bede's Old Testament Kings', in Patrick Wormald, Donald Bullough and Roger Collins (eds.), *Ideal and Reality*, pp. 76-89; Alan Thacker, 'Bede's Ideal of Reform'; Susan J. Ridyard, 'Monk-Kings', pp. 21-22.

forcibly tonsured in 731.[50] As Ridyard has noted, voluntary abdication may have been problematic because it could encourage and disguise the forced type that occurred in times of contested succession and political instability.[51] This may be a reason why Bede emphasised that the kings who abdicated did so late in their lives and only after they had appointed successors.

Royal women could also be forced into monasteries against their will, and kings often made the choice of either placing their daughters in family monasteries or giving them in royal marriage alliances. Ælfflæd herself did not voluntarily enter the religious life as the decision was made by her father king Oswiu, who dedicated her to lifelong virginity as an infant. Ælfflæd may not have had a choice but her life was notably safer than that of her sister, Osiwu's other daughter Osthryth; Oswiu gave Osthryth in a marriage alliance to king Æthelred of Mercia, but she was murdered by Mercian nobles in 697.[52] The precarious situation of a queen in a foreign kingdom was a real threat that could be avoided by entering a family monastery, which may explain why several queens opted to retire to monasteries in both Anglo-Saxon England and Merovingian France. Osthryth's husband had fought a battle against her brother, king Ecgfrith of Northumbria, in which her other brother Ælfwine was killed.[53] Radegund's brother faced the same fate at the hands of her husband king Chilperic, an event which Gregory links directly with her entrance into religious life. The threat of violence may have motivated elite women to seek security within monasteries, even for those who had originally been forced into monasteries in the first place, as can be seen in Gregory's description of king Chilperic's daughter Basina. Gregory related that after Basina's brother Clovis and her mother Audovera were murdered, her stepmother Fredegund tricked her into entering the nunnery at Poitiers and confiscated all of Basina's property.[54] Chilperic evidently made the decision as well as his partner Fredegund, for Gregory later claimed that it was Chilperic who had shut Basina away in the nunnery of Poitiers.[55] As Bikeeva has noted, with her own family deceased and her stepmother in power, Basina was safer in the

[50] The continuation of Bede's history records this information for 737.
[51] Susan J. Ridyard, 'Monk-Kings', p. 23.
[52] *HE* 5.24.
[53] *HE* 4.21.
[54] *DLH* 5.39.
[55] *DLH* 6.34.

seclusion of Poitiers.[56] Indeed, Radegund protected Basina from being taken from the convent when Chilperic later contemplated sending her to Spain for a marriage alliance with king Reccared.[57] Though Gregory simply stated that Basina was unwilling to leave, it is likely that she felt more secure at Poitiers than travelling to a foreign land; her decision was prudent as her half-sister Rigunth, daughter of Fredegund, was sent by Chilperic instead but never reached her destination, for she was attacked on the journey and most of her dowry was stolen.[58]

Gregory said that Rigunth's dowry was tremendous; there was such a vast weight of gold, silver and precious objects that it filled fifty carts.[59] A daughter's dowry could be a substantial expense for royal and aristocratic fathers, and one which could be avoided if they chose to place their daughters in family monasteries rather than arranging marriages for them. As Evans Grubbs has shown, some families abused the option of placing young daughters in monasteries to avoid paying dowries, an abuse condemned in the fourth century by Basil of Caesaria and in the fifth century by the western emperor Majorian.[60] The ruling of Majorian throws light on the possible threat posed to both Church and society when young wives left their husbands for the religious life. Majorian ordered that virgins should not be consecrated until the age of forty for two main reasons; firstly, women of childbearing age were essential for procreation, and secondly, those who had been forced into perpetual virginity while in the ardour of youth would be more susceptible to forming illegal unions.[61] In an account of a young married couple who chose to live a virginal life together, Gregory recorded that the husband Injuriosus was concerned about their families, as they were both only children and their parents had expected them to produce children as heirs.[62] A failure to produce heirs could be a real problem for aristocratic families and this

[56] Natalia Bikeeva, '*Serente Diabulo*: The Revolts of the Nuns at Poitiers and Tours in the Late 6th Century', in Radosław Kotechi and Jacek Maciejewski (eds.), *Ecclesia et Violentia: Violence Against the Church and Violence within the Church in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2014), pp. 72-90, at p. 74.
[57] *DLH* 6.34.
[58] *DLH* 7.9.
[59] *DLH* 6.45.
[60] Judith Evans-Grubbs, *Women and the Law in the Roman Empire: A Sourcebook on Marriage, Divorce and Widowhood* (London, 2002), pp. 109-110; citing Basil, *Epistle* 199.18 and *Majorian*, Novel, 6.
[61] Majorian, *Novel*, 6.1-3; the Council of Saragossa in 380 also ruled that virgins should only be veiled after they turned forty, in *Concilium Caesaraugustanum*, canon 8.
[62] *DLH* 1.47.

parental pressure can be seen in other hagiographical accounts, such as the fifth century life of Melania the Younger.[63] The author emphasised that Melania the Younger's family were of Roman senatorial class, and in Gregory's account he also highlights the fact that Injurious was from a wealthy family. Despite the pressure from their families, Injurious and his wife retained their resolve and Gregory praised them for their chastity.

Although Gregory praised them highly, it must be remembered that his account of the chaste couple was one of his miracle stories, and he provided another version of the story in his book on the martyrs.[64] In many cases Gregory praised those who took vows later in life after they had children like Monegund and Gregory of Langres, and since the latter was his great-grandfather, Gregory owed his very existence to the fact that he had procreated before taking vows. In the account Gregory stated that Gregory of Langres only approached his wife for the purpose of having children, and 'never, as is so often the case in the ardour of youth, did he lust after another woman.'[65] The 'ardour of youth' could be contained by Christian marriage, and as we have seen, Bede warned that young men who neither had a commitment to chastity nor a wife were forming illicit unions even with nuns.[66]

The young women who were placed in monasteries may have had this commitment to chastity, but others did not; Bede portrayed Ælfflæd as living a life of perpetual chastity, but as we will see in chapter five, he also stated that the nuns at the monastery of Coldingham were susceptible to attracting strange men by donning fine clothing.[67] We do not know if any of the Coldingham nuns were placed in the monastery by their families involuntarily, but Bede makes it clear that they were not willing to give up secular concerns. In the letter to Radegund the bishops emphasised that each of the nuns at Poitiers ought to have entered of their own free will, as ordered by the Rule.[68] Basina did not enter Poitiers of her

[63] Gerontius, *Vita S. Melaniae Iunioris*, 1 and 6.
[64] *GC* 31; on Gregory's two versions of the story, see Karen A. Winstead, 'The Transformation of the Miracle Story in the *Libri Historiarum* of Gregory of Tours', *Medium Ævum*, 59, 1 (1990), pp. 1-15.
[65] *VP* 7, in Edward James (trans.), *Gregory of Tours*, p. 43.
[66] *EE*.
[67] *HE* 4.25.
[68] *DLH* 9.39; the bishops refer to the Rule of Caesarius followed at Poitiers.

own free will, and Gregory later described how she expected preferential treatment at Poitiers on account of her royal secular status.[69] Gregory also related that Theudechild, widow of king Charibert, was consigned to the monastery of Arles by her brother-in-law king Guntram, where according to Gregory, she bore ill the fasts and vigils to which she was subjected.[70]

Bede's and Gregory's careful handling of wives who left their marriages for the religious life reveals that these women were exceptional cases, queens who had never truly acted as royal wives but as royal saints. It is difficult to assess Bede's and Gregory's stance on whether or not wives should leave their husbands, or whether both spouses should enter the religious life together. Since Bede and Gregory only described two royal women who had left their husbands in the secular world to enter the religious life, it is likely that they followed Pope Gregory's thought and believed that ideally, spouses should either remain in the world or take their vows together. However, an ideal may not also be feasible in practice, and the very ambiguity of Bede's and Gregory's exact thought on the topic suggests that both were willing to accept some variations in practice. Wemple and Mc Namara have noted that ecclesiastical legislation was more ambiguous on the matter of marriage separation than were the moral writings of patristic authors.[71] As will be seen below, traditional patristic thought on the subject of virginity could be altered or understood more subtly by ecclesiastical authors in order to accommodate different situations and regions while retaining the essential points of belief. Bede's and Gregory's understanding of virginity and chastity was more complex than physical distinctions of bodily integrity, and this is one of the reasons why it is difficult to assess their attitudes towards non-virginal married women entering the religious life. It is therefore essential to elucidate their views on chastity, virginity and spiritual marriage.

[69] This caused the two royal nuns to lead a revolt against their abbess Leubovera, as will be discussed in further detail in the following chapter.
[70] *DLH* 4.26.
[71] Suzanne F. Wemple and Jo Ann Mc Namara, 'Marriage and Divorce in the Frankish Kingdom', in Susan Mosher Stuard (ed.), *Women in Medieval Society* (Philadelphia, repr. 1989), pp. 95-124, at p. 97.

4.2: Spiritual Marriage and Personal Sanctity: Virginity and Renunciation

(i) Spiritual Marriage: Chastity and Virginity

Bede and Gregory were writing in an environment that prized virginity as a virtue that imitated Christ's example and illustrated the ascetic abstinence of the individuals who renounced the earthly bonds of sexual relationships. The virtue of virginity was synonymous with religious women in many patristic texts. Based on the portrayals of two key females in the Bible, Eve and Mary, Jerome wrote that as 'death came through Eve: life has come through Mary. For this reason the gift of virginity has been poured most abundantly upon women, seeing that it was from a woman it began.'[72] Bede similarly believed that God had taken the form of a man from the flesh of a virgin 'in order to show that he prized the glory of virginity more than marriage.'[73] However, Bede did not specify that virginity was a particularly female virtue, and as we will see, both Bede and Gregory also praise men for their chastity and virginity. Augustine devoted a lot of thought to the question of marriage versus virginity and composed treatises on both the good of marriage and the merits of virginity. The main argument that Augustine made, which was followed by Bede and Gregory, was that monogamous Christian marriage was honourable, but virginity was more praiseworthy. Jerome's writings on virginity are less favourable to marriage and he particularly emphasises the superiority of virginity. Both Augustine and Jerome developed from Scripture a division of virtues into descending order which ranked virginity as the highest and most praiseworthy of merits; virginity won the hundredfold reward, widowhood the sixtyfold, and marriage the thirtyfold.[74] Bede was well aware of this division and he cites Jerome as a reference to it in *De Temporum Ratione*.[75] The development of spousal rhetoric in reference to virgins in patristic thought and exegesis was influential for both Bede and Gregory. The image of Christ as the bridegroom and the Christian soul as the bride has a strong presence throughout

[72] Jerome, *Ep*istle 22 (Eustochium), in Elizabeth A. Clark and Herbert Richardson (eds. and trans.), *Women and Religion: The Original Sourcebook of Women in Christian Thought* (New York, 2nd edn. 1996), p. 47.
[73] Bede, *In Genesium*, 1.28 a/b, in Calvin B. Kendall (trans. and intro.), *Bede: On Genesis*, p. 93.
[74] The grading was developed from Gospel parables on the sower; see Matt. 13:3-8; Mark 4:3-8; Luke 8:5-8; Augustine, *De Bono Coniugali*; Jerome, *Adversus Jovinianum.*
[75] Bede, *De Temporum Ratione*, 1.1, citing Jerome's *Adversus Jovinianum*.

Bede's account of Æthelthryth. Patristic exegesis on several scriptural texts, such as the Pauline epistles, the Book of Revelation, and particularly on Psalm 44 and the Song of Songs, described the relationship between God and his people as a marriage.[76] However, the image of Christ as a Bridegroom came to be especially applied to female virgins since the writings of Jerome and Ambrose.[77] Gregory's contemporary Venantius Fortunatus employed celestial spousal imagery in his writings on virginity, as did Bede's near contemporary Aldhelm.[78]

However, Bede and Gregory were also writing in an environment where women who were not virgins were entering the religious life. The growing numbers of women who left their marriages needed to be accommodated into the patristic hierarchy of merits. In Anglo-Saxon England, the seventh century abbot of Malmesbury Aldhelm created an innovative interpretation of the traditional patristic grading of virginity by changing the category of widowhood to chastity, a more inclusive category that could be fulfilled by both widows and the previously married who still had living spouses in the world.[79] Aldhelm's creative recasting of the grades of virginity in his prose *De Virginitate* was composed at the turn of the eighth century and was well known to Bede.[80] The work was addressed to Hildelith, the abbess of the double monastery of Barking, and several other nuns at the community. A large number of the female inhabitants of Barking monastery, like many of the major houses in Anglo-Saxon England, were likely to have been women of high status who had been married and had children in their secular lives. These women could never be considered as physical virgins, but Aldhelm's text emphasises the importance of inner chastity over physical virginity in order to accommodate his audience. Aldhelm follows tradition in ascribing virginity the

[76] See for example, Jerome, *Epistle* 22 (Eustochium); Ambrose, *De Virginibus*; Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*; for an examination of patristic exegesis on the Song of Songs and Psalm 45, see David G. Hunter, 'The Virgin, the Bride and the Church: Reading Psalm 45 in Ambrose, Jerome and Augustine', *Church History*, 69 (2000), pp. 281-303.
[77] Brian Brennan, 'Deathless Marriage and Spiritual Fecundity in Venantius Fortunatus's *De Virginitate*', *Traditio*, 51 (1996), pp. 73-97, at p. 80.
[78] Venantius Fortunatus, *De Virginitate*; Aldhelm, *De Virginitate*; on Fortunatus, see Brian Brennan, 'Deathless Marriage and Spiritual Fecundity'; on Aldhelm, see Sinéad O' Sullivan, 'Aldhelm's *De Virginitate* – Patristic Pastiche or Innovative Exposition?', *Peritia*, 12 (1998), pp. 271-295.
[79] See Dyan Elliott, *The Bride of Christ Goes to Hell*, p. 66-71; Sinéad O' Sullivan, 'Aldhelm's *De Virginitate*'; Thomas Cramer, 'Containing Virginity: Sex and Society in Early Medieval England', in William North (ed.), *The Haskins Society Journal: Studies in Medieval History*, 21 (2009), (Woodbridge, 2010), pp. 47-66.
[80] Bede mentions Aldhelm's treatise in *HE* 5.18.

highest grade of virtue, but virgins who succumbed to pride on account of their bodily purity and rested on the merits of physical integrity alone could be superseded by those who advanced in humility and chastity of mind, as bodily purity was worth nothing without spiritual purity.[81]

Aldhelm explains that there are times when the hierarchal positions are reversed, 'so that the inferior, advancing little by little, takes the place of the superior grade'.[82] Aldhelm illustrates his argument by citing the example of the sinful woman and the Pharisee Simon in Luke; the woman anoints Jesus's feet, drawing the criticism of Simon who perceives her former sinfulness, but Jesus states that her sins had been forgiven and that she was in fact showing far greater hospitality and good works than Simon himself.[83] Simon thought himself superior to the sinful woman but she achieved greater faith in her humility, and by citing the example, Aldhelm makes a point to his audience that the nuns who had been previously married may through humility and faith supersede virgins who fall into the sin of pride.

Bede's portrayals of conversion in the *HE* emphasise inner motivation, and in several of his writings Bede related that external observation was characteristic of the old law, but the new law of Christ focused on inner observation. To Bede, the Pharisees and their stubborn observance of the old law were like the erring Britons, who stubbornly cling to their old observances instead of following those of the Catholic Church worldwide.[84] Bede's approach to the concept of inner purity offers parallels with Aldhelm's, and both authors cited the example of the sinful woman in Luke; in a Gospel homily, Bede explained to his audience that the ointment used by the sinful woman to anoint Jesus was 'compounded by spikenard which was pure (that is, untainted and unadulterated with other kinds), and which was precious, to imply the chastity of perfect faith and action.'[85] Bede believed that through repentance even the souls of sinners could be made perfect by

[81] Aldhelm, *De Virginitate*, 7.2-3.
[82] Aldhelm, *De Virginitate*, 10.1.
[83] Luke 7.36-50.
[84] *HE* 5.22; see William Trent Foley and Nicholas J. Higham, 'Bede on the Britons', *Early Medieval Europe*, 17, 2 (2009), pp. 154-185; see also Alan Thacker, 'Bede, the Britons, and the Book of Samuel'.
[85] Bede, *Homeliarum Euangelii*, John 11:55-12:11; Hurst, David (ed.), *CCSL* 122; Lawrence T. Martin and David Hurst (trans.), *Bede the Venerable*, *Homily* 2.4, p. 37.

advancing through faith and good works, while at the same time those who rested on their merits could fall behind. In his commentary on the Tabernacle, Bede related that 'there is no doubt that the chastity of the flesh often deprives some people of chastity of the heart', and he also stated, citing the Gospel of Matthew, that 'chastity of the flesh profited nothing to the foolish virgins who were without the light of inner purity when the bridegroom came.'[86] Bede was here warning his audience to be vigilant of mind and to augment the virtue of chastity with good works. Gregory's concept of chastity was similarly based on the attitude of mind and motivation of the individual; he describes Gregory of Langres as virginal, even though he had been married with children. Gregory's understanding of virginity and chastity may be viewed as responding to his environment, where many of the men who became bishops had been previously married, just as Aldhelm's can be viewed as a response to the formerly married nuns that made up significant numbers in the Anglo-Saxon Church.

The imagery of the bride of Christ was most frequently used in relation to female virginity but it was also used to describe male virgins. Aldhelm included both men and women in his treatises on virginity, pointing to the understanding that gender was an earthly division which was transcended by virgins of either sex. As a monastic ideal, virginity was a key aspect in undertaking the renunciation of worldly concerns for either sex, and Foot has argued that Bede's emphasis on the highest standards of observance was not gender-specific but directed at all Christians.[87] Both Bede and Gregory praise men for their virginity; Gregory praised Gregory of Langres and Bede praised Benedict Biscop. Drawing on a passage in Revelation which described how the chaste follow Christ as the Lamb wherever He goes, Bede said that Benedict Biscop 'refused to subject himself to marriage in the flesh so that he might be worthy of the lamb shining with the glory of virginity in the heavenly realms'.[88] Though Bede did not compare Benedict with Æthelthryth directly, he stated that both received a hundredfold reward in heaven on account of their chastity. Æthelthryth belonged to the highest category

[86] Bede, *De Tabernaculo*, David Hurst (ed.), *CCSL* 119A (Turnhout 1969); Arthur G. Holder (trans. and intro.), *Bede: On the Tabernacle TTH* 18 (Liverpool, 1994), pp. 138-139; Matt. 25:1-12.
[87] Sarah Foot, '*Flores Ecclesiae*', p. 175.
[88] *HA* 1, in Christopher Grocock and Ian Wood (eds. and trans.), *The Abbots of Wearmouth-Jarrow*, p. 25; cf. Rev. 14:4.

of merit, and Bede is determined to clarify this in his portrayal of her life. In his account of Æthelthryth, Bede stated that 'certain people doubted' that she had preserved her virginity throughout her marriages.[89] Though Bede does not elaborate on the matter, his comment here suggests that Æthelthryth suffered from suspicious accusations by her contemporaries. Æthelthryth's preservation of virginity during her marriages was so remarkable that it inevitably drew suspicion, as did one of Gregory's examples of chaste couples in the *GC*; Gregory related that bishop Simplicius and his wife drew scandalous accusations from their fellow citizens, who refused to believe that they refrained from sexual relations. According to Gregory, the couple proved their chastity through a miracle, where they placed burning coals in their cloaks but neither of their garments burned, thus demonstrating that 'the flames of wantonness' had been extinguished in them.[90]

For Bede, Wilfrid's testimony that the king had offered him a bribe proved that Æthelthryth's virginity was intact, but it also indicates that Æthelthryth was put under pressure from her husband to consummate their marriage. It is possible that Bede was here drawing on a hagiographical convention often used in early Christian saints' lives that focuses on the steadfast resistance of chaste women against being given in marriage, or against forced consummation within marriage. This steadfast resistance is suggested in Fortunatus's account of Radegund, where he relates that she would leave her husband's bed at night and 'prostrate herself in prayer under a hair cloak by the privy so long that the cold pierced her through and through and only her spirit was warm.'[91] However, the penitential nature of Radegund's night-time acts of self-punishment may indicate that her marriage to Chlothar was consummated, and Fortunatus never described her explicitly as a bride of Christ, an image which he used frequently in his works on virginity. On the other hand, Fortunatus does imply the image by stating that Radegund was 'more Christ's partner than her husband's companion.'[92]

[89] *HE* 4.19.
[90] *GC* 75.
[91] Venantius Fortunatus, *Vita Radegundis*, 5, in Jo Ann Mc Namara, John E. Halborg and Gordon E. Whatley (eds. and trans.), *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages* (London, 1992), p. 73.
[92] Ibid, 3, p. 72.

Gregory did not use celestial marriage imagery in his portrayal of Radegund, but he did when recording a miracle at Radegund's monastery; Gregory related that an unnamed nun at Poitiers had a vision in which the abbess Agnes dressed her in a queenly robe covered in gold and jewels, telling her that 'It is thy spouse who sendeth thee these gifts.'[93] Gregory also used celestial marriage imagery in his account of Injuriosus and his wife, one of the chaste couples mentioned above, relating that the wife said she would share with Injuriosus 'the dower promised me by my spouse, the Lord Jesus Christ, to whom I have vowed myself as handmaiden and bride.'[94] The couple lived together in abstinence, and when they died and were buried in tombs spaced apart, the two tombs miraculously came together side by side, in a miracle which Gregory believed proved their chastity.[95]

Posthumous miracles provided sure proof of the calibre of an individual's life, and in the case of those who maintained chastity, the miracle of incorrupt remains indicated their faultless purity. This is the second proof of Æthelthryth's perpetual virginity provided by Bede, which along with Wilfrid's testimony guarantees her virginal status to the reader. Bede related that Seaxburh, Æthelthryth's sister and successor as abbess, decided to translate Æthelthryth's remains sixteen years after her death to a new coffin in the church. Bede recorded the miraculous circumstances of her translation; the brothers of Ely discovered a white marble sarcophagus that was found to fit Æthelthryth's body perfectly, and when they raised her body from her coffin, it was found to be as incorrupt 'as if she had died and been buried that very day.'[96] Bede stated that the miraculous preservation of Æthelthryth's body was a direct result of her perpetual virginity, and earlier in the history he had described the incorrupt remains of Æthelthryth's sister Æthelburh at Farmoutiers in Gaul, explaining that she had 'lived a life of great self-denial, also preserving the glory of perpetual virginity which is well pleasing to God.'[97] At Æthelburh's translation, Bede explained that her body was found to be 'as untouched by decay as it had also been immune from the

[93] *DLH* 6.29.
[94] *DLH* 1.47.
[95] Ibid.
[96] *HE* 4.19.
[97] *HE* 3.8.

corruption of fleshly desires.'[98] The miracle was not specifically linked to physical virginity nor was it exclusively female; Bede also related the posthumous miracle of bodily incorruption in his accounts of Fursa and Cuthbert.[99] Bede did not specify that Fursa or Cuthbert were virgins, but he describes their abstinence and purity as virtues that contributed to their miraculous purity in death.

In his account of Cuthbert, Bede said that when the brothers decided to move Cuthbert to a new coffin eleven years after his death, they found his body to be completely intact, so that he looked 'more like a sleeping than a dead man.'[100] Similarly, when Æthelthryth was raised from her tomb, Bede she that she was 'laid on a bed like one asleep.'[101] As Thacker has noted, these translation ceremonies and accounts of corporeal incorruption parallel those of Merovingian Gaul.[102] Gregory's writings give several examples that are strikingly similar to Bede's of Cuthbert, Æthelhtryth and Æthelburh; in the *VP*, Gregory stated that Gregory of Langres's body was also found to be as 'intact as if he were sleeping…because his living flesh had not been corrupted by passions.'[103] In the *GC*, Gregory describes how bishop Felix of Bourges's body was found to be untouched by decay, as if he had just been placed there at that hour, though he was in the grave for almost twelve years.[104] Gregory also relates that the body of an unnamed girl was found to be completely intact, and her merit was revealed when Count Georgius's wife's blindness was miraculously cured by her sarcophagus.[105] According to Bede, the miracle of curing blindness was also worked through the relics of Æthelthryth's and Cuthbert's incorrupt remains in the *HE*.[106] In describing the miraculous curing of a blind woman at the cemetery of the holy nuns at Barking, Bede explained that the nuns had lost the light of this world in

[98] Ibid.
[99] *HE* 3.19 and 4.30.
[100] *HE* 4.30.
[101] *HE* 4.19.
[102] Alan Thacker, 'Lindisfarne and the Origins of the Cult of St Cuthbert', pp. 106-107.
[103] *VP* 7.4, in Edward James (trans.), *Gregory of Tours*, p. 47.
[104] *GC* 100.
[105] *GC* 34.
[106] *HE* 4.19; 4.32.

order to show the woman the light of God's grace through the healing of Christ's saints.[107]

Bede's account of Æthelthryth also described the posthumous healing of a tumour she had had on her neck when alive, again providing a source testimony as proof of the miracle: her doctor Cynefrith. According to Bede, Cynefrith reported that he had lanced Æthelthryth's tumour three days before her death which caused a gaping wound on her neck that was found to be healed at her translation, leaving behind only the trace of a scar. Æthelthryth's tumour, which will be discussed further below, was described in her own speech provided by Bede as 'a fiery red tumour.'[108] Bede specified that Æthelthryth's sarcophagus was made of white marble, and his use of the colours red and white in his account of Æthelthryth is very deliberate. The red of Æthelthryth's tumour, combined with the white of her miraculous sarcophagus, suggests that Bede was presenting Æthelthryth both as a pure virgin and a martyr, in imitation of Christ.[109] This imagery held a huge theological significance; red and white were often used to describe Christ, referring to his sacrifice and glorification, his purity and innocence, and to his dual natures of human and divine.[110] The gospel of Matthew describes Christ's garments as white as snow in the Transfiguration, and Mac Carron has pointed out how both colours are used in the Song of Songs where Christ as the Bridegroom is described as white and red.[111] In Christian thought, red represented the blood of martyrdom while white represented the virtue of virginity. Gregory describes white as representative of virginity in several of his writings; in the *DLH*, Gregory states that when the body of Disciola, a nun at Radegund's monastery, was washed before burial her flesh 'shone with a snow-white purity'.[112]

Gregory also used the colour white to describe virginity and chastity in his hagiographical works such as the *GC*, where he stated that the robes of the

[107] *HE* 4.10; on Bede's use of miracles see Benedicta Ward, S.L.G., 'Miracles and History: A Reconsideration of the Miracle Stories used by Bede', in Gerald Bonner (ed.), *Famulus Christi*, pp. 70-76.
[108] *HE* 4.19.
[109] Máirín Mac Carron, 'The Adornment of Virgins', pp. 154-155.
[110] See Jennifer O' Reilly, '*Candidus et Rubicundus*: An Image of Martyrdom in the Lives of Thomas Becket', *Analecta Bollandiana*, 9 (1981), pp. 303-314.
[111] Matt 17:2; Song of Songs 5:10; Máirín Mac Carron, 'The Adornment of Virgins', p. 152.
[112] *DLH* 6.29.

unnamed virgin were as a white as a lamb.[113] The unnamed bishop of Nantes mentioned above was seen by his wife to have a white lamb resting on his chest, symbolising his chastity.[114] For Gregory, the image of a white lamb symbolised Christ, as it had for Bede in his description of Benedict Biscop's virginity mentioned above. In the *VP*, Gregory stated that those who continued in virtues after their baptism 'never soiled by shameful acts the white and shining robe of regeneration. Deservedly they follow the Lamb wherever He leads, the Lamb whose great whiteness has crowned them with beautiful lilies, not withered by the heat of any temptation.'[115] Gregory used the image of white lilies and red roses when describing both Gregory of Langres's and Radegund's bodies in death.[116] While the colour white was associated with virginal purity and red with martyrdom, scholars have noted that church fathers such as Jerome and Ambrose believed that virginity was itself a lifelong daily martyrdom.[117] Patristic exegesis on the Song of Songs therefore linked the virginal bride of Christ to the image of red and white martyrdom, and Bede alludes to this in his account of Æthelthryth.

In comparing Bede's views on virginity with Gregory's, it appears that Bede held a more austere view towards sex than Gregory; both authors understood that sex within marriage was permitted for the propagation of the human race, but while Gregory described saints who had previous sexual relations as chaste such as Gregory of Langres, Bede clarified that Æthelthryth had never had sex even in marriage. Bede's account of Æthelthryth has been viewed as representing a 'desire for and denial of the female body and voice' due to his emphasis on her physical virginity.[118] However, it can be argued that Bede's emphasis on Æthelthryth's virginity, preserved throughout two marriages, was intended to portray the virginal queen as a martyred saint. This is evidenced by Bede's hymn in honour of Æthelthryth, which he inserted into his history in imitation of Scripture.[119] Bede's

[113] *GC* 34.
[114] *GC* 77.
[115] *VP* 1, in Edward James (trans.), *Gregory of Tours*, p. 3.
[116] *VP* 7; *GC* 104.
[117] Jerome, *Epistle* 108.31; Ambrose, *De Virginibus*, 3.10; see Máirín Mac Carron, 'The Adornment of Virgins', pp. 153-154; Clare Stancliffe, "Red, White and Blue Martydom," in Dorothy Whitelock, Rosamund Mc Kitterick and David Dumville (eds.), *Ireland in Early Medieval Europe* (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 21-46, at pp. 29-31.
[118] Catherine E. Karkov, 'The Body of St. Æthelthryth', p. 398.
[119] *HE* 4.20.

hymn draws on celestial marriage imagery and directly links Æthelthryth to the virgin martyrs of the early church, the universal saints, Agatha, Eulalia, Thecla, Euphemia, Agnes and Cecily. Bede portrays Æthelthryth as a bride of Christ but also a martyr through her preservation of virginity throughout two marriages, a remarkable example of abstinence, delighting that in his own time there could be martyrs like those of the early Church. In describing the doubts that certain people had about Æthelthryth's virginity, Bede states that 'Nor need we doubt that this which often happened in days gone by, as we learn from trustworthy accounts, could happen in our time too'.[120]

Æthelthryth's importance to Bede is evidenced by that fact that she appears in three of his works. In the *HE*, Bede devoted a chapter to Æthelthryth's life and also included the hymn in praise of her virginity, which he had composed in her honour several years before the *HE*. Bede catalogued Æthelthryth's commemorative festival in his *Martyrologium*, where she appears as one of only three Anglo-Saxon saints and is unique among them, for Bede records a full historical account only for Æthelhtyrth.[121] Finally, in the *Chronica Maiora* Bede recorded her perpetual virginity, her foundation of Ely, and her incorrupt body in death.[122] This is significant, for Bede rarely refers to Anglo-Saxon history in the *Chronica Maiora*, and he therefore attached a great deal of importance to Æthelthryth. For Bede, Æthelthryth encapsulates the high sanctity of Anglo-Saxon saints and she is counted amongst the saints of the universal church.

(ii) Personal Sanctity: Renunciation, Humility and Patience

Bede's and Gregory's descriptions of religious women emphasise their renunciation, humility and patience, virtues that were equally important for monastic men. In this respect, neither author viewed women as different from men as they believed women achieved monastic excellence by cultivating the same virtues as men. Æthelthryth did not die for her faith like the virgin martyrs, but through her perpetual virginity she became a martyr for Christ. The emphasis on

[120] *HE* 4.19; *HE* 4.20.
[121] Bede, *Martyrologium*; the only other Anglo-Saxons are the two Hewalds, whose martyrdom Bede records in *HE* 5.10.
[122] Bede, *Chronica Maiora,* Faith Wallis (trans. and intro.), *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, pp. 157-237.

Æthelthryth's virginity was her extreme abstinence in the face of overwhelming odds, through twelve years of married life and two husbands. In his *VP*, Gregory explained that, though the time of persecution was over, those virtuous individuals who 'become their own persecutors, in order to be thought worthy of God…have charged themselves with various crosses of abstinence'.[123] Christians could become martyrs by imitating Christ's sacrifice through abstinence, asceticism and striving in virtues. Following Constantine's conversion, the increased numbers of converts to the Christian Church meant that the numbers of martyrs dramatically decreased, and it has been argued that the emphasis on ascetic behaviour from the fourth century onwards may have been in response to these developments; there were no longer martyrs who died for their faith, and many of the new converts may have been only nominally Christian, thus asceticism became an avenue to manifest one's devotion to the faith.[124]

Bede and Gregory believed that the imitation of Christ's variety of virtues was the ideal way of life for both religious men and women. Gregory envisaged all Christians as living one common life in Christ, and in the preface to his *Life of the Fathers*, a hagiographical work that included a female saint, Monegund, Gregory explained that he used the singular 'Life' rather than plural because 'there is a diversity of merits and virtues among them, but the one life of the body sustains them all in this world.'[125] According to Bede, Christ's 'one and only church is constituted out of many faithful individuals who blossom with diverse virtues.'[126] Bede believed that 'believers, quite removed from each other though they may be in space, time, rank, status, sex and age, are nevertheless linked together by one and the same faith and love.'[127] This common life in Christ transcended physical, spatial and temporal boundaries; both authors place their local saints within a universal context, linked together through faith and love in Christ. The first Christian community described in the Acts of the Apostles followed a complete common life in Christ, so that 'the multitude of believers were of one heart and

[123] *VP* Preface, in Edward James (trans.), *Gregory of Tours*, p. 11.
[124] Elizabeth A. Clark and Herbert Richardson (eds. and trans.), *Women and Religion,* pp. 38-39.
[125] *VP* Preface, in Edward James (trans.), *Gregory of Tours*, p. 2.
[126] Bede, *In Cantica Canticorum*, 2.12, in Arthur G. Holder (trans.), *The Venerable Bede: On the Song of Songs and Selected Writings* (New Jersey, 2011), p. 96.
[127] Bede, *De Templo,* 18.9, in Seán Connolly (trans.) and Jennifer O' Reilly (intro.), *Bede: On the Temple*, p. 78; cf. Acts. 4:32.

one soul', and we will see that for Bede, 'the primitive Church glorified with garlands of diverse virtues', provided a perfect example for monastic life.[128] Bede's examples of Anglo-Saxon monastic women illustrate this diversity in virtues within the common life in Christ.

Renunciation became one of the prime ascetic practices in monasticism and the necessity of abstinence was outlined in monastic rules. All those who entered the monastic life were required to renounce the secular world including their familial ties to live as servants of God. Bede related that Æthelthryth gave up her secular crown and left her royal husband to serve Christ, 'the only true King'.[129] When describing how Monegund entered the religious life, Gregory said that 'despising the vanities of the world and having nothing more to do with her husband, she devoted herself entirely to God'.[130] Unlike Æthelthryth, we do not know if Hild was married before entering the religious life; Bede simply tells us that she lived nobly for thirty three years in the secular habit, before dedicating 'an equal number of years still more nobly' to the monastic life.[131] Hild was the daughter of king Edwin's nephew Hereric and was baptised at Edwin's court by Paulinus, but she was also related to king Eadwulf of the East Angles, son of Hild's sister Hereswith. Bede tells us that after taking up the religious life, Hild went to the kingdom of the East Angles and at that time Hereswith was living in the monastery of Chelles; Hild, being inspired by her sister's example, intended to cross to Gaul and enter Chelles, where she could 'live as a stranger for the Lord's sake'.[132] The term Bede uses, here translated as 'stranger', is *peregrina*, denoting 'pilgrim' or 'pilgrimage', and should be understood in this context not in the sense of visiting a particular holy place or shrine, but in the ascetic practice of becoming an exile in a foreign land for the sake of Christ.

The practice of 'self-exile' was particularly popular among Irish ascetics, but to Bede, the term incorporated a variety of meanings and he applied the term

[128] Bede, *De Tabernaculo*, 26:36, in Arthur G. Holder (trans. and intro.), *Bede: On the Tabernacle*, p. 82.
[129] *HE* 4.19.
[130] *VP* 19, 1, in Edward James (trans.), *Gregory of Tours*, p. 119.
[131] *HE* 4.23.
[132] Ibid; John M. Wallace-Hadrill has suggested that Chelles is unlikely to have been founded, or re-founded, by this date, and the monastery in Gaul may have actually been Jouarre, in *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, p. 232.

in different contexts, including for example, in reference to Augustine's mission of conversion to Britain.[133] In Hild's case, Bede's use of the term is linked directly to her desire to enter a monastery abroad, where her sister lived 'under the discipline of the Rule' and so, Hild's *peregrinatio* involved the desire for instruction in the monastic life. However, it also indicates her ascetic impulse to renounce her familial and royal ties, by leaving her Northumbrian homeland and living as an exile in a foreign land. In the *HA* Bede said that Benedict Biscop left his family and homeland for the sake of Christ, travelling to Rome but was later summoned back to Northumbria to fulfil his duty of spiritual leadership.[134] Bede may therefore have considered Hild to be the female equivalent to Benedict Biscop. It is possible that Bede meant a variety of these nuances, but his main point was to emphasise that Hild was a 'devoted servant of Christ' from the outset in his account of her life.[135]

Renouncing the world was also undertaken as an act of humility, and Gregory related in his account of Monegund that she left her homeland of Chartres to go to Tours, in order to avoid the trap of vainglory caused by her miracle-working.[136] Virtuous individuals who worked miracles could be more susceptible to the sin of pride, when they delight in their gifts rather than realising these were ultimately gifts from God. Bede related that when the miracles of Augustine of Canterbury became known, Pope Gregory sent a letter, which Bede included in the *HE*, to warn Augustine to suppress vainglory in his heart and the sin of pride.[137] Vainglory was a dangerous sin that could be prevented by practicing the virtue of humility, and in the *HE*, Bede assigns the virtue of humility to a number of religious men and women such as Aidan, Chad, Torhtgyth and Æthelhtryth.[138] Bede and Gregory both emphasise the virtue of humility in their accounts of

[133] Thomas M. Charles-Edwards has argued that for Bede the term *peregrinatio* implies 'a journey overseas', in 'The Social Background to the Irish Peregrinatio', *Celtica* 11 (1976), pp. 43-59, at p. 44; Diane Webb has suggested that for Bede the term could refer to 'self-exile for the love of God, which did not necessarily involve a known or defined destination', and ultimately, 'Bede perceived that it could bear different nuances', in *Pilgrimage in Medieval England* (London, 2000), p. 4; Calvin B. Kendall argues that the theme of exile structures Bede's entire commentary on Genesis, in *Bede: On Genesis,* pp. 14-18.
[134] *HA* 1 and 3.
[135] *HE* 4.23.
[136] *VP* 19, 2.
[137] *HE* 1.31.
[138] *HE* 3.17; *HE* 3.28; *HE* 4.9; *HE* 4.19.

religious women. Bede tells us that when Æthelthryth died after seven years as abbess of Ely, she requested to be buried in a wooden coffin among her fellow nuns.[139] Bede praised Æthelthryth's ascetic practices at Ely; she never wore linen but only woollen garments, seldom took hot baths, rarely ate more than once a day, and engaged in constant prayer from morning until dawn.[140] Gregory similarly described how Monegund only ate bread that she made herself from barley flour and ashes mixed with water, and slept only on twigs rather than a soft bed.[141] In the *DLH*, Gregory similarly stated that Radegund engaged in fasts and never-ending prayers, though Radegund's ascetic practices are described far more extensively in Fortunatus's and Baudonivia's *vitae* of the saint.[142] Fortunatus's descriptions of Radegund's ascetic acts are far more severe than Æthelthryth's; for example, he says that Radegund wore heavy chains and burned her flesh with a heated cross, in a form of self-mortification and suffering that portrays her as a martyr. Gregory did not describe any of these ascetic acts in his descriptions of Radegund in the *DLH*, and he appears not to have considered Radegund as a martyr; Gregory did however describe Radegund as a confessor in his *GC*, and both he and Fortunatus linked the virtues of renunciation, humility and suffering in their accounts of Radegund's asceticism.

Bede also linked these virtues together in his description of Æthelthryth's tumour, where he recorded a direct speech from Æthelthryth; she stated that she was glad to bear the affliction, for when she was a young girl she used to wear 'an unnecessary weight of necklaces', and she believed that the tumour was given by God so that she may 'be absolved from the guilt of my needless vanity. So, instead of gold and pearls, a fiery red tumour now stands out upon my neck.'[143] Bede rarely used direct speech in the *HE*, and therefore Æthelthryth's speech was important to him and needs to be carefully considered. Æthelthryth's welcoming of her suffering is understood as atonement for her past sin of wearing necklaces,

[139] *HE* 4.19.
[140] Ibid.
[141] *VP* 19, 1-2.
[142] *DLH* 9.39; for discussion of the differences in Fortunatus's and Baudonivia's versions of Radegund's life, see Brian Brennan, 'Saint Radegund and the Early Development of her Cult at Poitiers', *Journal of Religious History*, 13 (1985), pp. 340-354; Ruth Wehlau, 'Literal and Symbolic: the Language of Asceticism in Two Lives of St Radegund', *Florilegium*, 19 (2002), pp. 75-89.
[143] *HE* 4.19.

even though her previous transgression was not particularly sinful. As an Anglo-Saxon royal woman, Æthelthryth would have been adorned with jewellery; this was a culture that delighted in display and conspicuous consumption, and even the horse which king Oswine of Northumbria gave to Aidan was adorned with jewels.[144] Bede's account highlights the fact that Æthelthryth renounced her secular life so completely that she welcomed suffering as penance for her youthful vanity in wearing necklaces, an affirmation that confirms Æthelthryth's humility. In Bede's commentary on Tobit and the Canticle of Habakkuk, which he addressed to an unnamed nun, he explained how one is raised up by God when they humble themselves in temporal life; 'when, after being temporally humbled, they climb down from their haughty eminence of pride, they are glorified eternally and raised up by him who says: *And everyone who humbles himself will be exalted*. (Luke 14.11)'[145]. Æthelthryth's suffering absolved her of her sin of vanity, but her patience in bearing the pain was also an important feature in hagiographical lives, denoting the perfection of a saint's body through patience in suffering.

Patience in suffering was considered as a virtue in imitation of Christ, and in Bede's commentary on Tobit and on the Canticle of Habakkuk, he depicts Tobit as a model of patience in suffering; from the example of Christ's suffering at the crucifixion, Tobit was reminded 'to bear patiently the pressure of his woes'.[146] Another biblical example of faithful patience through adversity, that of Job, was cited by Gregory in his account of Monegund; Gregory said that when Monegund's children died she was inconsolable until she was reminded by the example of Job to bear her suffering and console herself with God.[147] In Bede's portrayal, patience in suffering is frequently linked to the perfection of the Christian soul. In the *HE*, Hild and the monk Herbert were subjected to bodily illnesses, as were Benedict Biscop and Sigfrith in the *HA*, and in all these examples, suffering was described as a trial of patience and dedication to perfecting the soul. [148] According to Bede, Hild was given the trial of bodily

[144] *HE* 3.14.
[145] Bede, *In Canticum Abacuc Prophetae*, 16:3.6, in Seán Connolly (trans.) and Diarmuid Scully (intro.), *Bede, On Tobit and On the Canticle of Habakkuk*, p. 76.
[146] Ibid, 4:3.2.
[147] *VP* 19.1; Job 1:21.
[148] *HE* 4.23 and 4.29; *HA* 11.

suffering so that she could perfect her soul through patient suffering; when describing Hild's illness, Bede related how 'it pleased the blessed Author of our salvation to subject her holy soul to the trial of a long bodily sickness so that, like the apostle, her strength might be made perfect in weakness.'[149] Bede here referred to Paul's words to the Corinthians, where the apostle stated that the soul could be made perfect through suffering.[150] Bede cited the same Pauline passage in the *VC* to describe Cuthbert's suffering. [151] Christ was the ultimate model of patience in suffering and strength in bodily weakness, exemplified by his sacrifice on the Cross, and Bede used descriptions of patience in suffering to indicate an individual's personal sanctity and devotion to the faith. Bede related that the monk Herbert was put through the punishment and pain of a long illness before death, so that, through his patience in suffering, his merits would be increased to the level of those of blessed Cuthbert.[152] In the *HA*, Bede said that Benedict Biscop and Sigfrith were both subjected to long bodily illnesses, so that they could 'prove their great zeal for the faith by means of a further virtue, that of patience in suffering'.[153] Both Bede and Gregory provide portrayals of the personal sanctity of religious women through describing their renunciation, humility and patience in suffering.

4.3: Monastic Leadership and Community: Female Leaders and Teachers

(i) Female Leadership and Episcopal Support

Bede and Gregory both described and praised female monastic leadership in their histories. Though women were not permitted to administer all the sacraments, they were capable of leading communities and were supported by episcopal figures in their task. Bishops ordained women to become religious leaders and instructed them in the teaching of the monastic way of life. Bede related that Hild was recalled to Northumbria and ordained by bishop Aidan to rule as abbess at the monastery of Hartlepool, where 'Bishop Aidan and other devout men who knew her visited her frequently, instructed her assiduously, and loved her heartily for her

[149] *HE* 4.23.
[150] 2 Cor. 12:9.
[151] *VC* 8.
[152] *HE* 4.29.
[153] *HA* 11.

innate wisdom and her devotion to the service of God.'[154] Bede tells us that Hild then founded the monastery of Whitby and later a smaller foundation at Hackness.[155] Hild therefore not only ruled at Whitby but also presided over the monasteries of Hartlepool and Hackness, revealing that some female leaders had authority over not only their primary institution but also smaller dependent monasteries.[156] In the *HE*, Hild plays an important role in the development of the Church in Northumbria; it is at her monastery that the synod concerning the dating of Easter took place, where Hild hosted the leading royal and ecclesiastical figures of her time. Although Hild was on the side of the Irish and their incorrect dating of Easter at the synod, Bede praises her as 'a woman devoted to God'.[157] At her monastery Hild was also a leader of religious men, and Bede stated that Whitby produced five bishops for the Anglo-Saxon Church, Bossa, Ætla, Oftfor, John and Wilfrid II, adding the detail that Oftfor had studied the Scriptures 'in both of Hild's monasteries'.[158] In fact, Bede relates that another man trained at Hild's monastery, Tatfrith, would have brought the number of bishops trained at Whitby up to six, but he died before he could take up his appointment in the kingdom of the Hwicce. Bede links this impressive list of bishops directly to Hild's industry and Whitby has often been referred to in scholarship as a 'nursery of bishops'.[159] According to Bede's letter to Ecgbert, the education of bishops was of paramount importance for achieving contemporary reform, and he portrays Hild and her monastery as an ideal example of spiritual education for his audience to imitate.

It has been argued, however, that Bede attempts to downplay Hild's role particularly in the account of Caedmon, the first poet to produce religious verse in the vernacular English language.[160] Bede presents the account as a miracle; Caedmon was a cowherd at Whitby who had no ability to compose verse, but God

[154] *HE* 4.23.
[155] Ibid.
[156] Alan Thacker, 'Monks, Priests and Pastoral Care in Early Anglo-Saxon England', in John Blair and Richard Sharpe (eds.), *Pastoral Care before the Parish* (Leicester, 1992), pp. 137-170, at pp. 143-145.
[157] *HE* 3.25.
[158] Ibid.
[159] Frank M. Stenton coined the term 'nursery of bishops', in 'The Historical Bearing of Place-Name Studies: The Place of Women in Anglo-Saxon Society', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 25 (1943), pp. 1-13, at p.1.
[160] Clare A. Lees and Gillian R. Overing, 'Birthing Bishops'; Caedmon is known in scholarship as the first English poet, though this is not explicitly asserted by Bede.

granted him the gift of song while he slept in a miraculous dream vision, and from then on, Caedmon could turn any passage from Scripture into song.[161] Bede tells us that it was Hild who recognised this divine gift in Caedmon, and 'instructed him to renounce his secular habit and to take monastic vows.'[162] Even though Bede specifically links Hild's involvement in the account of Caedmon, Lees and Overing have argued that he attempts to downplay her role and suggest that this is why he does not use Hild's name in the account of Caedmon, but only refers to her as 'the abbess'.[163] However, Bede had clearly already stated that Hild was the abbess of Whitby, and it is quite common to omit a personal name when describing an instance of divine intervention; in Gregory's account mentioned above of the nun who had been clothed in a queenly robe by the abbess Agnes in a vision, Agnes's name was also omitted.[164] Like Bede's account of Caedmon, Gregory's account of this vision was a miracle story, suggesting that both authors may have omitted names in certain stories which were focused not on individuals, but on the miracle itself, and the message to be gained from it. In Gregory's account of the unnamed nun at Poitiers, the vision illustrated the message of celestial marriage through renunciation, and prompted the nun to shut herself up in a cell and become a recluse. In Bede's account of Caedmon, the divine gift illustrated the didactic power that the lessons of sacred history and doctrine could provide for hearers, to turn them 'away from delight in sin and arouse in them the love and practice of good works', and prompted Caedmon himself to submit humbly to the discipline of the Rule.[165] Caedmon composed poetry on a number of different Christian topics including 'the terrors of future judgement, the horrors of the pains of hell and the joys of the heavenly kingdom'.[166] In both accounts, it is the power of God and the lessons of Christian doctrine that drive the narrative, however, both also give significant prominence to the roles of women as spiritual leaders and facilitators; Hild instructed Caedmon in the monastic discipline, and, not only did Agnes appear in the nun's vision, but she also provided the nun with

[161] *HE* 4.24.
[162] *HE* 4.24.
[163] Clare A. Lees and Gillian R. Overing, 'Birthing Bishops', p. 49.
[164] *DLH* 6.29.
[165] *HE* 4.24.
[166] Ibid.

the cell to which she retreated, with 'the blessed Radegund leading her by the hand.'[167]

The spiritual leadership of Æthelthryth, Hild and Radegund is expressed by Bede and Gregory as a parental relationship. The metaphor of a spiritual family was often used in monastic contexts and was also used in describing abbots; Bede described Benedict Biscop as a father to the monks at Wearmouth-Jarrow, who 'declined to father mortal children according to the flesh, predestined as he was by Christ to bring up for him with spiritual teaching sons who live forever in the heavenly life.'[168] The childless Æthelthryth became 'the virgin mother of many virgins dedicated to God' as abbess of Ely.[169] Hild, Monegund and Radegund are also described as mothers of their communities, and their close ties with the members of their communities is particularly emphasised in the accounts of their deaths. In his life of Monegund, Gregory said that when she was nearing death, her nuns 'wept bitterly' and asked to whom their mother would entrust her daughters after her death.[170] In the *GC*, Gregory described the tears and lamentations of the two hundred nuns present at Radegund's funeral, while the clerics who were there to chant the psalms 'could scarcely recite the antiphon because of their sobbing and weeping.'[171] Bede tells us that when the virgin Begu received a vision of Hild's death, she announced the death of the abbess with 'many tears and lamentations'.[172] Begu was present at a monastery thirteen miles away but both she and an unnamed virgin of Whitby saw Hild's soul ascend to heaven in the company of angels. Bede had earlier related that the nun Torhtgyth received a vision of her 'mother', abbess Æthelburh, being raised up to heaven by golden cords days before she died.[173] These visions testify to the sanctity of these abbesses, but they also provided comfort to their communities in revealing their admittance into the heavenly kingdom. Gregory stated this in his description of Radegund's funeral, where he related that the nuns were consoled by the fact that

[167] *DLH* 6.29.
[168] *HA* 1, in Christopher Grocock and Ian Wood (eds. and trans.), *The Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow*, p. 25.
[169] *HE* 4.19.
[170] *VP* 19.4, in Edward James (trans.), *Gregory of Tours*, p. 123.
[171] *GC* 104, in Raymond Van Dam (trans.), *Gregory of Tours: Glory of the Confessors*, *TTH* 5 (Liverpool, 2nd edn. 2004), p. 107.
[172] *HE* 4.23.
[173] *HE* 4.9.

they knew their mother had 'been admitted to the chorus of holy virgins and to the Paradise of God.'[174] Gregory says that he himself was so overwhelmed with grief that he would not have stopped weeping if he did not realise that Radegund 'had been taken from the world and placed in heaven.'[175]

According to Bede and Gregory, these women were predestined to become religious leaders and mothers of spiritual children. Bede's account of Hild portrays her as being predestined by God to fulfil the task of spiritual leadership, and while he may not explicitly state it as in his account of Benedict Biscop, Bede uses allusions and visions in his account of Hild to make the point clear to his readers. Indeed, Bede introduces Hild with numerical symbolism by recording that her life was divided equally into two spans of thirty-three years, the same length of time that Jesus lived on earth.[176] Bede did not mention this correlation explicitly, but by highlighting the sacred number thirty-three, he was linking Hild directly with Jesus, placing his account of her life in a providential framework from the beginning. Bede is most explicit about Hild's predestined role in his description of a prophetic dream that Hild's mother Breguswith had when she was a child. In the dream, Breguswith found a shining precious necklace under her garment which 'seemed to spread such a blaze of light that it filled all Britain with its gracious splendour.'[177] Bede explained that this dream 'was truly fulfilled in her daughter Hild' whose holy life was not only an example to all those around her but also to many 'who lived far away and who heard the happy story of her industry and virtue.'[178] The prophetic dream of a saint's mother was a feature of medieval hagiography and was used in the life of Leoba, a member of Boniface's circle, to prefigure her missionary activity on the Continent.[179] Lees and Overing have argued that Bede's portrayal of Breguswith's dream was a hagiographical convention that served to ensure Hild's sanctity for her community but 'at the cost of obscuring the real conditions of her life'.[180] However, while this prophetic

[174] *GC* 104, in Raymond Van Damn (trans.), *Gregory of Tours*, p. 106.
[175] Ibid, p. 108.
[176] *HE* 4.23; see Calvin B. Kendall, 'Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastic*a'.
[177] *HE* 4.23.
[178] *HE* 4.23.
[179] See Margaret Cotter-Lynch, 'Rereading Leoba, or Hagiography as Compromise'**,** *Medieval Feminist Forum*, 46, 1 (2010), pp. 14-37, pp. 21-23.
[180] Clare A. Lees and Gillian R. Overing, *Double Agents*, p. 23.

dream may follow hagiographical tradition, Bede uses it to emphasise that God had granted Hild power even outside of her monastery; her example spread throughout Britain to both men and women who heard of her virtue and industry, converting them to a better way of life.

In the *DLH*, Gregory similarly portrays Radegund's leadership in a providential tone, particularly in his record of the bishops' letter to Radegund. The letter begins by stating that God sends forth leaders to foster the faith from generation to generation, and had sent St Martin from a foreign nation to Gaul for this purpose; they then cast Radegund as a new St Martin, relating that she follows in his footsteps, arriving from a foreign land to Gaul and fostering the faith in her generation.[181] Like Bede's allusion to Hild's future leadership in the shining necklace of her mother's prophetic dream, the bishops say to Radegund that 'by the hot yearning of your heart the buds of faith burst once more into flower…the bright gleam of his doctrines shines forth again from you.'[182] Gregory described Martin's missionary work in Gaul with similar language, stating that 'Gaul became bright with new rays coming from its lamps, for this is the moment when Saint Martin began to preach in this country.'[183] The bishops in their letter to Radegund described Martin as a successor to the apostles, while Gregory portrays Martin as a successor to Christ.[184] In the *DLH*, Gregory linked Helena's discovery of the Cross to the birth of St Martin, and he later related that Radegund procured relics of the Cross from Jerusalem.[185] In the *GM*, Gregory claims that Radegund was 'comparable to Helena in both merit and faith'.[186] Gregory links Radegund to this chain of religious authority and leadership, using both male and female exemplars like Martin and Helena.

Radegund's procurement of the relics of the Cross of Christ gained significant honour and prestige for her foundation, but it also appears to have damaged her relationship with Maroveus, the bishop of Poitiers. Gregory tells us

[181] *DLH* 9.39.
[182] Ibid.
[183] *DLH* 1.39.
[184] Martin Heinzelmann, *Gregory of Tours*, pp. 169-170.
[185] *DLH* 1.36; *DLH* 9.40.
[186] *GM* 5, Raymond Van Dam (trans.), *Gregory of Tours: Glory of the Martyrs*, *TTH* 4 (Liverpool, 2nd edn. 2004), p. 22.

that when the relics of the Cross arrived, Maroveus refused to install the relics in her monastery.[187] Radegund had to turn to king Sigibert for help and he sent Eufronius, the bishop of Tours and Gregory's predecessor, to install the relics in Radegund's monastery. Van Dam argued that Maroveus felt threatened by Radegund's growing influence in the city, and the powerful relics of the Cross in particular may have been viewed by Maroveus as competition against the cult of Hilary, the major source of spiritual power for the bishop of Poitiers.[188] However, Rosenwein argued that a major factor in the dispute was the issue of locating the relics within the cloisters of a monastery that followed a rule which stipulated enclosure, thus making the relics 'inaccessible' to the wider Christian community.[189] Rosenwein's evaluation suggests that Maroveus was therefore acting with pastoral concern, but Gregory and Baudonivia both relate that Maroveus repeatedly neglected his episcopal duties in relation to supporting Radegund and her foundation. Gregory said that Radegund had to turn to Arles, adopt the Rule of Caesarius, and put themselves under the protection of the king, because they received no support from 'the man who should have been their pastor.'[190] Gregory's account is problematic for several reasons; it is likely that Radegund adopted the Rule of Caesarius before her dispute with Maroveus, Gregory's predecessor had stepped in to install the relics, and elsewhere in the *DLH* Gregory had praised Maroveus.[191] However, it is clear that Gregory here wanted to portray a bishop's neglect of his pastoral duty to the female communities under his episcopal care.

Considering that Hild and Radegund were both royal women with powerful connections and both are described as prominent spiritual leaders at important monastic foundations, it is striking to note the differences in Bede's and Gregory's accounts of them. While Radegund was forced to call on the aid of a king because

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[187] *DLH* 9.40.
[188] Raymond Van Dam, *Saints and their Miracles*, p. 34.
[189] Barbara Rosenwein, *Negotiating Space: Power, Restraint, and Privileges of Immunity in Early Medieval Europe* (Ithaca, 1999), p. 56; idem, 'Inaccessible Cloisters: Gregory of Tours and Episcopal Exemption', in Kathleen Mitchell and Ian Wood, *The World of Gregory of Tours*, pp. 181-198.
[190] *DLH* 9.40.
[191] *DLH* 7.24; *DLH* 9.30; Erin Dailey has thoroughly examined Gregory's construction of events; see Erin Dailey, *Gregory of Tours*, pp. 211-215; idem, 'Misremembering Radegund's Foundation of Sainte-Croix', in Hartwin Brandt, Benjamin Pohl, William M. Sprague and Lina K. Hörl (eds.), *Erfahren, Erzählen, Erinnern: Narrative Konstrucktionen von Gedächtnis und Generation in Antike und Mittelalter* (Bamburg, 2012), pp. 117-140.

her bishop neglected to support her, Hild was constantly supported, and Bede says 'loved heartily', by her bishop Aidan.[192] Elsewhere, Bede reiterates this relationship between bishops and holy women; Ælfflæd was helped by Trumwine at Whitby and she was also instructed by Cuthbert, for whom Bede says she held 'a great affection'.[193] Wilfrid supported Æthelthryth and consecrated her with the veil; indeed Bede said that there 'was none whom she loved more than Wilfrid himself.'[194]

Radegund's relationship with Maroveus is the direct opposite of Bede's examples, though she did however receive support from Eufronius and from the numerous bishops that she communicated with, as can be seen from the bishops' letter that Gregory includes in the *DLH*. Both monasteries held prominent positions within their wider ecclesiastical communities, but while Gregory alludes to some of the animosity caused by Radegund's monastery, Bede presents a picture of a harmonious existence between Hild's monastery and the neighbouring royal and ecclesiastical figures of importance. Bede emphasises this peace to edify contemporary readers, bishops and abbess, kings and queens. While Gregory may have been constrained by the fact that the events he was describing were contemporary, and he was himself involved in the scandal that broke out in Poitiers, Bede had greater freedom by choosing to present deceased subjects in a positive light.

Although the descriptions of Hild's and Radegund's relationships with their respective bishops differ, both authors describe the relationship between Radegund and Hild with their respective communities in positive terms. Both leaders attempted to ensure their communities would thrive after their deaths; in the *DLH*, Radegund's letter of foundation took special care to safeguard against threats from external forces and she also urged that her community should not be disturbed by any members who would break the Rule or revolt against their abbess.[195] Bede tells us that at Hild's death she urged her community 'to preserve the gospel peace among themselves and towards all others', an exhortation that Bede also gives in

[192] *HE* 4.23.
[193] *HE* 4.26; *VC* 23 and 24.
[194] *HE* 4.19.
[195] *DLH* 9.42.

his description of Cuthbert's final commands to his brethren in his life of the saint.[196] These two prudent female religious leaders were concerned about the harmonious continuation of their communities after their death. As we will see in the following chapter, Radeund's concerns were not unfounded; two years after her death, her community in Poitiers revolted against their new abbess, Leubovera. According to Bede, Whitby was still thriving after Hild's death, but immediately after his account of Caedmon Beede describes the destruction of the monastery of Coldingham, which burned down as divine punishment for the sins of the inhabitants and 'especially of those who were supposed to be its leaders.'[197]

(ii) Monastic Rules, Teaching, and Instruction

In Gregory's account of Radegund, he clarifies that she chose to adopt the Rule of Caesarius for her community at Poitiers.[198] Caesarius, bishop of Arles from 502 to 542, composed a monastic rule specifically for nuns for his sister Caesaria.[199] The Rule is considered to be the first monastic rule written specifically for nuns, though Caesarius drew on the Rule of Augustine, as well as the monastic writings of Pachomius, Cassian and the traditions of Lerins, the monastery in which Caesarius himself had lived prior to Arles.[200] The Rule of Caesarius forbade nuns from leaving and men from entering the confines of the monastery.[201] The Rule of St Benedict, composed in the mid-sixth century, was influential in Anglo-Saxon England and in Bede's own monastery, though we do not know the full extent to which Wearmouth-Jarrow followed Benedict's Rule.[202] Monasticism in early medieval England and France was diverse and rather than adopting one rule, monasteries appear to have followed a mixed rule of life, chosen from a variety of written rules.[203] The Frankish double monasteries such as Jouarre and Chelles followed elements of Benedictine and Columbanian monasticism, and the Anglo-

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[196] *HE* 4.23; *VC* 35.
[197] *HE* 4.25.
[198] *DLH* 9.42.
[199] On Caesarius, see William E. Klingshirn, *Caesarius of Arles: The Making of a Christian Community in Late Antique Gaul* (Cambridge, 1993).
[200] See Maria C. Mc Carthy (trans. and intro.), *The Rule for Nuns*, pp. 88-130.
[201] Caesarius, *Regula Virginum*, 39.
[202] See Patrick Wormald, 'Bede and Benedict Biscop', in Gerald Bonner (ed.), *Famulus Christi*, pp. 141-169; Scott De Gregorio, 'Bede and Benedict of Nursia', in Stephen D. Baxter, Catherine E. Karkov, Janet L. Nelson and David Pelteret (eds.), *Early Medieval Studies*, pp. 149-162.
[203] Henry Mayr-Harting, *The Venerable Bede, the Rule of St Benedict, and Social Class* (Jarrow, 1976), p. 6.

Saxon double monasteries appear to have followed the same pattern.[204] Although we do not know if a specific Rule followed at Whitby, Bede was much concerned with highlighting Hild's institution of monastic discipline; Bede stated that Hild spent a number of years at Hartlepool 'wholly occupied in establishing a Rule of life there', before going on to Whitby where she instituted 'the same Rule of life as in the other monastery'.[205] Bede here emphasised order and discipline, the complete opposite of the conduct at Coldingham.

Bede mentions the institution of monastic Rules in female monasteries elsewhere in the history; he related that Eorcenwald, bishop of London, had established an excellent form of monastic Rule in the monastery of Barking which he had founded for his sister Æthelburh.[206] Bede tells us that Æthelburh cared for all those under her care and that one of the sisters at Barking, Torthgyth, helped the abbess in ensuring that the discipline of the Rule was maintained.[207] However, Bede details the Rule of life at Whitby in greater detail, telling the reader that Hild taught her community the virtues of justice, devotion and chastity, but in particular, to observe peace and charity. Bede praised the way of life of the community, which followed that of the primitive church; alluding to Acts two and four, Bede said that at Whitby no one was rich and no one was poor because they shared all things in common and none had private property.[208] Earlier in the *HE* Bede said that Augustine and the Roman missionaries imitated the apostolic church, under the guidance of Pope Gregory, who stipulated that the missionaries ought to follow this monastic way of life.[209] Bede again cites Pope Gregory's directive when he praises the monastic discipline observed by Cuthbert and his community at Lindisfarne.[210] Bede believed the apostolic church was the ideal model for monastic life; therefore, by citing the Acts of the Apostles when describing Whitby, Bede presents Hild and her community as an ideal monastery. In Radegund's letter that Gregory records in the *DLH*, she stated that she had

[204] Clifford H. Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism: Forms of Religious Life in Western Europe in the Middle Age*s (London, 3rd edn. 2001), p. 56.
[205] *HE* 4.23.
[206] *HE* 4.6.
[207] *HE* 4.6; *HE* 4.9.
[208] *HE* 4.23; cf. Acts. 2: 44-45; Acts 4:32-34.
[209] *HE* 1.26; *HE* 1.27.
[210] *HE* 4.27; cf. *VC* 16.

adopted the Rule of Caesarius for her monastery, but she also makes it clear that the community 'followed the example of the Apostles' by giving up all personal possessions and sharing everything in common.[211] Though we do not know whether or not Hild's monastery followed a single Rule like Radegund's at Poitiers, both monasteries specifically draw on the communal life of the primitive Church as a model for their communities.

As well as ensuring that their communities followed monastic Rules, female religious leaders acted as teachers; Bede related that at Whitby Hild 'compelled those under her direction to devote so much time to the study of the holy Scriptures and so much time to the performance of good works, that there might be no difficulty in finding many there who were fitted for the holy orders, that is, for the service of the altar.'[212] Hild's monastery produced five bishops for the Anglo-Saxon Church as well as the first Anglo-Saxon religious poet, Caedmon. Bede said that Caedmon was encouraged by the abbess to join the community and ordered that he should be 'instructed in the whole course of sacred history.'[213] Hild was not the only abbess of Whitby praised by Bede for her teaching; the abbesses Eanflæd and her daughter Ælfflæd were also prominent figures in Bede's account of the monastery. Ælfflæd in particular is praised by Bede as being a *magistra* and *doctrix*, a teacher of the faith and the monastic Rule of life.[214]

Whitby stands out as one of the prime centres of learning, not only for religious men but also for religious women; Whitby produced the earliest known *Life of Gregory the Great*, and while its authorship is anonymous, it has been suggested that one of the nuns at the monastery composed the work.[215] Radegund's foundation at Poitiers provided sufficient learning that one of the nuns, Baudonivia, produced a written life of the founding saint. Radegund, either herself or in collaboration with Fortunatus, produced a verse epistle on the Frankish wars against her Thuringian homeland, the *De Excidio Thoringiae*, as

[211] *DLH* 9.42.
[212] *HE* 4.23.
[213] *HE* 4.24.
[214] *HE* 3.24; *HE* 4.26.
[215] See Alan Thacker, 'Memorializing Gregory the Great', p. 61; Andrew Breeze, 'Did a Woman write the Whitby Life of St Gregory?', *Northern History*, 49 (2012), pp. 345-350.

well as another verse epistle on her cousin's death, the *Ad Artachin*.[216] Fortunatus praised Radegund's learning and skill for poetry, and we know from the letters that Gregory records in his portrayal of Radegund that she communicated via letters with leading episcopal figures.[217] While there is a paucity of female-authored texts from the early medieval period, there are enough examples, especially in the epistolary genre, which reveal that communities of women were well educated and studied the Scriptures. Few female-authored letters survive in comparison to those written by men, but there are dedications in male-authored texts that clearly indicate mutual written communication between leading religious women and men. Aldhelm dedicated his prose on virginity to the nuns at Barking in response to a request from the abbess Hildelith and several of the nuns, and Bede dedicated an exegetical work on the Canticle of Habbakuk to an unnamed 'sister in Christ', also in response to her request.[218] Bede does not provide the name of this woman or her monastery, but it has been suggested that it was either an abbess of Whitby or Barking.[219] As Foot has noted, these texts, particularly the complex intellectual prose of Aldhelm's, testifies to the high capacity for learning and status of education of the Anglo-Saxon nuns.[220]

Bede and Gregory both describe how religious women instructed their communities on the monastic way of life, but Bede far more than Gregory highlights how abbesses provided counsel and advice to the faithful outside of their monasteries. Bede said that Hild's advice was sought by both royal and common people because of her innate wisdom and prudence, terms which Bede also applied to men such as bishop Aidan.[221] In Gregory's portrayal of Radegund we hear of how she interacted with leading royal and episcopal figures on matters relating to her own foundation, but there are no descriptions of her counsel being sought for matters outside of her monastery. Gregory surely had more first-hand

[216] See Jo Ann Mc Namara, John E. Halborg and Gordon E. Whatley (eds. and trans.), *Sainted Women*, p. 61.
[217] Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmina*, 8:1; *DLH* 9.42; *DLH* 9.49.
[218] Bede, *In Canticum Abacuc Prophetae*, preface; see Benedicta Ward S. L. G., ''To My Dearest Sister': Bede and the Educated Woman', in Lesley Smith and Jane H. M. Taylor, *Women, the Book and the Godly, Selected Proceedings of the St Hilda's Conference, 1993,* vol. 1 (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 105-111.
[219] Sarah Foot, 'Women, Prayer and Preaching', p. 67.
[220] Ibid.
[221] *HE* 4.23.

knowledge of Radegund's activities than Bede's of Hild's, as Gregory knew Radegund personally and recorded her procurement and veneration of important relics in detail. The reason for this discrepancy may lie in the observation made by Rosenwein in her evaluation of the dispute between Radegund and Maroveous, where she highlighted the fact that the rule of Caesarius prevented outsiders from visiting the relics which were held inside the monastery.[222] Gregory's presentation of Radegund and her monastery refers to the Rule of Caesarius on several occasions; therefore, any discussion of individuals visiting Radegund from outside the monastery, as Bede described in his account of Hild, may have jarred with his portrayal of Radegund's assiduousness in following the Rule. Regardless of the reason why, it is evident that Bede gave more space to describing this role for religious women than Gregory, yet it is Bede who has attracted criticism for downplaying their role in providing counsel, especially in his portrayal of Ælfflæd.

Hollis argued that Bede downplayed Ælfflæd in the history due to his hostility to powerful religious women, citing as evidence the fact that Bede neglects to mention Ælfflæd's influence at the Council of Nidd, as recorded by Stephanus in his life of Wilfrid.[223] Ælfflæd was praised by Stephanus as 'the best counsellor of the whole province', but his interest in the abbess is primarily due to her support of bishop Wilfrid, the subject of his work.[224] Bede did not describe Ælfflæd's activities in political affairs and ecclesiastical councils as much as Stephanus, but since Bede praised Ælfflæd for her teaching in the *HE* and described her as wise and learned in his life of Cuthbert, it is evident that he was not hostile to powerful religious women.[225] Bede may have only mentioned Ælfflæd twice in his history, but in these places he awarded her with the accolades of *magistra* and *doctrix*. Moreover, as the comparison above has shown, Bede provides more detailed descriptions of good abbesses than Gregory, even though Gregory knew some of his subjects personally and presumably thus had more direct knowledge of female religious leadership. This may be explained by the fact

[222] Barbara Rosenwein, 'Inaccessible Cloisters', pp. 181-198.
[223] Stephanie Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women*, pp. 179-181; *VW*, 128-132.
[224] *VW*, 60, in Bertram Colgrave (ed. and trans.) *The Life of Bishop Wilfrid by Eddius Stephanus* (Oxford, repr. 1985), p. 129.
[225] *VC*, 23; *VC*, 24; *HE* 3.24; *HE* 4.26.

that Gregory's aim was to focus on bad examples while Bede prioritised good examples, but it should be realised that Bede highlighted the power of religious women as active leaders and teachers more than many of his predecessors.

Conclusion

Bede and Gregory both provided positive examples of religious women, but Bede in particular presents complete representations of female sanctity through his accounts of Æthelthryth and Hild. Bede's presentation of Æthelthryth does not supersede his presentation of Hild, and need not be considered as motivated by hagiography versus history, or as downplaying active roles for women in favour of praising female virginity. Bede's praise of virginity extended to men as well as women, and his focus on virginity in the case of Æthelthryth was part of her complete renunciation of all worldly concerns. For Bede, Æthelthryth was an ideal model of religious life, the image of the virginal bride of Christ. Gregory's presentation of Radegund draws more similarities with Bede's descriptions of Hild. Æthelthryth's personal piety has more in common with Venantius Fortunatus's description of Radegund and his writings on virginity, and both are heavily influenced by patristic understandings of virginity.[226] However, Bede's and Fortunatus's presentations of virginity are based on the concept of both physical and mental chastity, a concept which Gregory also promoted in his accounts of chaste couples and individuals. Although Æthelthryth's physical virginity is an important aspect of Bede's account, two major points come to the surface; she was an earthly bride and queen, who renounced her secular life to become a celestial bride and queen of heaven, a martyr of 'our age'.[227] Bede hoped to edify his audience to imitate the examples of Æthelthryth and Hild, and immediately following his accounts of their lives, he provided an antithetical example of unholy religious life in his account of the monastery at Coldingham. As we will see, after Radegund's death Gregory also provided an antithetical comparison in his presentation of the scandal caused by a revolt at Radeund's foundation in Poitiers.

[226] John M. Wallace-Hadrill argues that Bede 'sees virginity as Venantius saw it', in *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, p. xxix.
[227] *HE* 4.19; *HE* 4.20.

Chapter Five: Elite Women as Bad Examples in the Religious Life: Scandal, Sin and Penance

Introduction

This chapter examines Bede's and Gregory's examples of the bad behaviour of women in the religious life, using a case study for comparison; Bede's account of the double monastery of Coldingham and Gregory's of Radegund's monastery for women in Poitiers. As Foot has noted, Coldingham is the only account in the *HE* where Bede directly criticises a Northumbrian monastery.[1] It is also the only instance in the *HE* where Bede negatively describes religious women. Bede related that Coldingham was burned down as divine punishment for the community's sinful behaviour.[2] The fire occurred in c.683, nearly fifty years before Bede wrote, but he used the account of Coldingham to warn his audience and highlight his concerns about the state of the Northumbrian Church of his own day.[3] Bede explicitly describes sinful behaviour in contemporary monasteries in his letter to bishop Ecgbert and though he does not discuss these issues directly in the *HE*, Bede uses Coldingham as an example from the past to highlight monastic abuses in the present. The account is effectively Bede's own case study of bad monastic behaviour, and will be analysed in comparison with Gregory's account of the scandal that occurred at Radegund's monastery of Poitiers after her death, when a group of nuns rebelled against their abbess. The Poitiers revolt occurred in 589-590, only four years before Gregory's death in 594, and he was directly involved in the events because he gave shelter to the rebellious nuns at Tours.

Gregory's account of Poitiers is far more concerned with the details of scandalous behaviour than Bede's of Coldingham. Scholars have argued that elements of Gregory's account were exaggerated, in order to give the account an apocalyptic tone, or to justify his own involvement in the scandal.[4] However, none have interpreted Gregory's portrayal of Poitiers as negative towards women, while

[1] Sarah Foot, *Bede's Church*, p. 19.
[2] *HE* 4.25.
[3] The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle dates the fire to 679, but Bede stated it occurred after abbess Æbbe's death in 683; for the dating of the fire, see Bertram Colgrave (ed. and trans.), *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert*, p. 318.
[4] For apocalyptic tone, see Martin Heinzelmann, *Gregory of Tours*, p. 74; for justification of his involvement, see Erin Dailey, 'Misremembering Radegund's Foundation', pp. 117-40.

Bede's account of Coldingham has been viewed as highlighting the sins of the nuns in 'a thinly disguised polemic against the double monasteries'.[5] The present chapter argues that both Bede's and Gregory's negative descriptions of religious women were not motivated by an anti-woman bias but an agenda for contemporary reform. The case study comparison examines three prominent themes and issues arising from Bede's and Gregory's accounts. The first examines Coldingham and Poitiers as representations of contemporary crises, exploring how these accounts exemplify both authors' contemporary concerns about monastic involvement with secular society. It questions how Bede and Gregory used examples of scandal to highlight corruption and failed leadership in monastic life. The second analyses the themes of sin and rebellion, exploring how both authors described the perversion of monastic discipline and rebellion at Coldingham and Poitiers, and asking how and why both used antithesis in portraying bad behaviour. The final theme addresses moral complacency and the necessity of penance. Pope Gregory's influence on both authors will be important here, particularly in relation to Bede's and Gregory's understandings of repentance and eschatology. Bede's admiration for Gregory is well known and has been noted earlier, but Gregory of Tours also appears to have held him in high esteem, for like Bede, Gregory devotes a chapter to Pope Gregory at the beginning of one of his books, and it is one that throws light particularly on eschatological warnings and the need for repentance.[6] The moral eschatology of Bede, Gregory and Gregory the Great have never been compared side by side, but they draw striking parallels that help to explain the authors' agendas. This theme is placed last as it draws together the key themes and issues that concerned Bede and Gregory and, as I will argue, is the ultimate driving force of their narratives.

[5] Stephanie Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women*, p. 102-103; see also Marilyn Dunn, *The Emergence of Monasticism: from the Desert Fathers to the Early Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2000), p. 206.
[6] As Paul Meyvaert has noted, Bede places his account of Pope Gregory's life at the beginning of book two against the order of chronological sequence, something which Bede does not ordinarily do, in order to give the account the most prominence; see Paul Meyvaert, *Bede and Gregory the Great* (Jarrow, 1964), p. 109. Gregory's account of Pope Gregory appears as the first chapter of Book 10, the final book of Gregory's history, giving the account the same prominence of place as Bede.

5.1: Coldingham and Poitiers as Representations of Contemporary Crises: Scandal, Corruption and Failed Leadership in Monastic Life

(i) Scandal and Corruption in Monastic Life

Bede's account of Coldingham is recorded immediately after his accounts of abbess Hild and her double monastery at Whitby, where Bede highly praised the community's monastic discipline and holy way of life.[7] Whitby was contemporary with Coldingham, and Bede juxtaposes his accounts of both by placing them side by side; he described Hild's death in 680, and then began his account of Coldingham by stating that 'about this time' a fire occurred at the monastery.[8] The fire was apparently caused by carelessness, but Bede stated that Coldingham was burned down by God as punishment for the sins of the inhabitants.[9] Bede related that the Irish ascetic Adomnan, a monk at the monastery who engaged in strict penance for a previous sin and occupied his nights in constant prayer, received a vision in which a man appeared to him with a prophecy of Coldingham's destruction. The man said that he had went around the monastery and found all except for Adomnan himself sunk in slothful sleep, only awaking for the purposes of sin. They spent their time feasting, drinking and gossiping, and the nuns wove elaborate clothes to adorn themselves as if they were brides, imperilling their virginity and attracting strange men. Adomnan told the abbess Æbbe, whom Bede said was unaware of this behaviour. The community repented, but when the abbess died, they returned to their sins and committed even worse crimes, bringing the just judgement of God upon them.[10]

Gregory devoted substantial space to the scandal at Poitiers, describing the revolt from beginning to end over the course of nine chapters.[11] These chapters incorporate four documents relating to Poitiers, including a letter from the founder, Radegund.[12] Though Gregory described several bad examples of religious life in the *DLH*, the revolt at Poitiers held a special significance to him,

[7] *HE* 4.23-24.
[8] *HE* 4.24; *HE* 4.25.
[9] *HE* 4.25.
[10] Ibid.
[11] *DLH* 9.39-43, 10.15-17 and 10.20.
[12] *DLH* 9.39, 9.41-42 and 10.16.

as can be seen by the amount of space he gave to describing it; a quarter of book nine, and nearly the same amount of book ten, was devoted to the revolt.[13]

Gregory related that after Radegund's death, a great scandal occurred in her monastery when two royal nuns, Clotild, daughter of king Charibert, and Basina, daughter of king Chilperic, led a revolt against their abbess Leubovera. Clotild was enraged that she and Basina were being treated like daughters of servants instead of kings at the monastery, and Clotild intended to install herself as abbess.[14] Clotild and Basina sought support from their royal relations and led a group of about forty rebellious nuns from their monastery to Tours, claiming that their own bishop, Maroveus of Poitiers, was incompetent in handling the situation.[15] Gregory attempted to convince the nuns to return to Poitiers but they refused, and some accepted offers of marriage at Tours and became pregnant.[16] When they returned to Poitiers, Clotild hired a gang of thugs and seized the monastery, committing violent acts of homicide and sacrilege.[17] The Count of Poitiers put down the revolt and the nuns were brought to an episcopal trial, where they made accusations against their abbess; they said she gave poor provisions of food and clothing, and made elaborate clothing for her niece from altar cloths. Clotild then made more scandalous accusations, claiming that Leubovera kept a man dressed as a woman at the monastery and castrated men to surround herself with eunuchs as if she were at the Imperial court.[18] Leubovera was cleared of all charges, Clotild and Basina were excommunicated, and though Basina repented and was readmitted to the monastery, Clotild lived out the rest of her life in a royal villa.[19]

The accounts of Coldingham and Poitiers encapsulate Bede's and Gregory's concerns about contemporary crises by describing the implosion of temporal and spiritual life, where the boundaries between the two spheres of Church and secular society were blurred by those who continued to live secular lives in monasteries.

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[13] Martin Heinzelmann, *Gregory of Tours*, p. 73.
[14] *DLH* 9.39.
[15] *DLH* 9.40.
[16] *DLH* 9.40; *DLH* 10.16.
[17] *DLH* 10.15.
[18] *DLH* 10.15-17.
[19] *DLH* 10.20.

This was causing scandal and widespread corruption in Bede' and Gregory's contemporary Church and society. The revolt of the nuns at Poitiers was a contemporary event, and Gregory highlights the scandal it brought to the reputation of Radegund's foundation. Coldingham burned down fifty years before Bede wrote, but it was a well-known royal monastic house, which had been founded by king Oswiu, was run by his sister Æbbe, and was visited by two of Northumbria's most popular saints, Cuthbert and Æthelthryth. Bede related that Æthelthryth received the veil from bishop Wilfrid at Coldingham and spent a year there before founding her own monastery at Ely.[20] Bede indicates that Coldingham began as a reputable royal monastery, training the ex-queen and saint Æthelhtyrth. Because Æthelthryth left after only a year, it has been suggested that the lax living at Coldingham jarred with her strict asceticism, prompting her to leave the monastery.[21] However, her departure may have had more to do with Æthelthryth wishing to set up her own foundation, as did Hild and other royal abbesses, especially as she did so in her native kingdom of East Anglia rather than Northumbria. Æthelhtryth was not the only wife of king Ecgfrith's who visited Coldingham; though Bede is silent about Ecgfrith's second wife Iurminburg, Stephanus's *Vita Wilfridi* recorded that she was scourged by God when the couple visited Coldingham.[22] Stephanus said that Æbbe warned her nephew that he and his queen were being punished for their unjust treatment of Wilfrid, and convinced Ecgfrith to recall the bishop from exile.[23]

As a royal double monastery, Coldingham therefore does not seem much different to Whitby; Whitby had also been founded by Oswiu and was ruled by a succession of abbesses drawn from the Northumbrian royal family. The remains of Coldingham may still have been visible in the landscape of Northumbria, located in the north, near to Lindisfarne and not far from Bede's own monastery of Wearmouth-Jarrow. However, while Whitby was praised by Bede and presented in the *HE* as still thriving in his day, he presents Coldingham as an example of a failed monastery, one which invites parallels with the false monasteries of his own day. Bede is more forthcoming about monastic involvement with secular society in

[20] *HE* 4.19.
[21] Virginia Blanton, *Signs of Devotion*, p. 39
[22] *VW* 39.
[23] Ibid.

the letter to Ecgbert, but he used the example of Coldingham in the *HE* to draw attention to the scandal and corruption of his contemporary Church caused by the practice of false monasteries. It is advantageous to compare Bede's and Gregory's accounts because Bede includes far fewer examples of bad behaviour, and those that he does provide concern people who are either long dead or unnamed, while Gregory names and shames several contemporary religious men and women. The only occasion where Bede negatively describes a contemporary religious is a monk whom he does not name, nor does he name the monastery; Bede simply stated that he 'belonged to a noble monastery but lived an ignoble life', though he did clarify that this was a Northumbrian monastery in the Bernican kingdom.[24] Bede's criticism here was solely with the individual monk, while the entire community of Coldingham lived in sin. Bede could do this with Coldingham because it was deserted by his day, but directly criticising a contemporary monastery was not on his agenda for the *HE*; the contemporary sinful monk, described also as engaging in a secular lifestyle, remained anonymous along with his monastery.

Bede's reluctance in shaming contemporary monasteries is understandable given that the letter to Ecgbert reveals his concern that scandalous rumours about the false monasteries would spread at home and abroad, and unlike the letter, the *HE* was written for a wide public audience. Bede could safely use Coldingham as an example from the past to allude to the fact that these same problems were happening in the present. We know that Bede was concerned about laxity in contemporary monastic life; his letter to Ecgbert deplores contemporary aristocratic men and women who had purchased estates under the guise of founding monasteries, so that they could freely indulge in their lustful desires.[25] Coldingham failed because of the community's retention of secular values; Bede said the inhabitants at Whitby relinquished all worldly concerns, while those at Coldingham indulged in feasting and frivolity, the same secular lifestyle that Bede observed in contemporary false monasteries in his letter to Ecgbert. For Bede and Gregory, the scandalous behaviour of the inhabitants of contemporary monasteries

[24] *HE* 5.14.
[25] *EE* 12; see John Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, p. 106.

was resulting in widespread disorder, exacerbated by a serious crisis of spiritual leadership.

(ii) Failed Leadership in Monastic Life

The responsibility of religious leaders to their community was stressed by Bede in the *HE*; even when Hild became sick, she 'never ceased to give thanks to her Maker and to instruct the flock committed to her charge both in public and in private.'[26] In the letter to Ecgbert, Bede particularly highlighted the importance of good leadership and pointed out how contemporary monasteries were being run by bad leaders; Bede said that wealthy lay men and women made themselves leaders of false monasteries, and persuaded disobedient religious from other monasteries or other lay men and women to join them.[27] Gregory's descriptions in the *DLH* point to similar issues, such as abbess Ingitrude of Tours, who persuaded her daughter Berthegund to abandon her husband and children to become her successor.[28] Gregory's account of Theudechild, who was forced into the monastery of Arles, also sheds light on the importance of good leaders; Gregory said that Theudechild tried to escape from the nunnery but 'was prevented by the vigilance of the abbess, who, discovering her deceit, ordered her to be severely beaten and kept in durance.'[29] Although Gregory may not have condoned violence, he made it clear that abbesses needed to be vigilant of rebellious inhabitants in their communities, something which Leubovera had failed to do at Poitiers.

Bede and Gregory used their accounts of Coldingham and Poitiers to highlight the importance of good leadership. Gregory related that the rebellious nuns who became pregnant at Tours were absolved of any blame by the bishops at trial, who believed they had only transgressed because they had no abbess to instruct them.[30] Although Bede exonerates Æbbe by stating that she brought her community to repentance and they only returned to sin after her death, he also made it clear that she had no idea about their behaviour until Adomnan informed

[26] *HE* 4.23.
[27] *EE* 12.
[28] *DLH* 9.33; *DLH* 10.12.
[29] *DLH* 4.26.
[30] *DLH* 10.15.

her. Bede opened his account by relating that Coldingham burned down because of the sins of the inhabitants, but 'especially of those who were supposed to be its leaders'.[31] The fact that Bede makes an effort to take blame away from Æbbe, including not mentioning her name in the account of Coldingham, suggests that his aim was not to criticise the abbess herself, but to make a more general point about religious leaders, to illustrate the need for vigilance and provision of guidance to their communities. This was a major point in Bede's letter to Ecgbert, which repeatedly emphasised that religious leaders were responsible for the sins committed by those in their care.

In the letter to Ecgbert, Bede said that bishops had a duty to ensure that no monastery was run by an incompetent abbot or abbess, especially since 'you bishops are accustomed to say that what happens in each monastery is not the responsibility of kings…but solely to be examined by your bishops' judgement'.[32] Bede envisaged that the secular and religious authorities would work together to institute reform, however he particularly emphasised that it was the bishops' responsibility to ensure that religious leaders in their dioceses were competent in leading their communities. The same duty of episcopal pastoral care was emphasised by Gregory, who highlighted Maroveus's failure in dealing with the nuns' revolt at Poitiers. Clotild claimed that Maroveus's incompetence was the real reason why the nuns came to Tours and sought assistance from Clotild's royal relations.[33] In a digression within his account of the revolt, Gregory related that Maroveus refused to install the relics of the Cross that Radegund had obtained for her monastery, prompting Radegund to turn to king Sigibert and bishop Eufronius of Tours for support.[34] Maroveus is characterised as proud and resentful; when he refused to install the relics, Gregory tells us that he mounted his horse and went off to one of his country estates.[35] The image of Maroveus that Gregory provides here is close to Bede's descriptions of negligent bishops in the letter to Ecgbert, but it is also in direct contrast to Bede's descriptions in the *HE* of the humility of saintly bishops like Aidan; Bede said that Aidan travelled everywhere on foot, not

[31] *HE* 4.25.
[32] *EE* 14, in Christopher Grocock and Ian Wood (eds. and trans.), *The Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow*, pp. 152-153.
[33] *DLH* 9.40.
[34] Ibid.
[35] *DLH* 9.40.

on horseback, and when given a horse adorned with royal trappings from king Oswine, Aidan gave it to a beggar.[36] Aidan visited Hild frequently at Whitby while Maroveus abandoned his duties to the abbess of Poitiers; even when Maroveus reconciled with the monastery after Radegund's death, Gregory said that Maroveus still harboured some resentment against the nuns.[37] Dailey has argued that Gregory misrepresented the history of Radegund's monastery, and exaggerated her disputes with Maroveus, in order to justify his provision of shelter to the rebellious nuns in Tours by claiming that Radegund had previously turned to Tours for support.[38] However, Gregory may have also amplified Maroveus's behaviour in order to warn readers about the importance of pastoral care and religious leadership.

Monastic rules placed substantial importance on the selection of monastic leaders, and both Bede and the anonymous author of Ceolfrith's *Life* said that Ceolfrith told the community to elect an abbot according to the Rule of St Benedict.[39] Benedict's Rule stated that the abbot should be chosen on merit of life and wisdom of doctrine, listing a number of qualities and virtues expected of the leader, including 'discretion, the mother of all virtues'.[40] Bede had used these words to describe Aidan, whom he portrayed as an ideal spiritual leader.[41] Monastic rules emphasised the correct procedure and selection process for choosing an abbot or an abbess, and the rule of Caesarius followed at Poitiers stipulated that an abbess should not be selected on the circumstances of their birth, a rule that Clotild certainly did not seem to observe.[42] Clotild also made the error of revolting against the authority of her abbess, which was entirely against the monastic rule of obedience to leaders. The inhabitants at Coldingham only briefly followed the authority of their abbess before returning to their sins after her death, and in the letter to Ecgbert, Bede warned the bishop to ensure that a band of

[36] *HE* 3.5; *HE* 3.14; cf. Bishop Chad, in *HE* 4.3.
[37] *DLH* 9.40.
[38] Erin Dailey, 'Misremembering Radegund's Foundation', pp. 117-40.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Benedict, *Regula*, 64, in Rev. Boniface Verheyen (trans.), *The Holy Rule of St Benedict*.
[41] *HE* 3.5.
[42] Caesarius, *Regula Virginum*, 61, in Maria C. Mc Carthy (trans. and intro.), *The Rule for Nuns*, p. 190.

undisciplined community members should never rebel against their leaders.[43] As Gregory's account of Poitiers reveals, even when the leader was not at fault, the inhabitants of their communities could rebel against their authority. The members of communities had their own responsibilities to be obedient to their leaders and to observe the vows they had themselves made upon entering the monastic life. Bede and Gregory both describe how entire communities were transgressing these observances.

5.2: Sin and Rebellion: Perversion of Monastic Discipline and Rebellion at Coldingham and Poitiers

(i) Perversion of Monastic Discipline as a Reversal of the Values of the Primitive Church

In their descriptions of the sins of the inhabitants at Coldingham and Poitiers, Bede and Gregory portray the perversion of monastic life as a reversal of the values of the primitive Church. We have seen that Bede viewed the conversion of the English, Gentiles at the ends of the earth, as the completion of the apostolic mission of salvation. Bede used the model of Christian marriage for his theme of conversion and the fulfilment of the apostolic mission. In the *DLH*, Radegund is described as emulating St Martin's apostolic grace through her teaching and care for her nuns at Poitiers. Bede and Gregory believed that the example of the apostles provided the ideal model for monastic life, and both described women who imitated the primitive Church. Æthelthryth and Radegund were both described as queens who relinquished their secular status and worldly possessions in order to follow the monastic discipline of the primitive Church. Bede praised Hild's community at Whitby by alluding to the Acts of the Apostles, stating that they shared all things in common and none had private property.[44] Earlier in the *HE*, Bede said that Augustine and the Roman missionaries, following Pope Gregory's directive, imitated the life of the primitive church.[45] Bede again cited this directive when he praised the monastic discipline observed by Cuthbert's

[43] *EE* 14, in Christopher Grocock and Ian Wood (eds. and trans.), *The Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow*, pp. 152-153.
[44] *HE* 4.23; Acts. 2: 44-45; Acts 4:32-34.
[45] *HE* 1.26; *HE* 1.27.

community at Lindisfarne.[46] Bede was greatly influenced by the Acts of the Apostles, particularly in his presentation of exemplary models of monastic life, models which Bede felt his contemporary Church sorely needed. Bede contrasted Aidan's imitation of the primitive Church with 'our modern sloth' and in *De Templo*, Bede deplores the 'sluggishness of our time when some want to have the appearance and name of being teachers, priests and pillars of the house of God' though they do not have 'the faith needed to despise worldly ostentation.'[47] In the *DLH*, Radegund stated that her community followed 'the apostolic example' by giving up all personal possessions and sharing everything in common.[48] Radegund's example was not continued at her foundation, as Gregory's portrayal of Clotild's behaviour testifies. Bede's and Gregory's histories portray the inhabitants of Coldingham and Poitiers as the complete antithesis of their exemplary models, perverting monastic discipline by living secular lives in the religious habit. Gregory directly juxtaposed Clotild's arrogance with Radegund's humility, and Bede placed his description of Coldingham immediately after his description of Whitby in order to portray Coldingham as the antithesis of an ideal monastic community.[49]

Bede used the Acts of the Apostles, which described the actions of the primitive Church, in his letter to Ecgbert in order to illustrate his points about the perversion of monastic discipline. Bede first recommended the example of Paul and Barnabas, who both preached and practiced the word of God through their holy way of life.[50] Later in the letter, Bede referred to Ananias and Sapphira in Acts, a husband and wife who falsely professed to be true members of the apostolic community; they sold their land but lied to Peter, keeping back some of the proceeds for themselves, and both dropped dead as divine punishment for their transgression.[51] According to Bede, contemporary men and women, 'who profess themselves to be servants of God' were even worse than Ananias and Sapphira, because they not only retain their own possessions but also attempt 'to procure

[46] *HE* 4.27.
[47] Bede, *De Templo* 18:16, in Seán Connolly (trans.) and Jennifer O' Reilly (intro.), *Bede: On the Temple*, p. 84.
[48] *DLH* 9.42.
[49] *DLH* 9.39; *HE* 4.23-24.
[50] *EE* 4; Acts 13:5.
[51] Acts 5: 1-11.

what they have not.'[52] The same example was also used by Gregory, who recorded Radegund's letter which stated that all at her monastery gave up their possessions, for they feared the fate of Ananias and Sapphira.[53] The Rule of Caesarius that Radegund adopted for her monastery explicitly stated that all should relinquish their possessions 'in fear of the example of Ananias and Sapphira.'[54] Ananias and Sapphira served as an example of the perversion of monastic life because they only pretended to preserve apostolic discipline by relinquishing their personal possessions and live as equal members of the community.

The example of Ananias and Sapphira was widely used by Christian writers and monastic legislators. Cassian used it in his early fifth century work, the *Collationes*, which Bede drew on in his commentary on Acts, tracing the origin of the category of monks called Sarabaites to Ananias and Sapphira, an aetiology original to Cassian.[55] Cassian denounced the hypocrisy of the Sarabaites, whom he said made public confessions of renunciation but continued to live secular lives in monasteries. The parallels with Bede's descriptions of false monasteries in the letter to Ecgbert are striking; Bede described false monasteries in the same manner that Cassian described the 'Sarabaites', and Bede also referred to Ananias and Sapphira in the letter, from whom Cassian said shot out the noxious root of false monks. The analogy is echoed by Bede, who explained that Peter gave the severe sentence to Ananias and Sapphira because 'he foresaw future weeds which would by their deformed character adulterate the simplicity of the Church.'[56] Bede's letter to Ecgbert may follow Cassian's polemic, and Bede's high monastic standards may have coloured his opinions on less strict forms of monastic life; like Cassian's treatment of the Sarabaites, Bede criticised a category of religious profession that did not live up to the standards which he perceived were fundamental to monastic life.[57] However, as Wood and Grocock noted, Gregory's

[52] *EE* 16.
[53] *DLH* 9.42; see also Caesarius, *Regula*, 6, which also cites the example of Ananias and Sapphira.
[54] Caesarius, *Regula*, 6, Maria C. Mc Carthy (trans. and intro.), *The Rule for Nuns*, p. 173.
[55] Stephen Lake, 'Knowledge of the Writings of John Cassian in Early Anglo-Saxon England', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 32 (December, 2003), pp. 27-41, at p. 39; Cassian, *Collationes*, 18.7, 1-2; Bede, *Expositio Actuum Apostolorum*, 5.1-11.
[56] Bede, *Expositio Actuum Apostolorum,* Acts 5:5, in Lawrence T. Martin (intro. and trans.), *The Venerable Bede, Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (Michigan, 1989), p. 57-58.
[57] Patrick Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature*, pp. 126-128; Susan Wood, *The Proprietary Church*, pp. 153-156.

descriptions of lax behaviour in monasteries provide evidence that there were Continental parallels to the problems described in Bede's letter.[58] Moreover, Bede's *HE* revealed that the issues he had with monastic standards were not confined to his letter to Ecgbert; the account of Coldingham was used by Bede as an oblique but striking example of behaviour that was not acceptable in monastic life, and it was not just condemned by Bede but by God Himself. Bede's letter denounced the false profession of contemporary monasteries, and he used his account of Coldingham to point to this concern with religious hypocrisy.

When Adomnan witnessed the vision on his approach to Coldingham, Bede said that he beheld the 'lofty buildings' of the monastery.[59] Bede is here subtly alluding to the false appearance of grand buildings reaching to the heavens but which are housed by inhabitants who have sunk to low living. Bede was generally not impressed by elaborate church buildings and adornment for their own sake; his description of Pope Gregory's achievement was that he, unlike other popes who built and adorned churches, devoted himself entirely to winning souls.[60] Stancliffe has noted the sharp contrast between Bede's presentation of Pope Gregory and Cuthbert with Stephanus's of Wilfrid; Stephanus praised Wilfrid's restoration and adornment of churches in literal imitation of Moses in the Old Testament, while Bede applied allegorical meaning to building and adornment in his commentaries on the Tabernacle and Temple.[61] Elaborating on the height of the temple in *De Templo,* Bede interprets the highest story as the category of virgins dedicated to Christ, who 'ought to give evidence of behaviour consonant with virginity, abstain from useless talk, anger, quarrelling, detraction, immodest dress, carousing, drinking, strife and jealousy'.[62] O'Reilly has linked this passage in *De Templo* to Bede's comment on the 'lofty buildings' of Coldingham.[63] As virgins dedicated to God, the nuns at Coldingham had adopted the highest profession of virtue, the

[58] Christopher Grocock and Ian Wood (eds. and trans.), *The Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow,* pp. lii-liii.
[59] *HE* 4.25.
[60] *HE* 2.1.
[61] Clare Stancliffe, 'Disputed Episcopacy: Bede, Acca, and the Relationship between Stephen's *Life of St Wilfrid* and the Early Prose Lives of St Cuthbert', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 41 (December, 2012), pp. 7-39, at p. 31.
[62] Bede, *De Templo*, 1, 7.3, in Seán Connelly (trans.) and Jennifer O' Reilly (intro.), *Bede: On the Temple*, p. 26.
[63] Jennifer O' Reilly, 'Introduction', in Seán Connelly (trans.) and Jennifer O' Reilly (intro.), *Bede: On the Temple*, p. xlviii.

hundred-fold reward of virginity. They placed themselves on the top story, but did not give evidence of virtue in their behaviour. In his commentary on Ezra, Bede said that the temple was immediately filled with priests, 'for there would be no point in having erected a splendid building if there were no priests inside to serve God.'[64] Bede applied this to his own day, stating that this 'should be impressed as often as possible on those who, though founding monasteries with brilliant workmanship, in no way appoint teachers in them to exhort the people to God's works but rather those who will serve their own pleasures and desires there.'[65] In his letter to Ecgbert, Bede urged that false monasteries should be transferred 'from luxury to chastity, from vanity to verity, from immoderate attention to stomach and palate to moderation and holiness of heart'.[66] Bede's comments here are strikingly similar to his description of the inhabitants of Coldingham and to Gregory's portrayal of the nuns at Poitiers. Both authors perceived these sins as a rebellion, against religious profession, against the authority of leaders, and ultimately against God.

(ii) Rebellion against Profession, Religious Leaders and God

The kinds of sins that Bede and Gregory related at the monasteries of Coldingham and Poitiers directly contradict the stipulations we see in church councils, letters and monastic rules. The council of Clofesho, held in 747, ruled that nuns should not occupy themselves with making fine clothing, but it also condemned the wearing of secular dress and elaborate garments by priests and monks, stipulating that all religious should wear simple clothing.[67] Boniface appealed to archbishop Cuthbert of Canterbury to put an end to the embroidered clothing being worn by members of the church, stating that the Devil had introduced such arrogance and vanity into monasteries for the ruin of souls.[68] In 793, Alcuin warned bishop Higbald of Lindisfarne about the sin of vanity caused by wearing elaborately adorned clothing and how it is 'a reproach before men and a sin before God.'[69]

[64] Bede, *In Ezram et Neemiam*, Ezra 2, 6:18, in Scott De Gregorio (trans. and intro.) *Bede: On Ezra and Nehemiah*, p. 102.
[65] Ibid.
[66] *EE* 10, in Christopher Grocock and Ian Wood (eds. and trans.), *The Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow*, p. 143.
[67] *Concilium Clovesho*, 19, 20 and 28.
[68] Boniface, *Letter to Cuthbert*, archbishop of Canterbury (who presided at Clofesho), 747
[69] Alcuin, *Epistola* 20, in Dorothy Whitelock (trans.), *English Historical Documents,* p. 846.

The letters of Boniface and Alcuin appear to refer to religious men as much, if not more, than women. In his treatise on virginity, Aldhelm also applied the sin of the wearing of embroidered silk, fine garments and adornment of the hair to both men and women.[70] Following Augustine's monastic rule, Caesarius's rule stated that the nuns' clothing 'should not be such as to attract notice, nor should you try to please by your clothing but by your conduct'.[71] Caesarius stipulated that no one should have their own private wardrobe and that all clothing should be kept in one place for common use.[72] Clearly Clotild did not adhere to this rule, as Leubovera pointed out at her trial that Clotild had her own clothing chest, filled with far more clothes than were necessary.[73] Caesarius stipulated that neither black nor brightly coloured clothing should ever be worn, but only sober colours or milk-white.[74] Caesarius stated that the nuns' hair should not be tied up higher than a certain measure, and he also prohibited nuns from making clothing for family members.[75] Leubovera was accused of making silken garments and a necklace for her niece from altar cloths; she was cleared of the charge because the materials had been gifts from outside the monastery to be used for that purpose, and she donated the remainder for use as an altar cloth.[76] Baudonivia praised Radegund for donating her royal garments to be used as an altar cloth.[77] However the reuse of an altar cloth for human adornment was completely unacceptable, as Caesarius stated that removing sacred objects from the Church defiled them.[78]

Bede said that the men and women at Coldingham spent their time feasting, gossiping and sleeping, but only the nuns committed the sin of weaving elaborate garments. This has led some scholars to argue that Bede sought to downplay the sins of men and highlight those of women; Hollis believes that Bede's account of Coldingham was 'a thinly disguised polemic against the double monasteries' and

[70] Aldhelm, *De Virginitate*, Michael Lapidge and Michael Herren (trans.), *Aldhelm: Prose Works* (Cambridge, 1979), pp. 59-132, at pp. 127-128.
[71] Caesarius, *Regula Virginum*, 22, in Maria C. Mc Carthy (trans. and intro.), *The Rule for Nuns* p. 177; following Augustine, *Regula*, 4.1; cf. Benedict of Nursia, *Regula* 55, which stipulates that monks should not care about the colour or texture of their clothing.
[72] Caesarius, *Regula Virginum*, 28; following Augustine, *Regula* 5.1.
[73] *DLH* 10.15.
[74] Caesarius, *Regula Virginum*, 55.
[75] Ibid, 51.
[76] *DLH* 10.16.
[77] Baudonivia, *Vita Radegundis*, 9.
[78] Caesarius, Epistle 21, p. 134.

argues that the 'real moral of the story is that, in the opinion of Bede, women were much too dangerous to share a monastery with.'[79] However, Bede praised the double monasteries of Whitby and Barking and his approval of these communities is plainly evident. Coldingham was an exception, a house that Bede elsewhere said was in need of exhortation; in his *Life of Cuthbert*, Bede related that Æbbe asked Cuthbert to visit her community 'for the sake of exhorting them'.[80] Cuthbert was portrayed by Bede as an apostolic figure and an ideal monk and bishop at Lindisfarne. Bede described Cuthbert's night vigils while at Coldingham, including a story about one of the brothers, who followed Cuthbert one night to spy on him and witnessed him immersing himself in icy sea waters. Ward suggested that the 'eroticism' of the community troubled Cuthbert enough that he stood in icy waters as a 'monastic remedy for lust.'[81] Immersion in cold water was a traditional method for combating lust and could be used as a penitential act, as we have seen in Fortunatus's *Life of Radegund* discussed in the previous chapter.[82] However, Bede was here also making a point about the slothfulness of the Coldingham community; Bede said Cuthbert entered the waters and prayed 'while the others were resting at night'.[83] This parallels his descriptions of the men and women of Coldingham in the *HE*, who were 'sunk in slothful slumbers' while Adomnan engaged in vigils.[84] Elsewhere in the *HE*, Bede criticised an unnamed monk by stating that he indulged in earthly pleasures while his brothers were praying and singing psalms at night.[85] Bede again used antithesis to amplify his points, in this case, that religious men and women should occupy their nights in prayer, not in slothful slumber or engaged in worldly activities.

According to the twelfth-century English chronicler Simeon of Durham, Cuthbert was so disturbed by the nuns at Coldingham that he forbade women from entering the church at Lindisfarne.[86] Simeon used Bede's account of Coldingham to explain why he believed Cuthbert sanctioned segregation of the sexes, which

[79] Stephanie Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women*, p. 102-103.
[80] *VC* 10, in Bertram Colgrave (ed. and trans.), *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert*, p. 189.
[81] Benedicta Ward S. L. G., 'The Spirituality of St Cuthbert' in Gerald Bonner, David Rollason and Clare Stancliffe (eds.), *St Cuthbert*, pp. 65-76, at p. 71.
[82] Venantius Fortunatus, *Vita Radegundis*, 5.
[83] *VC* 10, in Bertram Colgrave (ed. and trans.), *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert*, p. 189.
[84] *HE* 4.22.
[85] *HE* 5.14.
[86] Simeon of Durham, *Historia Ecclesiae Dunhelmemis*, 22-24.

has been viewed as evidence that Bede contributed to the development of strict segregation.[87] However, it is important to remember that it is in later traditions like Simeon's that we encounter explicit accusations of the sexual threat posed to men by female religious. This was not one of Bede's primary concerns; the Coldingham nuns' preoccupation with weaving clothes represented to Bede a far more complex threat than sexual sin alone. Gregory's descriptions of the nuns at Poitiers are relevant here, as their sins are not necessarily as sexual in nature as they may first appear; Clotild accused her abbess of keeping a man dressed as a woman in the monastery, and as suggestive as this may seem, the charge was not for sexual transgression but for breaking the Rule, which forbid men from entering the monastery.[88] The scandalous accusation that Leubovera castrated men was not about sexual misconduct; as Dailey pointed out, Clotild charged her abbess with committing castration, an act prohibited by law, while also accusing her of imitating the pomp of the Byzantine imperial court.[89] The only sexual sins actually committed were made by the nuns who became pregnant at Tours, but Gregory's purpose in describing their transgression here was to highlight the importance of religious leadership. Bede and Gregory also had other purposes in mind than criticising women's carnality when they described the nuns' preoccupation with clothing; their descriptions may point to potential sexual sins, but the main problem was that these nuns were behaving in a secular manner and thus rebelling against their monastic vows.

By weaving elaborate clothes, the nuns at Coldingham were in serious danger of defiling their souls by returning to secular activities. Bede used antithesis to highlight the point; religious women were vowed as brides of Christ, but the Coldingham nuns wanted 'to adorn themselves as if they were brides'.[90] We have seen in the previous chapter how celestial marriage imagery was used to describe female religious devotion and their relinquishment of worldly ties; the nuns at Coldingham and Poitiers were described as the exact opposite. Bede and Gregory were well aware of patristic thought on the subject of female adornment,

[87] Stephanie Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women*, p. 102.
[88] See Erin Dailey, *Gregory of Tours*, p. 178.
[89] Ibid, pp. 179-180; Dailey cites the following laws: *Pactus Legis Salicae*, 29.17; *Lex Ribuaria*, 6.28(27); and *Decretus Childeberto Rege*, 5.5.
[90] *HE* 4.25.

which drew on the language of the Old Testament to portray virgins as brides of Christ, while women who were concerned with elaborate clothes and jewellery were portrayed as harlots.[91] Cyprian and Jerome used female apparel to symbolise defilement and apostasy, and likened women who painted their faces with cosmetics to idols.[92]

The virgin's body was considered as a holy vessel, polluted by human contact; Caesarius said that, because removing a physical vessel from the church for lay human use defiled it, removing metaphorical vessels dedicated to Christ was far more serious.[93] Caesarius warned that holy souls should avoid contact with both strangers and relatives, lest their bodies, dedicated to God, became defiled by human contact; to illustrate his point, Caesarius used the analogy of removing vessels placed in a holy altar as removing a soul dedicated to God.[94] Gregory may have been alluding to Caesarius's statement in his account of Poitiers; Leubovera was falsely accused of removing an altar cloth for human use, while the revolt resulted in the far more serious defilement of the rebellious nuns who became pregnant. However, this imagery was not only used for the female body but for all Christian souls; when Bede said that Paulinus accompanied Æthelburh to her marriage to Edwin so that she would not be polluted by contact with pagans, he simultaneously referred to Æthelburh's faith and the fate of the Church in Northumbria. Their marriage brought the initial conversion of Northumbria in 625 and signified for Bede the marriage of Northumbria itself to Christ, but after Edwin's death, Northumbria was ravaged by the apostate kings Eanfrith and Osric, who polluted the kingdom by returning to the filth of their former idolatry.[95] Northumbria's faith was restored and strengthened by individuals like Æthelthryth, the bride of Christ whom Bede said never wore linen but only woollen clothes, adorning herself with virtues instead of elaborate garments.[96]

[91] Máirín Mac Carron, 'The Adornment of Virgins', pp. 142-155.
[92] Lynda L. Coon, *Sacred Fictions*, p. 30; Máirín, Mac Carron, 'The Adornment of Virgins', pp. 145-146; see Jerome, *Epistola* 38.
[93] Caesarius, *Epistola* 21.
[94] Caesarius, Epistola. 21, p. 134.
[95] *HE* 3.1.
[96] *HE* 4.19.

Mac Carron has traced Bede's use of patristic thought in relation to female adornment, which drew on the language of the Old Testament; professed virgins were described as the chaste brides of Christ, while those who were concerned with worldly things were described as harlots, who wore jewellery and elaborate clothes.[97] In patristic exegesis, and in Aldhlem's treatise on virginity, the outward adornment of worldly brides was contrasted with the inner adornment of virginal brides of Christ.[98] Coon has argued that the Hebrew Bible presented the notion that female clothing and adornment symbolised 'defilement, apostasy, and the eventual destruction of Israel.'[99] Mac Carron has shown how these themes were used by patristic authors, pointing out that Jerome believed that women who painted their faces unnaturally with cosmetics were like idols.[100] The perversion of a body consecrated to God was often linked to idolatry; Boniface used this imagery in his letter to Æthelbald, warning the king that the sin of fornicating with virgins places the 'doer among the slaves of idolatry'.[101] Boniface told Æthelbald that the sins of the Anglo-Saxons were used as a reproach abroad even by pagans.[102] The adornment and elaborate clothing of religious women could therefore symbolise idolatry, but at the social level, their outward appearance could also cause rumour and scandal. Jerome believed that professed virgins should ensure that their appearance and demeanour in public was so modest that their inward chastity would be readily apparent and their reputation secure.[103] The same concern is present in discussions of clothing in monastic rules and in Bede's and Gregory's descriptions.

The concern with clothing in ecclesiastical texts and monastic legislation arises from several interrelated factors. Because members of communities were required to relinquish their private possessions, elaborate clothing for personal use breached monastic rules and contradicted the ideal of communal living. In the

[97] Máirín Mac Carron, 'The Adornment of Virgins'; Mac Carron cites several passages from the Old Testament, including Ez. 6:15; Is. 1:21; Rev. 17:4.
[98] For discussion of the sources on the subject, see Máirín Mac Carron, 'The Adornment of Virgins', pp. 146-152.
[99] Lynda L. Coon, *Sacred Fictions*, p. 30.
[100] Máirín Mac Carron, 'The Adornment of Virgins', pp. 145-146; Jerome, *Epistola* 38.
[101] Boniface, *Epistola* 57, in Dorothy Whitelock (ed. and trans.), *English Historical Documents*, p. 818, (Tangl, 73).
[102] Boniface, *Epistola* 57.
[103] Jerome, *Epistola* 22; see Teresa M. Shaw, '*Askesis* and the Appearance of Holiness', *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 6, 3 (Fall, 1998), pp. 485-500.

secular world, ostentatious clothing and jewellery were used as markers of social status, but clothing could also be used as social markers in the religious life, not of status but of profession; monastic rules stated that monks and nuns should be recognizable in public by their appearance.[104] As Shaw has pointed out, patristic writers like Ambrose insisted that none should have to inquire about a professed virgin's status, for it should be readily apparent from her demeanour and appearance.[105]

Coldingham is likely to have followed a 'mixed' monastic rule, possibly comprising elements of the rules of both Columbanus and Benedict, like the double monasteries on the Continent.[106] These rules did not stipulate strict enclosure, and if the monks and nuns were to go outside the monastery, they had to be readily recognised. Bede said that the nuns' elaborate garments attracted strange men; these were men from outside the monastery. The rule of Caesarius followed at Poitiers did stipulate enclosure, and though we do not know how strictly this was enforced, the nuns who went to Tours and became pregnant may have attracted men by their appearance and demeanour. The correct clothing for religious women was therefore a practical concern; they had to be perceived as vowed women by the secular world. Clothing also served a symbolic purpose; changing robes from secular to religious habit functioned both as a private affirmation and a public confirmation of dedication, an outward symbol of that individual's inward change of profession. The hagiographical *topos* of changing garments was used in both Fortunatus's and Baudonivia's versions of Radegund's life, to symbolise how the secular queen transformed into an ascetic nun.[107] Gregory drew on the same symbolic use of clothing when he related that Agnes appeared to an unnamed virgin in a vision and clothed her in a queenly robe sent by her heavenly Bridegroom.[108] We have seen Bede's metaphorical use of necklaces in his treatment of Æthelthryth, who welcomed the fiery red tumour on

[104] Rebecca Krawiec, ''Garments of Salvation': Representations of Monastic Clothing in Late Antiquity', *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 17, 1 (Spring, 2009), pp. 125-150, at p. 127; Teresa M. Shaw, '*Askesis*', p. 490; Ambrose, *De Virginibus*, 3.3; Jerome, *Epistola* 22.
[105] Teresa M. Shaw, '*Askesis*', p. 490; Ambrose, *De Virginibus*, 3.3.
[106] Clifford H. Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism*, p. 56.
[107] Albrecht Diem, 'New Ideas Expressed in Old Words: *The Regula Donati* on Female Monastic Life and Monastic Spirituality', *Viator*, 43, 1 (2012), pp. 1-38, at p. 20; Venantius Fortunatus, *Vita Radegundis* 3, 8, 17, 19 and 35; Baudonivia, *Vita Radegundis* 2, 9 and 12-14.
[108] *DLH* 6.29.

her neck because of the pearl necklaces she had worn in her royal youth.[109] Æthelthryth's tumour served as a private mark of absolved guilt, but Bede made the transformation public by recording it in the *HE*; he also made the sins of the nuns at Coldingham public by recording their sins and punishment.

The nuns at Coldingham displayed secular behaviour by weaving elaborate garments, but they also behaved in a worldly way in their speech; Bede said that both the male and female inhabitants engaged in gossip and telling stories. Monastic rules prohibited gossip and idle talk, because free time should be spent in prayer and meditation on Scripture.[110] In a Gospel homily, Bede urged his audience to refrain from idle conversation, for prayers said on the lips of one whose mind was on frivolous thoughts had no efficacy.[111] Pope Gregory's *Dialogues*, a work that was influential for Bede, provided two accounts of nuns who maintained bodily integrity but engaged in unacceptable behaviour. The first account described two nuns of noble birth who were threatened with excommunication because of their repeated insults and inconsiderate talk; their punishment was realised in death when the nuns' bodies were seen to rise from their tombs and leave the church at communion.[112] The *Dialogues* later described a nun who 'certainly showed continence where her body was concerned, but did not avoid rudeness and foolish talk with her tongue', a sin which was revealed after her death when she appears in a vision with half of her body burning.[113] Pope Gregory recorded these stories to warn readers to be mindful of their behaviour, as sins that were not remedied would be judged after death. As Martyn pointed out, both accounts suggest the aristocratic status of these nuns, who could afford to be buried within the church.[114] These women were punished in death for their refusal to relinquish their aristocratic, secular behaviour.

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[109] *HE* 4.19.
[110] Caesarius, *Regula*, 19-20.
[111] Bede, *Homeliarum Euangelii*, Matt. 15:21-28; Hurst, David (ed.), *CCSL* 122; in Lawrence T. Martin and David Hurst (trans.), Benedicta Ward (preface) and Lawrence T. Martin (intro.), *Bede the Venerable: Homilies on the Gospels*, 1 (Kalamazoo, Michigan, 1991), *Homily* 1.22.
[112] Gregory the Great, *Dialogues*, 2. 23, in John Martyn (ed. and trans.), *Pope Gregory*, p. xliii.
[113] Gregory the Great, *Dialogues*, 4.53, in John Martyn (ed. and trans.), *Pope Gregory and the Brides of Christ* (Cambridge, 2009), p. xliii.
[114] John Martyn, *Pope Gregory*, p. xlviii, n. 8.

Since Coldingham was an important royal foundation, many of the nuns would have been of high status; Wormald suggested that Bede's use of *fabulae* to describe the gossiping at Coldingham can be understood as secular story-telling, possibly heroic tales associated with Anglo-Saxon aristocratic culture, as exemplified in *Beowulf*.[115] Reciting heroic tales and epic verse was a popular form of entertainment in Germanic society; Bede related in his account of Caedmon that people sang in turns for entertainment at feasts, but Caedmon never participated as he could not 'compose any foolish or trivial poem but only those which were concerned with devotion and so were fitting for his devout tongue to utter.'[116] Bede also used the word *fabulae* in his letter to Ecgbert and combined it with the metaphor of defilement, applying it this time to male religious; Bede stated that just as sacred vessels for the altar are profaned by common uses, so the sacraments are perverted when said on the lips of an ordained man who engages in idle gossip or secular story-telling.[117] In a letter to an Anglo-Saxon bishop named Speratus, Alcuin similarly criticised the feasting and story-telling that was occurring at episcopal dinner tables, posing the rhetorical question 'What has Ingeld to do with Christ?'[118] The pagan heroes of Germanic epic were as insignificant to Christians as those of Roman epic, and Alcuin's question echoes Jerome's 'What has Horace to do with the Psalter? Maro with the Gospels? Cicero with the Apostles?'[119] As discussed in chapter two, Jerome denounced the secular arts but Bede believed they could be utilised for Christian purposes; in his account of Caedmon, Bede said that the divinely inspired cowherd received the ability to compose poetry, not to compose the foolish and trivial but the wonders of Creation and the stories of Scripture. Bede denounced the story-telling at Coldingham and in contemporary monasteries in the letter to Ecgbert because such stories belonged to the world of secular entertainment, which had nothing to do with the religious life.

In the accounts of Poitiers and Coldingham, the nuns' refusal to relinquish secular activities and social status indicates that for Gregory and Bede, these women did not take their profession seriously; this suggests that many of the nuns

[115] Patrick Wormald, *Times of Bede*, p. 43.
[116] *DLH* 4.24.
[117] *EE* 3.
[118] Alcuin, *Epistola* 124, in Donald A. Bullough, 'What has Ingeld to do with Lindisfarne', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 22 (December, 1993), pp. 93-125, at p. 124.
[119] Jerome, *Epistle* 22.25.

may not have been motivated to enter monasteries for religious reasons. In the previous chapter, we saw that royal women were often placed in monasteries against their will. In both Merovingian France and Anglo-Saxon England, royal daughters could be dedicated to Christ at a young age or given lands to found royal monastic houses. Princesses and aristocratic daughters who were not of use for marriage alliances could be put to far greater use as members and leaders of religious communities, creating power bases or retaining land for families. Such arrangements could be to the benefit of the Church, as in the case of Ælfflæd at Whitby, or they could be to its detriment, as we have seen in Ingitrude's monastery at Tours.

Monasteries could also be used as a method for getting rid of unnecessary or troublesome royal offspring; in the *DLH*, Gregory related that Basina's father Chilperic had shut her away in the nunnery in Poitiers.[120] Basina was only of use to her father when he later sought to give her in marriage to king Recared; Gregory stated that Basina was unwilling to leave and Radegund backed her up by proclaiming that it would be 'unseemly that a maid dedicated to Christ should return to the pleasures of the world.'[121] By recording this, Gregory is making it clear to the reader that entering the religious life was meant to be a lifelong profession. Even though Gregory tells us that Basina was unwilling to leave, her later behaviour suggests that her motives for remaining at Poitiers were far from religious devotion. Like the nuns at Coldingham and the members of false monasteries described by Bede in his letter to Ecgbert, Clotild and Basina rebelled against their religious profession by continuing their secular lifestyles within religious communities.

It is important to ask why religious men and women were behaving like this and why Bede and Gregory believed this behaviour was so dangerous. We have seen that social factors of class clashed with the monastic ideal of poverty and that some merely changed their habit and continued to live secular lives in monasteries. For Bede and Gregory, one of the major causes of moral laxity was that Christians had become spiritually complacent; relaxing in an environment of

[120] *DLH* 5.39.
[121] *DLH* 6.34.

peace and self-security, they neglected their religious duties and lived in sin, free from any fear of the consequences. Radegund ensured that all at Poitiers relinquished their possessions in fear of God's wrath but after her death, Clotild lacked the fear of God so much that she attempted to use the relic of the Cross itself as a weapon.[122] Though Adomnan trembled in fear at the vision of Coldingham's destruction, the inhabitants neglected penance and returned to their sinful behaviour, becoming complacent in 'peace and security' and bringing divine punishment upon themselves.[123] By boldly rebelling against their profession, their leaders and God, these communities were punished by divine judgement, and Bede and Gregory used these examples to warn their contemporaries. In an authorial intervention that is rare in the *HE*, Bede stated that he included the account of Coldingham to warn the reader against earthly delights and indulgence, in fear of the temporal loss and more serious eternal perdition inflicted by God's righteous judgement.[124]

5.3: Punishment, Repentance and Reform: Spiritual Complacency, Divine Punishment and the Urgency for Reform

(i) Spiritual Complacency and Divine Punishment

Bede and Gregory believed that they were living in the sixth and final stage of the world, an age which began at Christ's Incarnation and would end at his Second Coming. According to Matthew's Gospel, this would occur when the word of God had been preached to all nations, and Bede may have viewed the conversion of the English at the ends of the earth as heralding in the Apocalypse.[125] However, Bede and Gregory were also well aware that the sixth age was of indeterminate length, since the Gospel texts made it clear the time of the Last Judgement was unknown to mankind.[126] This was indicated elsewhere in Scripture; Thessalonians stated that 'The day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night' and Bede quoted Thessalonians in his account of Coldingham to illustrate to the reader that God's

[122] *DLH* 10.15.
[123] *HE* 4.25.
[124] *HE* 4.25.
[125] Jennifer O' Reilly, 'Islands and Idols'; Peter Darby, *Bede and the End of Time*, p. 207.
[126] Mark 13:32; Matt. 24:1-25; Luke 21:5-38.

judgement could come at any time.[127] Bede's reference to Thessalonians here dispels any belief that the timing of the world's end was calculable, just as each individual's end and judgement was impossible to predict; therefore, Christians had to be vigilant of their behaviour at all times. Both Bede and Gregory increased eschatological warnings in the final books of their histories, recording several accounts of sin, punishment and damnation to remind readers of the judgement of God. Bede even included a lengthy account of the afterlife received in a vision by a layman, Drythelm, which described the horrors of Hell.[128] Bede and Gregory used eschatological themes in their accounts of Coldingham and Poitiers to warn their readers about the severity of God's judgement, and to provide their readers with the solution of repentance.

Bede ended his account of Coldingham by quoting 1 Thessalonians 5:3: 'and when they said peace and safety, suddenly the predicted punishment and vengeance fell upon them.'[129] The quotation throws light on the ultimate message in Bede's and Gregory's histories; both authors wanted to warn their audiences against complacency about their spiritual welfare and to encourage reform. Bede's exegesis is much concerned with repentance and moral reform, particularly his commentary on Ezra-Nehemiah, which repeatedly used the image of the rebuilding of God's temple as a spiritual allegory for sin, repentance and reform.[130] Bede's letter to Ecgbert declared his urgent desire for contemporary reform, and this was also one of his primary objectives in the *HE*. As Darby has argued, 'Bede wanted to inspire a spirit of repentance in the reader and promote an ideal of ecclesiastical reform' in writing the history.[131] Gregory's history provided detailed descriptions of the immorality of his contemporary Church and society; his concern that present Christians, both lay and ecclesiastical, were not adhering to the tenets of the faith are corroborated by the letters of his contemporary Pope Gregory the Great.[132] Though we do not know if Gregory of Tours and Gregory the Great read each other's writings, they shared the understanding that such lax

[127] *HE* 4.25; 1 Thess. 5:2-3.
128 *HE* 5.12.

[129] *HE* 4.25; 1 Thess. 5:3.
[130] Scott De Gregorio, 'Bede and the Old Testament', p. 138.
[131] Peter Darby, *Bede and the Future*, p. 210.
[132] See for example, Pope Gregory, *Epistulae* 5.58; 8.4; 9.219; 10.11; 11.38; 13.9.

behaviour was especially dangerous in the face of the impending end of the world. This view was also shared by Bede, who was directly influenced by Gregory the Great's writings and his eschatological understanding that, as the time of the Last Judgement was unknowable, constant watchfulness by the virtuous and urgent repentance by sinners was essential.

In describing Coldingham and Poitiers, both authors used the tactic of recalling examples of divine punishment to warn the individual reader to be mindful of their moral behaviour. Bede believed that the past provided lessons for the present, and it was essential to learn from the examples of history. Bede used Coldingham as an example from the past which revealed how severely God punished those who sinned; Gregory by contrast used a contemporary example, and though it does not reveal God's immediate punishment, the account's apocalyptic tone enables the audience to work out the consequences of their shocking behaviour.[133] Remembering instances of divine punishment in Christian history was essential; in his *Collationes*, Cassian said that none followed the example of Ananias and Sapphira because their severe punishment was stamped on the minds of all who remembered it, but when the passing of time resulted in the loss of memory of their fate, there arose the detestable group of Sarabaites.[134] Gregory had the same scenario in mind when he recorded that Radegund's community followed strict renunciation because they feared the fate of Ananias and Sapphira. The nuns at Poitiers had forgotten not only the exemplary behaviour of their founder Radegund and her resulting heavenly rewards, but they had also forgotten the severe punishment incurred by the bad behaviour of individuals like Ananias and Sapphira. In his letter to Ecgbert, Bede made it clear that contemporary religious behaved even worse than Ananias and Sapphira because they had forgotten the severity of God's punishment; Bede reminds his audience of this severity through his account of Coldingham. As noted earlier, eschatological ideas and warnings about divine punishment and damnation could be applied as a powerful tool to encourage moral change, and Bede and Gregory both used these ideas in their histories.

[133] Martin Heinzelmann, *Gregory of Tours*, p. 74.
[134] Cassian, *Collationes*, 18.7.

Both authors applied the moral uses of memory not only to monastic contexts but also to entire nations. Gregory called on contemporary Frankish kings to remember the disasters that befell their fathers, who perished at enemy hands because of their luxury, greed and disrespect for the Church.[135] Gregory explicitly contrasted the behaviour of contemporary kings with the first Christian kings of the Franks, reminding his audience that their forefathers had greater respect for the Church.[136] When addressing contemporary rulers, Gregory illustrated his points and increased the sense of urgency by employing eschatological warnings from Matthew's Gospel and the Pauline epistles.[137] In describing the destruction of the Britons at the hands of his own pagan ancestors, Bede related that the Britons kept peacefully within their bounds because the memory of war was still fresh in their minds; 'But, when they died, a generation succeeded which knew nothing of all these troubles and was used only to the present state of peace. Then all restraints of truth and justice were so utterly destroyed and abandoned that, not merely was there no trace of them to be found, but only a small, a very small minority even remembered their existence.'[138] Bede echoed Gildas's portrayal of the Britons; according to Gildas, the sinful behaviour of the Britons and their secular and ecclesiastical leaders brought God's punishment, and Bede drew on their fate to warn contemporary leaders that they would also bring certain destruction on themselves and their people.[139]

Bede did not directly warn his contemporaries, but he alluded to the example of the Britons in the penultimate chapter of his history to suggest that the Anglo-Saxons may fall into the same error. Bede stated that in these times of 'peace and prosperity', many Northumbrians had laid aside their weapons and taken monastic vows; the result of which, Bede stated perhaps ominously, 'a later generation will discover.'[140] Wallace-Hadrill noted that this can be interpreted both as a veiled reference to the false monasteries and also more broadly to all

[135] *DLH* 4.48; *DLH* 5 Preface; see Alberto Ferreiro, 'Discourse 'Sermons' in the *Libri Historiarum Decem* of Gregory of Tours', *Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique*, 107 (2012) p. 49-77, at p. 55 and pp. 67-68.
[136] *DLH* 4.48.
[137] *DLH* 5 preface; Matt. 10: 21; Matt 24:7; Gal. 5:15; Gal. 5:17.
[138] *HE* 1.22.
[139] Alan Thacker, 'Bede and History', p. 174.
[140] *HE* 5.23.

Christians in the final Age of human history, which began at Christ's birth and would end at his Second Coming; similarly, Darby argued that Bede's comments here provide a warning that contemporary moral laxity would lead to God's punishment on the day of Judgement.[141] Darby pointed out that Bede's discussion of the comets in the penultimate chapter as fiery torches 'poised to start a fire' allude to the fires of the Last Judgement, and argued that Bede's further comment that the comets indicated 'that mankind was threatened by calamities by both day and night' can be read in an eschatological context.[142] This may be related back to Bede's account of Coldingham, where Adomnan prophesied that 'a heavy vengeance from heaven' would strike the inhabitants 'in the form of raging fire.'[143] As Darby argued, the 'peace and safety' of Thessalonians quoted in Bede's account of Coldingham draws parallels with his seemingly ominous comments about the 'peace and prosperity' of contemporary Northumbria in the penultimate chapter of the *HE*. [144] Contemporary spiritual complacency would inevitably lead to punishment, and both Bede and Gregory used eschatology to highlight the need for repentance and reform.

(ii) Eschatological Imminence, Repentance and the Urgency for Reform

Bede's account of Coldingham quoted Thessalonians in order to explain that even during a time of 'peace and safety', God's judgement could come suddenly like a thief in the night; according to Bede's penultimate chapter, contemporary calamities were occurring both day and night, and Christians therefore had to constantly watch their behaviour. In Gregory's preface to his history, he said that his purpose was to keep alive the memory of those dead and gone for posterity and he stated from the outset that though the Last Judgment will come, no one knows the day or the hour.[145] Henizelmann has argued that Gregory believed that the certainty of the Last Judgement should concern all Christians but especially royal and ecclesiastical leaders.[146] Bede and Gregory feared that examples of divine

[141] John M. Wallace-Hadrill, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, p. 200; Peter Darby, *Bede and the End of Time*, p. 214.
[142] Peter Darby, *Bede and the End of Time*, p. 212.
[143] *HE* 4.25.
[144] Peter Darby, *Bede and the End of Time*, p. 214.
[145] *DLH* preface; *DLH* 1 preface; Mark 13:32; cf. Matt. 24:1-25; Luke 21:5-38.
[146] Martin Heinzelmann, *Gregory of Tours*, p. 79.

punishment had faded from memory, and both used their accounts to remind readers of the dangers of sin and the need for repentance. Bede made this necessity explicit in his account of Coldingham, and it was only after they lapsed from penance that the community were punished. Just as he had described the Britons, Bede explained that because the inhabitants of Coldingham relaxed in 'peace and security…sudden destruction fell upon them.' [147] Bede's use of Thessalonians here was very deliberate; in one sentence he alludes to the wider eschatological scheme that runs throughout the Gospels and repeatedly warned that, though the Last Judgment will come, no one knows the day or the hour.[148] Gregory used the same eschatological warnings in the preface to his history.[149]

The interrelated ideas that self-security can lead to complacency and sin, that repentance was the remedy for sin, and the urgency placed on reform through the imminent yet unknowable time of Judgement, are key aspects of Pope Gregory's thought; these were influential for Bede, and scholars have noted Bede's use of Gregory's phrase *adproprinquante mundi termino*, 'the approaching end of the world' in several of his writings.[150] Wallis has argued that, as this exact phrase is found only in Pope Gregory and Bede, Bede must have followed his application of the term.[151] However, it is possible that Bede was also influenced by Gregory of Tours's *DLH*; in the preface to book one, Gregory used the term *appropinquante mundi fine*, explaining that he would catalogue the years since Creation 'for the sake of those whose hearts fail them as the end of this world draws nigh'.[152] This suggests that Gregory believed that this would bring comfort to those who feared the end; Gregory provided dates at various stages in the history and at the end of the work, he calculated the date to 5,792 AM (AD 591). As Palmer noted, this may have provided comfort according to the Eusebian chronology which placed the year 6000 as still 208 years away, though Palmer points out that Gregory of Tours followed Augustine's belief that the end cannot

[147] *HE* 4.25; 1 Thess. 5:3.
[148]See Mark 13:32; Matt. 24:1-25; Luke 21:5-38.
[149] *DLH* preface.
[150] Robert A. Markus, 'Gregory and Bede: The Making of the Western Apocalyptic Tradition', *Gregorio Magno nel XIV Centenario della Mort Convegno* (Rome, 2004), pp. 247-255, at pp. 249-250; Faith Wallis, *Bede: Commentary on Revelation*, p. 52.
[151] Faith Wallis, *Bede: Commentary on Revelation*, p. 53.
[152] *DLH* 1 preface.

be calculated.[153] In the preface Gregory also cited Mark's Gospel, stating that none can know the timing of the end.[154] Gregory may here appear self-contradictory in suggesting that his catalogue of years would dispel fears that the end was coming, and by then also stating that the end times were unknowable; however, Gregory of Tours was using the same technique of delayed imminence used by Pope Gregory and Bede, alerting readers to adopt a constant mode of expectation that would help them to remain vigilant in their behaviour.

Neither Bede nor Gregory of Tours suppressed the possibility that the end times were imminent. McGinn suggested that Gregory used 'psychological imminence' as a rhetorical tool, appealing to apocalyptic thought to influence his present audience to reform.[155] Wallis argued that Bede, 'in line with the exegetical tradition he espoused, rejected *predictive* imminence, but preached *psychological* imminence'.[156] Wallis pointed out that Pope Gregory held an 'ethical and pastoral eschatology', oriented on the need for moral reform which was made more urgent by the unknown timing of the end, and she argued that this had a profound impact on Bede's eschatology.[157] In Bede's record of Pope Gregory's letter to Æthelberht, the pope warned the king that the end of the world was approaching, as can be seen by the signs of the end, including comets, wars, famine and pestilence; however, he also told the king not to be troubled because 'these signs of the end of the world are sent in advance to make us heedful about our souls, watching for the hour of our death, so that when the Judge comes we may, through our good works, be found prepared.'[158] The appearance of ominous signs and the fact that the timing of judgement could never be predicted made repentance and reform an urgent necessity for all. The idea of eschatological imminence carried a profound moral dimension, one which Bede and Gregory made use of in their histories to encourage readers to reform.

[153] James Palmer, *The Apocalypse in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 71.
[154] *DLH* 1 preface; Mark 13:32.
[155] Bernard Mc Ginn, 'The End of the World and the Beginning of Christendom', in Malcolm Bull (ed.), *Apocalypse Theory and the Ends of the World* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 58-89, at p. 60.
[156] Faith Wallis, *Bede: Commentary on Revelation*, p. 5.
[157] Ibid, p. 22.
[158] *HE* 1.32.

Pope Gregory provides a fitting point of comparison for Bede's and Gregory of Tours's accounts. Bede's close connection with Pope Gregory's eschatological thought has been investigated by Markus, Wallis and Darby among others.[159] Gregory of Tours's similarities with Pope Gregory on eschatological thought has only recently received sustained analysis in Palmer's work.[160] The present thesis expands on this recent scholarship by examining the connection between Bede's use of eschatology and that of the two Gregorys. Gregory of Tours devoted the first chapter of the last book of his history to Pope Gregory the Great, providing a biographical sketch and recording a sermon that the pope had delivered to the people of Rome in 589.[161] Bede also devoted a chapter to Pope Gregory at the beginning of book two, but it is perhaps more significant that Gregory of Tours chose to dedicate an opening chapter to his papal namesake; in the *DLH*, Gregory appears uninterested in the bishops of Rome, yet he decided to open his last book with a long chapter on Pope Gregory at Rome.[162] Like Bede's account of Pope Gregory in the *HE*, Gregory of Tours described the pope's asceticism and learning, and praised his reluctance to leave his ascetic life. Gregory similarly praised Bishop Salvius of Albi, who was elected bishop against his will as he had desired to remain an ascetic recluse. Gregory chose to devote the first chapter of book seven of the *DLH* to the account of Salvius, and it offers further parallels with his description of Pope Gregory. Salvius was bishop when a plague broke out at Albi, and Gregory said that he remained in the city like a 'good shepherd' in order to exhort his flock to pray unceasingly in vigil.[163] Gregory related that Salvius used to say that Christians should always act 'that if God will you to leave this present world, ye may enter not into His Judgement, but into His peace.'[164] Gregory stated that Pope Gregory's sermon was made in response to the floods and an outbreak of plague that had afflicted the people of Rome, and like Salvius, Pope Gregory remained in the city, preaching vigils and pointing to the necessity

[159] Robert A. Markus, 'Gregory and Bede'; Faith Wallis, *Bede: Commentary on Revelation*; Peter Darby, *Bede and the End of Time*.
[160] James Palmer, *The Apocalypse in the Early Middle Ages*, pp. 55-78.
[161] *DLH* 10.1.
[162] For an analysis of Gregory's silences on the papacy and the Roman Church, see Thomas F. X. Noble, 'Gregory of Tours and the Roman Church', in Kathleen Mitchell and Ian Wood (eds.), *The World of Gregory of Tours*, pp. 145-161.
[163] *DLH* 7.1.
[164] Ibid.

of penance in the face of sudden destruction, lamenting those who had fallen without having a chance to repent their sins.[165]

Gregory of Tours portrayed the floods at Rome in a vivid apocalyptic tone before recording that Pope Gregory reassured the citizens that they could be saved through repentance like the people of Nineveh; the pope said that all sinners could be redeemed through penance, for a 'repentance of three days absolved the men of Nineveh that were sunken in their sins'.[166] The account of Nineveh, related in the book of Jonah but also mentioned in the Gospel accounts of Matthew and Luke, depicts Nineveh as a wicked city worthy of destruction, but when God sent Jonah to preach to the people, they fasted and repented and were thus saved from certain destruction.[167] Elsewhere in the *DLH*, Gregory related that when kings Chlothar and Childebert lay siege to Saragossa in Spain, the citizens responded through penance, began to 'fast even as Nineveh', and were saved as a result.[168] Gregory said that the citizens abstained from eating and gathered in procession to sing psalms, carrying the tunic of the martyr St Vincent as a banner, prompting the troops to become fearful and withdraw from the city.[169] This idea of public penance in response to adversity is prominent in the *DLH*; Gregory even includes an account of the institution of Rogations, public processessions of litanies and penance, introduced to Gaul by St Mamertus of Vienne in response to famine.[170]

Bede's reference to Thessalonians in his account of Coldingham creates an ominous tone by pointing to the sudden destruction brought by God's judgement on those who sinned, but he also explained that sinners could be saved if they repent and reform, citing the people of Nineveh as an example.[171] Bede said that God had sent a warning through Adomnan so that the inhabitants of Coldingham could amend and repent, to avert 'the wrath of the just Judge from themselves as did the people of Nineveh.'[172] The example of Nineveh demonstrated the efficacy of penance, and though its inhabitants were a pagan people, they turned to God

[165] *DLH* 10.1.
[166] Ibid.
[167] Jon. 3:5-10; Matt. 12:41; Luke 11:32.
[168] *DLH* 3.29; Jon. 3:5.
[169] *DLH* 3.29.
[170] *DLH* 2.34.
[171] *HE* 4.25; Jon. 3:5-10.
[172] *HE* 4.25; Jon. 3:5-10.

and were saved; this was particularly important to Bede and Gregory, who knew there were Christians weak in faith who could turn to idolatry in times of adversity.[173] To Bede, the inhabitants of Coldingham were worse than the pagan Ninevites because they did not repent in fear of God's punishment. Bede and Gregory made it clear that the only remedy for sin was repentance, and both emphasise the point by providing examples of successful penance; Gregory said that Basina was later accepted back at Poitiers because she repented, and Bede devoted substantial space to describing Adomnan's repentance at Coldingham.[174] Bede said that Adomnan had originally undertaken strict penance to atone for a certain sin, but continued even after atonement as a daily spiritual exercise.[175]

Bede made it clear that those who failed to repent, like the inhabitants of Coldingham, would be punished with eternal perdition. Bede aimed this warning at his present audience, as can be seen in his account of the sinful monk at an unnamed contemporary Northumbrian monastery; Bede said that because the monk neglected to amend his sins, he witnessed the horrors of his certain damnation and died without receiving the saving viaticum.[176] This account is recorded in the last book of the *HE*, where Bede provided two further examples of eternal damnation. Bede described a Mercian soldier who refused to repent his sins and received a vision in which two books were shown to him; one was minute and recorded his good deeds, the other was massive and weighed down with all his sins in action and thought.[177] Bede here alluded to the Last Judgement scene in Revelation, where two books record the sins and good deeds of each individual.[178] Bede said that the soldier refused to repent because he was concerned about what his friends would think of him, believing he was brave by doing so; bravery was important as a code of honour for men in a warrior society like Bede's, but he used it here to point to the soldier's vanity. The account of the soldier suggests that Bede understood men to be susceptible to the sin of vanity in their attempts to portray themselves as brave, while the Coldingham nuns illustrate the feminine aspect of vanity by weaving elaborate clothing to adorn themselves. At the end of

[173] *HE* 3.30; *HE* 4.27.
[174] *DLH* 10.20; *HE* 4.25.
[175] *HE* 4.25.
[176] *HE* 5.14.
[177] *HE* 5.13.
[178] Faith Wallis, *Bede: Commentary on Revelation*, pp. 83-84.

Bede's account of this soldier he cited Pope Gregory's writings, the chapters of book four of his *Dialogues* concerned with spiritual punishment, which stated that certain visions were granted not for that individual's benefit but for those who hear of it.[179] Bede wanted his audience, both male and female, to benefit from his accounts of sin, punishment and repentance. The fact that Bede applied sin and punishment equally to both men and women is demonstrated by the other example he provides in the last book, the vision of Drythelm. The vision revealed a cross-section of society, a layman, a cleric, and a woman, being dragged into the pit of Hell.[180] Bede believed that both men and women, secular and religious, should all be aware of the punishment awaiting those who sinned on the Day of Judgment.

It is evident that Bede was informed by Pope Gregory in writing about divine judgment since he cited the *Dialogues* in book five, but it is also possible that Bede drew on the *DLH*, especially since both authors increased eschatological warnings in the final books of their histories. Moreover, Gregory of Tours's eschatological thought is strikingly similar to Pope Gregory's; in his description of Pope Gregory's sermon and the disaster at Rome in book ten of the *DLH*, Gregory of Tours used apocalyptic imagery that draws parallels with the *Dialogues*. Gregory of Tours said that the plague epidemic in Rome occurred when a swarm of serpents and an enormous dragon swam up the river but were drowned by the waves and washed up on the shore.[181] The image of the serpent or dragon was widely used in Christian literature as a symbol of the devil and could be utilised as a means to instil fear in those who neglected to repent. Pope Gregory used the image of the dragon three times in his *Dialogues*, each time describing how a great dragon appeared to sinners preparing to devour them.[182] In one of these accounts, the dragon devoured the sinner, but the other two examples were saved because they repented and amended their ways.[183] Gregory of Tours set up his account of Pope Gregory's sermon to the people of Rome with these apocalyptic images in the same way as the pope himself used them; as a means to stir people to repent their sins. Bede was perhaps influenced by the eschatology of both Pope Gregory

[179] *HE* 5.13; see Gregory the Great, *Dialogi*, 4.37-40.
[180] *HE* 5.12.
[181] *DLH* 10.1.
[182] Gregory the Great, *Dialogi*, 2.25; 4.37 and 4.38.
[183] The two that repented are in *Dialogi* 2.25 and 4.37.

and Gregory of Tours when he included several accounts of sin, punishment and damnation in book five of the *HE*, highlighting the need for repentance.

Following in the Christian historiographical tradition of Orosius, both Gregory and Bede described disasters in history as manifestations of divine punishment for sins. For both authors, natural disasters were sent by God as a response to immoral behaviour. Patterson has drawn the stark contrast between modern and medieval notions of natural disaster; while the modern label of 'acts of God' shifts blame away from any human agency, disasters in the medieval world were understood to be 'acts of God' caused by human conduct.[184] As Patterson has noted, Gregory perceived the destruction in Rome caused by floods in 589 and the death of Pope Pelagius II as events brought on by God's displeasure with the Church.[185] Bede's understanding of plague has been described as scientific in comparison to other medieval historians.[186] However, Bede understood that God's will ultimately determined occurrences in nature and human affairs, and though Bede did not always directly link natural disasters to sin, he made the efficacy of faith and repentance very clear.[187] Bede related that the inhabitants of the monastery at Selsey fasted for three days in response to an outbreak of plague.[188] A vision revealed that because God was pleased by their fasts, all in the monastery would be spared, and Bede said that many who heard of this were encouraged 'to pray to the divine mercy in times of adversity and to submit to the wholesome remedy of fasting.'[189] Bede and Gregory both wanted to inform their readers that sinners could be reconciled to God through penance. Caesarius of Arles's sermons preach daily penance as a remedy for sin and warn religious leaders to urge their flocks to do so.[190] Ulhadle has shown that Gregory, like Caesarius and Gregory the Great, believed that bishops ought to above all be

[184] David J. Patterson, 'Adversus Paganos: Disaster, Dragons, and Episcopal Authority in Gregory of Tours', *Comitatus: A Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 44 (2013), pp. 1-28.
[185] Ibid, p. 5.
[186] Lester K. Little, *Plague and the End of Antiquity: the Pandemic of 541-750* (Cambridge, 2007), p. 181.
[187] Scholars have noted that Bede often implies rather than asserts that plague was caused by divine punishment; see Peter Darby, *Bede and the End of Time*, p. 100; Calvin B. Kendall and Faith Wallis (trans. and intro.), *Bede: On the Nature of Things and On Times*, *TTH* 56 (Liverpool, 2010), p. 158.
[188] *HE* 4.14.
[189] Ibid.
[190] See for example, Caesarius, S*ermone* 54; 59; 61.

'preachers of penance.'[191] In fact, the very first thing that Gregory says about Christ in the *DLH* is that He preached repentance.[192] Repentance was of primary importance because all would be judged when Christ would return at the Last Judgement.

The nuns at Coldingham and Poitiers falsely professed to relinquish all worldly concerns while continuing to act and think in a secular manner. The concern with falseness in religious profession is intrinsically linked to Bede's and Gregory's understanding of the Last Judgement. False teachers and preachers, both men and women, would come from inside the Church at the end of time, led by the ultimate figure of falsehood, the Antichrist.[193] In his letter to Ecgbert Bede urged him to ensure that the devil did not take over monasteries consecrated to God, to prevent discord, quarrels, drunkenness, fornications and homicide; Gregory's account of Poitiers shows these sins in action and he mentions the presence of the devil a total of five times throughout the account. Both authors believed that false religious were being influenced by the devil to turn their backs on their profession and betray God. Such unrepentant sinners would not be saved at the Last Judgement, and the fact that the timing of the end was unknowable only increased the urgency for reform. In the parable of the foolish virgins who neglected to carry oil in their lamps in watchful expectation, the Bridegroom told them to watch 'because you know not the day nor the hour.'[194] Caesarius opened his rule for virgins with the parable, reminding them to take their professions seriously lest they remain outside with the foolish virgins when Christ arrives.[195] Bede's commentary on Luke links the parable directly to Thessalonians; quoting the same passage from Thessalonians used in his account of Coldingham, Bede explained that the example of the foolish virgins provided a warning that all Christians must wait in fearful expectation.[196] Bede and Gregory use descriptions

[191] Kevin Uhalde, 'Juridical Administration in the Church and Pastoral Care in Late Antiquity', Abigail Firey (ed.), *A New History of Penance* (Leiden, 2008), pp. 97-120, at pp. 111-119.
[192] *DLH* 1.20.
[193] Peter Darby, *Bede and the End of Time*, p. 120.
[194] Matt. 25:13.
[195] Caesarius, *Regula*, 1.
[196] Bede, *In Lucae Euangelium Expositio*, 21:26; 1 Thess. 5:3.

of wise and foolish religious women in their histories to warn their readers, with the aim of moral reform.

Bede and Gregory deplored the moral decline of their contemporary Churches, but they also believed Christians could be shaken from their spiritual complacency. The accounts of Coldingham and Poitiers were not written from an anti-woman bias but were aimed at arousing their readers, both men and women, from their lax state of security. In a homily on the Gospels, Bede drew on Thessalonians to urge believers to pray without respite, warning that no one should 'cease from his prayers as if he has no need of the mercy of the righteous Judge.'[197] However, Bede goes on to say that even those whose sins are particularly serious should not despair, as even they can achieve salvation through repentance. This was an essential aspect of Pope Gregory's views on repentance; in this homily, Bede uses the same imagery of God as a physician that Gregory had used in his *Moralia*, to explain that repentance was granted by God as a remedy for the infirmities of sin.[198] Pope Gregory's sermon to the people of Rome recorded by Gregory in the *DLH* provides the same reassurance, that even those whose sins were particularly numerous and serious could be forgiven, just like the people of Nineveh. The Coldingham nuns had the opportunity to be saved like the Ninivites, and though they rejected this chance for mercy, Bede hoped his readers would learn from their example, repent and reform.

Conclusion

Bede's and Gregory's accounts illustrate their wider concerns about moral complacency and the perversion of monastic discipline in their contemporary Church and society; neither believed women were any more or less sinful than men. Bede and Gregory may have used some distinctions of gender to articulate particular sins, such as the nuns who wove elaborate clothing, but their accusations were not gender-specific; both sexes were equally susceptible to sin, and both had to amend their ways to achieve salvation. The scandal at Poitiers revealed abuses

[197] Bede, *Homeliarum Euangelii*, Luke 11:9-13, quoting 1 Thess. 5:17; David Hurst (ed.), *CCSL* 122; Lawrence T. Martin and David Hurst (trans.), *Bede the Venerable: Homilies on the Gospels*, 2, *Homily* 2.14, p. 125.
[198] Ibid; see Pope Gregory, *Moralia in Iob*, 7, 18, 21.

occurring in Gregory's time, but Bede used Coldingham to allude to the contemporary abuses that he denounced in his letter to Ecgbert. Bede interpreted Coldingham in a providential context, where the community's sins repeat those of the Britons, and the same sins were now being committed in contemporary Northumbrian false monasteries. Bede made his appeal for reform urgent by describing how God had punished the Britons and the inhabitants of Coldingham, implicitly pointing to the destruction that could happen on a wider scale if the English did not repent and reform. Bede and Gregory used the idea of eschatological imminence in their accounts of Coldingham and Poitiers as a tool for contemporary moral reform.

Bede's and Gregory's aim of moral reform was made more urgent by their eschatological concerns. Both authors placed the majority of their examples of bad behaviour, sin and punishment in the final books of their histories, with a particular emphasis on the need for repentance; in doing so, the points both authors made about moral behaviour from the beginning of their histories are driven home in a climactic fashion. However, there was no definite ending; for Bede and Gregory, the end of history would come when the Last Judgement arrived. As Christian historians, both authors placed their descriptions of the past and present in the last stage of human history, the final phase of the aging world that looked forward to the end of time. Bede and Gregory chose to place their accounts of Coldingham and Poitiers towards the end of their histories to warn readers against sin in the face of Judgement.

Thesis Conclusion

This thesis is the first study to directly compare Bede's and Gregory's representations of women. It has argued that this comparative approach not only contributes to our understanding of Bede's and Gregory's representations of women, the primary objective of the thesis, but also to our understanding of the authors themselves. The investigation of Bede's and Gregory's attitudes towards women has wider implications for their attitudes towards men, their Church and society, and even their conceptions of the end of time. For example, chapter five was concerned with investigating Bede's and Gregory's portrayals of the bad behaviour of religious women, but it also revealed connections between the eschatology of Bede, Gregory of Tours and Pope Gregory the Great. Bede and Gregory may be profitably compared in many areas of study yet to be undertaken, but the focus on their representations of women appeared to be particularly appropriate since there has been a tendency in existing scholarship to interpret the authors' attitudes towards women quite differently. Bede has been regarded as misogynistic while Gregory has not; the present thesis attempted to address this disparity by comparing both authors' representations of women.

This disparity in scholarship between interpretations of Bede's attitude towards women and Gregory's appears to arise from a certain degree of preoccupation with finding evidence of female power and influence in the sources. This is understandable given that the period produced very few writings from women themselves, and the male-authored sources focused primarily on subjects relevant to men, in accordance with the structure of patriarchal societies. However, some scholars have perhaps focused too much on quantifying the presences and absences of female power in the sources, leading them to identify misogynistic attitudes in medieval authors who describe fewer women in their writings. Gregory provided several examples of royal women exercising considerable power, and even though the majority involve examples of bad behaviour, they provide sufficient evidence for the presence of female power to those modern historians who seek it in the sources. Bede provided fewer and less explicit examples of female power, and though his examples were predominantly of good behaviour, he has been viewed as downplaying the influence and importance of

women in the Church and in society. Bede's and Gregory's attitudes towards women should not be assessed on the presence or absence of female subject matter alone; their motivations in writing and their complexities as authors are of paramount importance in attempting to understand their portrayals of women. The present thesis located and compared Bede's and Gregory's shared themes in relation to women which indicated that their wider concerns about contemporary society lay behind the authors' portrayals of women. It argued that Bede's and Gregory's portrayals of women, as equally as their portrayals of men, should be viewed as moralising techniques aimed at contemporary moral reform.

This thesis directly challenged the arguments of Hollis, Klein, Lees and Overing, who argued that Bede denigrated women in his history. Bede's positive attitude towards women is evident in his portrayals of both secular and religious elite women. Bede described queens who aided Christianisation and the creation of peaceful kingdoms through their marriage alliances, and he also described abbesses who provided spiritual instruction and ideal examples of Christian life. These positive representations of women were intended to provide models for imitation and they form part of Bede's agenda for reform, an agenda that also included negative representations of women; Bede's portrayals of women like Rædwald's wife and the nuns at Coldingham were similarly aimed at his audience, instructing them on how they should not behave. Bede's examples of bad behaviour provided juxtapositions to his ideal examples, and this offsetting of good and bad behaviour was also used by Gregory. The thesis located the authors' similarities and argued that these similarities challenge the view that Bede was misogynistic; just as Gregory's portrayal of the revolt of the nuns at Poitiers has been interpreted as a part of an eschatological theme he used to encourage reform, Bede's portrayal of the nuns at Coldingham should be interpreted as part of his reform agenda.

The first part of this thesis was concerned with providing context for the comparative analysis; chapter one explored modern scholarship on Bede, Gregory and their representations of women, and chapter two questioned why both authors wrote about women by examining their contemporary contexts. The first chapter outlined the rationale for the thesis, explaining how Bede's portrayals of women

can be better understood through comparison with Gregory's. It argued that this investigation was especially pertinent since modern scholarship has viewed Bede's attitude towards women rather harshly in comparison to Gregory's more lenient assessment. The chapter concluded that Bede's and Gregory's representations of women should be compared in the context of their narrative strategies, audience expectations and contemporary concerns. Chapter two highlighted the importance of Bede's contemporary concerns investigating the contexts in which the histories were written. It explored the secular and ecclesiastical crises in Bede's and Gregory's societies and churches, arguing that these crises motivated the authors' portrayals of both women and men in their histories. It argued that both Bede's and Gregory's representations of women form part of their agendas for contemporary moral reform.

The second part of this thesis comprised three chapters of thematic analyses comparing Bede's and Gregory's representations of women. Chapter three focused on secular women, investigating the role of women in the authors' descriptions of queens and their marriages. It argued that Bede and Gregory drew on the '*topos* of womanly influence' in their portrayals of secular women, and that both authors adapted an earlier narrative technique that has not been fully recognised. The chapter argued that Bede, and particularly Gregory, were influenced by Rufinus's account of the conversion of the Georgians when they described the proselytising roles of queens Æthelburh and Clotild. The connection between Rufinus, Bede and Gregory found here indicates that Rufinus's account provides a possible inter-text for examining Bede's and Gregory's conversion narratives. Bede and Gregory are often considered to be the first writers to narrate the conversion of a barbarian nation, but Rufinus had earlier described the conversion of the barbarian Georgians and Gregory's account of Clovis and Clotild mirrors that of Rufinus's king and queen. Bede's account of Edwin and Æthelburh implicitly echoes Rufinus's and Gregory's accounts and comparing the three conversion narratives has the potential to increase our understanding of the authors' techniques and agendas in writing about barbarian conversion. The chapter indicated that Bede and Gregory highlighted the role of secular women in conversion and Christianisation, and that both authors demonstrated the positive influence of secular women through their marriages.

The fourth and fifth chapters focused on Bede's and Gregory's representations of religious women respectively as examples of good and bad behaviour. These chapters questioned how the authors were influenced by ecclesiastical legislation, monastic rules, and patristic thought on pastoral and exegetical concerns in their portrayals of religious women. The attention paid by both authors to the topic of married women entering the religious life was explored, indicating that Bede and Gregory addressed similar issues in their representations of women, albeit in a different tone. Gregory highlighted the social issues involved by describing women who left their marriages without the permission of their husbands, and how monasteries were used by kings as places to store unmarried princesses until they were required for marriage alliances. While Bede did not describe any of these issues in the *HE*, he denounced the women who lived sinfully with their husbands in contemporary false monasteries in the letter to Ecgbert; comparing both the letter and the *HE* with Gregory's history helped to amplify the issues behind Bede's representations of women. Gregory repeatedly emphasised the importance of religious vocation in discussing motivations for leaving spouses to enter monasteries. Bede's portrayal of *Æ*thelthryth is the only woman in the *HE* to leave her husband for the religious life, and Bede's focus on her virginity has often been considered in feminist scholarship as evidence for his preoccupation with female sexuality. However, in the context of the issues raised by Gregory in his history and by Bede in his letter to Ecgbert, it is apparent that Bede's focus was also on consent and motivation; in Bede's portrayal, *Æ*thelthryth was devoted to Christ throughout her marriages, and her virginity provided proof of her vocation.

Bede's letter to Ecgbert has been essential for our understanding of his reformist agenda in his history, but this agenda can be elucidated further when the *HE* is compared with the *DLH*. In chapter five, Gregory's lengthy and explicit account of Poitiers was compared with Bede's account of Coldingham to highlight the issues that Bede expressed more directly in his letter to Ecgbert, specifically the monopolisation of monasteries by sinful elites. Bede and Gregory shared a concern about the secularisation of contemporary monasteries and they both responded to it through their accounts of Coldingham and Poitiers. The chapter argued that Bede and Gregory also shared an eschatological approach to

encouraging reform which they made use of in their accounts of Coldingham and Poitiers. Bede's and Gregory's portrayals of these sinful women are better understood when their eschatology is considered, which has implications for our understanding of their attitudes towards women; since both authors used references to the end times which they applied to all Christians regardless of their sex, neither author specifically criticised women. Bede and Gregory used the idea of eschatological imminence in their accounts of Coldingham and Poitiers to highlight the responsibility of all individual Christians, both women and men, for the welfare of their own souls.

Chapter five also demonstrated the shared eschatological terminology of Bede, Gregory of Tours, and Gregory the Great. It has been recognised that Bede was influenced by Gregory the Great's moral and eschatological thought, but it has only recently been observed, in the work of Palmer, that Gregory of Tours's use of eschatological themes in his history is very close to that of Gregory the Great. The two Gregorys were contemporaries and Gregory of Tours would not have been in the same position as Bede, who had access to Pope Gregory's corpus. This is significant and demands further analysis; it is possible that the similarities between the two Gregorys in their moral and eschatological discourse indicates an emerging pattern of thought in the late sixth century which was later engaged with by Bede. It is not surprising that Bede, Gregory of Tours and Gregory the Great shared a particularly reformist mode in writing, as all three faced secular and spiritual crises in their contemporary Church and society; moreover, they all held a high degree of authority in their own time and were responsible, to varying degrees officially and equally in degree of pastoral duty, for leading contemporary moral reform. Further research is needed but this chapter contributed to the topic by suggesting that Bede was influenced by Gregory of Tours's use of eschatological imminence in a historiographical context. It also raised the possibility that specific eschatological terminology which has been attributed to Bede's use of Gregory the Great may also be attributed to his use of Gregory of Tours. A comparative analysis of Bede's, Gregory of Tours's and Gregory the Great's use of eschatological discourse would provide an ideal opportunity to gain a better understanding of these complex themes.

This comparative analysis of Bede's and Gregory's representations of women has yielded results that have wider implications for our understanding of both authors individually. Scholars have made great advances in elucidating the nuances of Bede's and Gregory's texts and their authorial motivations, and questioning what the results of these advances mean for interpreting the authors' portrayals of women can greatly contribute to our assessments of their attitudes towards women. By employing a cohesive methodological and theoretical approach, the investigation of women and of specific authors and their texts can be examined simultaneously. Comparative research provides further opportunities for connecting common themes and locating differences in examining representations of women. This thesis has attempted to elucidate the complexities of Bede's representations of women by comparing with Gregory's, and while further research will benefit our assessment, the findings of this comparison indicate that both authors had positive attitudes towards women.

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