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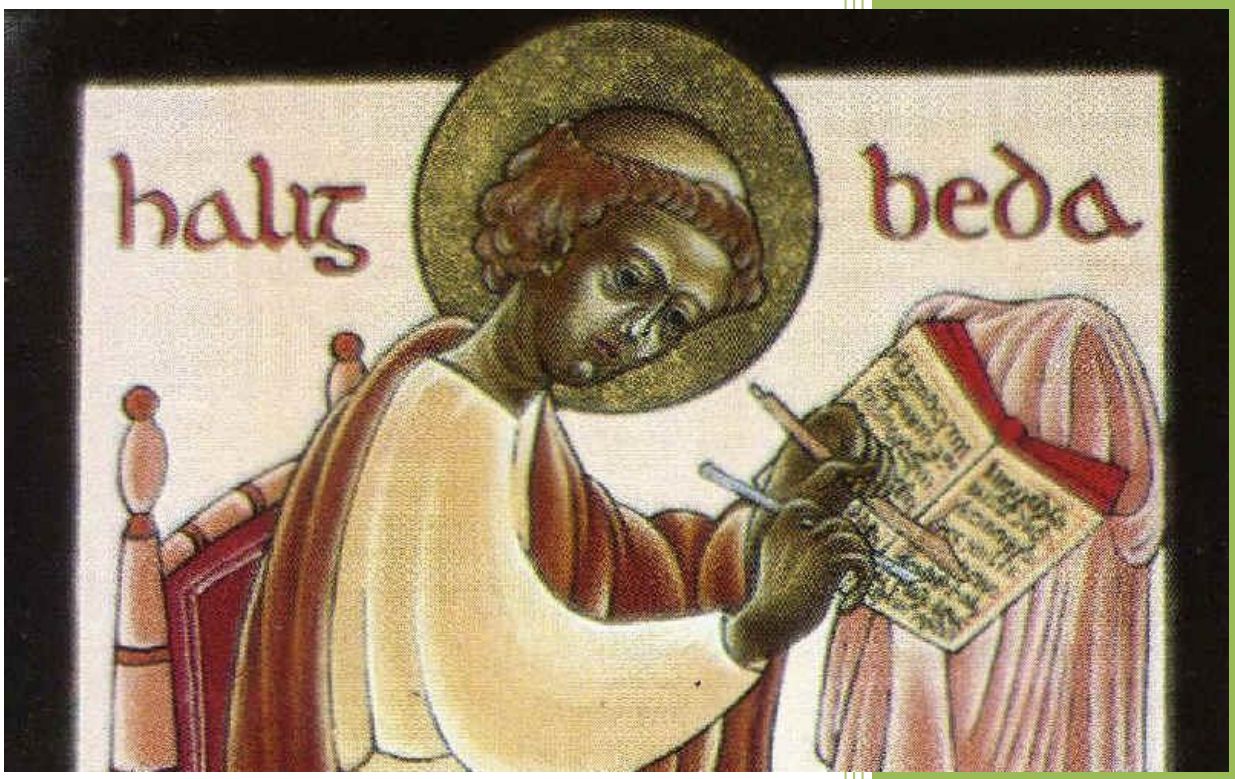
Pastoral eschatology, reform and Book 5 of Bede's Historia ecclesiastica



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“And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world, as a testament to all nations: and then shall the consummation come.” (Matt 24:14)

“The Sixth Age, which is now in progress, is not fixed according to any sequence of events or times, but like senility, this [Age] will come to an end in the death of the whole world.” (Bede, *De Temporum Ratione* 66)

“We would wish your majesty to know that the end of the world is at hand.... Not all these things will come about in our days, but they will all follow after our days” (Gregory the Great to King Aethelberht of Kent, *Historia ecclesiastica* 1.32)

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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 regarding plagiarism.

David O'Mahony (Dáithí Ó Mathghamhna)

Signed _____

Date _____

Abstract

This thesis examines the eschatology of Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* (AD731), and in particular the eschatological elements of the lesser-studied Book 5. Bede has a profound interest in the pastoral care of his people (not just those of his native Northumbria, but all Anglo-Saxons) and has a real fear that they are on the verge of missing out on salvation. He presents English history as taking place in the last era of the world before the Last Judgement, and this heightened concern sees him interpret eschatological elements in a pastoral light. When he writes about the fate of the soul and potential signs of divine judgement, it is to inspire moral reform; hence this thesis argues that his eschatology is pastoral.

This thesis locates the eschatology of the *Historia* within Bede's wider body of work, and especially his scriptural commentaries. It shows that pastoral eschatology is a theme running through his work from his earliest career. This thesis uses Insular and classical texts to examine how the location of Britain and Ireland has a dramatic effect on how Bede interprets sacred time. It pays particular attention to Bede's writings on the fate of the soul to argue that Bede saw the English as potentially being judged on a catastrophically wide scale, following biblical examples but also the example of the Britons. As part of this theme it argues that Bede saw the Saracens as potential agents of judgement, much as the English had been the agents of judgement sent to the Britons.

Acknowledgements

My most copious thanks and appreciation to my supervisor Dr Diarmuid Scully for his astute advice and boundless wisdom, for stopping me from inadvertently picking academic fights, for retrieving me from digression rabbit holes, and for exhibiting the patience of the saints we both write about. His constant, unflinching support has helped to see this thesis through and his constructive criticism and expertise, freely shared, were invaluable. The thesis draws deeply from the well of the school of thought at UCC inaugurated by Dr Jennifer O'Reilly and continued by Dr Scully, Dr Damian Bracken, and others.

This thesis is dedicated to Sarah, who went from girlfriend, to fiancée, to wife, to mother of our three children (the last born soon after the thesis was submitted for examination) while this text was assembled word by word. She was my rock of stable eternity amid the fleeting, wave-tossed course of this thesis.

To Jacob and Samuel, who brought new energy and perspective (and occasionally random consonants) to this work. Keep being Jacob and Samuel.

To Alice, the youngest but by no means least of our household, you may not have had a chance to edit the text like your brothers but you inspired me to keep going.

Abbreviations:

CSEL – Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum

CCSL – Corpus Christianorum Series Latina

CS – Cistercian Studies

DCD – Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, ed. B. Dombart and A. Kalb, CCSL 47, 48 (Turnhout, 1969); trans. R.W. Dyson, *Augustine: The City of God against the Pagans* (Cambridge, 1998).

DDC – Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, CCSL 32, eds. I. Martin and K. Daur (Turnhout, 1962); trans. R.P.H. Green, *Augustine: On Christian Teaching* (Oxford and New York, 1999).

DEB – Gildas, *De Excidio Britianniae*, ed. and trans. Michael Winterbottom (Chichester, 1978)

DNR – Bede, *De natura rerum*, ed. C.W. Jones, CCSL 123A (Turnhout, 1975); trans. Calvin Kendall and Faith Wallis, *On the Nature of Things and On Times* (Liverpool, 2011).

De tab – *De tabernaculo*, ed. D. Hurst, CCSL 119A (Turnhout, 1969); trans. Arthur Holder, *Bede: On the Tabernacle* (Liverpool, 1994).

De templo – *De templo*, ed. D. Hurst, CCSL 119A (Turnhout, 1969); trans. Seán Connolly, *Bede: On the Temple* (Liverpool, 1995).

DTR – *De Temporum Ratione*, ed. C.W. Jones, CCSL 123B (Turnhout, 1977); trans. Faith Wallis, *Bede: On the Reckoning of Time* (Liverpool, 1999), *Chronica Maiora* translated as 'The Greater Chronicle', *Bede: The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, eds. Judith McClure and Roger Collins, (Oxford, 1994), 305-40.

Epistulas VII – Bede, *In epistulas VII catholicas*, ed. D. Hurst, CCSL 121 (Turnhout, 1983); trans. David Hurst, *Commentary on the Seven Catholic Epistles of Bede the Venerable*, (Kalamazoo, 1985).

Exp Apoc – *Expositio Apocalypseos*, CCSL 121A, ed. Roger Gryson (Turnhout, 2001); trans. Faith Wallis, *Bede: Commentary on Revelation* (Liverpool, 2013), also *The Explanation of the Apocalypse by the Venerable Bede*, trans. E. Marshall, (Oxford, 1878).

FotC – Fathers of the Church

HE – Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, ed. and trans. Bertram Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford, 1969).

Hist Abb – Bede, *Historia Abbatum,* ed. and trans. Christopher Grocock and I.N. Woods, *Bede: Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow* (Oxford, 2013); also, Charles Plummer, *Venerabilis Baedae;* trans. D.H. Farmer, 'The Lives of the Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow', *The Age of Bede*, ed. D.H. Farmer, (London, 1998), 185-209.

Homeliarum – Bede, *Homeliarum evangelii,* ed. D. Hurst, CCSL 122 (Turnhout, 1955); trans. Lawrence T. Martin and David Hurst, *Homilies on the Gospels: Book*

One, Advent to Lent, CS 110 (Kalamazoo, 1991) and *Homilies on the Gospels: Book Two: Lent to the Dedication of the Church*, CS 111 (Kalamazoo, 1991).

In cantica – Bede, *In Cantica canticorum*, ed. D. Hurst, CCSL 119B (Turnhout, 1983); trans. Arthur Holder, *On the Song of Songs* (New Jersey, 2011).

In Ez – Bede, *In Ezram et Neeiam*, ed. D. Hurst, CCSL 119A (Turnhout, 1969); trans. Scott DeGregorio, *On Ezra and Nehemiah* (Liverpool, 2006).

In Samuhelis – Bede, *In primam partem Samuhelis libri Iii*, ed. D. Hurst, CCSL 119 (Turnhout, 1962).

Isaias – Bede, *De eo quod ait Isaias*, ed. J.P. Migne, PL 94 (Paris, 1850); trans. Arthur Holder, *Bede: A Biblical Miscellany*, eds. Arthur Holder and W. Trent Foley, (Liverpool, 1999), 35-52.

LOTF – Library of the Church Fathers

NPNF – Nicene Post-Nicene Fathers

SC – Sources Chretienne

Tobias – Bede, *In Tobiam*, ed. D. Hurst, CCSL 119B (Turnhout, 1983); trans. Seán Connolly, *On Tobit and On the Canticle of Habakkuk* (Dublin; Portland, Oregon, 1997), and Holder and Foley, *Biblical Miscellany*, 57-80.

TTH – Translated Texts for Historians

VSP – Visio Sancti Pauli

Citation method:

As a rule, Bedan texts are cited in Latin by page number of the critical edition, with translations cited by series, volume, and page number where appropriate (for example *Exp Apoc*, 229; TTH.58, 141). The two key sources, *HE* and *DTR*, are referred to by their divisions in the critical edition. For example, the *HE* is referenced by book and chapter. Some primary sources are referred to similarly; these are indicated. Footnotes that refer only to the Latin title refer only to the critical edition. Occasional page references – for instance, to an editor's note – are indicated. Secondary sources are cited by page number.

Biblical quotations in English, unless otherwise noted, are from the Douay-Rheims edition, with Latin from Jerome's Vulgate known by Bede.

Introduction

This thesis argues that Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* (AD731) is shaped by eschatology and Bede's concerns about the end of the world, fate of the soul, and salvation of the English.[1] It argues that Bede (d.AD735) saw himself as living at the very end of space and time, and that this shaped how he wrote about the English of the present day. It does this in part by using case studies from *HE* 5, the last book of the *HE* and the one concerning the events closest to Bede's day, and uses these case studies as keys for unlocking the *HE* overall. The thesis sets the *HE's* eschatology within the context of Bede's exegesis, including his work on geography and time. It also argues that the eschatological expectancy of the *HE* is informed, in part, by a moral and political crisis in Bede's native kingdom, Northumbria. In addition, it argues that Bede saw his people as being on the verge of a catastrophic divine judgement on a national scale, and that, drawing on the history of Britain, he saw the Saracens, the name by which medieval Europeans knew Muslims, who were encroaching on established kingdoms in Bede's day such as in Spain and Gaul, as potential agents of that judgement.

A key and innovative aspect of this thesis is its examination of how eschatology informs Bede's reform and pastoral agendas. The importance of reform as a key theme in Bede's work has become well established and widely acknowledged since Alan Thacker's 1983 landmark article on the subject. Similarly, there has been an upsurge of interest in Bede's eschatology, with Peter Darby's landmark monograph and the collection of essays he co-edited with Faith Wallis. However, where this thesis is different is that it pays close attention to how the two themes intersect. Describing it as a pastoral eschatology, the thesis examines how this concept underpins in particular *HE* 5. It examines how Bede used eschatalogical elements to emphasise his calls for reform and spiritual

[1] Eschatology – Anything to do with last things, such as the fate of the soul, the judgement of souls, and divine judgement. It does not necessarily refer to these things being imminent. Translation used is that found in Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, trans. Bertram Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford, 1969); It was reproduced in Judith McClure and Roger Collins, *Bede: The Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Oxford, 1994).

regeneration among the English, both at an individual and national level. The thesis draws on Bede's exegesis and other works to show that pastoral eschatology is a broader theme in his ouevre and is not limited to the *HE*. However, it focuses on the *HE* because of how Bede uses the theme of divine judgement in that text to awaken the living from "the death of the soul" (*HE* 5.12). Bede's primary concern was the salvation of souls, and the thesis argues that he uses eschatology – whether it be the fate of individual souls or divine punishment on a grand scale – to further that priority. Another theme of the thesis is the theme of three judgements: individual (where the single soul learns its fate), national (where whole populations are punished), and universal (where all the living and the dead would be judged at the end of time). Bede's focus is on ensuring the salvation of individuals, who could learn lessons from what he wrote about eschatology, and his wider people, who could avoid a punishment on a biblical scale if they reformed. If he could ensure those, then the English would have nothing to fear from the Last Judgement.

It is this localisation of universal themes that makes Bede if not unique, then certainly distinctive. What will become clear throughout the thesis is that Bede is taking what he learns in the Bible and patristic sources – which primarily deal with events and locations far removed from Britain and Ireland at the ends of the Earth – and applying it to a specific English context. His pastoral eschatology, though formed through the process of learning from Church Fathers, is scrupulously turned to local concerns, whether that be to ward off predictions about the end times to the incorporation of continental vision material into English vision narratives. His message is that the English are not only as central to the overall Christian world as people from the Holy Land and need to conduct themselves accordingly.

Apocalyptic[2] thought permeates the Bible, both Old and New testaments, and it can be found in a great deal of early medieval literature. Palmer and McGinn have argued that it was mainstream and, in McGinn's case, that it was formative in early Christianity, in that it caused the oppressed to think of a future reward.[3] McGinn has argued that one of the defining characteristics of this thought in the early medieval period is the idea of psychological rather than chronological imminence. This will be an underlying theme of the present thesis, which argues that Bede had seen this approach in the work of one of his main influences, Greory the Great (d.AD604), and that it appears in Bede's work as a driver of urgency as he sought moral reform amid a spiritual and political crisis. It will argue throughout that Bede's interpretation of crisis should be seen in the light of his exegesis, and it is important to note at the outset that his knowledge of scripture underpins his conception of his contemporary world. The end times were well prophesied in both testaments, but most importantly for Bede were prophesied by Jesus and Paul. Jesus predicted that nation would rise against nation, that there would be plagues and earthquakes in different places, and that there would be signs (Matt 24:7, Lk 21:11, Mark 13:8). Paul's letters had indicated there would be wars, tribulations, and "dangerous times" ("*tempora periculosa*") as men blasphemied and grew to "love themselves" (2 Tim 3:1), while Antichrist, "the son of perdition" would come amid revolts and the fading of political power (2 Thess 2:3). When it comes to discussions of crisis and urgency in the present thesis, it should be understood that Bede knew these biblical texts intimately and had internalised their messages.

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[2] Apocalypse – Strictly speaking, an apocalypse is a revelation, such as a dream or vision like that of Dryhthelm in *HE* 5.12. It is also the case that "apocalypse" can refer to the genre, while "apocalyptic" is an adjective, so "apocalyptic" in this thesis is used to refer to the actual end of the world and works concerning it (Bill T. Arnold, 'Old Testament Eschatology and the Rise of Apocalypticism', *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology*, ed. Jerry Walls (New York, 2008), 23-39: 32).

[3] James Palmer, *The Apocalypse in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2014), 3; Bernard McGinn, 'The End of the World and the Beginning of Christendom', *Apocalypse Theory and the Ends of the World* (1995): 58-89, passim.; Bernard McGinn 'The Last Judgement in Christian Tradition', *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, eds. Bernard McGinn, John J. Collins and Stephen J. Stein, Vol. 2, (London and New York, 2000), 361-401: 366-67.

This roadmap sets out the structure of the thesis in outline terms – there is a detailed breakdown of how each chapter works at the start of each chapter – and the logic behind this structure. This is so the reader has a solid grounding in what to expect and why. In addition, this roadmap outlines how this thesis connects with previous scholarship and how it differs from what has gone before. It is not an exhaustive statement of which scholars feature in the thesis, but an introduction to the key themes in existing scholarship. Detailed engagement with the primary and specialist sources takes place in each respective chapter; the intention here is to introduce key sources and debates and how the thesis engages with them.

The thesis is structured in four chapters, which address the following issues: 1) How Bede's understanding of geography influenced his eschatology and the *HE*, and how this understanding connects with his work on time; 2) How the vision of Dryhthelm, who dies, is shown the afterlife, and is brought back to life (*HE* 5.12) draws on patristic traditions to show that the English are in a dire spiritual condition; 3) Crisis and reform: How Bede drew on Gildas, a sixth-century British monk, as a framework for understanding and addressing the crisis in contemporary Anglo-Saxon England;[4] 4) How the eschatological role the Saracens play in the *HE* and his exegesis is heightened by illustrating Bede's use of ideas around the signs of the end times.

It is important to note that Bede believed he lived at a time of political but more importantly moral crisis. This crisis – where bishops demand payment for preaching, where quality preachers are in short supply, and where monastic foundations have become corrupt – is detailed in his *Epistola ad Ecgbertum* (AD734), a letter to the incoming Bishop of York, the future archbishop Ecgberht (d.AD766).[5] In this, Bede excoriates the present corruption and moral decay, while also setting out a moral

[4] The text used is Gildas, *The Ruin of Britain and Other Works*, trans. Michael Winterbottom (Chichester, 1978).
[5] A Latin version can be found in C. Plummer, *Venerabilis Opera Historica* (Oxford, 1896), Vol 1, 405-23. Translation is J. McClure and R. Collins, 341-57.

reform programme, which included training better quality preachers and basing episcopal sees at monastic centres. Bede's era was also marked by political instability, while his own monastery underwent significant upheaval as well (explored in chapter three). Reform is a key theme in Bede's exegesis and this thesis sets that theme in the context of Bede's eschatology and concerns about divine judgement. The crisis features throughout the thesis, but is marked here to ensure the reader understands that when Bede writes about moral reform or divine judgement he is doing so against the backdrop of moral corruption and instability.

By approaching the thesis in the four-fold manner above the reader derives a thorough understanding of the role of the English in the latter days, as well as how Bede understands sacred time and the place of the English within that providential history, before the discussion of Bede's conception of judgement and the death of the soul in Dryhthelm's vision (which has been the subject of little scholarship). The thesis argues this vision is structurally key to *HE* 5 and that it is tightly bound to Bede's exegesis and patristic tradition concerning the fate of individual souls. Understanding that Britain has an eschatological role, and how Bede believes individual souls will be judged, allows the reader to understand better why Bede believes the contemporary crisis is part of a biblical cycle of sin, repentance, and divine punishment, and this latter discussion then allows the reader to understand more fully why the Saracens play such a key role in how Bede believes a national judgement will be passed.

The role of Bede's exegesis in helping scholars' understanding of his *HE* has become widely accepted, and more widely accepted during the lifetime of this thesis. However, it is essential to analyse the exegesis for this thesis because aspects of *HE* 5 – for example, the connections between his scriptural work and the vision of Dryhthelm – can only be understood through an examination of their connections to the eschatology present in Bede's scriptural commentaries. The key work on Bede's eschatology –

indeed, the only monograph on the subject – is Peter Darby's *Bede and the End of Time*.[6]

This is a landmark publication that shows how eschatology is central to Bede's work. It examines how Bede anticipated and articulated ideas about the end times and judgement, and how these derived from the Bible and patristic scholarship. It argues that Bede created a "master narrative" for how the end times would unfold.[7] It explores Bede's conception of time measurement and how it differs from some of the contemporary debates regarding the calculation of time and the World Ages. Darby outlines and examines what he terms the end-time sequence, the series of events that Bede argues will precede and follow the Last Judgement, and examines how Bede's eschatological thought developed over the course of his career, both through his commentaries but also poetry and his great work on time, *De temporum ratione* (AD725). This thesis draws on Darby's work while focusing on how Bede applies eschatological teachings to the contemporary Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, such as through his use of Gildas and how he distils deep eschatological thought into into the figure of Dryhthelm. Such is the scale of Darby's work – and the book of essays which he and Faith Wallis subsequently edited, *Bede and the Future*, which cover the whole range of Bede's concerns with time and judgement[8] – that there is no one place where the thesis can engage with Darby's text or ideas; rather they are discussed throughout the thesis.

Regarding chapter 1: Bede's understanding of sacred geography is vital for this thesis because it illustrates how he believed the English to have a providential role, and that their conversion to Christianity played a vital eschatological role ahead of the Last Judgement. The thesis is indebted to works by Jennifer O'Reilly and Diarmuid Scully on sacred geography, and particularly on the role of the islands in patristic and early medieval

[6] Peter Darby, *Bede and the End of Time* (Farnham, 2012).
[7] Ibid., 218.
[8] *Bede and the Future*, eds. P. Darby and F. Wallis (Farnham, 2014).

exegesis.[9] The thesis engages, for instance, with O'Reilly's work on the role islands play in pre-Bede Christian exegesis, and do this as a way of emphasising that Bede draws on these traditions for his own eschatology but channels them to emphasise the role Britain has in wider Christian eschatology. Scully locates the Atlantic archipelago firmly in the Classical and patristic imagination, with particular discussion of Gildas and the Britons. There is a wide and substantial body of research on wider Classical and medieval ideas of geography, such as work by Romm and Hiatt, who locate Britain in the imagination and literature of Classical and patristic writers.[10] Drawing on and debating with these, the thesis connects the themes to the eschatology of the *HE* and to Bede's writings about time and use of the AD dating system. It argues that AD is used to emphasise the eschatological nature of the conversion of the English. The chapter also emphasises how Bede is drawing on a rich patristic tradition concerning geography and time to show that the English are a key part of the wider Christian world. *De temporum ratione* is vital for this chapter and Faith Wallis's translation and commentary are important in the discussion, while Mairin MacCarron's recent work on Bede and time has also proved valuable concerning why he used AD and its eschatological context.[11] She has also argued that he used AD as a way of reframing English history to influence the perception of the future. Her work has also demonstrated the sheer innovation of how Bede synchronises different dating systems, as

[9] Jennifer O'Reilly, 'Islands and Idols at the Ends of the Earth: Exegesis and Conversion in Bede's Historia Ecclesiastica', *Bède Le Vénérable. Entre Tradition Et Posterité*, eds. Stephane Lebecq, Michel Perrin and Olivier Szerwiniack, (Lille, 2005), 119-45; Diarmuid Scully, 'Location and Occupation: Bede, Gildas, and the Roman Vision of Britain', *Anglo Saxon Traces: 13th International Society of Anglo-Saxonists Conference*, eds. Jane Roberts and L Webster, (London, 2011), 251-80;, Jeremiah A. (Diarmuid) Scully, 'The Atlantic Archipelago from Antiquity to Bede: The Transformation of an Image', Unpublished PhD thesis (National University of Ireland, UCC, 2000).

[10] Alfred Hiatt, 'From Pliny to Brexit: Spatial representation of the British Isles', *postmedieval: a journal of medieval cultural studies* (2016) 7, 511–525; James S. Romm, *The Edges of the Earth in Ancient Thought: Geography, Exploration and Fiction*, (Princeton, 1992).

[11] Faith Wallis, *Bede: On the Reckoning of Time* (Liverpool, 1999); Mairin MacCarron, 'Bede, *Annus Domini*, and the *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*', *The Mystery of Christ in the Fathers of the Church*, eds. Janet E. Rutherford and David Woods, 116-134; 'Christology and the Future in Bede's Annus Domini', *Bede and the Future*, 161-80; 'Bede, Irish Computistica and Annus Mundi', *Early Medieval Europe* 23 3 (2015): 290-307.

well as how Bede blends computus, history, and theology in a dynamic and holistic way that shows how deep and interconnected his thought is concerning the subjects of this thesis.

Regarding chapter 2: This chapter draws on a wide array of scholars who have written about judgement in medieval text and on miracles in medieval texts, including Kabir, Colgrave, and McCready.[12] These cover a range of accounts and contexts, with Colgrave and McCready having a heavy focus on Bede and his miracle accounts, and what they mean in contemporary and exegetical contexts, and Kabir locating Anglo-Saxon ideas of judgement and doomsday in a broader field. It also draws on the Dryhthelm studies by Miller and Rabin.[13] Both of these pay close attention to the literary context and traditions of the vision narrative, with Rabin arguing that it was in part designed to allow the reader to follow a process of internal revelation by considering the vision and placing themselves within it. This chapter emphasises the exegetical connections in the Dryhthelm text and relates it to the *HE*'s overall eschatology. In addition, the chapter does not simply present the connections between the Dryhthelm vision and other medieval miracle or vision texts. Rather, it connects Dryhthelm to the wider patristic exegetical conditions regarding judgement, and specifically to the connections between the Dryhthelm account and Bede's exegesis. A key element of the chapter not found in other studies is what Bede means by the phrase "death of the soul", which he uses in introducing the account. The chapter argues that the account is a distillation of Bede's exegesis concerning judgement into an individual man who dies and is resurrected in the years shortly before the *HE* was written. There does not appear to have been a previous study of Bede's use

[12] William D. McCready, *Miracles and the Venerable Bede*, (Toronto, 1994); Ananya Jahanara Kabir, *Paradise, Death, and Doomsday in Anglo-Saxon Literature*, (Cambridge, 2001); Bertram Colgrave, 'Bede's Miracle Stories', *Bede: His Life, Times, and Writings: Essays in Commemoration of the Twelfth Centenary of His Death*, ed. A. Hamilton Thompson, (Oxford, 1935), 201-29.

[13] Andrew Rabin, 'Bede, Dryhthelm, and the Witness to the Other World: Testimony and Conversion in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*', *Modern Philology* 106 3 (2009): 375-98; Linda L. Miller, 'Drythelm's Journey to the Other World: Bede's Literary Use of Tradition', *Comitatus: A journal of medieval and renaissance studies* 2 1 (1971): 3-15.

of that phrase and what it means in a patristic, exegetical, and eschatological context.

Regarding chapter 3: This chapter draws on work at MA level as well as showing a considerable debt to the work of Jennifer O'Reilly concerning Bede's *Epistola,* a polemical tract that outlines the decayed state of Northumbria as Bede sees it and articulates a reform programme.[14] The role of Bede's reform agenda and the *Epistola* in that has become greatly appreciated in recent years, and the thesis draws on the work done by scholars such as Thacker and DeGregorio on Bede's vision of reform,[15] a vision they argue is rooted in his exegesis and his conception of pastoral theology; Bede's key proposal for counteracting spiritual decay is the training of quality preachers. The chapter also engages with some recent work by Conor O'Brien about Bede's monastic foundation and its internal crises.[16] O'Brien argues that Wearmouth-Jarrow was divided between a kin group and a faction that wanted reform along Benedictine lines. This thesis examines the role of dynastic instability and its impact on Bede's work. The chapter pays close attention to how Bede uses Gildas as a model, both in terms of information and ideas about divine judgement.[17] Gildas's *De excidio Britanniae* is a sixth-century polemic rooted in scriptural allusions which argues that the Britons were punished by God through the agency of the Anglo-Saxons, and the chapter examines how Bede uses this as a prism through which to view Britain's history and his people's possible future. This concept has been a feature of scholarship before, but the particular

[14] Dáithí Ó Mathghamhna, 'Crisis and Reform: Bede's Letter to Ecgbert and the Model Kingship of Oswald of Northumbria', Unpublished MA thesis. (University College Cork, 2009).

[15] For example, Alan Thacker, 'Bede's Ideal of Reform', *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society*, eds. Patrick Wormald, Donald Bullough and Roger Collins, (Oxford, 1983), 130-53; Scott DeGregorio, 'Visions of Reform: Bede's Later Writings in Context', *Bede and the Future*, 207-32.

[16] Conor O'Brien, 'Hwaetberht, Sicgfrith and the reforming of Wearmouth and Jarrow', *Early Medieval Europe* 25.3 (2017), 301-19; for a more general study that touches in these themes, see O'Brien, *Bede's Temple: An Image and its Interpretation*, (Oxford, 2015).

[17] Examples of work on Bede and Gildas include Miller, 'Bede's Use of Gildas', *The English Historical Review* 355 (1975): 241-61; Diarmuid Scully, 'Bede, Orosius, and Gildas on the Early History of Britain', *Bède Le Vénérable. Entre Tradition Et Posterité*, 31-42; Scully, 'Location and Occupation'; E.A. Thompson, 'Gildas and the History of Britain', *Britannia* 10 (1979): 203-26.

relevance for this thesis is the concept of being judged through the agency of another people, which chapter 4 argues is the Saracens.

Regarding chapter 4: This chapter pays attention to the elements of *HE* 5 that suggest an imminent – psychologically at least – judgement. These are connected to how Bede introduces the Saracens into the narrative of the *HE*, and the chapter argues that his process illustrates that there is a real risk of a catastrophic judgement that could see the English miss out on salvation. There is a close reading of Bede's exegesis on the Saracens, also known in exegesis as Ishmaelites. Since the thesis began, Bede's conception and references to Islam and the Saracens have become of greater interest to scholars, such as Calvin Kendall. Even before though, there have been studies on the subject of how medieval Europe understood Islam, and these are important for understanding the wider context, for instance the work of John Tolan on the Saracens in the European imagination.[18] For instance, Tolan argues that Islam presented a profound challenge to Christian conceptions of the world, not only because of a rising military power but because it presented a challenge to Christian ideas of the Other such as pagan, Jew, or heretic.

A key argument, advanced in Katharine Scarfe Beckett's *Anglo-Saxon Perceptions of the Islamic World*, which covers a wide context of early medieval and Old English sources, is that the Saracens and Muslims generally were known to the English predominantly through literary sources.[19] Her text goes from early Anglo-Saxon to post-Conquest England, and her discussion of Adomnán's *De Locis Sanctis* (AD690s) is important for this thesis because Bede rewrites this and incorporates part of it into *HE* 5. She also argues that Adomnán's text was the sole eyewitness account of the Holy Land circulating in Anglo-Saxon England. Elsewhere, Kendall has

[18] John V. Tolan, ed., *Medieval Christian Perceptions of Islam* (New York, 1996); *Saracens: Islam in the Medieval European Imagination* (New York and Chichester, 2002); John Tolan, Gilles Veinstein, and Henry Laurens, eds., *Europe and the Islamic World* (Princeton and Oxford, 2013).
[19] Katharine Scarfe Beckett, *Anglo-Saxon Perceptions of the Islamic World*, (Cambridge, 2003).

examined Bede's use of the Saracens – both as part of Kendall's translation of Bede's Genesis commentary and in recent years as a standalone article on the subject.[20] These argue that Bede's approach to the Saracens became more hardened and negative as his career progressed. Kendall discusses the Saracens in the context of Bede's exegesis on Ishmaelites, who also appear in the works of Jerome as opponents of the chosen people. Kendall's work is hugely important, because it ties together various strands of Bede's thought and exegesis. This thesis examines how the Saracens fit in to Bede's overall eschatology and its relation to the *HE*, and how the Saracens fit in to the context of an overall picture of judgement, following the patterns of Gildas and the Bible. This chapter also examines Bede's comments on the Britons and Jews to argue that he sees the status of the English as members of the new chosen people (i.e., Christians) at risk. It argues that, in this context, the Saracens are potential agents of a sweeping, catastrophic judgement that would leave the English outside of salvation.

[20]Calvin Kendall, 'Bede and Islam', *Bede and the Future*, 93-114; 'Introduction', *On Genesis*, (Liverpool, 2008), 1-61.

Chapter 1

At the edge: How Bede's location in geography and time influenced his eschatology and the *HE*

This chapter argues that Bede saw himself as living at the ends of the Earth and the end of time, and that these beliefs profoundly shaped how he wrote the *HE*. The chapter advances its argument by first outlining his location in Wearmouth-Jarrow and the intellectual assets at his disposal in order to show how he applies the techniques of scriptural commentary to historical events, which he does to advance his moral reform agenda. After that it discusses geography and how Bede, following Classical and patristic traditions, understood the Earth and especially the remoteness of Britain and Ireland, as well as how he articulated his belief that he lived at the ends of the Earth. It then discusses the role the Insular world plays in Christian eschatology, in order to explain how this role influenced Bede's approach to the history of the English. It is essential to do this so that the significance of Dryhthelm in chapter two is made clear. After the role of the Insular world, the present chapter examines Bede's understanding of sacred time in order to show how he works within, and diverges from, patristic eschatological exegesis (it does not, however, examine in detail the signs of the end of the world, as this is more suited for discussions of Bede's treatment of the Saracens in chapter four).

The chapter especially looks at his commentary on Revelation and how he relates it to his day, while also discussing his attitude toward martyrs and how they reflect his eschatological framework and exegesis. Martyrs not only represented ideals of Christian forbearance but were reminders of divine reward in the contemporary world, and by extension divine judgement. They formed part of apocalyptic expectations and showed for Bede that the conditions of the past were manifesting in the present. The discussion of martyrs and Revelation is necessary to understand what follows, which is an examination of Bede's understanding of time and dating systems to show that his choice of the AD system for the *HE* is profoundly eschatological.

Bede's physical location and its influence on his eschatology

This section establishes where Bede literally saw himself in the patristic traditions of space and time. It does this by first examining his physical context in northern Britain and the resources at his disposal, and how those circumstances affected how eschatology influenced his work. It does this by examining his intellectual context and demonstrating his working practices, to show how he works within established patristic traditions to show their applicability to a local context. The argument also includes outlining how he articulates that he is living at the end of time, and how he shows the intersection between Britain and the apocalypse.

Bede was born in the 670s and lived in the twin monastery of Wearmouth-Jarrow, in the north of the English kingdom of Northumbria, from the age of seven until his death in 735.[21] He was highly educated, a champion of orthodoxy, and his scriptural commentaries were so highly regarded that they were in much demand throughout the medieval period and beyond.[22] He was also a providential historian who saw a divine plan and linear progression from creation to the Last Judgement, and for whom history and biblical commentary were both instrumental in expounding and sharing his moral reform programme.[23] Scholars such as Darby point out that "Bede's writings on the past and the future were not the products of two enterprises; they were parts of a single whole and it is difficult to

[21] He was Bæda in contemporary texts, Beda in medieval ones, and Bede to modern scholars. The name means "prayer" (George Hardin Brown, *A Companion to Bede*, (2009), 8.). While his precise year of birth is unknown, his year of death can be dated by a letter written by one of his students, Cuthbert. Cuthbert, 'Cuthbert's Letter on the Death of Bede', trans. Bertram Colgrave, *Bede: The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, eds. Judith McClure and Roger Collins (Oxford, 1994), 300-03.

[22] See Joshua Westgard, 'Bede and the Continent in the Carolingian age and Beyond', *Cambridge Companion to Bede*, 201-15; J.E. Cross, 'Bede's influence at home and abroad', in *Beda Venerabilis: Historian, Monk & Northumbrian*, eds. L.A.J.R. Houwen and A.A. McDonald (Groningen 1996), 17-29; Joyce Hill, *Bede and the Benedictine Reform* (Jarrow, 1998); David Rollason, *Bede and Germany* (Jarrow, 2001); Walter A. Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History (A. D. 550–800): Jordanes, Gregory of Tours, Bede, and Paul the Deacon* (Princeton, 1988).

[23] Scott DeGregorio, 'Bede's in Ezram Et Neemiam and the Reform of the Northumbrian Church', *Speculum* 79 (2004): 1-25: 25.

understand the former fully without an appreciation of the latter."[24] Writing an ecclesiastical history, as opposed to a political history, reflected Bede's linear, eschatological thinking. As Hardin Brown points out, "ecclesiastical history, based on biblical rather than Classical concepts of time and event, presupposes a theocratic universe in which primary concern is focussed on the sacred, and the secular is understood in terms of the sacred; it is a history that traces the development of the church as it advances in time and geography to 'the ends of the earth' [Acts 1:8]".[25] Studying and writing history was a way of taking part in the unfolding of a divine plan as the world moved toward the Last Judgement.[26] Bede's works were strongly marked by the end of time; he believed he was living in the last age of the world. In his Genesis commentary, he says that "Even now we see the evening of this day [the sixth day/Age] approaching, when, with iniquity abounding everywhere, the charity [*caritas*, love] of many grows cold [Matt 24:12]".[27]

When it comes to understanding why Bede's work is so influenced by eschatology, it is important to remember that contemplating the Judgement was a part of daily life at Wearmouth-Jarrow. St Peter's church at Monkwearmouth was adorned with images of the events related in Revelation.[28] These, Bede says, served as a message for anybody who entered the church, whether they could read or not. He had written in his *De templo* (c.AD731) commentary that art was "living writing" ("*viva scriptura*") to the illiterate.[29] Darby notes that the apocalypse pictures "conveyed a powerful, yet simple didactic lesson: the day of judgement

[24] Darby, *Bede and the End of Time*, 5.
[25] George Hardin Brown, *Bede the Venerable* (Boston, 1987), 86.
[26] Alan Thacker, 'Bede and History', *The Cambridge Companion to Bede*, ed. Scott DeGregorio (Cambridge, 2010), 170-90: 170.
[27] *In Gen*, 38, TTH.48, 104: *Cuius diei uesperam iam nunc adproinquare cernimus, cum, abundante per omnia iniquitate refrigescit caritas multorum*.
[28] *Hist abb* 6, Plummer 368-70. For a fuller study of Bede's description and presentation of the paintings, see Paul Meyvaert, 'Bede and the Church Paintings at Wearmouth-Jarrow', *Anglo-Saxon England* 8 (1979), 63-77. For discussion of the influence of such iconography in Bede's work, see Wallis, 'Revelation Introduction': 34-9.
[29] *De templo*, 213, TTH, 91.

should inspire Christians to lead better lives".[30] The images were on a wall facing a cycle of Gospel scenes, in what was likely an effort to highlight an allegorical relationship between the biblical past and eschatological events of the future; the events of Jesus' life were on the congregation's right, with the events of Revelation on the left.[31] However, the mere inclusion of these images is in itself is a departure from the visual practices of previous centuries.

Laffin points out that there is a paucity of representations of the Last Judgement in the early Christian period, as far as the sixth century, and Christ is often depicted as a philosopher/shepherd.[32] So the art at Jarrow would seem to be part of a shift in iconography that focused more on the nature of judgement. Indeed, Hawkes points out that the eighth and ninth centuries were a time of experimentation in Insular art, with eschatology and judgement being key themes in Anglo-Saxon sculpture.[33] And a tablet at the monastery that dates from Bede's lifetime engaged profoundly with biblical eschatology. Hawkes notes that the tablet, which concerned the elevated cross, refers to Constantine's vision ("*in hoc singulari signo*") and the eternal life it represents ("*vita redditur mundo*").[34] She stresses that Constantine's sign, a cross in the sky, recalled the prophecy of Matt 24:30 that the sign of the son of man (the cross) would be seen in heaven, the tribes of earth would mourn, and the son of man would come from the clouds.

Hawkes points out that this tablet would have been behind the altar at Jarrow and was probably intended to recall the procession of the True Cross at Rome which was itself intended to recall Christ's road to Calvary.[35]

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[30] Darby, *Bede and the End of Time*, 220.
[31] *Ibid*, 220-21.
[32] Josephine Laffin, 'What Happened to the Last Judgement in the Early Church?', *Studies in Church History* 45, 20-30: 22-24.
[33] Jane Hawkes, 'The Road to Hell: The Art of Damnation in Anglo-Saxon Sculpture', *Listen O Isles Unto Me*, eds. Elizabeth Mullins and Diarmuid Scully (Cork, 2011), 230-242: 231.
[34] Hawkes, 'Road to Hell', 232.
[35] Hawkes, 'Road to Hell': 232.

Such a procession would likely be designed to encourage participants and onlookers to consider Christ's passion – the period from his entrance to Jerusalem to his execution – and what it meant in terms of salvation. But for the purposes of this thesis it shows that Bede's brethren were surrounded by reminders of judgement and the end, and that their chapel was designed to emphasise and reinforce the messages that all souls would be judged by Jesus following the Second Coming. As Darby notes, anybody who saw the pictures in the church was inspired to consider the fate of their soul after death.[36]

Other aspects of the monastery could also be read symbolically in the light of scriptural exegesis. DeGregorio argues that the combination of royal and ecclesiastical at Jarrow – where one Northumbrian dynasty served as patron of the monastery – allowed Bede to interpret the monastery as a manifestation of the rebuilding of the Temple of Jerusalem carried out by king and priest in Ezra-Nehemiah.[37] These biblical books concern the return of the Jews to Israel after the fall of Babylon (586BC), and the efforts of the priest Ezra and king Nehemiah to build a strong, pure religious populace. Bede wrote a commentary on these books, which had been neglected by patristic tradition. He expresses a fervent desire that a great leader like Nehemiah ("*nostris Neemias*", "our Nehemiah") would come and reform the English people, "restrain our errors [and] kindle our breasts to love of the divine", thus keeping them morally upstanding at a time of coming judgement.[38] For Bede, who wrote a commentary on it after AD725, Ezra was key exemplar, he was both priest and exegete, a compiler and codifier of scripture but also a disseminator through preaching; DeGregorio notes the emphatic relevance of this with regard to Bede's

[36] Darby, *End of Time*: 220.
[37] DeGregorio, 'Bede's *In Ezram et Neemiam*', 4, 12-14.
[38] *In Ezram*, 360; TTH.47, 184. "*Atque utinam aliquis in diebus nostris Neemias, id est consolator a domino, aduenuens nostros compescat errores nostra ad amorem diuinum praecordia accendat nostras a propriis uoluptatibus ad constitudendam Christi ciuitatem manus auertens confortet*."

concerns regarding Northumbria, to be discussed later.[39] And the parallels in Ezra-Nehemiah for Bede would have been striking, as he himself wrote about the need for strong co-operation between the secular and spiritual leaders, and indeed had seen it in the history of his own kingdom with King Oswald and Bishop Aidan.[40] It is a royal-ecclesiastical alliance Bede hopes will be replicated in his own day to ensure the strengthening of English Christian identity.[41] As Thacker puts it, "the Northumbrian monks [at Jarrow] were re-enacting the restoration and reform of the Temple, in its figural sense … Their involvement in missionary work among the peoples of Britain advanced the eschatological moment when the furthermost isles were converted and the Last Judgement became a reality".[42]

The Last Judgement was fundamental to Christian thought from the beginning.[43] Beliefs about it were built on biblical texts, both on Old Testament prophecies such as those of Daniel and Isaiah and aspects of the gospels as well as Revelation. The words and actions attributed to Jesus in the gospels display a pronounced interest in eschatology and the fulfilment of earlier biblical prophecies about the end times.[44] Meanwhile, at the end of Revelation the author stresses that "he [Jesus] who gives this warning says, 'Indeed I am coming soon'. Be it so, then; come, Lord Jesus" (Rev 22:21), suggesting that he was either hoping for or at least welcoming the return of Jesus and the Last Judgement. Pertinently for the present thesis, Bede notes that one of the most fundamental Christian prayers, the *Pater*

[39] Scott DeGregorio: 'The Figure of Ezra in the Writings of Bede and the Codex Amiatinus', *Listen O Isles Unto Me*: 115-25, see especially 119-21. See chapter 3 below.
[40] On Oswald as an exemplar in time of crisis, see Ó Mathghamhna, 'Crisis and reform', passim.
[41] Letter to Ecgbert, passim.
[42] Alan Thacker, *Bede and Augustine of Hippo: History and Figure in Sacred Text*, Jarrow Lecture (2005), 27; See also Scully, 'Atlantic Archipelago', 152-255.
[43] Bernard McGinn, 'The Last Judgement in Christian Tradition', *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, eds. Bernard McGinn, John J. Collins and Stephen J. Stein, vol. 2 (London and New York, 2000), 361-401; Bernard McGinn, 'John's Apocalypse and the Apocalyptic Mentality', *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, eds. Bernard McGinn and Richard K. Emmerson (Itaca and London, 1992), 3-19.
[44] See, for instance, Robert M. Grant, 'The Coming of the Kingdom', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 67 (1948), 297-303; Christopher Rowland, 'The Eschatology of the New Testament Church', *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology*, ed. Jerry Walls (Oxford, 2008), 56-72.

noster, includes a plea for the end to come: "They [martyrs] pray for the day of judgement, in which the reign of sin (*quo peccati aduenire precantur*) shall be destroyed, and the resurrection of the bodies of the dead take place. We likewise in this present time, though we are commanded to pray for our enemies, say when we pray to the Lord, Your kingdom come."[45] Christians were praying for the end of the world and Second Coming of Jesus.

Exegetes had biblical authority for believing that the end was imminent. 1 Pet 4:7 said that "The end of all things is close at hand; live wisely, and keep your senses awake to greet the hours of prayer".[46] Paul, in his letter to the Romans, says the recipients should "make no mistake about the age (*tempus*) we live in; already it is high time for us to awake out of our sleep; our salvation is closer to us now than when we first learned to believe" (Rom 13:11); when Bede says that Dryhthelm's death, vision of the afterlife, and resurrection are a miracle designed to "arouse the living from the death of the soul" (the focus of chapter two of the present thesis) he is drawing from the same well of ideas as Paul's letter, and is emphasising how it applies to a local context.

Understanding this and how it informs the eschatological concerns of the *HE* requires some intellectual context. Bede did not emerge in isolation, though despite his statements that he was following in the footsteps of the Fathers he was no slave to tradition.[47] Older scholarship tended to say he was humble and following patristic authors, whereas more recent scholars such as Darby believe Bede was probably aware of his contribution to theological discussion.[48] Most of what can be learned about Bede's mindset is through analysis of his commentaries, and this is the only way of analysing his eschatological thought.

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[45] *Exp Apoc*, 303; TTH.58, 145.
[46] "*Omnium autem finis adpropinquavit estote itaque prudentes et vigilate in orationibus*".
[47] See, for example, Scott DeGregorio, 'Footsteps of His Own: Bede's Commentary on Ezra-Nehemiah', *Innovation and Tradition in the Writings of the Venerable Bede*, ed. Scott DeGregorio (Morgantown, 2006), 143-68.
[48] Darby, *Bede and the End of Time*, 11.

Bede is careful at selecting his citations and sources, and just as careful at blending them into his work in order to further his programme of moral reform.[49] His attitude to citing older texts can be summed up in a line from his own exegesis: "we need to keep meditating upon the flow of divine words so that by reading what the saints have done or said our minds may be alerted to the ways in which the ancient enemy tries to conquer us by direct assault or trip us up by tricks (*fraudium*) of deception".[50] However, in his exegesis he remarks that the English have a certain slothfulness, and that not everybody has access to patristic sources as only the wealthy could afford them all, with authors like Ambrose of Milan (d.AD397) writing in such a complex way that only the very skilled could understand them.[51]

This informs Bede's drive for moral reform, outlined in the thesis introduction and returned to in the following chapters, and in turn his eschatological thought, with the *HE* becoming a warning for the future based on a reading and analysis of the past. However, he writes for his audience, in order to ensure salvation on as wide a scale as possible. For example, when figuratively explaining a literal passage in Ezra-Nehemiah, Bede says "what all this suggests with regard to what is done or is going to be done in the Church by the Lord is clear to the learned reader (*docto patent lectori*), but we will take pains to make them accessible to the less learned (*simplicioribus*) as well".[52] While his audience was predominantly the ecclesiastical elite, he is conscious of the need for simpler instruction as

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[49] For the sources available to Bede, see Gerald Bonner, 'Bede: Scholar and Spiritual Teacher', *Northumbria's Golden Age*, eds. Jane Hawkes and Susan Mills (Stroud, 1999), 365; Arthur Holder, 'Introduction', *Bede: On the Tabernacle* (Liverpool, 1994), xiii-xxvi; Ian N. Wood, 'Bede's Jarrow', *A Place to Believe In*, eds. A. Lees Clare and R. Overing Gillian (University Park, Pa., 2006), 67; Michael Laistner, 'The Library of the Venerable Bede', *Bede: His Life, Times and Writings*, ed. A. Hamilton Thompson (Oxford, 1935), 263-6; Michael Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library* (Oxford, 2006). A list of sources found in Bede's work is available by searching "Fontes Anglo-Saxonici: World Wide Web Register," English Faculty, University of Oxford, <http://fontes.english.ox.ac.uk>.7

[50] *In cantica*, on Sg 5:12; CCSL, 287, Holder trans, 160

[51] *Exp Apoc*, 233; TTH.58, 106. See *Exp Apoc*: "*id est Anglorum gentis inertiae consulendum ratus*". See also George Hardin Brown, *Bede the Venerable* (Boston, 1987), 43.

[52] *In Ez*, 310; TTH.47, 114.

well. But everything is rooted in orthodoxy and scripture. He frequently used quotations from the Old Testament alongside elements of the New in order to make his point; this "concordance exegesis" is a feature of his writing and so when examining one of his texts the reader must be aware of connections to other biblical or exegetical texts. [53]

It is important for the present thesis to establish this now, because parallels between Bede's texts are a fundamental part of the analysis of his eschatology. For instance, Bede is clear in his exegesis that the Old and New Testaments are closely linked:

> in the design of God's providence, which is, of course, inaccessible and incomprehensible to us, it was arranged before the world began (*ante saecula dispositum*), when and how and by what authors sacred scripture was to be written … the coming of Antichrist, the end of the world (*finem saeculi extremi*), the critical moment of the last judgement, and the eternal glory of the good and punishment of the wicked, both testaments demonstrate with harmonious truth.[54]

The passage is key for the concerns of the present thesis, because it shows not only Bede's providential thinking but also the integral role that eschatology plays in his intellectual framework. In addition it shows how Bede understood exegetical processes to be valuable tools for interpreting and writing about historical events. He was well aware of Augustine of Hippo's (d.AD430) statement that "anything ... that we learn from history about the chronology of past times assists us very much in understanding the scriptures".[55] So it is not surprising that he uses the historical past to elucidate scripture, nor that he uses scripture to form an understanding of historical events (this will be particularly pertinent in the discussion of "ancient times" regarding the Dryhthelm vision). This is a hallmark of Bede's exegesis, though his work often has eschatological themes. For instance, the conclusion to his commentary on Luke (pre-AD716) ends with

[53] Lawrence T. Martin, 'Introduction', *Bede: Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, ed. Lawrence T. Martin (Kalamazoo, 1989), xxv-xxxii: xxix-xxxi.
[54] *De templo*, 181-2; TTH.21, 50-52.
[55] *DCD* 2.28.

a call to the reader to emulate the apostles and prepare for the Last Judgement with calm minds so they could "follow in the footsteps" of Jesus.[56] This is pertinent here especially not just for the eschatology, but because the evangelist was considered a historian and because Luke 1:4 resembles Bede's statement in the *HE* that he reported things for the common good, which ties Bede to biblical tradition.[57]

By now showing how Bede believed he literally lived at the ends of the Earth, and by explaining the significance of this belief, it will be clearer why eschatological concerns play such a significant role in the *HE* overall.

The geography of the world, the remoteness of Britain and Ireland, and the eschatological role of the islands in the late antique and early medieval periods

This section argues that Bede literally saw himself as living at the very ends of the Earth. It examines Classical and patristic concepts of how the world was shaped, and how Bede followed and diverged from these traditions; this examination will explain why the location of Britain and Ireland was so important to him. This section also emphasises the remoteness of Britain and Ireland, ideas embraced by Bede. It then outlines the importance of the islands to Christian eschatology, and how Bede absorbs and retransmits ideas about the islands' eschatological role through the *HE* and his exegesis.

[56] *In Luc*, 424-25. See also Brown, *Companion*, 61.
[57] Lk 1:1-4: "Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a narration of the things that have been accomplished among us; According as they have delivered them unto us, who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the world: It seemed good to me also, having diligently attained to all things from the beginning, to write to thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, That thou mayest know the verity of those words in which thou hast been instructed."

For Classical geographers such as Pliny (d.AD79), who was cited by Bede, Earth was a sphere in the middle of the universe.[58] Classical, patristic, and early medieval sources believed that the globe was divided into five climatic zones. The ancient Greeks had only vague ideas of the real extent of the Earth; Romm has argued that establishing boundaries was their way of making the world intelligible.[59] It was believed that the far north and south were too cold for habitation, and there were two habitable zones divided by the equator, which was an area too hot for people to live in. The known world, then, was in the northern habitable zone – the existence of an inhabited southern zone was a fable, Bede notes (*DTR* 34).[60] For Classical writers, there were three continents: Europe, Libya/Africa, and Asia, and these were surrounded by Ocean; Bede follows this model.[61] Patristic authors added the concept of Jerusalem being at the centre of the world, and added a layer of providential geography, informed by scriptural exegesis, by setting out which son of Noah settled a particular continent – Japheth in Europe, Shem in Asia, Ham in Africa (the map included, from the first printed edition (14th century) of Isidore's *Etymologiae*, is a classic example of the T-O map concept known in the medieval period). All such geographical conception was accepted by Bede, who received it transmitted from Classical authors and also Christian ones such as Isidore (d.AD636), who wrote about geography in his *Etymologiae* and who has been described as integrating "many details of the Classical Roman ethnographic tradition [but placing] them within a biblical framework, imposing order on

[58] Scully, 'Location and Occupation, 252-57.
[59] Romm, *Edges of the Earth*: 11.
[60] See Pliny, *Historia Naturalis* 2.68.
[61] *DNR* 51; Pliny *Historia Naturalis* 3.1; Isidore, *De natura rerum*, 48.2.

chaos".[62] Bede, citing Isidore, wrote that the descendants of Japheth were Gentiles who occupied Europe.[63] This was an emphatic statement that the English were descended from Noah, and so were part of a continuum with the other European (and near-Asian) Gentiles and indeed the entire human race, as established in Genesis.

Since Classical times Ireland and Britain were seen as another world ("*alter orbis*") at the edges of the far west, beyond which no lands were inhabited or inhabitable.[64] Hiatt notes that one eighth-century mapmaker locates Britain and Ireland – not named as Britannia or Hibernia but conjoined – in the western Ocean, a region he labels "dead sea" ("*mare mortuum*").[65] Virgil described the Britons as divided from the whole world ("*toto divisos orbe Britannos*").[66] Psuedo-Hegesippus, in his fourth-century adaptation of Josephus' *De Bello Iudaica*, says Britain is outside the world ("*Britannia extra orbem*") but had been brought into the world by Roman conquest.[67] Romm has argued that the conquest of Britain by Caesar was in effect the Roman parallel to the conquest of India by Alexander.[68] It played a hugely important role in the intellectual conception of the world precisely because it represented an ultimate boundary. The Insular region was as far west and north as was inhabited, with the Orkneys the furthest habitable area north and Ireland the furthest west; the only island further north, Ultima Thule, was believed to be an uninhabitable wasteland. Sailors who ventured into the North Sea were elevated to the status of epic heroes.[69]

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[62] John Tolan, 'Saracens and Ifranj: Rivalries, Emulation, and Convergence', in John Tolan, Henry Laurens, and Gilles Veinstein, *Europe and the Islamic World* (Princeton, 2013), 11-87: 12.
[63] *In Gen*, 142, 150.
[64] Lozovsky, *Earth Is Our Book*, 86-94; O'Loughlin, 'Living in the Ocean'; Baumgarten, 'Geographical Orientation'. See also Scully, 'The Atlantic Archipelago', 7-20; Waters Bennett, 'Britain among the Fortunate Isles': 114-5; Stewart, 'Inventing Britain: The Roman Creation and Adaptation of an Image': 10; Romm, *The Edges of the Earth*, 10-26.
[65] Hiatt, 'Pliny to Brexit', 513.
[66] Virgil, *Eclogae* 1.66; Scully, 'Proud Ocean', 9, notes similarities in Origen, *In Lucam Homilia* 6; Jerome, *Ep* 46.10; and Isidore, *Etymologiae* 9.2.
[67] Pseudo-Hegesippus *Historiae Libri* 5 2.9, ed V Ussani, CSEL.66, 150. As noted in Scully, 'Proud Ocean', 8.
[68] See Romm, *Edges of the Earth*: 140-45.
[69] Romm, *Edges of the Earth*: 142-43.

Pliny the Elder wrote of Ultima Thule that it was six days sail north of Britain, and that it had no nights during mid-summer and no days in mid-winter. Isidore stated that it was separate from the Insular world (Britain, Thanet, Ireland, and the Orkneys), and that there was no daylight beyond Thule. Thule, for Bede, was associated with barbarians: He associated it with Scythia, which he wrote was the original home of the Picts, and associates it also with the midnight sun.[70]

Isidore, meanwhile, had written that the Britons were a "*gens intra Oceanum*" (a people within Ocean) who were "*quasi extra orbem posita*" (as if outside the world).[71] The patristic writer Jerome saw the Insular world as "a place apart".[72] One of the earliest Insular writers, Gildas, refers to Britain as "an island numb with chill ice and far removed, as in a remote nook of the world, from the visible sun" (*DEB* 8).

Bede acknowledges that Britain is the last inhabited place before icy regions.[73] In *In Cantica canticorum* (pre-AD716), he refers to the intersection of geography and time when he writes that "For fragrant spices flowed from the garden on a blast of wind when that holy man who was buffeted by adversities spread the odor of his marvellous constancy in virtue so very far and wide that the ardour of its unerring sweetness has even permeated to us who live at the very end of the world and the age (*in ultimo fine et mundi et saeculi*)".[74] Davidse believes this to be the one place in Bede's work where he connects the islands with the end of time.[75] It certainly shows that Bede has thoroughly absorbed patristic and biblical discourse concerning

[70] Bede, *In regum librum XXX quaestiones*, ed. D. Hurst, CCSL 119 (Turnhout, 1962), 317; trans. 'Thirty Questions on the Book of Kings', Holder and Foley, *Biblical Miscellany*, 89-138.
[71] Isidore, *Etymologiae* 9.2.102, ed. W.M. Lindsay (Oxford, 2011), translated in *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, ed. Stephen Barney, W.J. Lewis, J.A. Beach, and Oliver Berghof (Cambridge, 2006).
[72] See his Ep. 46.10.
[73] *DNR*, 230-31; TTH.56, 100
[74] *In cantica*, 271; Holder trans, 139. See also Darby, *Bede and the End of Time*, 206.
[75] Jan Davidse, 'The Sense of History in the Works of the Venerable Bede', *Studi medievali* 3.2 (1983), 647-89: 664-5.

islands and the remote parts, and that he has integrated this with his understanding of providential history.

Elsewhere in Bede's exegesis, the world was fleeting, like a night, with life a mist "appearing for a little while and after that it will be driven away" (Jm 4:14); the emphasis then was on "the future life in heaven", after Christians, as "resident aliens", would "return to their heavenly homeland" for eternal rest or the eternal Sabbath if they were judged worthy of entry.[76] Ensuring that the English will be deemed worthy is the fundamental purpose of the *HE* and his exegesis, where he tries to inspire reform among readers.

In the *HE*, Bede emphasises the island's remoteness by opening the text with "*Britannia Oceani insula*" – stressing that Britain is, physically, apart from the rest of the world and separated by water. It is the first image that readers have of Britain in the *HE*, that of an island in the Ocean. Bede notes too that the Orkneys are the most northerly point of the archipelago, which is located in "boundless Ocean" (*HE* 1.1).[77] This too emphasises the remoteness of the islands, heightening their eschatological role. Bede also omits Thule from the archipelago, in contrast to Classical and patristic writers, which emphasises that Britain is at the theoretical limit of the known world.[78] Bede also drew attention to the remoteness of Britain and Ireland in his prologue to *In cantica canticorum*, saying he took pains to describe the nature of trees and herbs of the Holy Land "not out of desire to seem presumptuous, but mindful of the ignorance that befalls me and my

[76] *In cantica*, 202, 222, trans Holder, 52, 78; *Epistulas VII*, CS.82, 53; *DTR* 66; *De tab*, 25-26, TTH.18, 25-6; *Tobias* 18; trans Connolly 60; rest and Sabbath see *Exp Apoc* 297, TTH.58, 141.
[77] For more see Diarmuid Scully, 'Ends of the empire and the earth: themes of transition and the Orkney Islands from antiquity to Bede', *The Art, Literature and Material Culture of the Medieval World*, ed. Meg Boulton (Dublin, 2015), 125-37.
[78] Scully, 'Bede, Gildas, and the Roman Vision of Britain', 247.

people as a result of having been born and bred far outside the world, that is on an island in the ocean".[79]

This idea returns in the *HE*, when Bede says the earliest Roman missionaries to the English had considered abandoning the mission rather than going to "a barbarous, fierce, and unbelieving nation" (*HE* 1.23); here Bede draws on a Classical idea about the peoples of the islands in order to highlight the significance of their conversion. The concept of non-Romans as barbarous is a firm trope of Classical literature, with Gauls, Irish, and Germanic tribes all described as such. St Paul uses the term "barbarian" to refer to non-Greeks ("*barbaris*", Rom 1:14) or those who speak a different language ("*barbarus*", 1 Cor 14:11). Bede points out that the Romans had not conquered the entire island but had to build a wall to keep the Picts out of the far north; however, Christianity had gone beyond Roman borders. He quotes Gregory's *Moralia in Iob* (AD578-95) to emphasise this, saying "proud Ocean has become a servant" and that barbarians who could not be subdued by the sword were now repressed by priestly words and the fear of God (*HE* 2.1).[80] Gregory, who initiated the Christian mission to the English, believed his missionaries had gone to the ends of the Earth, and articulated this in texts known to Bede, which in turn made Bede more aware of the important role Ireland and Britain played in the times leading to the Last Judgement.[81] Importantly for Bede and for the present thesis, it meant there was literally nowhere further west for Christianity to spread.

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[79] "*Feci namque hoc non arrogantiae studendo sed meae meorumque imperitiae consulendo qui longus extra orbem hoc est in insula maris oceani nati et nutriti ea quae in primis orbis partibus Arabiae dico et India Iudaea et Aegypto geruntur non nisi per eorum qui his interfuere scripta nosse ualemus*." *In cantica*, 180. See Arthur Holder, 'Introduction', *Bede: On the Song of Songs*, ed. Arthur Holder (New Jersey, 2011), 1-32: 28-9.

[80] See also Scully, 'Proud Ocean', 15.

[81] *Moralia* 9.9.10; 27.11.19-21; 28.6.15 and 29.25.50; *Homiliae* I.4.1; I.19.1; II.29.2. Translations of those texts referred to are LOTF 18, 21, 23, 31; see Gregory, *Morals on the Book of Job*, Library of the Church Fathers, vol. 18, 21, 23, 31 (Oxford, 1844); Gregory, *Forty Gospel Homilies*, trans. D. Hurst (Kalamazoo, 1990). For the ends of the earth and ends of time, see O'Reilly, 'Islands and Idols'. For an overview of Gregory, see Carole Straw, *Gregory the Great: Perfection in Imperfection* (Berkeley, 1988). For Gregory and his influence on the English, see Brian Butler, 'The Whitby Life of Gregory the Great:

The earliest Insular writers, responding to scripture and patristic exegesis, understood the significance of converting the islands. Patrick (writing after AD431), for instance, felt that "in these late days", he could "imitate somewhat those whom the Lord foretold would announce his gospel in witness to all nations before the end of the world". He had fulfilled the commandment in Matt 24 to preach to all peoples of the world: "We are the witnesses that the Gospel has been preached to the limit beyond which no-one dwells".[82] Bede makes no references to Patrick, but he is aware of Palladius, who he notes was sent to Ireland by Pope Celestine I, and so is evidently cognisant of the direct papal intervention in building up the Church on the island and the conversion of the ends of the Earth (*HE* 1.13) – indeed it is momentous enough that it is recorded again in the *HE*'s recapitulation (*HE* 5.24). The key thing emerging here is that Bede is working within the same patristic and Insular tradition on space regarding Britain, and that he demonstrates this throughout the *HE.*

The conversion of the British-Irish islands meant that the furthest Gentiles were being converted to Christianity, a process which was laden with eschatological meaning because it was a criterion that had to be fulfilled before the Last Judgement. Paul had taught that salvation was for Gentiles as well as Jews (Gal 3:28, 29), which allowed patristic writers to argue that Christianity had expanded beyond the frontiers of Rome and into barbarian territories. There were still peoples who had to be converted, such as the Germans to whom the English sent missionaries in Bede's day,

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Exegesis and Hagiography', Unpublished PhD thesis (University College Cork, 1995); Henry Chadwick, 'Gregory the Great and the Mission to the Anglo-Saxons', ed. Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, *Gregorio Magno E Il Suo Tempo* (Rome, 1991), 199-212; George Demacopoulos, 'Gregory the Great and the Pagan Shrines of Kent', *Journal of Late Antiquity* 1.2 (2008), 353-69; Stephen J. Harris, 'Bede and Gregory's Allusive Angles', *Criticism* 44.3 (2002), 271-89; R.A. Markus, 'Gregory the Great and a Papal Missionary Strategy', *Studies in Church History* 6 (1970), 29-38; Paul Meyvaert, *Bede and Gregory the Great*, Jarrow Lecture (1965).

[82] Patrick, *Confessio* 34, 38. For the importance of Ireland in Christian missionary history, see for instance Damian Bracken, 'Leo the Great, the People of God, and the conversion of Ireland', forthcoming; Bracken, 'Rome and the Isles: Ireland, England and the rhetoric of orthodoxy', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 157, 75-97; Thomas Charles-Edwards, 'Palladius, Prosper, and Leo the Great: Mission and primatial authority', *Saint Patrick, AD493-1993*, ed. David N. Dumville (Woodbridge, 1993).

as he notes in the *HE*, but the point was that their conversion was under way. For Bede, the conversion of the English meant that the last people in the archipelago had been converted (*HE* 5.23 refers to the Picts, Irish, English, and Britons as Christian, even if the Britons were schismatic), which in turn stressed that the Last Judgement could now come.

O'Reilly, in a fundamentally important study, argues that in the Bible, Gentiles are particularly associated with islands and the ends of the earth, far from Jerusalem.[83] In the Bible, the Gentiles are described as enslaved to idols, "the works of men's hands. They have a mouth, but they speak not: they have eyes, but they see not" (Ps 134: 15-18). The importance of converting the isles was steeped in scriptural authority, with Christ's final command to the disciples being that they should be witnesses to him "even to the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8, Matt 28:19-20). This is the Bible passage to which Patrick refers above. It continues in later medieval work, with Adam of Bremen, in reference to the evangelisation of the Germans and Scandinavians, stating that it is only where the world ends that preaching falls silent.[84] As well as the Matt 24 passage quoted above, the importance of the isles was also derived from passages in the Psalms and Isaiah. These passages include Isa 49:1-12, which said "Listen, O isles, unto me and hearken ye people from afar, the Lord has called me from the womb … And he said, I will give you as a light to the Gentiles that you may bring salvation until the end of the earth (*usque ad extremum terrae*)". Pope Vitalian (d.AD672), in his scripturally-laden letter to King Oswiu of Northumbria (*HE* 3.29), quotes this passage when telling the king that it had been foretold in scripture that all peoples, even if scattered, would come to believe in Christ.

[83] O'Reilly, 'Islands and Idols', 120. This thesis' discussion and interpretation of Bede's self-location at the literal ends of the Earth is informed very much by O'Reilly's work overall.
[84] Hiatt, 'Pliny to Brexit', 516.

Elsewhere in scripture, the psalms prophesied that God would be worshiped "from sea to sea and from the river unto the ends of the Earth [Ps 71:8] and that he would be worshiped by Gentiles through "the multitude of isles" (Ps 96:1). Bede quotes Ps 96:1 at the close of the *HE* narrative: "Let the earth rejoice in his perpetual kingdom and let Britain rejoice in his faith and let the multitude of isles be glad and give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness" (*HE* 5.23), emphasising how he had internalised the application of biblical prophecy to the conversion of his own people. Similarly, Ps 18:5 says God's messengers' "sound hath gone forth into all the earth: and their words unto the ends of the world". The verse is seen as referring to the message of creation; however, Romans 10:18 had associated it with the conversion of the world to Christianity. Patrick, Adomnán, and Columbanus had connected Ps 18:5 with the conversion of Ireland.[85] Meanwhile, Ps 18:5 was quoted by Gildas in relation to how the priests of the Britons were failing in their duties, as they were not doing as the psalmist said (*DEB* 70). So Bede had seen Insular writers apply biblical prophecies to their own islands. However, he had also seen Ps 18:5 applied to the conversion of the English. Pope Boniface (*HE* 2.8), writing to Justus, bishop of Rochester (d.AD631), encourages Justus' missionary work among the English by citing God's promise to be "with you always, even unto the end of the Earth" (Matt 28:18-20) and that he will be rewarded by God as all nations will declare that their sound is gone out into all the earth, and their words unto the end of the world. That psalm was also associated with the incarnation of Jesus, giving it an extra Christological and eschatological dimension.[86] Having seen the application of scriptural prophecy first applied to the island of Britain by Gildas in the sixth century, he then sees it applied to the conversion of his own people by a Pope. It was definitively not just a topos, but a mission statement that he took to heart and transmitted through his own work.

[85] MacCarron, 'Bede, *Annus Domini*, and the *HE*': 126.
[86] See discussion in ibid: 126-8.

O'Reilly also points out that Paul took Isa 49 and the Psalms to heart in his mission to the Gentiles, and that patristic authors followed suit.[87] These included Eusebius (d.AD339), Jerome, Augustine, and Leo the Great (d.AD461), all of whom were known to Bede.[88] Augustine refers to Ps 71:8 when explaining that scripture's mentions of islands mean that "no part of the earth is excluded from having the Church, since none of the islands is left out, some of which are found in the Ocean … whatever shores it has not yet reached it will eventually reach".[89] Gregory, in his *Moralia* commenting on Job 36:30, said God had already reached the hearts of almost all peoples because Britain sang the alleluias of the Hebrews, though Stancliffe argues this may actually refer to the Britons rather than the English, as Bede understood it in his biographical account of Gregory (*HE* 2.1).[90] However, Gregory did write to Bishop Eulogius of Alexandria (d.AD608) to tell him of the conversion of the English, "in the far corner of the world", a people "at the end of the world".[91]

Bede, in his exegesis, is firm that the inhabitants of the heavenly Jerusalem after the end of the world are "to be gathered together from all the nations (*eo quod ex omnibus sit gentibus congreganda*)", tying the conversion of the islands to the fate of souls at the end of time.[92] In this he had papal precedent, which he includes in the *HE*. Pope Boniface V (d.625), who would urge King Edwin of Northumbria to become Christian, also saw the conversion of the islands as fulfilling the biblical eschatological prophecy that missionaries would have "gone out into all the earth, and their words spread to the end of the world", though the process was not yet complete (*HE* 2.8). In Pope Boniface's letter to Edwin he says the word of

[87] O'Reilly, 'Islands and Idols': 120-4.
[88] Eusebius *HE* 2.3; Jerome *Ep*. 58.3; Augustine *Ep*. 199.50; Leo *Ep*. 10.1.
[89] Augustine, *Ep* 199, 47; translation from W. Parsons, *Saint Augustine: Letters*, 394-95.
[90] Clare E. Stancliffe, 'The British Church and the Mission of Augustine', *St Augustine and the Conversion of England*, ed. Richard Gameson (Stroud, 1999), 107-51: 111-12. Job 36:29-30 reads: "[God] with those clouds when it is his pleasure, he spreads his pavilion, flashes his lightning on high, brings darkness on the depths of the sea".
[91] *Registrum epistolarum*, CCSL 140A, 8.29.
[92] *Exp Apoc*, 563, quoting Primasius.

God has caused "to melt, by the fire of his Holy Spirit, the frozen hearts of races even in the far corners of the earth" (*HE* 2.10), recalling Classical concepts of Britain and Ireland as cold, nearly frozen zones.[93] However, for Bede, it would also have recalled Gildas's reference to the island being numb with ice, with Christ, "the true sun", melting that ice (*DEB* 8). Pope Vitalian (d.AD672) also made reference to the Atlantic islands fulfilling prophecies of Christianity spreading to the ends of the Earth (*HE* 3.29). However, while popes, Fathers, and Insular writers often focused on the importance of the remote isles being converted, Bede uses the *HE* to tie the Insular world emphatically into the heart of Christianity. As the thesis will now argue, by doing this Bede was not just incorporating a topos but rather emphasising the eschatological role of the islands and of the conversion of the English.

In *HE* 1.1, Bede describes Britain and Ireland in great detail as islands that possess great and varied natural resources, where produce is abundant and the lands and rivers are fertile and prosperous. Hiatt has shown that many of the details, such as there being no snakes in Ireland and the richness of Britain's minerals and springs, seem to come from Pliny's fourth-century reviser Iulius Solinus.[94] He argues though that Solinus's emphasis on the peculiarities of the islands serves to push them further out of the Roman cultural norm.[95] For Bede, however, it serves a very different purpose. In his hands, it becomes a creation scene reminiscent of Genesis. This is reminiscent also of the Fortunate Isles of Classical writings, and indeed the idea of Britain as a large and rich island is found in Classical works as a theme to support the island's inclusion within the Roman Empire.[96] But while Bede is aware of this topos, he gives it a biblical parallel when he specifically describes Ireland as a land of milk

[93] See, for instance, Strabo's *Geography* I.4 (written c.AD19).
[94] Hiatt, 'Pliny to Brexit', 514.
[95] Id.
[96] Diarmuid Scully, 'Proud Ocean Has Become A Servant: A Classical topos in the Literature of Britain's Conquest and Conversion', *Listen, O Isles, Unto Me*, ed Elizabeth Mullins and Diarmuid Scully (Cork, 2012), 3-15: 5-6.

and honey, recalling Moses' encounter with the burning bush in Exodus 3:8. That biblical passage referred to how the Jews would be delivered from slavery under the Egyptians, and that they would be brought to a prosperous and spacious land of their own. It is the prophecy of a chosen land for the chosen people. Bede is not, however, stating that Ireland, as opposed to Britain, is the chosen land; rather, he is tying the archipelago together in order to establish that the islands together represent a vision of paradise.

This is vital for understanding the eschatology of the *HE*, because Bede is going to great lengths to parallel Britain and Ireland and biblical creation imagery, in order to show their blessed state but also their fulfilment of scriptural promise. Bede is not alone in the Insular world in presenting Britain as paradisiacal. Gildas (*DEB* 3.1) describes lakes in a manner that suggests the river from Eden in Gen 2:10-14, which exegetes identify with Christ. However, for Gildas this is a paradise which has rebelled against God (*DEB* 4.1), and he is also different from Bede in that he treats Britain as distinct whereas Bede and Classical authors saw it as part of an archipelago with Ireland and the Orkneys.[97]

Unlike Gildas, who refers to the islands' pre-Christian past in his own opening description of Britain, Bede omits this initially so as to depict the islands as Christian at the beginning of the *HE*. He does not ignore their pre-Christian past in the *HE* but structures it in such a way that his opening description of the physical islands is a description of the present day laden with biblical imagery. This is important for the eschatology behind the overall text, because it emphasises that these are Christian islands at the end of time. Continuing the parallels, in a passage that recalls the garden of Eden, Bede writes that the islands also produce plants that are effective against poison – Scully points out that Bede writes that before the fall of

[97] Scully, 'Location and Occupation': 264, 67.

Adam the Earth produced no harmful plants (citing Gen 3:14).[98] So what Bede is doing is presenting a vision of a restored paradise at the far end of the Earth at the end of time.

The image of the restored paradise has been seen as a metaphor for a spiritually fruitful community.[99] However, it has a parallel in his exegesis on Revelation. When commenting on Rev 1:17 (the Lord's statement that he is "the first and the last"), Bede says: "First, because 'all things were made in him', last because all things are restored in him".[100] Bede's description of the isles can thus be seen as paradise restored through faith in Jesus, but this meant that the end was approaching.

Furthering the biblical parallels, Bede also compares the languages spoken in the islands – English, British, Irish, Pictish, and Latin – to the first five books of the Bible, the Pentateuch (Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, Leviticus, Numbers). These set out the Mosaic law and the history of the Jewish people; importantly, they outlined the covenant between God and the Chosen People, and chronicle the place of the Jews in providential history. But for Bede and patristic writers this covenant was a forerunner of the universal covenant between God and Christians, made up of Jews and Gentiles alike. Accordingly, in Bede's exegesis the number five is typically seen as representing the law of Moses.[101] Scully, along with O'Reilly and other scholars, points out that by using a five-book format, Bede structures the *HE* after the Pentateuch.[102]

This is an allusion to the English being a new chosen people – in the sense of being a member of the new Chosen People, the Christian community – by virtue of being Christians. Importantly, it ties the island

[98] Scully, 'Location and Occupation': 262. See *In Genesim*, 30; TTH.48, 94.
[99] Diarmuid Scully, 'Introduction', *Bede: On Tobit and on the Canticle of Habakkuk*, ed. Seán Connolly (Dublin, 1997), 17-38.
[100] *Exp Apoc* 249; TTH.58, 115, quoting Primasius, quoting John 1:3. "*Ego sum primus et nouissimus: Primus, quia omnia per ipsum facta sunt, nouissimus, quia in ipso restaurantur omnia*."
[101] See Bede, Homily 1.23.
[102] Scully, 'Location and Occupation': 258; O'Reilly, 'Islands and Idols': 130-32.

into biblical history. Bede, in *Expositio Apostolorum* (AD709, *Retractatio* finished by AD731), says the descent of the holy spirit onto the disciples (Acts 2:4) indicates that the Church, "when it had spread to the ends of the earth (*per mundi terminus*), was to speak in the languages of all nations", restoring the harmony that had been broken when humanity and its sole language had been scattered after the tower of Babel (Gen 11:1-9).[103] The reference to languages in the *HE* is an allusion to this, in that there is one island with several languages all in use. However, the languages and peoples of *HE* 1 are united by their faith in Jesus and by the Church through Latin. It emphasises the eschatological nature of the islands because, much as Bede's geographical description showed the islands to be a paradise restored at the end of time, so the different peoples become a vision of humanity restored through the Church but restored at the end of time.

By drawing on the scriptural allusions, Bede firmly locates Ireland and Britain in a universal context, showing how the islands' past integrates into the timeframe of the universal Church.[104] Hiatt has argued that the *HE's* purpose, at least in part, was to show Britain's re-insertion into Roman influence.[105] He highlights the Synod of Whitby, where the Columban tradition within the English Church loses the argument over the calculation of Easter to the Rome-allied Bishop Wilfrid (who says the Irish, Picts, and Britons "on the last two islands in the world" resist Europe, *HE* 3.25).[106] Bede's integration of the islands into the history of the universal Church is a political as well as chronological statement. By highlighting the

[103] *Expositio* 16-17, Martin trans, 29. As noted by O'Reilly, 'Islands and Idols': 131.
[104] See also Scully, 'Bede's Chronica', and Scully, 'Proud Ocean Has Become a Servant'.
[105] Hiatt, 'Pliny to Brexit', 515-6. For more on the theme of the insular world and Rome, see Bracken, 'Rome and the Isles' and 'Juniors Teaching Elders: Columbanus, Rome and Spiritual Orthodoxy', in *Roma Felix: Formations and Reflections of Medieval Rome* (Aldershot, 2007): 253-75.
[106] For an argument that the Roman side at the Synod of Whitby was actually fractured, see E.T. Dailey, 'To Choose One Easter From Three: Oswiu's Decision and the Northumbrian Synod of AD664', *Peritia* 26 (2015): 47-64. For a recent study of the Irish in the *HE*, see Sarah McCann, 'Bede's *plures de Scottorum regione*: The Irish in the *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*', unpublished PhD thesis (NUI Galway, 2013).

place of Britain and the English in universal history, Bede highlights their responsibilities as Christians. They had, after all, joined "the unity of Christ's holy Church" (*HE* 1.26) by converting in the first place – now they had to maintain their place in that union. Rabin has noted that Bede's *DTR* and its chronicle of universal history have been seen as putting Northumbrians at the centre of the Christian historical narrative, allowing other peoples on the edges of the known world to do the same.[107] This is an important aspect of Bede's thinking, because he was earnest in his belief that English Christians should know they are on a par with Christians closer to holy places like Rome and Jerusalem, even if Britain is surrounded by "boundless Ocean", far away from what Bede elsewhere describes as the "first places" of the world: Arabia, India, Judaea, and Egypt.[108] These were among the first places to convert but Bede is eager to stress that contemporary Britain is as central to the Christian world as those earlier places.

This is an example of the connection between location and time in Bede's work. Understanding this is vital for understanding why the *HE* contains the structure and content it does, and so the discussion therefore turns to Bede and time, and specifically his use of dating systems to emphasise the eschatological role of his people's conversion.

Bede's use of dating systems and how his work on time is informed by eschatological thought

This section argues that Bede's use of dating systems is designed to emphasise that the conversion of the English had taken place in the last era of the world, heightening the need for moral uprightness. Bede used three key dating systems throughout his work but focuses on using AD in the

[107] Andrew Rabin, 'Historical Re-Collections: Rewriting the World Chronicle in Bede's De Temporum Ratione', *Viator* 36 (2005), 23-39.
[108] Holder, 'Introduction': 29.

HE, and this section will ultimately argue that this is to emphasise that the events of Bede's day are taking place at the end of time. To do this, the section first examines how Bede believed he was living in the last Age of the world, while drawing on and diverging from patristic tradition. It then examines Bede's place in Christian apocalyptic thought to argue that he was taking a rich tradition and applying it to a local context. It does this in part by examining his use of martyrs and martyrdom to emphasise that he sees similar conditions in the present as existed in the past. A key focus of the section overall is *DTR* and the Six World Ages model, which is present in his exegesis and helps to explain why he chose the AD system for the *HE*.

The section also examines aspects of his exegesis which suggest an imminent end or judgement. It includes discussion of martyrs because for Bede these recalled the earliest days of Christianity, when apocalyptic expectation was high, and also demonstrated that God's power was active in the world (through ongoing miracles associated with martyrs) while suggesting that the earliest times of Christianity were recurring toward the end of time. This then leads to discussion of his use of the AD dating system and how that is key to understanding the eschatology of the *HE*. The chapter does not examine the end-time sequence or what Bede saw as signs of the end, because this discussion is better suited to discussion of the Saracens in chapter 4. Instead it argues throughout that the sense of imminent judgement emphasises the need for urgent moral reform, which in turn influences the shape and content of the *HE*.

The New Testament contains a greatly simplified division of history, with only two eras: from Adam to Christ, and from Christ's resurrection to the parousia.[109] Bede, at various points in his corpus, uses three systems: *annus mundi* (AM), the World Ages, and the incarnational

[109] Alan Bernstein, *The Formation of Hell: Death and Retribution in the Ancient and Early Christian Worlds* (London, 1993), 211-2, citing 1 Corinthians 5:20-28.

(*anno domini*, AD). This could make a single event incredibly complex to date. For example, MacCarron has demonstrated how complicated it was to date the Council of Hatfield (AD680) using indictions and the regnal years of all the kings who were involved – and she has argued that these systems made it difficult to predict the future, something that made it more difficult to calculate events such as Easter.[110] She argues also that multiple competing dating systems were an obstacle to Bede's intention to write a unified chronology of his people's conversion to Christianity.[111] Computus aided Bede's allegorical reading of history, and Wallis notes he was the first to combine a chronicle and computus in the same text, making chronology applied computus.[112]

Previous Christian chronographers had used many systems, such as dating by the reigns of emperors, years from the foundation of Rome, or cycles of Olympiads. These were synchronised and synthesised by Eusebius who, in the first Christian chronicle of its kind, drew together a myriad of traditions to "illustrat[e] with absolute clarity the prior antiquity of the Hebrew-Christian nation and provided an indispensable handbook for the historical chronology and exegesis of the Old Testament".[113] Bede knew of Eusebius' text via its Latin translation and continuation by Jerome, and states that he followed it (*DTR* 9). It was an elaborate and complicated work that begins with Abraham and uses different empires to measure time, although the purpose was to show how these empires were eventually eclipsed by the Roman Empire.[114]

McClure has noted that Bede's chronicle and history work, notably *In Samuhelis*, is closer in aims and techniques to the editors of the books of

[110] MacCarron, 'Bede, the annus Domini, and the HE': 117-9.
[111] Ibid, 120-21.
[112] Rabin, 'Historical Re-Collections'; Wallis, 'Commentary': 353; Máirín MacCarron, 'Bede, Irish Computistica and Annus Mundi', *Early Medieval Europe* 23.3 (2015), 290-307: passim.
[113] See Brian Croke, 'The Origins of the Christian World Chronicle', *History and Historians in Late Antiquity*, eds. Brian Croke and Alanna M. Emmett (Sydney and Oxford, 1983), 116-31: 125.
[114] Wallis, 'Commentary': 355.

Israelite history than Eusebius, in that he too produced a historical account by drawing on older traditions to teach a historical lesson to contemporaries.[115] DeGregorio has described the *HE* as an "emulation" of Eusebius' work of the same name.[116] However, they have very different emphasises. As Thacker observes: The *HE* "formed a fitting counterpoint to Eusebius, chronicling the inauguration of the final phases in Christian salvation, just as Eusebius had chronicled the first".[117]

Bede's interest in time did not emerge in isolation: it had been a fixture of patristic thought and writing for centuries, although Bede put his own stamp on it. His ideas of the World Ages, which are the focus of his landmark *DTR*, give an indication of how he understood providential history unfolding. As Rabin has pointed out, although Bede in *DTR* claims to be traditional in how he assembled the material from diverse sources, "it asserts his own authority as the text's compiler … the entries are only those selected by the chronicler".[118] The incarnation of Jesus was the fulcrum for Bede's historical understanding because it marked the beginning of the last era of the world and meant the end is approaching, but at the same time it carried the idealism of victory for the righteous. Jesus' ministry was strongly eschatological, as indicated in Mark 1:14-15: "But when John had been put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God's kingdom. The appointed time has come, he said, and the kingdom of God is near at hand; repent, and believe the gospel."

[115] Judith McClure, 'Bede's Old Testament Kings', *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society*, eds. Patrick Wormald, Donald Bullough and Roger Collins (Oxford, 1983), 76-98: 94.
[116] Scott DeGregorio, *The Cambridge Companion to Bede* (Cambridge, 2010), 9.
[117] Thacker, 'Bede and History': 183; Scully, 'Introduction': 33-5; O'Reilly, 'Islands and Idols': passim.
[118] Ibid., 28.

As well as in Genesis, in *De temporibus*, Bede's earliest work on time (AD703), Bede breaks down the Six Ages thus (following Augustine's *De catechizandis rudibus)*:[119]

1. Adam to Noah
2. Noah to Abraham
3. Abraham to David
4. David to Babylonian exile
5. Exile to incarnation of Jesus
6. Incarnation to end of the world

The Six Ages model "intersects with almost all of Bede's identifiable interests as a teacher. The World Ages scheme provided a historical framework for the biblical and post-biblical events of the past and it also defined Bede's perception of the present."[120] Bequette argues that Bede saw the Six Ages as an "instrument… of personal formation" for monks, with the human being as human history in microcosm.[121] Bequette's argument is that Bede demonstrates humanism; however, his observation feeds into the theme identified in this thesis about the need for constant internal conversion to Christianity, something emphasised by the proximity to the Last Judgement. However, the process had to be internalised and regulated. Quoting Augustine, Bede in *DTR* 68, referring to the four servants of Matt 24:45-51, notes that the servant who believes the lord's return will happen soon may undermine faith should the return be later than expected.[122] This too reflects the process of internalising Christianity and being endlessly heedful of one's behaviour, because it suggested potential indolence and complacency. Chazelle suggests a parallel between Bede and Gregory of Tours (d.AD594), who said his people "fail to hope for the approaching end of the world (*adpropinquantum finem mundi disperant*)",

[119] *De temporibus*, 600-611.
[120] Darby, *Bede and the End of Time*, 22. See also Jones, *Sacris Erudiri*, 191-8.
[121] John P. Bequette, 'The Six Ages of History and the Renewal of the Human Person: Christian Humanism in Bede's Gospel Homilies', *A Companion to Medieval Christian Humanism*, ed. John P. Bequette (Leiden, 2016), 40-61: 40-43.
[122] Celia Chazelle, 'Debating the End Times with Bede', *Irish Theological Quarterly* 80.3 (2015), 212-32: 222-3.

and so were becoming complacent.[123] It resembles also references from Gregory the Great, one of the formative influences on Bede, which Bede includes in the *HE*. It is no wonder then that the Six Ages are both a tool for inner reform and for understanding sacred history.

The Six Ages appear throughout Bede's works, including his work on figures and tropes (*De schematibus et tropis*); his commentaries on Genesis, Samuel (finished AD717), the Temple, Ezra-Nehemiah, Mark (AD716), Luke, Acts, the Catholic Epistles (AD709 at least), and Revelation (by AD709); and also his homilies and hymns.[124] In *DTR* he would add two Ages: a Seventh, which ran parallel to the first six and which "began when the first martyr ("*protomartyr*") Abel … entered in spirit into the Sabbath of perpetual rest", and an Eighth (mentioned for the first time in *DTR* 71), which will see the faithful rewarded with "everlasting joy" after they receive their bodies again (*DTR* 10).[125] The idea of the Seventh Age as a perpetual Sabbath is reflective of Augustine's *De civitate Dei* (AD426), which suggests selective decision-making on Bede's part because Augustine's writings contained other concepts of the end times.[126] The Eighth may have been suggested by the way he associated his exegesis of fasting seven days in 1 Sam 31:12 with the seven Ages: "the six are when Christ dies with the seventh of his repose, the seven days of carnal observation and blindness until the eighth day of the Lord and his resurrection".[127]

However, in terms of World Ages the Sixth is the most important for this thesis, because it was, as far as Bede was concerned, very definitely

[123] Chazelle, 'Debating', 214; and Peter Brown, 'The Decline of the Empire of God. Amnesty, Penance, and the Afterlife from Late Antiquity to the Middle Ages,' in *Last Things*, 41–59: 50–51. For a recent study of Gregory of Tours, see Jenny Coughlan, 'Saints and Scandals: Representations of Elite Women in the Writings of Bede and Gregory of Tours', unpublished PhD thesis (UCC, 2018).
[124] Charles Plummer, *Venerabilis Baedae: Opera Historica*, vol. 2, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1896), xli-xlii. For more on Bede's work on tropes see Gussie Hecht Tanenhaus, 'Bede's De Schematibus Et Tropis—a Translation', *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 48.3 (1962), 237-53.
[125] See also *In Genesim*, 39; TTH.48, 104. See also *Epistulas VII*, on 2 Pet 2:5; CS.82, 138.
[126] Darby, *Bede and the End of Time*, 71, 78 and referring to *DCD* 22.30.
[127] Brown, *Bede the Venerable*, 52.

coming to an end, even if that end was known only to God (*DTR* 67).[128] MacCarron argues that he is being strictly orthodox in this assessment, but that he also demonstrated utter mastery of dating systems by calculating the start of the Age as being in AM3952 rather than the traditional AM5199 – again by scrupulous use of established, credible sources such as the reign of Caesar Augustus, Olympiads, and years from the foundation of Rome.[129] This entry in his *Chronica maiora* effectively synchronises hugely disparate systems and incorporates them into a unified Christian chronology. Indeed, MacCarron notes how Bede incorporates dates "from the Incarnation" of Jesus in some key entries of the Chronica, such as Dionysus' paschal tables and the conversion of Iona – the last holdout of the old Easter calculation – to orthodox Easter by an Anglo-Saxon missionary.[130] That missionary, Egbert, is presented by Bede as having brought a divine reward to the Columban Irish who had done so much to bring Christianity to the English (*HE* 5.22).[131] Bede was not the first to place importance on that Age: Caesarius of Arles (d.AD542), well read in Augustinian works and whose sermons circulated among the English, argued that the six water jars at the wedding in Cana represented the Six Ages and "our salvation which occurs in the Sixth Age", drawing a comparison with baptism.[132] Bede too draws on this idea of the jars reflecting the Six Ages, adapting Augustine and urging monks to internalise the mysteries contained within those Six Ages as a way of directing them toward spiritual growth.[133]

The World Ages, of which Bede says God is king ("*rex saeculorum"*), feature from Bede's earliest works, such as his comments on Rev 19:11.[134] They underlie his eschatology. Familiar with the overall idea from

[128] See also Bede, 'Letter to Plegwin', trans. Faith Wallis, *Bede: On the Reckoning of Time*, ed. Faith Wallis (Liverpool, 1999), 405-15: 414.
[129] MacCarron, 'Bede, the *annus Domini*, and the *HE*': 122.
[130] Ibid, 123.
[131] See Jennifer O'Reilly, 'St Paul and the Sign of Jonah, Theology and Scripture in Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*' (Jarrow, 2018): 30-32.
[132] Caesarius of Arles, sermon 167, in CCSL 103.
[133] Bequette, 'Six Ages', 52-7.
[134] *Exp Apoc*, 495; TTH.58, 247, on Rev 19:11 "and with justice does he judge and fight".

Eusebius-Jerome, Augustine, and Isidore of Seville, Bede discusses it at some length in *DTR* (*DTR* 10, 66-71).[135] The Ages model permeates his work. For instance, the Temple of Solomon taking seven years to build before being dedicated in the eighth year was tied in his mind to seven Ages of building the universal Church and an Eighth Age of rest.[136] That will be the day when "the just behold forever the lovable countenance of Christ; they will be shining as angels in the celestial citadel".[137] What particularly distinguishes Bede is his focus on the local – the English – as a case study for the universal. Although nobody could predict the end, this is the sort of future to which he wishes the English to aspire. In his commentary on Genesis, he embarks on a lengthy digression to elaborate on the Ages after he finishes commenting on the seven days of creation.[138] It is a distinct break from the verse-by-verse commentary because he wants to "make it clear" to the reader how the order of days "in which [the world] was created is also in harmony with the same number of its ages".

The Sixth represented "the evening of this day", with the love of men growing cold (Matt 24:12), while "its advent … will be darker by far than the others, when, with the appearance of the man of sin … the tribulation will be so great that even the elect may be induced into error ... And the hour of universal judgement will immediately follow (*statim hora uniuersalis iudicii*)".[139] Bequette, pointing out that Bede refers to the light at the start of each Age and dark at the end of each due to sin, shows that Christ upends this conventional order of time.[140] He notes that Bede says Jesus "rose [from the dead] during the final part of the night" and illuminated the night "by the glory of his resurrection". Bede's intention is

[135] Wallis, 'Commentary': 355-7.
[136] *De templo*, 196-7; TTH.21, 71-2.
[137] Brown, *Companion*, 89.
[138] *In Genesim*, 35-9; TTH.48, 100-5
[139] *In Genesim*, 35-9; TTH.48, 104.
[140] Bequette, 'Six Ages', 49-50.

to encourage monks to follow this spiritual development and move from night to day,[141] though this thesis argues it applies to all the English.

In *DTR*, and drawing on Augustine's *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*, Bede likens the Ages to the stages of human life, with the Fifth, "from the exile into Babylon until the coming of our Lord and Saviour in the flesh" (*DTR* 66), considered "maturity". However, "the Hebrew people were weakened by many evils, as if wearied by heavy age. The Sixth Age, which is now in progress, is not fixed according to any sequence of generations or times, but like senility, this will come to an end in the death of the whole world." Augustine too had associated the Sixth Age with old age ("*senectus*").[142] This resembles Lactantius' argument in the AD300s that Rome was reaching old age "and what is left to follow old age but death?" ("*quid restat nisi ut sequetur interitus senectutem*").[143] Brown argues that in the Christian imagination death was "an exact reflection, in miniature, of the terror of the Last Judgement".[144] However, it was not always a bad thing. Bede writes that Gregory "loved death, which in the eyes of almost everybody is a punishment, because he held it to be the entrance to life and the reward of his labours" (*HE* 2.1).

However, that meant death was only a release if one was righteous, and one had to work hard to maintain that status. Bede saw in Revelation an allegory for the current day and its troubles; he describes Revelation as a text "in which God has deigned to reveal in words and symbolic imagery the wars and inward conflagrations of his Church" (a crisis more fully explored along with the discussion of Gildas in chapter three of the present thesis).[145] Elsewhere he says "the hour of universal judgement (*hora*

[141] Bequette, 'Six Ages', 58-61.
[142] Darby, *Bede and the End of Time*, 23-4.
[143] In his *Divinae Institutiones* Vii.15, 17, as quoted in Palmer, *Apocalypse*, 28.
[144] Brown, 'Decline of the Empire of God', 45.
[145] "*In secunda autem periocha descriptis in sede dei quattuor animalibus et uiginti quattuor senioribus, agnum uidet apertis septem libri signati sigillis conflictus et triumphos ecclesiae reserare futuros*." See his letter to Hwaetberht at the beginning of the

universalis iudicii) will immediately follow" this Age.[146] In this, he draws on Augustine's *DCD* and *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*, although he presents it in his own fashion; again this is Bede drawing on and adapting older traditions on space and time.[147] Indeed he is differing from one of his key sources and models for chronicles, Isidore, whose *Chronica Maiora* says that the "consummation of the Age" ("*consummationis saeculi"*) referred to in Matt 24 is, for the individual, death.[148] It is a further demonstration of how Bede is cognisant of, but not chained to, patristic tradition. Bede does, though, connect Matt 24:12 to Jesus's prophecy that the Second Coming would be preceded by wickedness akin to Noah's era, and says that his contemporaries are sinning, similar to the prophecy outlined in Luke 17:26-30.[149] So it is clear that there is a heightened eschatological fear in his work that the English could miss out on salvation should they not internalise the Christian message.

Bede draws links between the contemporary Church and scripture. For example, he writes in one commentary that the Church

> is fair as the moon [Sg 6:10] in the night of this present life (*noctem saeculi huius ipsa*) when she imitates the moon's course as it waxes and wanes, as her own position changes over time: now brilliant in the world, now despised and oppressed; now full of virtuous splendour, now dishonoured by the blemishes of many errors. She will be bright like the sun [Sg 6:10] on the day of future blessedness, when her position will remain constant for eternity (*in die futurae beatitudinis ubi manente statu aeternitatis*).[150]

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commentary, *Exp Apoc* 221-3. See Benedicta Ward, *The Venerable Bede* (London, 1990), 52.

[146] *In Genesim*, 39; TTH.48, 104.

[147] Faith Wallis, *Reckoning of Time*, 158 n4. See also Joseph F. Kelly, 'Bede's Use of Augustine for His *Commentarium in Principium Genesis*', *Augustine: Biblical Exegete* eds. Frederick Van Fleteren and Joseph C. Schnaubelt (New York, 2001), 189-96.

[148] Chazelle, 'Debating', 218.

[149] Chazelle, 'Debating', 228.

[150] *In cantica*, 311, Holder trans 190.

This passage is important because it shows how he connects Ages with the contemporary period, and specifically the Church.[151] And it is deeply eschatological in that it encourages readers to be hopeful for the future and to aspire to being part of "the day of future blessedness" and this stable eternity. It is a call for readers to remain true to their Christian faith and practice it whatever troubles befall them, their kingdoms, or the Church generally. It is a call to think about the Judgement and what readers should do, morally, in order to be deemed worthy of a place in heaven after judgement. Bede's commentary on Samuel stresses to his readers that the universal judgement would affect everybody in every region of the Earth.[152] This was especially pertinent now that the English had been converted.

In Bede's Ages model of time, the Seventh Age actually runs parallel to the Six Ages, and Bede, in his Genesis commentary, says the Seventh is the "eternal repose" ("*perpetuas quietis*") of the saints.[153] It is not a chronological Age as such, in that it is not intended to chronicle years. Rather, to quote Wallis, "it is a way of designating the duration of the Church Expectant, the totality of the election from the time of Abel to the end of the world".[154] Bede says the saints are already in the Seventh Age, in that they have already gone to heaven and eternal rest, yet these "perfect" souls are relatively few, although it would seem that everyone could aspire to be one of the perfect.[155] The Eighth Age, marked particularly by the general resurrection of the dead, comes after the Judgement, and Bede says it will be preceded by "the killing of the Antichrist by the Lord Jesus" and followed by "eternal rest ... given with greater blessing and sanctification to

[151] "*Saecula"* acquired a mystical meaning in the Christian era, with the phrase "*in saecula saeculorum"* (effectively "forever and ever") appearing throughout the New Testament, such as Gal 1:1-5 and Rev 1:6. It is used by Bede and Gregory at the conclusion of their homilies.
[152] Darby, *Bede and the End of Time*, 127.
[153] *In Genesim*, 39; TTH.48, 104. For the Seventh Age, see Darby, 65-91, and Chazelle, 'Debating', 222-5.
[154] Faith Wallis, 'Commentary', *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, 251-376: 368-9.
[155] *In Genesim*, 39-40. See also *DTR* 66.

the bodies rising again to eternal life".[156] This is how he anticipates the Seventh and Eighth Ages occurring and the overall concept is fundamental to his understanding of history. It determines his approach to the *HE* and its eschatology at the latter end of Bede's career.

However, his *Exp Apoc*, early in his career as it was, demonstrates an already high level of engagement with the concept. Given the pastoral elements of the commentary it would have been an opportunity to show how the sloth of the English was dangerous due to the coming Last Judgement; he explains that Revelation details things "which are to happen to the Church in the present time" ("*praesenti tempore*"). [157] In his commentary he notes that the Holy Spirit is often alluded to by the number seven, while at the beginning he says that "an entirety" is usually referred to by the number seven, which he connects to the world week (the seven days in which God created the Earth).[158] The world week he equates with the seven seals of Revelation, with the Church struggling through the first six and resting on the seventh.[159] And the seventh trumpet of the seventh angel will announce "the eternal Sabbath, [indicating] the victory and supreme rule of the true king".[160] Later, in a parallel to this while discussing Rev 17:10 ("five are fallen, one is, and one is to come"), he writes that five kings have passed, the sixth is present, and one is to come (a reference to the reign of Antichrist, who will be destroyed to make way for eternal salvation). However, he makes sure to remove anything which could be equated with contemporary political powers, stating instead that seven represents "the plenitude of worldly empire" ("*plenitudinem mundani … imperii"*). Faith Wallis points out that his exegesis "finds no parallel in his sources", with that phrase detaching the passage from any particular

[156] *In Genesim*, 39-40; TTH.48, 104-5. See also *DTR* 66-71
[157] *Exp Apoc*, 236.
[158] *Exp Apoc*, 238, 545.
[159] *Exp Apoc* 331. The world week also appears in *In Genesim*.
[160] *Exp Apoc* 383, TTH.58, 187. "*Sex tubae priores saeculi praesentis aetatibus conpararatae uarios bellorum ecclesiae denuntiauere concursus, septimo uero sabbati aeterni nuntia uictoriam tantum et imperium ueri regis indicat*."

historical sequence.[161] This is fitting with his emphasis throughout his exegesis that only God knew when the world would end, but shows that from an early period he was confident enough to interpret passages without having reference to Church Fathers. However, despite his departures there is no doubt that Bede's commentary was both erudite and firmly rooted in patristic tradition.

Bonner describes Bede's commentary on Revelation as "an artfully assembled mosaic of quotations and paraphrases", albeit deliberately chosen ones.[162] More recent scholarship has shown it to be not only learned but to reflect contemporary concerns about predicting the coming Last Judgement.[163] He drew primarily on Primasius (d.AD560) and Tyconius, the fourth-century North African Donatist whose seven rules for interpreting scripture had been influential on Augustine's work.[164] Tyconius' work, which filtered to Bede through *DCD,* was formative on Bede's commentary.[165] Tyconius had presented Revelation as a spiritual rather than a literal account of final judgement. Bede follows a similar train of thought, rejecting the literal interpretation that Jesus would reign on earth for one thousand years, arguing that the number was symbolic. This spoke directly to Bede's belief that nobody should attempt to predict the actual end date.

Exegetes from the second century on, attempting to calculate the Second Coming so as to understand why it had not happened yet,

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[161] *Exp Apoc*, 469; Wallis trans, 233, n855.
[162] Gerald Bonner, *Saint Bede in the Tradition of Western Apocalyptic Commentary*, Jarrow Lecture (1967), 11; For Primasius, see Wallis, 'Revelation Introduction': 4, 18, 28-31. For mosaic, see ibid., 26.
[163] See Darby, *Bede and the Future*, and Faith Wallis's introduction to her translation of *Exp Apoc*.
[164] For discussion of Tyconius and his methods, see Pamela Bright, *The Book of Rules of Tyconius: Its Purpose and Inner Logic* (Notre Dame, 1988); Thomas O'Loughlin, 'Tyconius' Use of the Canonical Gospels', *Revue bénédictine* 106.3-4 (1996), 229-33; Gerald Bonner, *Saint Bede*, 4-7; Palmer, *Apocalypse*. For Bede and Tyconius, see Faith Wallis, 'Revelation Introduction', *Bede: Commentary on Revelation*, ed. Faith Wallis (Liverpool, 2013), 5-94; Darby, *Bede and the End of Time*, 78-9, 111-3.
[165] Brown, *Companion*, 69; Wallis, 'Revelation Introduction': 1. For other influences on Bede's commentary and its legacy, see Bonner, *Saint Bede*.

developed a millenarianist concept based on the statement of Ps 90:4: "A thousand years in your sight are like a day",[166] which is repeated in 2 Peter 3:8 that "with the Lord one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day".[167] By comparing this to the week of creation in Genesis, the belief developed that each of these days represented 1,000 years, with the seventh day, when God rested (Gen 2:1-3), symbolic of the Seventh Age, the rest of the just.[168] However, Bede warned against predicting the precise end time, claiming this was heretical as Christ had said man would know neither the day nor the hour (*DTR* 67, quoting Matt 24:36). Rebutting this is a theme throughout Bede's work, and appears in his commentary on that passage in 2 Peter, where Bede stresses that "certain persons" who believe in the literal interpretation "do not advert to the fact that he does not say simply, 'One day will be as a thousand years'."[169] Jesus had said the end date was unknowable – "but of that day or hour no man knoweth, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father" (Mark 13:32; also Matt 24:36, and Acts 1:7; see 1 Thess 5:1-2: "Now as to the times and the epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you. For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night"). He would have seen this applied to poetry as well when he was composing his *De die iudicii*.[170] Indeed in his exegesis Bede suggests the last days of the world have been around since biblical times – 1 John 2:18 reads "little children, it is the final hour".[171]

John's letter says many antichrists have appeared ("*antichristi multi facti sunt*"), which when read against Revelation is an indicator of the

[166] Croke, 'Christian World Chronicle', 120-2.
[167] See also Chazelle, 'Debating', 216-8.
[168] See Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church: A Handbook of Patristic Eschatology*; Daley, 'Eschatology in the Early Church Fathers'; Daley, 'Apocalypticism in Early Christian Theology'.
[169] *Epistulas* VII, 271-9; CS.82, 148.
[170] *De die iudicii* has been the subject of a recent study in Peter Darby, 'Apocalypse and Reform in Bede's *De die iudicii'*, Matthew Gabriele and James T. Palmer (eds.), *Apocalypse and Reform from Late Antiquity to the Middle Ages* (Abingdon and New York, 2019), 77-100. In this instance see p84.
[171] "*Filioli, novissima hora est*".

looming Last Judgement. However, as that statement had been made hundreds of years before Bede was born and the world had not yet ended, this eschatological expectancy lent itself to a spiritual interpretation. In his commentary on the phrase, Bede says:

> He calls the last age of the world which is now in progress the last hour (*nouissimam horam nouissimum saeculi tempus*), according to that parable of the Lord in which he tells of the workers having been hired at the first, third, sixth, ninth, and eleventh hours … those who obey the heavenly commands from the time of the Lord's incarnation to the end of the world (*ad finem saeculi*) do so from the eleventh hour. In this hour, namely, it was foretold by the prediction of the prophets that there would be both the coming of the saviour in the flesh and that there would follow the plague of the antichrist, which would assail the heralds of salvation[172]

It had been the "eleventh hour" since John wrote his gospel and it would be that hour for some time. For Bede that was key; one should live and act accordingly, so as to be in the right spiritual condition when the end finally did arrive. Bede is clear that certain criteria need to be fulfilled before the end and Last Judgement comes. This includes the Second Coming – so his message in this passage is that his readers should not attempt to predict the date of the end based on events that were occurring in their lifetime. The conversion of the islands of the Gentiles was one of the key criteria, but all that meant was that the end could come.[173]

Charles Plummer, the nineteenth-century editor of Bede's historical works, says Bede was "justly severe" on people making predictions about the end date, given their potential for heresy (and heretics would be outside union with the Church and thus salvation at the Last Judgement).[174] It is no surprise that Thacker notes the importance of heresy to Bede, pointing out that "heretics and their doings were generally referred to in

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[172] *Epistulas VII*, 295; CS.82, 175.
[173] For discussion of the signs, see Darby, *Bede and the End of Time*, 95-124, and chapter four of the present thesis, below.
[174] Charles Plummer, 'Introduction', *Baedae Venerabilis: Opera Historica*, ed. Charles Plummer, vol. 1 (Oxford, 1896), ix-clxiv: lxxi.

the present tense; for Bede they were part of the here and now".[175] As Wallis points out, he had, from the beginning of his career, "set himself up as an expert … on orthodox thinking concerning the future".[176] This enhanced the impetus behind his moral reform agenda; by expounding a scrupulously orthodox interpretation of the future Bede emphasised the importance of good Christian conduct in order to achieve salvation. However, he had been accused of heresy when his earliest chronicle, now known as the *Chronica Minora,* shaved 1,200 years or so from the chronologies generally accepted in the Christian world. Instead of the generally accepted 5,000 years from creation to the birth of Jesus, as found in Isidore and Jerome's translation of Eusebius, Bede calculated that the number was actually 3,952.[177] His detractors accused him of dating Christ's incarnation in the Fifth Age rather than inaugurating the Sixth.

Bede had simply been putting together a chronology based on the Vulgate that more accurately reflected history since the creation of the world. It also speaks to his eschatology; MacCarron has argued that by using the Vulgate translation in order to calculate his chronicle, Bede was actually making a statement against apocalyptic expectation.[178] This seems to have been a particularly pertinent concern in contemporary Northumbria; some, perhaps many of his contemporaries were apprehensive that the end was imminent, a concern also found in contemporary Irish texts with which Bede was familiar.[179]

Bede's *Epistola ad Pleguinam* (AD708) is not only a vehicle for Bede to defend himself against heresy, but to point out the folly of the "rustics" who "every day ... [ask] how many years are left in the final millennium of

[175] Alan Thacker, 'Why Did Heresy Matter to Bede? Present and Future Contexts', *Bede and the Future*, 47-66: 47, and see 56-61.
[176] Wallis, 'Commentary on Revelation'.
[177] Brown, *Companion*, 29.
[178] MacCarron, 'Bede, Irish Computistica and Annus Mundi': 293.
[179] See Darby, *Bede and the End of Time*, on the crisis of AD716, 165-186, and chapter three, below; MacCarron, 'Christology and the Future', 166; MacCarron, 'Bede, Irish Computistica and Annus Mundi': 293-4.

the world, or learn from them that the final millennium is in progress".[180] The letter articulates a clear and orthodox understanding of what was to come at the end of time that did not have anything to do with calculating when that end was coming.[181] Wallis suggests the reference to the "rustics" asking about the end every day was because, based on a millennial model of thinking, there was only a century left by AD701; she also suggests that the rustics may have been Bede's monastic brethren.[182] His calculations were orthodox – indeed MacCarron argues that the Vulgate allowed him to break the link between the World Ages and the idea that the world would end 6,000 years after creation; he also argued that chronographers should be ignored if they differed from the Bible.[183] Bede expanded on this in *DTR*, adding that the idea that there would be six 1,000-year Ages was "heretical and frivolous" (*DTR* 67), because this presumed to know when the end would come and this was "known only to the Judge himself".[184] But he did his best to make the Ages more easily understood for those without a substantial Christian education. The key point was that all history falls into this framework, which emphasises how Bede understood history to be entirely of divine origin and shows how all people are dwelling within sacred history.

That is not to say that Bede did not feel genuine anticipation of a coming Judgement. Wallis and Darby have pointed out that he goes to some lengths in *Exp Apoc* to avoid referring to passages that could be interpreted as meaning the end was imminent, suggesting that he was sensitive to such interpretations and concerns from his earliest exegetical career.[185] Yet Wallis comments that by AD716 or so, when Bede was writing his commentary on Samuel, he "was openly referring to the approaching

[180] Bede, 'Letter to Plegwin': 413. For more on the letter, see Chazelle, 'Debating', 219-23, and MacCarron, 'Bede, Irish Computistica, and Annus Mundi: 300-303.
[181] Darby and Wallis, 'The Many Futures of Bede'.
[182] Wallis, 'Revelation Introduction': 49; See alsoWallis, 'Commentary on Revelation': passim; ibid., 42.
[183] MacCarron, 'Bede, Irish Computistica and Annus Mundi': 301, 306.
[184] Bede, 'Letter to Plegwin': 414.
[185] Wallis, 'Revelation Introduction': 40.

end of the world", borrowing the phrase "*adpropinquante mundi termino*" from Gregory, a phrase included in *HE* 1.32 (Gregory's letter to Aethelberht of Kent). The inclusion of this letter emphasises the link between the conversion of the English and the end of time. Gregory writes that Aethelberht has been raised up by God to bring divine righteousness to the people under him, and encourages the king to work closely with Bishop Augustine to spread Christianity, the argument in part being that the king would have less to fear from divine judgement if he worked toward seeing his people "cleansed". This parallels Bede's exhortations in the *HE* for kings to work with bishops to spread moral reform. But Gregory's letter is staunchly eschatological in order to emphasise the need for embracing Christianity quickly and deeply:

> We would wish your majesty to know that the end of the world is at hand, as we learn from the words of Almighty God in the holy scriptures; and the kingdom of the saints which knows no end is near. As the end of the world approaches (*Adpropinquante autem eodem mundi termino*), many things threaten which have never happened before; these are changes in the sky and terrors from the heavens, unseasonable tempests, wars, famine, pestilence, and earthquakes in diverse places. Not all these things will come about in our days, but they will all follow after our days (*nostros dies omnia subsequentur*). So if you see any of these things happening in your land, do not be troubled in mind; for these signs of the end of the world (*signa de fine saeculi*) are sent in advance to make use heedful about our souls, watching for the hour of death

This serves as patristic reinforcement for Bede's own work. Gregory was applying scripture to contemporary events, much as Bede would later apply exegesis to his own people's history. This passage from the letter thematically parallels his comments on Genesis that the time was at hand when the love of men was growing cold, though that passage should be read as also being a sign sent in advance to make people heedful of their souls. Bonner considers Bede's reuse of "*adpropinquante mundi termino*" to be a sign that Bede "was quite certain that the end was close at hand".[186]

[186] Bonner, *Saint Bede*, 5.

Darby points out that it is also used in Bede's commentary on Luke, commenting that Plummer seems to have taken the quotation at face value.[187] This would suggest that Plummer felt Bede saw the end as imminent. However, Gregory was writing in response to contemporary strife and disasters (such as the Lombard wars and his own poor health), and these events were cast in an eschatological light; his letters in particular alluded to the impending end of the world.[188] The sense of an impending end is more palpable in these texts, and more explicit. But Bede had the benefit of an additional century in which the world had not ended and was conscious it could continue for a while yet.

Indeed Bede made reference to this in his exegesis, writing that it was revealed to the prophets that "salvation would not come in their days but rather in yours, who are born at the end of ages (*in fine saeculorum*)".[189] This passage of commentary is directed at his contemporary reader, and indeed in *HE* 5.24 Bede writes that his scriptural commentaries were written mostly for the benefit of his brethren at Wearmouth-Jarrow. He is therefore explicitly reminding his fellow monks of the role the conversion of the islands had when it came to the end of the world, emphasising to his readers that they were living in the end days, which could come at any moment. He had learned from Gregory's letter that one should act as if it was; this becomes embodied in the figure of Dryhthelm in the following chapter.

Generally, in his pastoral eschatology Bede favours the Gregorian ideal that one should see the end as psychologically rather than physically imminent, using that as motivation to preach and engage in evangelism.[190] For example, Bede concludes his Genesis commentary by stating that when the judgement comes, "all who have not amended their ways beforehand

[187] Darby, *Bede and the End of Time*, 147-8.
[188] Ibid., 150-2.
[189] *Epistulas VII* on 1 Pet 1:12, CS.82, 75
[190] Wallis, 'Revelation Introduction': 3-5.

are pronounced strangers and exiles from the inheritance of blessing".[191] His argument is very much that only the present life allows time for repentance and moral rectitude, and that the consequences of not reforming are catastrophic for the individual who has not taken sufficient care for their soul. Gregory's focus has been on preserving order though his theology reminded people to take responsibility of their own souls.[192] There were aspects of Gregory's work that seemed to suggest the apocalypse was nigh, such as his connecting of the Lombard siege of Rome in AD593 with biblical prophecies about destruction.[193] Meanwhile, in another homily cited by Bede in his commentary on Revelation, Gregory had argued that "Although the end of the world (*mundi finis*) comes in its own time, nevertheless it will be made known when it overtakes certain perverse people, because they will be crushed in its ruins, as they deserve".[194] The argument here is that there will be signs of the end, but that these are designed as markers rather than a strict chronology. It underscores Gregory's areguments that people needed to take responsibility for their own spiritual welfare, and that Bede had incorporated this into his thinking.

The English were living as the love of men grew cold, but there was still some time yet; the key point was that the unfolding of the English Christian story was taking place during the last Age. In his commentary on Luke 14:17, he says that "as the end of the age (*finem saeculi*) has come near, we have all the less reason to excuse ourselves from God's banquet".[195] Note that he says the end "has come near" and not that it has begun or will begin immediately – this is an indication of Bede's self-location at the end of time. This is a close citation of Gregory's homily 2.36, and indeed Darby points out that Bede produces a number of consecutive verses verbatim

[191] *In genesim*, 242; TTH.48, 322.
[192] Palmer, *Apocalypse*, 59.
[193] In his homily on the boiling pot of Ezekiel 24:3-5; see Palmer, *Apocalypse*, 58.
[194] Homily 35, quoted in *Exp Apoc*, 437; TTH.58, 215.
[195] *In Lucam*, 278: "*Si ergo iam hora caenae est cum uocamur, tanto minus debemus excusare a conuiuio Dei quanto propinquare iam cernimus finem saeculi*."

from Gregory.[196] But Bede omits the line "as we reflect that there is no time remaining, we must dread to lose the time at hand" (alternatively "the time of grace at hand").[197] Bede is careful to suggest that there is some time remaining while simultaneously insisting that what time there is could expire at any moment. Statements that the end was close were evidently not as compelling for Bede as they had been for Gregory, writing a century earlier; Darby argues that Bede omitted passages that may have been disproved with the passing of time.[198] But for Bede there was always a warning to mind one's conduct.

For instance, concerning 1 Pet 4:7, Bede writes: "he advisedly warns that, although the time of the arrival of the final judgement is indefinite … it is definitely clear to all that they are unable to continue for long in this mortal life … in view of the indefinite time of the end, the Lord has also admonished us to pray always and to be watchful".[199] This is a good example of how, like in *Exp Apoc*, he takes the concept of imminent apocalypse and adjusts it so that the indefinite aspect is emphasised, while also allowing him the chance to articulate pastoral concerns. It parallels his approach in the *HE*, which features eschatology and judgement while deliberately not suggesting a definite end point. It matches his exegesis on time. In *DTR*, he argues that "when that son of perdition [the Antichrist] will have been struck … and damned with an eternal verdict, it is not to be believed that the Day of Judgement will arrive immediately" (*DTR* 67). So even in his most eschatological passages Bede, despite being driven by a profound urgency for the moral reform of the English, was careful to stress that the day of the Last Judgement was unknown. In this he could draw on 2 Peter 3:9: "The Lord delayeth not his promise, as some imagine, but

[196] Darby, *Bede and the End of Time*, 163.
[197] As translated in ibid., 162-3. "Grace" is the translation used in Gregory, *Forty Gospel Homilies*, 314.
[198] Darby, *Bede and the End of Time*, 163.
[199] *Epistulas VII*, 253: "*Ne sibi quisque blandiretur de longinquitate futuri iudicii in quo uiuos et mortuos dixerat esse iudicandos consulte ammonet quia etsi incertus est extremi discriminis advuentus, certum tamen omnibus constat quod in hac mortali uita diu subsistere nequeuent*".

dealeth patiently for your sake, not willing that any should perish, but that all should return to penance". Jesus was being patient, giving everybody a chance to atone.[200]

Amongst early Christians there was a broad welcome for the end, because it would result in the reward of the just and punishment of the wicked, a "reordering of the world and its institutions", and as Christians at various times were persecuted or members of lower social classes, this would result in a great equalisation and justification for holding on to their beliefs.[201] Indeed Gregory once told his congregation in Rome that anybody who did not rejoice as the end came near was an enemy of God.[202] Bede, who knew Gregory's homilies well, would have recognised this as an example of how the English should look to heavenly things as opposed to temporal prosperity. Indeed in his own work Bede had remarked how Ezra, the priest, rewrote scripture so the people "might be inwardly restored in faith and love of their creator".[203]

This is something Bede is eager to achieve or at least influence through his exegesis and the *HE*, because it would bring about a deeper internal conversion for the English. He would have seen articulated in Gregory's *Moralia* the idea that conversion was a continuous process, a struggle against sins which included lapses and repentance.[204] As O'Reilly argues, Bede appreciated that Christian life came with it a continuing internal conversion, using baptism as a symbol of the initial and continuing

[200] *Epistulas VII*, 277-9; CS.82, 148-50.
[201] Rowland, 'New Testament Church': 57. Carole Straw, 'Settling Scores: Eschatology in the Church of the Martyrs', *Last Things: Death and the Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, eds. Caroline Walker Bynum and Paul Freedman (Philadelphia, 2000), 24-40. For full discussion of the development of early Christian eschatology, see Brian Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church: A Handbook of Patristic Eschatology* (Cambridge, 1991); Rowland, 'New Testament Church'; Brian Daley, 'Eschatology in the Early Church Fathers', *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology*, 91-112; Daley, 'Apocalypticism in Early Christian Theology'.
[202] John Moorhead, *Gregory the Great* (New York, 2005), 15, citing Gregory's Homily 1.3.
[203] *In Ezram*, 260; TTH.47; 36. See also DeGregorio, 'Bede's in Ezram': 17-18.
[204] Straw, *Perfection in Imperfection*, 194.

conversion.[205] He emphasised the need for humility and to hold a "disregard for visible things (*contemptu rerum uisibilium*)", such as material wealth.[206] However, this needs to be seen within the context of eschatology, because a key message is that temporal prosperity – and indeed hardship – do not prepare one for judgement. This can be seen in Bede's work on martyrs, which is closely linked to the discussion on time because he could use them to represent the manifestation of past times in the present.

Martyrs too were important because they were a way for Bede to show that English history was part of something larger. This can been seen in how the AM system used in *DTR* 66 allowed Bede to integrate Britain into universal history. He highlights that in AM4258, during the persecutions of Diocletian and Herculius Maximian, "in Britain Alban, Aaron, and Julius [see *HE* 1.6-7], with many other men and women, were condemned to that happy slaughter". Here he is citing Gildas, but more importantly he is using Britain as a case study for the persecutions that were happening across the Christian world. This is one reason it is so important to pay attention to how he constructs the *HE*, which in itself is designed in part to show that the English are in unity with Rome and other parts of Europe. Bede writes in *DTR* that 17,000 people died in one month (not all in Britain) and so he could have used any number of examples from the Continent. Instead he focused on the local to show that Britain was part of a wider, universal context.

The age of martyrs naturally gave rise to apocalyptic expectation, in that Christians believed the suffering and persecution through which they were going would give rise to eternal reward.[207] However, by Bede's time

[205] Jennifer O'Reilly, 'Introduction', *Bede: On the Temple*, ed. Seán Connolly (Liverpool, 1995), xvii-lv: xxv.
[206] *Epistulas VII*, 194; CS.82, 23.
[207] See Judith Perkins, *The Suffering Self: Pain and Narrative Representation in Early Christianity* (London and New York, 1995); Erin Ronsse, 'Rhetoric of Martyrs: Listening to Saints Perpetua and Felicitas', *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 14.3 (2006), 283-327; Straw, 'Settling Scores: Eschatology in the Church of the Martyrs'; Gregory of Tours, *Lives of the Martyrs*, trans. Raymond Van Dam (Liverpool, 1988).

the persecutions had ended and there were no longer any martyrs in Britain. However, that did not mean he did not see martyrs as useful for educating the present day. But what has this to do with Bede as an apocalyptic writer? It shows, as the thesis will now examine, that he was outlining that similar conditions existed in his day as had as in the earliest days of the Church, and that they still carried with them the same moral lessons. This is vital for chapter two of the present thesis, because this manifestation of earlier conditions, it is argued, shows that Bede believed in real danger to the salvation of his people. In *HE* 5 he illustrates that there are English martyrs, which in turn shows that the English are the recipients of divine miracles but also further illustrating that the conversion of the Gentiles is continuing apace.

In *HE* 5.10 he writes of Northumbrian preachers, the Hewalds, martyred during their mission to the Germans within Bede's lifetime (AD690s; they are explicitly described as martyrs in *HE* 5.20). Miracles accompanied their deaths, including their bodies floating down river to their companions. This was accompanied by "a great ray of light reaching to heaven" shining on their bodies every night, and Bede pointedly notes that "even the heathen who had slain them saw it". The Hewalds do not appear in Bede's martyrology. However, the recovery of bodies through signs and visions is a feature of that text.[208] Bede writes that one of them appeared in a vision to a monk and told them where their bodies could be found, while a spring came forth at the site of their deaths which could still be seen in the 730s. So while martyrdom was no more in Britain, it continued in pagan lands, except Bede is able to show that it is the English who have become martyrs due to their faith and willingness to spread Christianity to pagans. It functions as a pointed example of sanctity at a time of contemporary moral decay. Martyrs were of particular interest to

[208] Thacker, 'Bede and His Martyrology', 129-30.

him: Bede's martyrology contained narrative accounts of each holy figure, which meant their lessons could be taught more widely.[209]

This martyrology was an innovation, because not only did Bede rework varied and sometimes confusing sources into a coherent and proper sequence, but he emphasised the historical nature of the martyrdoms. This historical martyrology was the first of its kind, and Thacker argues it was driven by Bede's concerns about the "*aedificatio ecclesiae*" or building up of the Church.[210] It is a pertinent example of how Bede saw the lives, suffering, and deaths of holy figures as vital for encouraging moral reform and inward reflection. Bede saw martyrs as pastoral examples for his contemporaries, asking in his exegesis, "I thank you, Jesus, who bless in heaven those who meet their death on earth in you. How much more [do you bless] those who lay down their happy souls in you, and for the sake of your faith?"[211]

Martyrs were generally historical figures and their commitment could be emulated in the present day. King Oswald is depicted as a royal martyr – and was presented by Bede as the exemplar par excellence for the kings of the 730s.[212] Alban, a martyr of possibly the third century, is held up as an example of a saint from the earliest period of Christianity in Britain (*HE* 1.7). [213] Alban, converted by the example of a cleric during the persecutions, chose torture and martyrdom above betraying the cleric. As he is led to his execution Alban takes on a Mosaic role: with the bridge too

[209] Bede, 'Martyrology', trans. Felice Lifshtiz, *Medieval Hagiography: An Anthology*, ed. Thomas Head (New York, 2001), 179-98.
[210] Thacker, 'Bede and His Martyrology', *Listen O Isles Unto Me*: 126-141: passim.
[211] *Exp Apoc*, 431; TTH.58, 213. *Gratias tibi, Iesu, qui beatificas eos in caelo qui in te moriuntur in terra. Quanto magis illos qui et in tua et pro tua fide felices ponunt animas?*
[212] Ó Mathghamhna, 'Crisis and Reform'. For debate on the status of Oswald as a martyr, see Victoria A. Gunn, 'Bede and the Martyrdom of St Oswald', *Studies in Church History* 30 (1993), 57-80; Clare E. Stancliffe, 'Oswald, "Most Holy and Most Victorious King of the Northumbrians"', *Oswald. Northumbrian King to European Saint*, eds. Clare Stancliffe and Eric Cambridge (Stamford, 1995): 33-83; Alan Thacker, 'Membra Disjecta: The Division of the Body and the Diffusion of the Cult', *Oswald: Northumbrian King to European Saint*, 97-127.
[213] Bede does not give a date for Alban's execution but it is implied to be after the persecution of Diocletian (303AD) began; Gildas (*DEB* 10) had located the martyrdom of Alban, Aaron, and Julius in the reign of Diocletian but it may have occurred in the 250s.

full of people to pass, he turns his eyes to heaven and "thereupon the river-bed dried up at that very spot and he saw the waters give way and provide a path for him to walk in"; the miracle sees one of the executioners convert to Christianity on the spot. Gildas is more explicit in connecting the miracle to the ancient past: "by a miracle he was marked out by wonderful signs. Thanks to his fervent prayer, he opened up an unknown route across the channel of the great river Thames – a route resembling the untrodden way made dry for the Israelites when the ark of the testament stood for a while on gravel in the midstream of Jordan". Bede continues his narrative by saying that atop the execution hill, "Alban asked God to give him water and at once a perpetual spring bubbled up, confined within its channel and at his very feet, so that all could see that even the stream rendered service to the martyr"; it is not unlike how Moses raised water in the desert through beseeching the divine, and the healing spring is recalled by that which follows the martyrdom of the Hewalds. The executioner, himself executed, is "cleansed by the washing of his own blood" as he could not be baptised.

Having witnesses to a martyrdom is one of Bede's common motifs in the martyrology.[214] But Bede was not just tying Alban into a wider martyrdom tradition, he was drawing on Insular sources as well. Gildas, one of Bede's sources for *HE* 1.7, says that during the persecution "God … increased his pity" for the Britons and "acted to save Britain being plunged deep in the thick darkness of black night; for he lit for us the brilliant lamps of holy martyrs" (*DEB* 10). Gildas's argument is that Alban illustrated how the Britons were able to demonstrate the same ardent faith as the martyrs of Rome and the Holy Land, which Bede adopts when it comes to describing the English. Bede's use of Gildas here is not only out of necessity for information but to make a point that conditions similar to those days were manifesting in the contemporary period. The inclusion of this

[214] Thacker, 'Bede and his Martyrology', 129-30.

narrative early in the *HE* is both chronological and didactic. Such miracles and martyrdoms were taking place in the earliest days of the Church in Britain, showing for Bede that God had looked well on the island at a point in the remote past. However, it also sets up the miracle narratives to come later in the *HE*, particularly that of Dryhthelm. While Dryhthelm's miracle echoes those in the Bible, a conscientious reader could read Alban's narrative and then *HE* 5.12 and pause to consider that perhaps the English of the 700s were in need of great miracles like those of *HE* 1.7 if they were to be converted to Christianity at an inward level. Importantly, Bede notes that healing miracles continue at the site of a memorial to Alban at Uerlamacæstir (near the modern-day city of St Alban's), which by 731 was ruled by the English, again illustrating that the example of one Christian can have lasting benefits for all peoples. It also shows that just because a people had lapsed on a spiritual level it did not mean they were without hope of salvation; that is the essence of the *Historia's* eschatology. Discussing the AD system used in the ecclesiastical history will underscore why Bede's belief that previous conditions were returning was so important from an eschatological perspective.

Though Markus says that while ecclesiastical history was, as a rule, "not intended to be contemporary history", Bede again transcends this rule.[215] The Christian concept of time meant there was one direction, from creation to Judgement. There was only one God, only one world, and only one history for all peoples.[216] Bede's insertion of the English into universal history should be understood in this context. Their conversion is emphatically placed in the years after Christ, emphasising that Anglo-Saxon history is taking place in the last Age of the world. Wallis has argued that the use of AD ties the events of English history to the Sixth Age.[217] In the *HE*, Bede frequently uses the AD system, which, it has been argued, is

[215] R.A. Markus, 'Church History and the Early Church Historians', *Studies in Church History* 11 (1975), 1-17: 12.
[216] Wallis, 'Commentary': 354.
[217] Wallis, 'Commentary':

related to his work concerning Easter calculations.[218] Indeed MacCarron argues that he did not use AD dates for people associated with the incorrect calculation of Easter.[219] AD is a prospective system in that it counts forward from a certain place, which makes using it in a chronology like the *HE* unusual. His usage was not a sudden shift; rather, he used it at various stages throughout his career, starting with his first chronicle in *De temporibus*.[220] However, the *HE* represents his most concerted and sustained usage of the system.[221] His reasons are eschatological, and traces of his motivation are found in his exegesis. In *Exp Apoc*, Bede recalls Paul's letter to the Colossians when he writes: "As the apostle says: If you be risen with Christ, seek the things that are above (*quae sursum sunt quaerite*)".[222] The biblical text itself says: "You must be heavenly-minded, not earthly-minded (*quae sursum sunt sapite non quae super terram*)". This is Bede's thinking when it comes to writing the *HE*. Even when Bede makes mention of other systems, he connects them to Christ in some way. For example, he puts Caesar's campaign in Britain in "the year of Rome 693, that is, in the year 60 before our Lord" (*HE* 1.2). Britain is formally conquered by Rome "in the year of our Lord 46" (*HE* 1.3). He closes the historical narrative of the *HE* by noting that he wrote "about 285 years after the coming of the English to Britain, in the year of our Lord 731" (*HE* 5.23). When it came to dating the reigns of English kings, Bede calculated their AD years instead of just quoting lists of regnal years.[223] This allowed for more precision as well as emphasising the eschatological nature of the *Historia*: in *DTR* 49 he pointed out that dating by regnal years could see one historian assign a year to a

[218] See the discussion in MacCarron, 'Bede, the *Annus Mundi*, and the *HE*': 125.
[219] MacCarron, 'Christology and the Future': 175.
[220] MacCarron, 'Christology and the Future': 163,
[221] For a breakdown of how frequently Bede uses it in the *HE*, see MacCarron, 'Christology and the Future': 172-3.
[222] *Exp Apoc*, 509; TTH.58, 254; quoting Tyconius and citing Col 3:2
[223] D.P. Kirby, 'Bede and Northumbrian Chronology', *English Historical Review* 78 (1963), 514-27; Susan Wood, 'Bede's Northumbrian Dates Again', *English Historical Review* 98 (1983), 280-96. For a case study of Bede's construction of the chronology of Northumbrian kings, see Molly Miller, 'The Dates of Deira', *Anglo-Saxon England* 8: 40-62.

king or emperor who died rather than his successor because the deceased king had reigned for half of it.

AD reinforces Bede's perspective on time as implied in the *HE*: Everything in his era is taking place in the years after Jesus' birth, defining them as part of the end times. The AD system "allows him to express the linearity of time linked to the central event of Christ's birth and to link events and personages of the Old Testament who prefigure, foreshadow, and explain the meaning of the New Testament, as well as the present state of historical development".[224] Similarly, AD allowed him to "reframe the past in order to actively influence his contemporaries' perception of the future".[225]

Although Bede was not the first to use the system for historical purposes (that was Julian of Toledo, d.AD690), he pioneered it with the *HE*, and this ultimately lead to the rest of Christendom dating its years as AD, arguably from Insular-influenced centres in Frankish territory.[226] The system was developed by Dionysius Exiguus in the sixth century in part to displace the Diocletianic calendar system with its connotations of paganism (Diocletian having ordered the persecution of Christians), but also to dissuade Christians from believing in an imminent end of the world.[227] Early in his career, Bede drew on Dionysius in *De temporibus*, using him to illustrate how to calculate Jesus's nativity with regard to indictions and paschal cycles.[228] Later, he applied more explicit exegetical thinking, writing that Dionysius refused to link his paschal cycles "to the memory of an impious persecutor, but chose instead to designate the years from the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ, so that the source of our hope might

[224] Ibid., 113.
[225] Mairin MacCarron, 'Christology and the Future in Bede's Annus Domini': 162. See also MacCarron, 'Bede, Irish Computistica and Annus Mundi'.
[226] Georges Declercq, *Anno Domini: The Origins of the Christian Era* (Turnhout, 2000), 149-88, esp 68-88. See also James T. Palmer, 'The Adoption of the Dionysian Easter in the Frankish Kingdoms (c. 670-c. 800)', *Peritia* 28 (2017): 135-54.
[227] Georges Declercq, 'Dionysius Exiguus and the Introduction of the Christian Era', *Sacris Erudiri* 41 (2002), 165-246; Declercq, *Anno Domini*.
[228] *De temporibus*, 598-99. See also *DTR* 49.

be more evident to us, and that the cause of man's restoration, that is, our redeemer's passion, might be more clearly manifest" (*DTR* 47). He is quoting this as a statement by Dionysius in the prologue to his tables, though Wallis notes the text is probably from a later continuator.[229] Nevertheless, it shows that Bede is eager for his readers to understand that calculating times according to Jesus was a spiritual as well as chronological endeavour. He encourages readers to use the formula set out in Dionysius to "diligently seek out the year of our lord's passion". In effect, he is calling on his readers to engage intellectually with the nature of computing time in order for them to become personally engaged with the passion story, connecting time, space, and spirituality.

His use of Dionysius also emphasises that for him time and dating systems could be applied exegetically, encouraging readers to think more about the life to come. In Bede's hands, the AD system "allows him to express the linearity of time linked to the central event of Christ's birth and also to link events and personages of the Old Testament who prefigure, foreshadow, and explain the meaning of the New Testament, as well as the present state of historical development".[230] That observation by Brown could easily have been applied very accurately to the *Historia*. By connecting every event in the ecclesiastical history of the English people to the era of Christ, this reinforced the eschatological aspect to the development of the Church among the English. The dangers associated with this become more apparent in the following chapter concerning the vision of Dryhthelm.

[229] TTH.29, 126, n21.
[230] Brown, *Companion*, 113.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that Bede saw himself as living at the literal ends of the Earth as well as the end of time. He drew on substantial patristic and Insular traditions in order to emphasise the eschatological role of the conversion of Britain and Ireland. This was borne out by analysing his understanding of geography and exegesis and the islands, which was derived from Classical and patristic sources but adapted for a local context. This was set against Bede's understanding of time, and especially the World Ages, to show why his use of the AD system is vital for understanding the eschatology of the *HE*, because it reinforced and emphasised that the English had been converted in the last Age of the world, which meant their entire Christian history had been played out in the last days. To follow this, the thesis turns to the vision of Dryhthelm (*HE* 5.12) as a case study for Bede's eschatology and his concerns regarding judgement of individuals, as well as the significance of his statement that Dryhthelm's contemporaries were living "in the death of the soul".

Chapter 2

Dryhthelm's vision and the death of the soul: Judgement on the individual

This chapter analyses Bede's presentation of the judgement of individuals and sets it in the context of his wider eschatology. It does this through a close reading of the vision of Dryhthelm (*HE* 5.12). Dryhthelm was a secular Anglo-Saxon man who died and was shown the afterlife, including the purgation of souls and souls being dragged to hell, before being brought back to life to "arouse the living from the death of the soul". The chapter argues that the vision narrative serves as a case study for Bede's eschatology, and as a key to understanding the *HE* a whole. To do this the chapter begins by locating it structurally in the *HE*, amid the seemingly eclectic contents of *HE* 5, the broad themes of which are judgement and the revival of spiritual quality. It first outlines the content of *HE* 5 in order to argue that the vision's placement fulfils an important structural and eschatological role in Bede's conception of judgement and efforts to inspire moral reform. The chapter then assesses the content of the vision, noting parallels with other vision texts circulating at about the same time, and then discusses *HE* 5.12's content in detail. It then examines the vision's literary context with regard to how Bede draws on different sources when finalising the narrative, and importantly how it connects to his exegesis on the concept of judgement. It also discusses how Bede has previously reshaped existing narratives such as that of the anonymous *Vita Cuthberti* (c.AD699-705) in order to convey better his own thinking on judgement and moral reform. This is to show that *HE* 5.12 is not the only instance where Bede has taken material from other sources and moulded it to match his exegetical and eschatological concerns. The chapter then examines the pastoral function of the vision and how it intersects with Gregory the Great's work. It subsequently discusses the death of the soul, and the patristic traditions in which Bede is working when he uses that phrase, but also how he deploys it in his exegesis to emphasise the need for moral reform before judgement.

HE 5 – Content, structure, and eschatology

This section argues that the placement of the Dryhthelm chapter within *HE* 5 is an illustration of Bede's application of eschatology to the overall *HE*, and that this shows the content and structure of *HE* 5 are designed to emphasise the need for reform before judgement. The section does this by outlining the overall structure and content and then analysing how eschatology underlies all of it.

HE 5 makes up roughly twenty percent of the *HE*'s overall text but has been little studied, and described by McClure and Collins as "less well structured than the previous [books]".[1] They suggest that the structure – the content seems on initial observation to be more eclectic than the proceeding books – indicates Bede was in the process of revising *HE* 5 when he died in 734.[2] The previous four books proceed in a largely chronological order and are concerned with the establishment, spreading, and development of the Christian church on the island of Britain. However, the structure appears to break down in *HE* 5, though this thesis argues this is not the case in light of the discussions above regarding eschatology within Bede's exegesis.

It opens with Oethelwald, successor as hermit on the island of Farne after the death of the great Northumbrian saint Cuthbert (d.AD687). Oethelwald is shown to be a miracle worker as God grants him powers in recognition of his "merits" (*HE* 5.1). Most notably, through prayer he calms the waters during a storm, recalling Christ calming the storm on the Sea of Galilee (Mark 4:35-41); this also recalls Ps 88:10, which says God rules the sea and shows power by calming the waves.[3] While McClure and Collins argue that thematically this belongs with *HE* 4, this thesis argues it is actually a deliberate placement in order to highlight dramatically that the

[1] McClure and Collins, *Bede: The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, 410.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Matt 8:23-27, Mark 4:35-41, Luke 8:22-25.

English have been capable of great deeds because of faith in God but are at risk of losing divine favour.

The first portion of *HE* 5 features healing miracles (*HE* 5.2-6), the pious acts of kings (*HE* 5.7), and the consecration of bishops (*HE* 5.8). Then the narrative moves to Germany (*HE* 5.9-11), to where the Anglo-Saxons had begun sending missionaries. This display of pastoral activity is then followed by the resurrection of Dryhthelm (*HE* 5.12, the halfway point of *HE* 5). There are then two visions of hell (*HE* 5.13-14) granted to Anglo-Saxons contemporary with Dryhthelm. After this there is an account of how the majority of the Irish churches in the north of Ireland accept the canonical Easter (*HE* 5.15), emphasising the move of the archipelago toward full synchronicity with Rome. There are descriptions of Jerusalem and the Holy Land (*HE* 5.16-17) and accounts of kings entering monasteries, along with the consecration of bishops (*HE* 5.18-20).

The evangelisation of the Picts continues and they are brought into union with regard to the Easter calculation (*HE* 5.21), while Iona, the lone holdout of the old Easter calculation, converts to the Roman practice in about AD716 [4] (*HE* 5.22), meaning that in the short chapter on contemporary Britain (*HE* 5.23) the entire archipelago, with the exception of the schismatic Britons, is in full unity with the global Church. But even this should be looked at through Bede's eschatology, especially in light of Britain's location, as discussed in chapter one above. Bede's commentary on Samuel argues the faithful show unity and heretics and their ilk discord.[5] He would have seen from the anonymous *Vita Ceolfridi* a reference to how the unity of his monastery should be maintained; the Jewish people

[4] J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People: A Historical Commentary* (Oxford, 1988), 198 puts it in AD729. However, Bede says the conversion took place during the abbacy of Dunchad, who died in AD717, and he adds that Egbert stayed on Iona for thirteen years after overseeing the transition to the canonical Easter, dying in AD729. His death does not coincide with the first celebration of the Roman Easter on Iona.

[5] Thacker, 'Why Did Heresy Matter?': 50.

"had divided against themselves through the folly of Solomon's son [and] never had respite from external disaster".[6]

Davidse describes the *HE*'s closing prayer – "Let the Earth rejoice in his [Jesus'] perpetual kingdom and let Britain rejoice in his faith and let the multitude of isles (*laetentur insulae multae*) be glad and give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness" – to be eschatological because of its reference to the islands and the whole world.[7] The "multitude of isles" is a direct quote from Ps 97:1 – "The Lord hath reigned, let the earth rejoice: let many islands be glad".[8] This is one of the biblical passages seen as a prophetic link between the conversion of the islands and the end of time. Bede is in effect concluding his history by invoking the spirit of the Last Judgement. A brief recapitulation of some of the main events of the *HE*, including some events which are not referred to at all in the main text, and a bibliography of his own scriptural works brings Bede's *HE* to a close.

The importance of Dryhthelm cannot be overemphasised. Bede gave almost as much attention to the Dryhthelm narrative as he did to the Synod of Whitby, the pivotal ecclesiastical gathering that resulted in the triumph of the Roman Easter over the older, now discredited calculation adhered to by Iona and which had been prevalent in Northumbria.[9] Easter was a subject dear to Bede's heart because it spoke to the whole unity of the Church, and so to give something else just as much attention in the *HE* speaks volumes as to its importance. Not only that, it was of pressing contemporary concern as well.

Dryhthelm's death and resurrection are placed at the turn of the eighth century.[10] It is thus within living memory, allowing Bede to set

[6] *Vita Ceolfridi* 25.
[7] Davidse, 'The Sense of History', 665.
[8] "*Dominus regnavit: exsultet terra; laetentur insulae multae.*"
[9] Darby, *Bede and the End of Time*, 208.
[10] *HE* 5.11 concerns an Anglo-Saxon mission to Frisia, and Bede says Pippin was consecrated archbishop of the Frisians in 696. He introduces *HE* 5.12 by saying "about that time", and notes that Dryhthelm met King Aldfrith, who died in about 705.

contemporary political and ecclesiastical developments against an eschatological background. The contemporary events were certainly harrowing for a kingdom that had been one of Britain's most powerful. Ecgfrith, king of the Northumbrians, died in battle in AD685 following disastrous campaigns against the Irish and the Picts, and the kingdom's borders and power have shrunk, which Bede acknowledges (*HE* 4.26).[11]

The key point is that while these chapters seem to be an eclectic mix, they are actually tied together by eschatology and a concern with divine judgement. It is telling then that Dryhthelm's vision, one of the most important narratives in *HE* 5, is explicitly located in time (Bede's era) while simultaneously being shown as a manifestation of the island's distant past in the English present. The thesis turns now to that vision and how it fits with Bede's exegesis and patristic tradition, to show that the vision narrative encompasses Bede's warnings and eschatological fears, as well as relating closely to his drive for moral reform in the overall *HE*. An analysis of the ties between the narrative and Bede's exegesis will show how the vision is linked to his overall concerns about the spiritual fate of the English. While Bede connects Dryhthelm's daily life with his own pastoral concerns, the vision itself has several atypical features which show it to not only be a vision narrative to inform the reader, but a case study for Bede's application of exegesis to history. Bede composed his hagiography (and *HE)* in such a way that the meaning would be clear to both the learned and the less educated at the first reading.[12] This is a hallmark of Bede's exegesis and demonstrates how he has taken the influences of earlier writers and adapted them for an English context.

[11] For a recent study of the king and his place in English history, see N.J. Higham, *Ecgfrith: King of the Northumbrians*, *High-King of Britain* (Donington, 2015).
[12] Brown, *Companion*, 77.

The vision narrative and how it intersects with Bede's writings about judgement and the fate of the soul

This section argues that the content of the Dryhthelm vision is designed not only to revive the English at a spiritual level, but to emphasise the spiritual dangers which threatened them. It emphasises the connections to his exegesis to argue that it was written to inspire contemporary moral reform and to sound an eschatological warning.

Bede begins the vision chapter thus:

> *His temporibus miraculum memorabile et antiquorum simile in Britannia factum est. Namque ad excitationem uiuentium de morte animae, quidam aliquandiu mortuus ad uitam resurrexit corporis, et multa memoratu digna quae uiderat, narrauit* ("At about this time a memorable miracle like those of ancient times happened in Britain. In order to arouse the living from the death of the soul, a certain man who was already dead was resurrected, and he spoke of many memorable things that he had seen").

Bede states that he thinks some of these "memorable things" ought to be included in the *HE* – he is usually content to let readers make their own connections, so this rare editorial interjection is an important sign that they should pay close attention to what follows of Dryhthelm's death, vision, and post-resurrection life. Grocock has argued that oftimes Bede's Latin is constructed in such a way that the sense of a sentence is only made clear at the very end.[13] So by spelling out the meaning of the Dryhthelm account quite clearly, he is making an unusually (for him) blunt point. In his Revelation commentary Bede says the living who are spiritually dead will be destroyed at the end of the world.[14] Elsewhere in that commentary he says that "the soul that sins shall itself die" (or "it is the guilty soul that

[13] Christopher W. Grocock, 'Separation Anxiety: Bede and Threats to Wearmouth and Jarrow', *Bede and the Future*, 67-92: 71.
[14] "*Fastu prudentiae carnalis mortem illis infligens spiritalem. Sapere enim secundum carnem mors est*". *Exp Apoc*, 341; TTH.58, 165.

must die") but the remission of sins is akin to a resurrection through baptism.[15]

Dryhthelm is described as living a religious life with his family in Northumbria. He falls ill, deteriorates, and dies in the early night, only to awaken at dawn in an event that terrifies everybody holding vigil over him except his wife. He announces he has to live "in a very different way" and ultimately takes holy orders. While dead, Dryhthelm is taken by a guide (generally known in vision texts as a *ductor*; Dryhthelm refers to his as such) on a journey around the afterlife. The afterlife journey is a genre of medieval literature in its own right, although the substance and style varies widely. Medieval vision texts tended to follow a prescribed formula of *topoi* in order to gain credibility.[16] One of Bede's great editors, Plummer, highlighted the apocryphal *Acts of Thomas* and the *Apocalypse of Peter* as the earliest examples of this type of vision.[17] Both of these were known in Western Europe, *Thomas* through a Latin version by Gregory of Tours and *Peter* by, at the very least, a reference to it in Eusebius's *Historia ecclesiastica*. Like most medieval vision narratives, Dryhthelm's is presented in travel terms, although unlike contemporary vision accounts, he does not meet somebody he knows, nor are any of the souls named.[18] So the Dryhthelm journey opens with a typical stylistic feature, tying the account into the expected *topoi* of a vision narrative and establishing Bede's credibility as a narrator. Kabir has argued that, generally in the medieval period, otherworld visions were an important channel for transmitting ideas between the lay and ecclesiastical worlds, with monasteries themselves

[15] *Exp Apoc*, 507-9. The phrase about the soul dying is a quote from Ezek 18:4: "*anima quae peccaverit, ipsa morietur"*.
[16] Eileen Gardiner, *Visions of Heaven and Hell before Dante* (1988), xxiv; Carol Zaleski, *Otherworld Journeys: Accounts of near-Death Experience in Medieval and Modern Times* (New York and Oxford, 1987), 81-5.
[17] Plummer, *Opera Historica*, 294. For the *Acts of Thomas*, see M. Bonnet, *Acta Thomae Graece* (Leipzig, 1883), translated from Greek in Elliot, *Apocryphal New Testament*, 439-511. For the Apocalypse of Peter, translated from Elliot, 593-612.
[18] Kabir, *Doomsday*, 87.

forming a similar crossover.[19] The dedication of the *HE* to a king and thus its exposure to a secular audience allows Bede to take advantage of such a line of communication in order to spread his teachings (something Bede is explicit about in the *HE*'s dedication to King Ceolwulf).

Dryhthelm is "guided by a man in shining robes", who takes him in the direction "of the sun at summer solstice". Although not stated in the narrative, the conventions of the genre suggest this is an angel. Dryhthelm and the *ductor* walk to a valley of "infinite length" hemmed in on one side by flames and on the other by hail and ice. Souls are blown from one side to the other – but his guide says "this is not hell as you think", suggesting there was some expectation about what hell was among contemporary Northumbrians but that it may be beyond human reckoning. It will be argued below that this is in fact an area of purgation rather than punishment. Indeed, it reflects Bede's commentary on a verse of Isaiah, in which Bede quotes Jerome to highlight the mystery of scripture, the meaning of which is sometimes obscure: "we must understand that human fragility is unable to know God's judgement, or to pass judgement on the magnitude and the measure of punishments, which is reserved to the decision of the Lord" ("*poenitentiam quod multa post tempora Domino visitentur"*).[20] It was impossible for humans to understand fully what would happen, a theme that is brought to the fore in Dryhthelm's vision as he struggles to fit what he sees into his preconceived notions of hell or heaven.

Dryhthelm is then brought to and left in a place of darkness save for globes of fire that shoot up from a vast pit, which is the entrance to hell. Evil spirits drag souls into the pit: it is noteworthy that of the five, one "was tonsured like a clerk, one a layman, and one a woman". This tells the reader that all social classes and categories can fall into hell, in much the same way as Ambrose had written that "the last day carries off rich and

[19] Kabir, *Doomsday*, 81-4.
[20] *Isaias*, col 703; TTH.28, 40.

poor alike".[21] Bede emphasised that people of all times, genders, and social classes were linked by the same faith (*DTR* 18).[22] But as Dryhthelm is approached by some of the "hostile spirits", his guide returns and scatters them. Dryhthelm is brought "to the right" and led "in the direction of the rising of the winter sun" into bright light. They see an endlessly long and endlessly high wall without gate, window, or step. Suddenly they appear on top of the wall and behold "a very broad and pleasant plain" full of sweet-smelling flowers (this passage is reminiscent of the *Apocalypse of Peter*).[23] It is brightly lit and full of "joyful" men in white robes – although in this case the context is clear that these are the saved rather than angels – but Dryhthelm is told "this is not the kingdom of heaven as you imagine". Rather, it is a place where trivial sins are cleansed.

In fact, Dryhthelm never actually sees heaven: he can smell the fragrance of the flowers growing in a field shrouded by "wondrous light" – reminiscent of Bede's statement that God dwells within "inaccessible light" and "reigns beyond the stars" – and he can hear singing, but before he reaches this field his guide stops him and explains everything he has seen.[24] Dryhthelm has only really seen up close two areas of purgation – one for those who had waited until their deathbeds to confess, the other for people who had lived good lives but were not perfect enough to go directly to heaven. However, those are enough to inspire both fear and wonder in him. The last location resembles the *Visio Sancti Pauli (VSP)*, in which it is said that the "souls of the just" are dismissed to Paradise while awaiting the Last Judgement.[25]

The *VSP* is a heretical third- or fourth-century Egyptian text that was highly influential on vision literature despite being condemned by

[21] Ambrose, *First Oration on the Death of His Brother*, chapter 5. FotC.22, 163.
[22] As noted in Scully, 'Introduction': 19.
[23] Plummer, *Opera Historica*, 297; *Apoc Peter* 5.
[24] Light: *In Genesim*, 8; TTH.48, 73. Stars: *Exp Apoc*, 217.
[25] 'Visio Pauli': 628.

Augustine for contravening scripture.[26] The text, which circulated widely in Europe, purports to be Paul's vision of heaven which is referred to, but not detailed, in 2 Cor 12:1-4. More than any other apocryphal text, the *VSP* was responsible for spreading popular ideas of heaven and hell throughout medieval Europe,[27] and it would have been known in Britain. The important thing to note here is that with Dryhthelm, Bede is engaging in an ongoing dialogue concerning the fate of the soul and judgement, a dialogue which involves apocryphal as well as mainstream texts. There were competing ideas, some of which were scrupulously orthodox and others, such as the *VSP*, seen as less so. Bede's narrative includes elements strongly associated with apocryphal texts without acknowledging them. He is working within the tropes and sources of the vision genre, but making them orthodox, familiar and locating them in an English context.[28] This serves to demonstrate that vision and judgement narratives apply directly to a local audience.

Not only does this pre-heaven realm show a debate with apocryphal texts, it intersects with Bede's exegesis on the soul as well. In his commentary on Revelation, he states that the faithful, "sustained by their previous labours", rest from the time of death.[29] In *Exp Apoc* it is not clear if he means rest permanently or rest until after the Last Judgement before going on to a different place for reward, although in his later

[26] Bertram Colgrave, 'Bede's Miracle Stories', *Bede: His Life, Times, and Writings: Essays in Commemoration of the Twelfth Centenary of His Death*, ed. A. Hamilton Thompson (Oxford, 1935), 201-29: 215; Hilhorst, 'Previous History and Afterlife': 21-2. For a translation of one of the many recensions of this text, see 'Visio Sancti Pauli', trans. J.K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, ed. J.K. Elliott (Oxford, 1993), 616-44. The text was considered heretical by some early Christian writers, such as Tertullian, but circulated nonetheless. See Albert L.A. Hogeterp, 'The Relation between Body and Soul in the *Apocalypse of Paul*', *The Visio Pauli and the Gnostic Apocalypse of Paul*, eds. Jan N. Bremmer and Istvan Czachesz (Leuvens, 2007), 105-29: 105. For knowledge of the text in Anglo-Saxon England, although not specifically in Bede, see Kabir, *Doomsday*, 14-47.

[27] 'Visio Pauli': 616.

[28] For a study of Bede's use of tropes, see David Allison Orsbon, 'Bede's Sacred Order: Schemes and Tropes in the Historia Ecclesiastica', *American Benedictine Review* 62:1 (2011), 3-5, and *American Benedictine Review* 62:2 (2011), 125-142. This study, though lacking in context of Bedan scholarship, argues that Bede used tropes to present the *HE* as a type of scripture.

[29] *Exp Apoc*, 432; TTH.58, 213, quoting Primasius.

exegesis Bede suggests that some greater reward awaits after the Last Judgement.[30] It would seem to match with the Seventh Age referred to in *DTR*.

The white robes of the men in the field are also hugely important from an exegetical and eschatological perspective. They parallel those worn by the multitude "of all nations and tribes and peoples" in Rev 7:9-17 who have "come through the great tribulation" and serve God having washed their robes "in the blood of the lamb", referring to their faith in Jesus. This carries connotations of baptism generally but also to references in Bede's exegesis and homilies to overcoming "the world in Christ" and the "radiance bestowed by the Holy Spirit", and possibly even martyrdom.[31] The people of the heavenly Jerusalem also "shine with the purity of mind and radiance of [their] works".[32] So Dryhthelm's journey narrative is shaped by a deep level of Bedan exegesis. This is Bede's eschatology quite literally distilled into an English individual, illustrating how tightly connected the English are to the central Christian story while also demonstrating how interlinked the *HE* is to Bede's scriptural commentaries. The English were eligible to be among the white-robed people in the field but this would only happen if they paid attention to Bede's warning at the start of *HE* 5.12, and Dryhthelm's statement that he needed to live in a very different way.

As part of this change, following Dryhthelm's resurrection he divides his estate amongst his family and the poor, and enters holy orders, living "a life of such penance of mind and body that even if he had kept silence, his life would have declared that he had seen many things to be dreaded or desired which had been hidden from other men". This is mentioned before Bede relates the vision account itself, which is a deliberate literary construction to emphasise that a key thing for the reader

[30] *Tobias*, 19; Connolly trans 62.
[31] *Exp Apoc*, 324; *Homeliarum* 1.10, CS.110, 100-1.
[32] *Exp Apoc*, 561; TTH.58, 279

to internalise is that Dryhthelm transformed his life following the vision in order to focus on getting into the right spiritual condition at a time when Northumbria's power had waned.

Bede's engagement with ideas about the afterlife is informative about his eschatology and approach to teaching: his intention is to inform fully his contemporaries about the judgement to come immediately upon death and, more importantly, to encourage them to live a more properly Christian life in order to avoid being dragged into the pit. Dryhthelm is not a distant figure from the Bible, the Holy Land, or Europe; he is a local who has seen judgement first hand. Bede wants his readers truly to comprehend this, because what Dryhthelm has seen is what they will see when they die. This is not unique to Bede; Wallis points out that Hippolytus (d.AD235) argued that "for the individual, the day of death is a sort of Judgement Day, when an account must be rendered for one's moral choices during life".[33] The Dryhthelm narrative is, in part, engaging with traditions and the discourse on the nature of hell and heaven. The imagery must therefore have inspired enough fear or motivation among the contemporary audience that it became a mainstream and common understanding of what the afterlife consisted of; had it not, it would not have been circulated or preserved with the two vision narratives that follow it in the *HE*.[34]

Dryhthelm's is the only miracle in the *HE* which involves a person being resurrected. Bede is making the point to his readers that what Dryhthelm sees is what awaits them after death, and Dryhthelm's guide even leaves him for a time at the end of the vision narrative to find out what his fate would be. So it is important to note that this is not exactly like other vision narratives circulating at the time, when somebody is granted a vision while asleep or in a state of distress or ecstasy like Fursa (*HE* 3.19) or the missionary Laurence, scourged by St Peter (*HE* 2.6). While Bede sets out

[33] Wallis, 'Revelation Introduction': 9.
[34] The three were often circulated separately from the *HE*: M.L.W. Laistner and H.H. King, *A Hand-List of Bede Manuscripts* (Ithaca, 1943), 107-9.

that the vision is "to awaken the living from the death of the soul", it would seem to recall Gregory's teaching that some visions are to help many people, while others are for the individual: "We should also keep in mind that sometimes people are given a glimpse of their future punishment while they are fully alive. In some cases, the person himself derives much benefit from the experience; in others, the good lesson is meant for the people who are present and observe what is taking place" (*Dialogii* 4.40).[35] Gregory's *Dialogii* is of enormous importance to Bede – it not only offers him a model of how to present miracle stories but also patristic authority and guidance on how to interpret miracle and resurrection narratives. Bede says Dryhthelm

> was stricken down by an illness which grew worse from day to day until he reached his end and died in the early hours of the night. But at dawn he came to life again and suddenly sat up (*qui infirmitate corporis tactus, et hac crescente per dies, ad extrema perductus, primo tempore noctis defunctus est; sed diluculo reuiuiscens, ac repente residens, omnes, qui corpori flentes adsederant, timore inmenso perculsos in fugam conuertit*).

Resurrection is a central tenet of Christianity, in that all the dead were going to be raised from the dead in order to be judged by Christ, whose own resurrection had "conquered death".[36] This is a predominantly New Testament concept, although it is present in Ezekiel, Isaiah, and Daniel.[37] Elsewhere, Bede says the three resurrections carried out by Christ are to regenerate people dead in sin (daughter of Jairus in Mk 5:21-43, young man from Nain in Lk 7:11-17, Lazarus in Jn 11:1-44).[38] Bede puts the emphasis on the "mystical truths" lying behind miracles, and particularly their use in bringing people to the faith and impressing on them the magnitude of

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[35] *Dialogii*, SC.265, 138; FotC, 244 ("*Sciendum quoque est quia nonnumquam animae adhuc in suis corporibus positae poenale aliquid de spiritalibus uident, quod tamen quibusdam ad aedificationem suam, quibusdam uero contingere ad aedificationem audientium solet"*).
[36] Augustine, Sermon 233, referring to 1 Cor 15:54.
[37] Bernstein, *Formation of Hell*, 172-5.
[38] William D. McCready, *Miracles and the Venerable Bede* (Toronto, 1994), 108, citing Bede, *In Marc* 2 on Mark 6:30-43; *In Luc 3* on Luke 9:10-17; and Homily 2.2 on John 6:1-14.

divine power and influence. This is the sense in which he uses it in his homilies also, such as that on Jn 11:55-12:11, where he describes the resurrection of Lazarus as signifying the resuscitation from the death of the soul.[39] Jesus tells the disciples that Lazarus was sleeping and he was going to awaken him; John however clarifies that Jesus meant Lazarus was dead but his disciples misunderstood this as "natural sleep" (Jn 11:11-13). It is the gospel resurrection account preceded with the line: "I am the resurrection and the light; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, so shall he live" (Jn 11:25). This is vital for understanding Bede's approach to Dryhthelm, because he is emphasising that Dryhthelm's faith was akin to the faith of Lazarus' sister Martha. Lazarus was "a man whose soul he [Christ] allowed to live spiritually after he raised him from the dead", and Bede says that contemplation of this and "imitating the good life of [that] man" would see the brethren merit a place in heaven.[40]

Compare this to how in the *HE* Bede says that should history tell of "good men and their estate" then the reader or listener will be spurred on to imitate such good men (*HE* pref). Dryhthelm, through being granted a vision of the afterlife and transforming himself as a Christian, counts among these good men. Elsewhere, Bede says Christ "saves not only the body, but also the soul from death".[41] Christ had gone to Bethany "so that the raising up of Lazarus might be imprinted more deeply on the memory of all. Then the wicked leaders might be more and more confounded and shown to be inexcusable" in wanting to put Jesus to death.[42] Bede says this was also the purpose of holding a dinner after Lazarus was brought back to life, in case there were accusations that Jesus had brought forth only a

[39]Bede, Homily 2.4, *Homeliarum* 208; CS.111, 32-41.
[40] *Homeliarum* 212-3: "*Sed nos uersa uice, fratres carissimi, si cognoscimus ubi Iesus est ubi mansionem facit, ubi Bethaniam, id est domum animae oboedientis in qua habitet inuenit, ueniamus illuc contemplatione non propter hominem tantum quem a morte animae suscitatum spiritaliter uiuere donauit sed ut bonam hominis uitam imitando per hoc ad uisionem Iesu pertingere mereamur quia pro certo cognouimus ubi Iesus est."*
[41] Bede, Homily 2.4, CS.111, 40-1.
[42] *Homeliarum*, 208; CS.111, 35. "*Resuscitatio Lazari cunctorum memoriae artius inprimeretur*."

ghost. Instead, Lazarus becomes a flesh-and-blood example of divine power and victory over death, while to exegetes also serving as a reminder of the importance of resurrecting the soul as opposed to just the body. While Dryhthelm is not explicitly labelled a Northumbrian Lazarus, it can be argued that Bede's exegesis of John's gospel is related to his approach to aspects of the Dryhthelm narrative. For a man like Bede, what other purpose would there be for a man to be brought back from the dead if not to remind the living of what they should be doing, i.e. preparing their souls? It is the message he expounds time and again. And it is the same approach Bede takes to other resurrection narratives in the New Testament.

For example, in his commentary on Luke and the passages regarding Christ's resurrection of the rabbi's daughter, he draws attention to Lk 8:55: "her spirit returned, and she arose immediately". This, Bede says, should be seen as reviving people from the death of the soul.[43] In Mk 5:39, Christ says: "*Puella non est mortua, sed dormit*" ("the girl is not dead, but sleeps"); his miracle is therefore cast as an awakening. In the same passage of his commentary on Mark, Bede says sleeping is an allegory, basing this on 1 Thess 4:13-14.[44] Bede says it is an allegory because the soul ("*anima*") that sins is dead, but God can resurrect it and offer eternal life.[45] This was a development in the exegesis of the Church Fathers as they adapted the Greek idea of the immortality of the soul – there is no mention of immortal souls in the New Testament, only death as a sleep from which

[43] *In Lucam*, 192: "*Et … spiritaliter insinuans, quia quisquis a morte animae Christo sibi manum confortante resipiscit non modo a sordibus exsurgere uitiorum sed et in bonis continuo proficere debet operibus*."

[44] The biblical passage reads: "And we will not have you ignorant brethren, concerning them that are asleep, that you be not sorrowful, even as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again: even so them who have slept through Jesus, will God bring with him."

[45] *In Marcum*, 499: "*Sed et in parte allegoriae cum anima quae peccauerit ipsa moriatur tamen ea quam Dominus resuscitandam atque ad uitam aeternam praeuidit esse uenturam nobis quidem mortua fuisse sed ei obdormisse dici non incongrue potest*."

people would be raised (in the flesh) free from corruption at the Last Judgement.[46]

It is no wonder then Dryhthelm's second life is cast in an entirely Christian light: His first words, "do not be afraid" ("*noli timere*") have a powerful biblical heritage. In the Old Testament, they are God's words to Abraham in a vision which restores his faith; God tells him that under the covenant, Abraham will have descendants as numerous as the stars.[47] They are also the words the angel says to Mary Magdalene and Mary when they see him roll away the stone at Jesus' tomb: "You need not be afraid; I know well that you have come to look for Jesus of Nazareth, the man who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, as he told you (Matt 28:5-6)."[48] In both these instances they are reminders of covenants between God and man. The fact that Dryhthelm has entered into this tradition would imply a covenant between God and the English, a covenant already entered into by virtue of the English being part of the new chosen people, Christians.

However, the warnings that the English were living in "the death of the soul" emphasise that the English had to act accordingly if they were to achieve this salvation. There is one other example of its usage in the *HE*, and this shows Bede's mindset and sincere fears that the English were in spiritual danger. Bede writes that in the sixth century, the Britons were sent a plague to inspire them to moral reform, but they "could not be awakened from the death of the soul" and so faced a "more terrible retribution" in their defeat by the Saxons (*HE* 1.14). In Matthew's gospel, these words are the fulfilment of Jesus' promises and prophecies; by using them in the *HE*, Bede is calling attention to what he considers the truth and reality of the Christian message, and uses it as a reminder to his fellow Englishmen that

[46] Gatch, 'Some Theological Reflections': 100, refering to 1 Cor 15:52.
[47] Genesis 15:1 "Have no fear, Abram, I am here to protect thee; they reward shall be great indeed." "*Noli timere, Abram: ego protector tuus sum, et merces tua magna nimis*."
[48] Matt 28:5-6: "*Nolite timere vos: scio enim, quod Jesum, qui crucifixus est, quaeritis. Non est hic: surrexit enim, sicut dixit*."

Jesus was raised from the dead to fulfil scriptural prophecies and prove himself the son of God, thus saving their souls.

Bede had in his exegesis stated that "the Father raises up and makes the dead to live" (i.e., gives life to the soul) and nobody can be harmed (spiritually) except by themselves.[49] This tallies with some of the content in the vision, such as the cleric who is dragged to hell; he should have known what sort of life to lead, but did not and has been punished accordingly. Similarly, the souls in the valley of ice and fire, and in the meadow, are in these waiting regions because of things they failed to do, although they will get to heaven following the Last Judgement. However, if Dryhthelm's words are to serve as a reminder that Jesus had lived, then they are also a reminder that he will be the judge at the end of time, and consequently none of Bede's readers should forget this.

Bede's understanding of Dryhthelm's resurrection should be seen in this light, because it is a sign the English need spiritual regeneration. Miller argues that the use of a first-person perspective heightens the sense of awe even as the tone remains simple and gentle.[50] However, the imagery is designed to inspire reform and, if not terror, at least fear for the reader's soul. It is simply described, but Dryhthelm himself explains to people who visit him at the monastery that the conditions in the afterlife were potentially harsher than those of real life. When queried after standing in freezing water he says he has "seen it colder", a simple phrase designed to inspire the reader to ponder what the afterlife must have seemed like to Dryhthelm. These layers of meaning and connections with scripture are the hallmark of Bedan exegesis, and their application here with regard to Dryhthelm illustrate how he is firmly connecting the vision in a biblical eschatological tradition, with all the weight that carries.

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[49] *Epistulas VII*, 245, on 1 Pet 3:13; CS.82, 104.
[50] Linda L. Miller, 'Drythelm's Journey to the Other World: Bede's Literary Use of Tradition', *Comitatus: A journal of medieval and renaissance studies* 2.1 (1971), 3-15: 13.

Miller describes the narrative as an example of Bede's literary skill, with Dryhthelm "fashioned [as] a consistently human and humane witness to the afterlife", while Loomis has argued that the vision was "Bede's creation" and Rabin has argued that the narrator is fictional, with a disjoint between Dryhthelm the visionary and the narrator relaying the vision.[51] There are no other surviving versions of the narrative, and indeed what Bede presents often fits so perfectly with his exegesis that it could not have done so without significant and deliberate construction. Bartlett, in a recent study on medieval miracles, comments that miracle narratives were composed in England in the eighth century and not again until the tenth.[52] If that is the case, then Bede's Dryhthelm narrative would seem to fall into that period of industry. Rabin has noted that the *HE* 5.12 vision has parallels with works by Gregory, Augustine, Jerome, and Plutarch, suggesting that whoever composed it was familiar and conversant with the various traditions regarding the fate of the soul.[53] Rabin refers to Gregory's *Dialogii* 4.37.4 (SC.265, 126-8), and says that while the description of hell resembles the *VSP* and Plutarch's vision of Thespesius in *Moralia*, "the quadripartite structure of the afterlife echoes Augustine's categories of good and evil souls in the *Enchiridion* [29.110]; and the structure of the dream itself recalls the afterlife visions in Gregory's Dialogues, the *Visio Sancti Pauli*, and Saint Jerome's vision of his condemnation as 'Ciceronian'."

This, indeed, strengthens the case for it being a composition or at least heavy adaptation of Bede's, as it fits the sources available to him and his own interests; research for this thesis has been unable to find concrete evidence that he was aware of Plutarch's *Moralia*, though they share the

[51] Miller, 'Drythelm's Journey', 3; C. Grant Loomis, 'The Miracle Traditions of the Venerable Bede', *Speculum* 21.4 (1946), 404-18: 409; Rabin, 'Testimony and Conversion', 376-77.
[52] Robert Bartlett, 'Medieval Miracle Accounts as Stories', *Irish Theological Quarterly* 82.2 (2017), 113-127: 114.
[53] Rabin, 'Testimony and Conversion': 396. See *Dialogii*, SC.265, 126-8, Jerome, *Epistulas* 22:30, *VSP* 2:755-98, Plutarch *Moralia* 7:295.

image of souls being blown about. Thespesius' vision in that text does, however, refer to the purgation of souls, albeit in more graphic terms than in Dryhthelm's, which limits it to souls jumping between heat and cold.[54] The account is not intended simply as a description of the afterlife, although that is the most powerful part of the chapter. Dryhthelm, in Bede's hands, becomes a witness to the afterlife, and more importantly, a contemporary English witness.

This concept of witness is important for Bede: Butler notes that Bede generally provides more witnesses for miracles than he does for political events.[55] Bede's emphasis is on spiritual reflection and regeneration, so the more credibility he can assign to a miraculous event, which is designed to remind readers and onlookers of God's active power, the better. Dryhthelm is religious, but not in holy orders, so he represents the ordinary Englishman living and dying in Northumbria in Bede's day. Indeed, Foot argues that because he is not named until after the vision is related, Bede makes him an archetypal sinner.[56] This technique, it can be argued, also allows readers more easily to put themselves in the visionary's place, which would allow for a more personal response to the account. And there is an emphasis on validating that it happened. Bede even says where Dryhthelm lived before and after his resurrection: he had a home and family in the Cunningham region of Northumbria, and subsequently entered a monastery at Melrose on the River Tweed. Bede also identifies his source, the priest Haemgisl, who he says "is still alive, living in solitude in Ireland". So it is a vision that his contemporary readers could verify.

Bede made a habit of citing his sources, either with margin marks in manuscripts or in the text, which is unusual in medieval practice.[57]

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[54] Plutarch, *Moralia*: *De sera numinis vindicta* 22, in *Moralia* vol VII, trans. Phillip de Lacy and Benedict Einarson (Massachusetts, 1959): 170-298.
[55] Brian Butler, 'Doctor of Souls, Doctor of the Body: Whitby *Vita Gregorii* 23 and its Exegetical Context', *Listen, O Isles, Unto Me*, 168-180: 169.
[56] Foot, 'Anglo-Saxon Purgatory', 88.
[57] Hardin Brown, *Venerable Bede*, 20.

Although he does not cite it explicitly Bede has a biblical parallel in this, where John of Patmos gives the time and place of his vision lest people think he was "beguiled by a fleshly apparition" ("*carnali fantasmate*").[58] Wallace-Hadrill notes that Bede refers to his source material from Haemgisl as a "*relatio*", implying a written source.[59] This suggests a document was in circulation. However, it has not come down to us and Bede's statement is the only evidence for it once having existed.[60]

Though it may have derived ultimately from a now-lost document, the Bedan text connects so solidly with his exegesis that it must be considered his narrative, as opposed to Haemgisl's. For example the wall without gate in Dryhthem's vision, which is a relatively common *topos* in vision literature,[61] ties in with his exegesis on the "great, high wall" of Rev 21:12. The wall represents "an unassailable firmness of faith, hope, and love. The Lord can be understood as the great wall that protects the Church everywhere … that is, the protection of the Lord and the intercession of the saints who by teaching make a path for him into the hearts of the faithful", which itself relates to his emphasis elsewhere on good teaching. Wallis points out that this comparison of the wall to faith, hope, and love is original to Bede.[62] The Revelation wall, though, has twelve gates which Bede says represent how the apostles opened the world to the faith. There is also something reminiscent about his comment in *Cantica canticorum* that "the wall that shuts us off from the sight of him is the work of that mortality that we acquired by sinning … now only a very few of the more perfect are able to see it when through the utmost effort their hearts are purified in faith".[63] Dryhthelm's wall, though, evidently seems designed to fit with genre themes while also recalling scripture for the more spiritually initiated. It is also the case that the narrative calls attention to its nature as a

[58] *Exp Apoc*, 241; TTH.48, 110, quoting Primasius.
[59] Wallace-Hadrill, *Historical Commentary*, 185.
[60] Kabir, *Doomsday*, 95.
[61] Gardiner, *Visions of Heaven and Hell before Dante*, xix.
[62] *Exp Apoc*, 526; TTH.48, 263.
[63] *In cantica*, 219-20, on Sg 2:9; Holder trans, 76.

literary construct by including a quote from Virgil's *Aeneid* in direct speech from Dryhthelm, who says: "As we went on 'through the shades of the long night' [*Aeneid* 6.268], there suddenly appeared before us masses of noisome flame". This is a reference to Aeneas' approach to the underworld, as he and Sibyl travel "through the empty halls of Dis [Pluto] and his phantom realm" before reaching "the very jaws of hell".

Bede does not quote non-Christian writers lightly. However, Augustine had argued that Christians should take what pagans wrote and "convert it" to Christian use.[64] And, while Bede preferred to draw on Christian rather than Classical examples for his text on orthography, his work on metrics does include quotes from Virgil,[65] suggesting he too saw some place for certain pagan writers. There is a slight Virgilian aspect to his poem prefacing *Exp Apoc*, where John sees "wave wandering wheels everywhere adrift" in a possible parallel to Neptune in *Aeneid* 1.147.[66] Waves are often his favoured term to contrast with stability, for instance in his reference to the "waves" of persecutors in the final days of the world and how his book on "the fleeting and wave-tossed course of time comes to a fitting end in eternal stability and stable eternity".[67]

Bede is clearly capable and willing to absorb elements from pagan Classical literature into his scriptural commentary if they suit his purpose, which in turn suggests that the Virgilian quote in the Dryhthelm account is used because it thematically connects with what Dryhthelm has seen. Bede was well read and would not have included the reference if it did not have some justified meaning. However, his writings "are not collections of other men's flowers".[68] Rather, he takes what he needs from his sources and adapts or excises it as appropriate to his needs, which are always to do

[64] *DCD* 11.40.
[65] Brown, *Bede the Venerable*, 33.
[66] *Exp Apoc*, 218; TTH.48, 99: "*Currere fluctiuagas cernit ubique rotas*."
[67] The point about waves is made by Wallis in Bede, *Revelation*, 229, n832. The waves quote is from the end of *DTR* 71: "*Noster libellus de uolubili ac fluctiuago temporum lapsu descriptus oportunum de aeterna stabilitate ac stabili aeternitate habeat finem*."
[68] Scully, 'Introduction': 18.

with the moral and spiritual wellbeing of his audience and by extension his people. In this case, he makes alterations to the standard stock materials of a vision narrative. For instance, as a general rule "the individuality of the seer could not or was not allowed to come to the fore"[69] – and yet Dryhthelm's individuality is made explicit: when questioned about his rigorous asceticism, he says "I have seen it colder" and "I have seen it harder".

In both cases the use of "*ego*" makes his individuality emphatic, which in turn causes the reader to pause and consider the experience. Bede is working within established traditions but adopting and adapting them to a local context, as will be evident from a discussion of patristic links to the vision.

The vision's intersection with patristic traditions around purgation and judgement

This section argues that the Drythtelm vision is closely linked to patristic exegesis, with a particular emphasis on Gregory and Augustine. It examines purgative aspects of the narrative such as fire to show that Bede is drawing from a vast well of ideas but is not beholden to them. Rather, he is focused on what will convey a sense of urgency in the *HE*.

For Bede, telling a story required him at the same time to interpret it for his readers' benefit, such as explaining that Cuthbert's vision of Aidan being taken to heaven was given to him in order to encourage him into monasticism.[70] Cuthbert was one of the great saints of Northumbrian history, and was one of Bede's heroes, while Aidan was one of the greatest missionaries the region had seen and was responsible for a significant

[69] Haas, 'Otherworldly Journeys in the Middle Ages': 448.
[70] Lutterkort, 'Beda Hagiographicus': 85.

amount of the initial conversion to Christianity. While much of what Bede says is implied or requires analysis to unravel, he takes care to make his most salient points obvious in case they are missed. It is not surprising then that Dryhthelm, an analogue for the reader (in that readers can put themselves in Dryhthelm's situation), is told that his initial beliefs regarding heaven and hell are incorrect, because this suggests that the vision is, in part, intended to correct such beliefs. It also suggests to readers that the reality of hell is worse than they know how to articulate or envisage (Dryhthelm himself does not see hell, though he does experience an aspect of it by seeing souls dragged into the pit, which is the entrance to hell). And it seems to play with the idea found in the work of Ambrose, an exegete whose work Bede knew well, that a soul, unfettered by the "disabilities of bodily corruption", can see more and enjoy greater mental powers.[71] Through Dryhthelm, the *HE* 5 reader is thus guided toward beliefs more in keeping with the Church's conception of the afterlife. Bede has digested and distilled patristic exegesis for his readers, and almost every aspect of *HE* 5.12 touches on patristic commentary.

For instance, Jerome points out that angels can distribute rewards to the good or torment the wicked, something also seen in apocryphal visions.[72] Certain angels are described as "without mercy" in *VSP*, which has parallels (in the relentless activities of agents of divine punishment) in Job 41.9-10 and Wisdom 11.19.[73] Gregory's *Dialogii* may have been written as part of an attempt to address concerns regarding the afterlife between death and the Last Judgement, particularly to correct beliefs inspired by the *VSP*. Importantly for the concerns of this thesis, the *VSP* also widely

[71] Ambrose, *First Oration* 73, p192. Compare to Wis 9:5, "the corruptible body weighs down the soul, and the earthly dwelling presses down the mind that ponders many things", which Bede cites in *Habacuc*, 388; Connolly trans, 73.
[72] Two-fold nature of angels is in Jerome's commentary on Daniel, quoted in *Exp Apoc*, 436. For angels carrying out both jobs, see the Apocalypse of Peter or Apocalypse of Paul, or in an Anglo-Saxon context the vision of a monk at Wenlock in Ephraim Emerton, *The Letters of Saint Boniface* (New York, 2000).
[73] Anthony Hilhorst, 'The *Apocalypse of Paul*: Previous History and Afterlife', *The Visio Pauli and the Gnostic Apocalypse of Paul*, 1-22: 8.

transmitted the idea that a soul was judged immediately upon leaving the body, as opposed to the general judgement found in Revelation, an idea which Hilhorst suggests was "of much more practical importance than the idea of Christ's Second Coming at the end of time".[74] The New Testament was somewhat at odds: Rev 6:9-11 suggests an interim state for even the righteous dead, while Jesus' words to the good thief suggest immediate reward ("I promise thee, this day thou wilt be with me in paradise").[75] It is no wonder then that Dryhthelm's vision addresses both: There is both an interim state and a reward, although the reward will become more magnificent after the souls are cleansed of their trivial sins.

Bede's descriptions of heaven may be somewhat imprecise throughout his exegesis, but the overarching theme is that it is a place of joy and even eternal youth, whereas hell would seem to be a place of fire, sorrow, weeping, and mortality.[76] Dryhthelm's experience inspires him to follow a life of prayer as a way of purifying himself before judgement. Prayers are essential for Bede's eschatology – as he points out in his poem on Judgement Day, the thief crucified next to Jesus "was a wicked man who had committed evil deeds; but at the point of death, he cried out with words of prayer. With one word of faith he merited salvation and entered the open gates of paradise with Christ." [77] In relaying Dryhthelm's transformation, Bede is exhorting his readers to contemplate the vision and its affect on Dryhthelm, and consider what actions they need to take in their own lives in order to achieve salvation. In his homily on the birth of John the Baptist, he says Christ brought "hidden spiritual mysteries" and

[74] Hilhorst, 'Previous History and Afterlife': 20.
[75] As pointed out by McGinn, 'The Last Judgement in Christian Tradition': 363. Rev 6:9-11: "And when he broke the fifth seal, I saw there, beneath the altar, the souls of all who had been slain for love of God's word and of the truth they held, crying out with a loud voice, 'Sovereign Lord, the holy, the true, how long now before thou wilt sit in judgement, and exact vengeance for our blood from all those who dwell on Earth?' Whereupon a white robe was given to each of them, and they were bidden to take their rest a little while longer, until their number had been made up by those others, their brethren and fellow servants, who were to die as they had died."
[76] *Exp Apoc*, 521-3; TTH.48, 260-61
[77] Bede, 'De Die Iudicii': 209.

that "by illumining them inwardly, does not cease to turn many peoples daily … to faith and charity in him".[78] This replaced the old covenant, "the fleshly observance of the law" which was, with Christ's birth, "now to be brought to an end".[79] That is what makes Bede's use of afterlife imagery and motifs interesting, because he does not simply repeat the *topoi* found throughout medieval texts, although there are certainly connections, especially with regard to the idea of purgation and fire.

The valley of fire and cold engages with a great deal of scriptural context. Benedicta Ward has considered the valley to be the entrance to hell, while Wallis has called it the "antechamber of hell".[80] Foot describes it as more than an antechamber but also refers to it as a "provisional hell", a phrase also used by Sims-Williams and Kabir.[81] Kabir argues that the souls in the meadow are also in provisional hell, though Bede's conception of hell and punishment differ from this. By the ninth century a scene such as the valley was more clearly one of punishment: the Frankish *Visio Bernoldi* (AD870s) has forty-one often named bishops suffering in alternate hot and cold.[82] However, while Darby is right to note the overlap in theme and imagery with Bede's *De die iudicii*,[83] this sense of definite punishment is not articulated by Bede's Dryhthelm. Indeed, Dryhthelm's guide says the souls in the valley, while being "chastened", were there because they "delayed to confess and make restitution for the sins they had committed until they were on the point of death; and so they died. But because they did repent and confess, even on their deathbed, they will all come to the kingdom of heaven on judgement day". It can be argued then that it is not a precursor

[78] *Homeliarum*, 329; CS.110, 203.
[79] *Homilarium*, 330; CS.110, 205.
[80] Ward, *The Venerable Bede*, 128; Wallis, 'Revelation Introduction': 83.
[81] Foot, 'Anglo-Saxon Purgatory', 90-92; Patrick Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England, 600-800* (Cambridge, 1990), 259; Kabir, *Doomsday*, 105.
[82] Maaike Van der Lugt, 'Tradition and Revision: The Textual Tradition of Hincmar of Reims' Visio Bernoldi. With a New Critical Edition', *Archivum Latinitatis Medii Aevi* 52 (1994), 109-49.
[83] Darby, 'Apocalypse and Reform', 87.

to a permanent state of punishment, and indeed the narrative refers to how prayers for the dead can benefit them in the afterlife.

The cleansing of souls before reward is a feature of biblical and patristic tradition. It appears in both the Old and New Testament; Augustine's *DCD* points out the connections between the testaments in this regard.[84] Malachi 3:3 says God "will purify the sons of Levi, and will refine them like gold and silver. Then they will offer to the Lord sacrifices in righteousness"; Augustine says that "from these words it seems quite evident that in the judgement the punishments of some are to be purificatory".[85] Indeed the image of souls flying between heat and cold is a parallel with the image of souls being refined in Malachi; it would also have a parallel with metalworking, heating and cooling the metal so it is harder and purer. But in order to understand better Bede's engagement with these ideas it is essential to examine the scriptural context.

Fire, in the Bible, is an agent of both destruction and cleansing. For destruction, one thinks merely of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19:24). Amos, the earliest of the prophetic texts and on which Bede wrote a now-lost commentary (to which he refers in *HE* 5.24), refers to fires that will destroy the sinful cities of the Palestine region (Am 1:4, 9). In Isaiah, God protects the righteous from fire: "When you shall pass through the waters, I will be with you, and the rivers shall not cover you: when you walk in the fire, you shall not be burnt, and the flames shall burn in you: For I am the Lord your God" (Is 43:2-3). In the New Testament, God is "a consuming fire" (Heb 12:29); Gregory says this is because God "consumes the rust of sin [*Deus quippe ignis dicitur, quia per hunc peccatorum rubigo consumitur*]".[86] The idea of sin as rust is interesting: it is corruption that starts on the surface but which can go to the heart of the metal if one is not careful. In the gospels, Christ refers to fire that will separate the wheat from the chaff, the

[84]Thacker, *Bede and Augustine*, esp 20-32.
[85] *DCD* 20.25; Bettenson translation.
[86] Gregory, *Homilia in Evangelia*, CCSL.141, 260.

righteous from the damned (Matt 3:12). Jesus says he will come "to cast fire on the earth".[87] The New Testament position is expounded in 1 Cor 3:11-15:

> For other foundation no man can lay, but that which is laid: which is Christ Jesus. Now, if any man build upon this foundation, gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble: Every man's work shall be manifest. For the day of the Lord shall declare it, because it shall be revealed in fire. And the fire shall try every man's work, of what sort it is. If any man's work abide, which he has built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work burn, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire.

Gregory, in *Dialogii* 4.40, argued that this passage meant both the fire of tribulation in this world and very light sins, but that nobody could be purged unless he or she had earned that through good works in this life. He referred to a purgatorial fire for "certain small sins", but emphasised that one would be presented for judgement to God in the condition one was in upon death.[88] This matches closely with the Dryhthelm material, because the five souls being dragged to hell are condemned on the basis of their sins, while those in the valley and meadow are to achieve salvation based on their general good qualities despite some faults before death, such as not making confession.

Commenting on 1 Cor 3:11, Bede stresses that "Only through faith in and love of Christ, through the reception of Christ's sacraments, and through observing Christ's commandments does one reach the lot of the elect and eternal life".[89] This also parallels the message of Dryhthelm's vision, and in particular his transformation as an individual after his resurrection, focusing on spiritual over temporal. But underlying this is a fear of falling into eternal flames, as opposed to transient flames in the valley. Bede is explicit on the two natures of fire in his commentary on Rev 11:5 ("And if any man will hurt them, fire shall come out of their mouths,

[87] *Exp Apoc*, 337, quoting Luke 12:49 and Primasius.
[88] *Dialogii*, SC.265, 138-146
[89] *Homilarium*, 144-45, CS.110, 201.

and shall devour their enemies").[90] He says that anyone who harms the Church could be "condemned by retributive justice" and be consumed by fire, or else be "consumed in a good fire through the prayers of the mouth of the Church, and transformed into something better". Fire could also be a miracle, such as when Jesus granted the power of the holy spirit to his disciples.[91] But he says that sinners, once they die, are afflicted by the fires of Gehenna "forever". This resembles his commentary on 2 Peter, in which he says "the judgement of the destruction of the wicked began already formerly and it will never cease torturing them without end always", and also resembles his poem *De Die Iudicii*.[92] This sense of permanency is missing with Dryhthelm's vision. However, Bede's exegesis does make some reference to passing through heat.

When writing about the tabernacle, he says there is "no one whose spirit does not need to be cleansed by fire".[93] He also refers to "the fire of judgement" at the end of the world and how fire may cover the surface of the earth, leaving "the wicked", although resurrected, awaiting Jesus's judgement on the ground amid flames (elsewhere he says this is akin to the fire that destroyed Sodom and that the wicked will suffer it without end).[94] Elsewhere, he says "that bloody deeds deserve the punishment of Gehenna is conveyed by the voice of preachers who say, 'Let them pass from snow waters to excessive heat' [Job 24:19]. By the word 'blood' we may also understand the spiritual death of the soul (*mors animae spiritalis*)."[95] Apocryphal texts such as the Apocalypse of Peter were insistent that sinners "shall be punished eternally", and often hideously in a torment

[90] *Exp Apoc*, 372-3; TTH.58, 181-2.
[91] *Exp Apoc*, 419-1; TTH.58, 202-3
[92] *Epistulas VII*, 269; CS.82, 135. "*Quomodo dicitur, iam olim non cessat, cum iam olim praeteritum tempus significet, non cessat autem uerbum praesentis sit temporis, nisi quia iam olim coepit iudicium perditionis impiorum quod eos praesentialiter semper excrucians nullo numquam fine cessabit?"*
[93] *De tab*, 132; TTH.18, 154.
[94] *Epistulas VII*, 271-2; CS.82, 139.
[95] *Exp Apoc*, 339; TTH.58, 163.

"according to his works".[96] Punishment is thus connected with hell. And Bede himself tends to agree that punishment will be never-ending – "the judgement of the destruction (*iudicium perditionis*) of the wicked began already formerly and it will never cease torturing (*excrucians*) them without end always".[97] In his poem *De Die Iudicii* he seems to connect fire and cold to hell:

> No voice can declare the miserable punishments (*miseras poenas*), the regions of eternal (*aeternae*) hell filled with black fires (*nigris loca plena gehennae*) and the icy colds mingled with burning flames, the eyes weeping from the furnace's great heat on the one hand, and the teeth gnashing from the bitter cold on the other.[98]

However, he stresses that this is an "eternal punishment in the black prison (*atro perpetuas meruisset carcere poenas*) … where no peace or mercy, or indeed hope of peace, smiles upon those who weep":

> With these wretched alternations the wretched wander forever in pitch darkness and night's obscurity. No voice sounds there unless it is the dreadful weeping all around, and no face is seen except for the faces of those in torture (*tortorum facies*). Nothing is felt except the cold and the flames.[99]

Note the references to "forever" and "torture"; the poem is black and white, and there are no interim states. A soul that is in the cold or flames is explicitly said to be without hope of escape. A few lines earlier in the poem Bede refers to "avenging heat" accompanying the Last Judgement that will only spare those who have been cleansed, resembling his comments in *Epistulas VII*. This sort of categorisation does not apply to Dryhthelm's valley of ice and fire, which is a transitive state (there is no use of *poena*, as found in his exegesis). This emphasises that their sins are being eaten away or burned off, an idea found in his commentary on Habbakuk.[100] That said,

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[96] James Keith Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation* (1993), 603-8.
[97] *Epistulas VII*, 269; CS.82, 135.
[98] *De Die Iudicii*, 211.
[99] Id. For discussion see Darby, 'Apocalypse and Reform', 86-87.
[100] *Habacuc*, 404-5; Connolly trans 90.

the image is still firmly engaging with scripture and contemporary literature.

De die iudicii is ascribed to Bede in most of its manuscripts but its authorship has been disputed, with Alcuin of York also put forward as an author.[101] However, Lapidge and more recently Darby have argued on metrical and content grounds that it is definitively a Bedan composition.[102] It is also rooted in patristic and biblical texts, with Darby highlighting that the language recalls for instance Psalm 101:6 ("*voce gementi*", "moaning voice") and Ezekiel 27:32 ("*carmina lugubria*", "mournful songs"), and also Gregory's *Moralia* ("*maculas vitae*", a phrase which also appears in Bede's gospel commentaries).[103]

The image of souls being purified in extreme heat and cold is common in medieval texts and may go back to Matt 3:11 and Luke 3:16, "he shall baptise you with the holy Spirit, and with fire".[104] In Bede's commentary on 1 John he says that the world "will pass away when on the day of judgement it will be changed into a better shape by fire",[105] implying that fire can be a positive force when seen in a wider context. He also wrote that following the Last Judgement heaven and Earth will be "renewed by fire and glorified by the power of the resurrection" (*DTR* 69-70). It is reasonable to argue that the souls in the valley are being changed into a better shape, given that their sins are being eliminated. This offers an ideal of hope to the contemporary English, if they are willing to reinvigorate themselves spiritually. This could explain why he does not state that the souls in the valley are being punished – it put a greater emphasis on transformation and cleansing as opposed to torture.

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[101] *Hand-list of Bede Manuscripts*, 127; Hardin Brown, *Companion*, 90-92; Darby, 'Apocalypse and Reform', 78.
[102] Darby, 'Apocalypse and Reform', 78-81, see also Michael Lapidge, 'Bede and the *Versus de die iudicii*', Andreas Bihrer and Elisabeth Stein (eds.), *Nova de veteribus* (Munich and Leipzig, 2004), 103-111.
[103] Darby, 'Apocalypse and Reform', 85.
[104] Jacques Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (London, 1984), 9.
[105] *Epistulas VII*, 294; CS.82, 174. "*Mundus transibit cum in die iudicii per ignem in meliorem mutabitur figuram ut sit caelum nouum et terra noua*".

This matches other aspects of Bede's exegesis. Compare it to his comment on Is 24:22 ("They shall be shut up there in prison; and after many days they shall be visited").[106] Acca, Bede's correspondent, sought the monk's advice on the meaning of this passage, which seems to refer to a punishment that ends eventually. Regarding Acca's request, Bede calls it a "very dangerous question" because it is unclear what Isaiah actually meant. Bede quotes Jerome to highlight the mystery of scripture, the meaning of which is sometimes obscure: "we must understand that human fragility is unable to know God's judgement, or to pass judgement on the magnitude and the measure of punishments, which is reserved to the decision of the Lord" [107] However, Bede was precise about when punishment lasted forever. In his commentary on Samuel, he says the devil "will never be saved so as to be delivered from his torments, nor will he alternate at various times between punishments and repose" and later refers to "the sentence of the Lord and Judge who foretells that at the critical moment of the Last Judgement he will say: Depart from me, ye accursed, into everlasting fire [Matt 25:41]."[108] In his Isaiah commentary Bede says both the devil, "along with reprobate angels and humans" will suffer eternal punishment. He also cites Jerome's analysis of Is 24:22 to say that "since the rewards given to the righteous at judgement are eternal – when the reprobate are damned they are visited in perpetual punishment (*damnati perpetua poena reprobi*) in a manner unknown to us [the biblical passage says 'they will be visited' but not by whom]; that they may obtain a little relief (surely not, however, being released from all torments), or perhaps be punished with a still more grievous reproach" – only God knows.[109]

[106] *Isaias*, passim.
[107] *Isaias*, col 703; TTH.28, 40
[108] *Isaias*, cols 702-4; TTH.28, 40-1
[109] *Isaias*, col. 703.

Bede's homilies apply "punishment" to the damned, who suffer "eternal punishments".[110] In his exegesis, he says "those heavy with sins (*scelerum*) are plunged into the raging water like lead, because by reason of their sins they fall into the abyss of grave punishment (*in abyssum poenae*)".[111] Bede's exegesis often refers to the "punishment" of sinners of the "vengeance" of the Church in a broader, general sense. But there is greater emphasis in *HE* 5.12 on the two regions where people are purified before reaching heaven, and there is no description of hell itself, only its edges. And while the lack of detail regarding heaven and hell may be down to the sheer inability of humans to understand those, as Gurevich notes is the case in Gregory of Tours' work, it has some scriptural background.[112] In Paul's letters, his only mention of Hades (a hellish region) is in 1 Cor 15:54-5, where he celebrates its impotence now that Christ has conquered death.[113] However, the lack of detail on heaven and hell also puts greater emphasis on what readers need to do to reach heaven and avoid the waiting areas and hell. It resembles Bede's exegesis. Compare it to his comment on Heb 13:7, where Bede says that "by thus considering the virtues of those who are greater, [the faithful] are able to become great also".[114] Dryhthelm, having seen the afterlife, come back from the dead, and then exemplified Christian asceticism, is such a virtuous figure who can encourage reform among Bede's readers. And yet the ambiguity over the valley in particular, as well as the scene of souls being dragged into the pit, sees Bede manage to invoke the fear of hell among readers, through imagery mixed with Dryhthelm's inability to comprehend fully what he is seeing, while offering hope. When discussing Isaiah, Bede says that, to humans, God "may appear to be wrathful while he is inflicting

[110] Bede, Homily 2.7, 1.18.
[111] *De tab*, 40; TTH.18, 43
[112] Aron Gurevich, *Medieval Popular Culture: Problems of Belief and Superstition*, trans. Janos M. Bak and Paul A. Hollingsworth (Cambridge, 1990), 118, in reference to Salvius' vision included in the *History of the Franks* book 7.
[113] Bernstein, *Formation of Hell*, 207.
[114] *De tab*, 80; TTH.18, 112. See also *De templo*, 229. Heb 13:7-8: "Remember your prelates who have spoken the word of God to you; whose faith you follow, considering the end of their conversation, Jesus Christ, yesterday, and today; and the same forever."

punishment. And yet, soon afterwards he will remember to be suitably merciful to the penitent".[115] This is not unlike what is happening in Dryhthelm's valley, and especially that Dryhthelm cannot quite grasp the nature of hell or heaven – it is a divine mystery.

The souls in the valley are also suggestive of Bede's division of humble sinners and proud sinners; the humble ones make restitution through penance.[116] Bede had written that pride ("*superbia"*) was the beginning of all sin.[117] He had also written that God was particularly against the proud.[118] Goff has argued that by using "*scelera"* in *HE* 5.12, Bede means the gravest of sins and that the valley is therefore a "place ... of examination and punishment, not of purification in the proper sense of the word".[119] It has been argued in the present thesis that Bede's narrative is explicit that the souls in the valley will reach heaven, which emphasises the purification aspect of their experience. Given Bede's exegesis concerning the fate of souls and punishment, if he did not see the valley as a place of purgation then he would have been explicit that it was a place of punishment (i.e., unending with no heavenly reward at the end).

Typically, early Christian writers tend to emphasise that the general resurrection is necessary for actual punishment, so that the individual can feel pain in their original body.[120] Although we are told of the souls' "atonement", and though Dryhthelm describes them as "wretched" ("*miserae"*, which could also be translated as "unfortunate", "poor", or "miserable"), in terms of Bede's narrative composition it is Dryhthelm himself who decides they are being "tortured" a perspective based on his

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[115] *Isaias*, cols. 702-3.
[116] *In Lucam*, 279-80; Carroll, *Venerable Bede*, 145-81: 46.
[117] *In genesim*, 66, quoting Sirach 10:15.
[118] Against the proud: *Epistulas VII*, 213; CS.82, 50: "*Deus sed specialiter superbis resistere*". Compare to *HE* 5.14.
[119] Le Goff, *Birth of Purgatory*, 115.
[120] *DCD* 13.2, 385-6. Compare with Tertullian, *De Testimonia Animae* 3 (PL.1, 607-18): "there would be no grounds for judgement without the presentation of the very person to whom the sufferings of judgement were due". Translation used is S. Thelwall, *Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian*, Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, Mich, 1896), 175-80.

incomplete understanding of the afterlife, an incomplete understanding that is emphasised by his guide. Bede uses the same term when describing the Mercian nobleman who experiences a vision in *HE* 5.13: Bede says that before the vision the man fell ill and suffered "cruel pains" ("torturous pains" would seem another fitting translation).[121] Rabin has highlighted the first-person perspective of the Dryhthelm vision, meaning the focus is on Dryhthelm's own responses and expectations.[122] This is reasonably common in vision texts, because in order to convince the audience that what they had seen was real, a visionary would have to rely on words that were familiar and made sense to the audience.[123] However, unlike other vision accounts such as that of monk at Wenlock (see below), there is no overt indication in this case that the souls are enduring punishment; the guide corrects Dryhthelm's perception when he says they are being "tried and chastened".

The purgative aspect of the vision narrative shows not only Bede's eschatology at work but also how he presents the English as being fully a part of the Christian world, both temporal and posthumous. He does not use some form of the adjective "*purgatorius"* in the *HE*, but would have known its usage from Augustine's works.[124] This suggests that when composing the Dryhthelm narrative Bede is working with new conceptions of the afterlife, conceptions that help to make the idea of purification after death more tangible to an audience not necessarily soaked in Christian theology.

Although Dryhthelm is brought to two areas where souls are kept waiting in a sort of transitional or purgatorial state, this was not official Church doctrine. There was no doctrine of purgatory in Bede's era – there

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[121] "*Haec inter tactus infirmitate, decidit in lectum atque acri coepit dolore torqueri*."
[122] Rabin, 'Testimony and Conversion': 377.
[123] Gardiner, *Visions of Heaven and Hell before Dante*, xxv.
[124] Augustine uses "*nullas poenas nisi purgatorias uolunt esse"* in *DCD* 21.13, "*ignem purgatorium"* in *Enchiridion* 69, "*purgatoria tormenta"* in *DCD* 21.16 and "*temporarias poenas"* in *DCD* 21.13. As noted in Le Goff, *Birth of Purgatory*, 67.

was none until the twelfth century.[125] Foot points out that the lack of specific vocabulary concerning a purgatorial area illustrates that the idea was fluid and not fixed.[126] Augustine's *DCD* distinguishes four areas or states: the righteous, the damned, a waiting area for those not righteous enough to enter heaven, and a waiting area for those who will ultimately be condemned. The Dryhthelm account, while containing four locations, really only describes three states: damned, waiting but ultimately saved, and the righteous. This is not only a break from Augustine but a message to the English that salvation could be achieved despite faults, provided one made a genuine effort to be a good Christian. This is rooted in scripture and patristic commentary. In *Exp Apoc* Bede had pointed to precedents in the Bible and Gregory's work that good works could outweigh bad: "Blessed are they … whose sins are covered, [Ps 31:1] who conceal the baseness of their wicked life before the eyes of the just at the judgement with a veil of subsequent good deeds (*bonis operis*)" [citing Gregory's *Moralia*]. [127] Similarly, Bede writes that "in this life [Jesus] forgives the elect their daily and trivial sins, without which we cannot live in this life … there is not a righteous person on earth who does good and does not sin … it is impossible that some of the saints do not occasionally incur guilt in very small sins (*minutis peccatis*) … but still they do not cease being righteous".[128]

With regard to patristic commentary, it is worth comparing the Dryhthelm resurrection with a resurrection account in Gregory's *Dialogii*. These will better explain the patristic traditions in which Bede is working. In *Dialogii* 1.2, Libertinus, prior of the abbey of Funda, is travelling to

[125] Gardiner, *Visions of Heaven and Hell before Dante*, xiii. Luther blamed Gregory the Great for initiating the doctrine of purgatory: see Gatch, 'Some Theological Reflections': 106-7.
[126] Foot, 'Anglo-Saxon Purgatory', passim. See also Philippe Aries, *The Hour of Our Death*, trans. Helen Weaver (New York, 1991); Gurevich, *Medieval Popular Culture*, 120-1; Darby, *Bede and the End of Time*, 7; Richard Landes, 'The Fear of an Apocalyptic Year 1000: Augustinian Historiography, Medieval and Modern', *Speculum* 75.1 (2000), 97-145;. Peter Brown, 'The Decline of the Empire of God', 41-59; Marilyn Dunn, 'Gregory the Great, the Vision of Fursey, and the Origins of Purgatory', *Peritia* 14, 238-54; Laffin, 'What Happened to the Last Judgement?'.
[127] *Exp Apoc*, 457; TTH.58, 227, citing *Moralia* 2.81.
[128] *Epistulas VII* on 1 John 1:9-10; CCSL.121, 287-88, CS.82, 165-6.

Ravenna on a mission for his abbot, carrying with him as always one of the stockings of his former abbot, Honoratus.[129] Libertinus is stopped by a woman carrying her dead son and she begs him to raise the son from the dead. Confused and "not acquainted with such a miracle", he eventually kneels and prays, laying the stocking on the boy, who is brought back to life. Gregory states that this miracle occurred due to the merits of both Honoratus and Libertinus: "Libertinus had power to raise up that dead child, because he had learned to trust more upon the virtue of his master [Honoratus] than his own: for when he laid his stocking upon the child's breast, no doubt but he thought that his soul did obtain that for which he did then pray".[130] Similarly, Bishop Fortunatus raises "the good virtuous man Marcellus" from the dead simply by praying at his bedside. Marcellus, Gregory says, lived a long life after and was brought back to "live yet more virtuously after his death" because he wanted to please God (*Dialogii* 1.10).[131]

This episode is closely paralleled in the *HE* by how Dryhthelm announces that he must live "in a very different way" and enters holy orders; arguably this is Bede's direct application of *Dialogii* to a Northumbrian context. In *Dialogii* 1.12, a man dies without being able to confess because the priest Severus delayed attending him, preferring to finish pruning vines.[132] On hearing of the man's death, Severus weeps and beats his head on the ground, saying he is guilty of the death, at which point the man suddenly returns to life.[133] He confesses to Severus, does a seven-day penance, and dies on the eighth day. In this case, while it would initially seem akin to Dryhthelm, "who was resurrected", it is different. Gregory says this resurrection was because God loved Severus and did not

[129] SC.260, 24-34.
[130] *Dialogii* 30: "*Cuius enim caligulam in pectore extincti corpusculi posuit, eius nimirum animam obtinere quod petebat aestimauit*."
[131] SC.260, 92-110
[132] SC.260, 112-18.
[133] *Dialogii* 114: "*Cumque uehementer fleret, in terram caput tunderet, se reum mortis illius clamaret, repente is qui defunctus fuerat animam recepit*."

want him to grieve, making it very clear to the reader that the resurrection was carried out by God based on the weeping and supplications of the priests. However, the consequences of not making a confession before death are made very clear in the Dryhthelm account, in the souls sent to the valley. Bede had written in his exegesis that "the first hope of salvation is confession".[134]

The stories in *Dialogii* mainly concern men of lower social standing as opposed to heroic preachers or martyrs.[135] Dryhthelm fits this model exactly as a secular man who is not of the social elite. It therefore shows how teachings and miracle stories apply to everyday life and everyday situations, while emphasising that all social classes are equally represented and equally benefit from the miraculous. By using the ancient dialogue format, Gregory ensures that common beliefs are made more orthodox, while also showing that the realities of heaven and hell are more fantastical and intense than humans can imagine.[136] This is also what is being done in *HE* 5.12.

In all three of the Gregorian reanimation accounts, a named individual is involved in the resurrection, either as the man raising the dead or whose grief causes one to be raised. However, this is absent in Bede's account, which indicates a subtle shift away from Gregory's model of resurrection tale. Nobody is depicted as beseeching God or a holy man to raise Dryhthelm from the dead; rather, the chapter simply begins with him coming back to life. This emphasises the divine agency behind the miracle. Where it was clearly not the work of the devil, Bede would have understood this was God at work, and would have seen from Gregory and the Bible that even great prophets needed divine aid, such as Elijah needing

[134] *Epistulas VII* on 1 Jn 1:9; CCSL.121, 288, CS.82, 164.
[135] R. A. Markus, *Gregory the Great and His World* (Cambridge and New York, 1997), 64-7.
[136] Gurevich, *Medieval Popular Culture*, 125-6.

a chariot to ascend to heaven.[137] Ultimately Gregory says some holy men could work miracles because of the power granted to them.[138] Thus even those who seemingly worked miracles through their own power actually only did it thanks to divine dispensation. Gregory applies this to Britain and the earliest phase of the conversion of the English, as recorded in *HE* 1.31. He wrote to his missionary, Augustine, stating that he had heard Augustine was performing miracles, and argues that these miracle powers were not granted to Augustine for his own use but rather to help convert the English. The English were "drawn by miracles to inward grace", and the power to enact miracles was conferred not on Augustine personally but for the purposes of their salvation.[139] This would have been understood by educated Christians, but for an uneducated audience this point might have been lost on them without proper guidance or instruction – Gregory notes that the "weak mind" may develop excessive pride through misinterpretation of miraculous events (*HE* 1.31) – and so the way Bede constructs the narrative causes the reader to ponder what force raised Dryhthelm and why.

This is an example of eschatology influencing his teaching method as well as his historical writing. Bede is typically more concerned with why the miracle happened, rather than how.[140] Gregory had argued it was better to convert a sinner than to raise the dead – the argument is that by recalling their souls, one is causing the individual to live again.[141] However, it is living in the sense of spiritual resurrection and not just physical. In Bede's case Dryhthelm may stand for all non-saintly humans and the "miracle" refers not only to the bodily resurrection but also his change of lifestyle to

[137] Ward, *Venerable Bede*, 72; Straw, *Perfection in Imperfection*, 103.
[138] *Dialogii* 2.31, cited in Straw, *Perfection in Imperfection*, 104.
[139] See O'Reilly, Jarrow lecture, 15-17,
[140] Benedicta Ward, 'Miracles and History: A Reconsideration of the Miracle Stories Used by Bede', *Famulus Christi: Essays in Commemoration of the Thirteenth Centenary of the Birth of the Venerable Bede*, ed. Gerald Bonner (London, 1976), 70-6. 71-2
[141] *Dialogii* 3.17, SC.260, 340: "*Ego autem cunctis miraculis hoc potius existimo esse miraculum, quo ad uitam mortui redeunt, eorumque animae ad carnem ex occulto reuocantur*." See also Rabin, 'Testimony and Conversion': 378; Ward, 'Miracles and History': 72.

one more focused on future salvation. So when Dryhthelm tells his wife that "I have indeed risen from death which held me in its bonds", the reader is inspired to consider the power of God in breaking the chains of death. This is a teaching device to encourage the reader to look for a deeper meaning behind the literal narrative, which ensures the account works for multiple audiences.

The bonds reference parallels Isaiah 58:9, in which chains/bands are metaphors for sin; release from these chains is symbolic of release from sin, although Bede does not make this explicit in *HE* 5.12.[142] He does in his exegesis though, stating that "if we sin we soon lose our freedom and become slaves of sin".[143] It also parallels a passage in the *VSP*, where false clerics are bound by the neck, shoulders and feet by dragon-like beasts.[144] This suggests that the image was particularly relevant to the idea of sin and judgement. However, the *HE* 5.12 account has a direct parallel with Bede's account of Imma, an Anglo-Saxon thegn taken captive after battle (*HE* 4.22). This shows how the eschatology of *HE* 5 is connected to other aspects of the overall text. His brother Tunna, a priest, finds a body similar to Imma's on the battlefield and, thinking it is Imma, buries it "and took care to offer many masses for the absolution of his soul". Imma, meanwhile, is kept in slavery but it is impossible to chain him; he tells his captors that this is because his brother was a priest and "if I had now been in another world (*in alia uita*), my soul would have been loosed from its punishment (*a poenis*) by his intercessions". His captors put "every kind of bond" on him but the chains fall off: "the bonds were most frequently loosed from about nine in the morning, the time when masses were usually said". After being

[142] Isaiah 58:9: "Then you shall call, and the Lord shall hear: you shall cry, and he shall say, Here I am. If you will take away the chain out of the midst of you, and cease to stretch out the finger, and to speak that which profits not." "*Tunc invocabis, et Dominus exaudiet; clamabis, et dicet: Ecce adsum. Si abstuleris de medio tui catenam, et desieris extendere digitum et loqui quod non prodest*." Dryhthelm's statement upon resurrection is: "*Noli ... timere, quia iam uere surrexi a morte, qua tenebar, et apud homines sum iterum uiuere permissus; non tamen ea mihi, qua ante consueram, conuersatione, sed multum dissimili ex hoc tempore uiuendum est*."
[143] *Epistulas VII*, 236; CS.82, 92.
[144] As noted in Hawkes, 'Road to Hell', 238.

ransomed, he learns that this is because his family had been praying and saying masses for his soul, thinking he had been killed. Imma understands his "comforts and blessings" during captivity to have "been bestowed by heaven".

The message, therefore, is that prayers can relieve the soul of the chains of sin, and that the prayers of the living can intercede to benefit souls in the afterlife, such as those in the valley of fire and ice of *HE* 5.12, where the guide tells Dryhthelm that prayers can release the souls sooner. Karl Lutterkort and J.M. Wallace-Hadrill have suggested that the Imma account is derived from Acts 12:5-7, where prayers are said for Peter while he is imprisoned by Herod:[145]

> And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison. And behold an angel of the Lord stood by him and a light shined in the room. And he, striking Peter on the side, raised him up, saying: Arise quickly. And the chains fell from his hands.

This same connection between masses and the loosening of chains is also found in Gregory's *Dialogii* 4.59, where an unnamed man is imprisoned by his enemies, only for his bonds to fall off on the days his wife had mass offered for him. Gregory then explains that this shows how prayers protect the living.[146] Bede was keen to stress the importance and effectiveness of prayer, stating in one of his works that the faithful who prayed would be forgiven "greater temptations" (i.e., those beyond what he calls "trivial" sins) by Jesus – this meant Jesus was ensuring they would not be harmed by sins before death and judgement.[147]

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[145] Lutterkort, 'Beda Hagiographicus': 103-4; J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, 'Bede and Plummer', *Historical Commentary*, xv-xxxv.
[146] SC.265, 200-202.
[147] *Epistulas VII*, 288-9; CS.82, 165. For a study on Bede's use of prayer, see Scott DeGregorio, 'The Venerable Bede on Prayer and Contemplation', *Traditio* 54 (1999), 1-39.

Bede's emphasis on prayer, the efficacy of which is referred to in *HE* 5.12, seems to reflect a weakness in English Christianity. In his exegesis, Bede described his countrymen as having adopted Christianity in a "lukewarm"("*tepide*") fashion, which would be cause for alarm given that the New Testament had said Christ would come like a thief in the night (Matt 24:42-4, 1 Thess 5:2).[148] Being a lukewarm Christian carried dire eschatological implications, as articulated in Rev 3:15-16: "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were cold or hot. But because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will begin to spew you out of my mouth." Bede explains this as meaning: "You are neither fervent in faith, nor totally unfaithful (*Nec in fide feruidus es, nec in totum infidelis)*." For were you even now unfaithful, there would yet remain a hope of converting you. But now, because you do not do the Lord's will, which you know, I shall expel you from the bowels (*uisceribus*) of my Church."[149] Bede had written that "we must never let the innocence of a pure thought (*purae cogitationis*) be followed by a pious action that is less than perfect; nor should we let the apparent perfection of a work be left to some extent in the lurch, abandoned by a relatively imperfect intention of the mind (*imperfectior mentis*)".[150] In other words, deeds and actions were to be carried out wholly and with sincerity, something that was apparently lacking in Bede's time.

It is a theme he returns to in the *HE*, for instance praising how the early missionaries to the English imitated the apostles, "despised all worldly things", and "in all things … practised what they preached" (*HE* 1.26). Similarly, the Irish bishop Aidan, one of the great pastoral figures of the *HE*, is industrious and proactive, "in great contrast to our modern slothfulness (*nostri temporis segnitia*)" (*HE* 3.5). The evidence from the *Epistola ad Ecgbertum* and Bede's exegesis, with the love of men growing

[148] *Exp Apoc*, 234; TTH.48, 106.
[149] *Exp Apoc*, 273; TTH.48, 129.
[150] *De tab*, 100; TTH.18, 115.

cold as per Matt 24, is that lukewarm Christianity is quite common in Bede's world – preachers and bishops should and do know better. The proximity to the end of time meant the English were at too great a risk of missing out on salvation. Therefore it is no surprise that Bede draws attention to miracles, corruptions, and exemplars as part of his pastoral eschatology.

This need to extol examples of righteousness is reinforced by Dryhthelm's pastoral function, which is designed to reinforce the drive for spiritual and moral reform. Examining this now will illustrate how Bede further articulated the need for inner reform among his readers in the context of the individual judgement that would befall them all after death. This is a theme which also appears in his *De die iudicii*, a "deeply introspective" work which emphasises the need for continual self-improvement through reflection and penance, "a rigorous process of self-examination [which] is made all the more pressing by the prospect of a sudden apocalypse".[151] The key issue for Bede in that poem and with Dryhthelm is the promotion of individual salvation and the localisation of universal themes about judgement and reform.

It is important to note that Dryhthelm has become a monk in a scrupulously orthodox monastery, as opposed to one of the corrupt monasteries mentioned in the *Epistola*. Bede would have seen in one letter by Aldhelm, bishop of Sherborne (d.AD709), that good works or a meticulous example of monastic asceticism counted for nothing if done outside the Catholic Church.[152] Stancliffe argues that this letter influenced Bede's portrayal of the Britons, in that even if some Britons live good lives they are still damned as they are not in communion with the universal Roman Church. Bede had presented the Britons as having once been good Christians, but they had refused to preach to the English and ultimately

[151] Darby, 'Apocalypse and Reform', 88.
[152] Stancliffe, 'The British Church and the Mission of Augustine': 130.

held to their own particularist practices.[153] Ultimately they had "cast off Christ's easy yoke" and been punished by God, being conquered and displaced by the Anglo-Saxons (*HE* 1.14). By Bede's day the Britons are in a situation that Ambrose would describe as deprived of the resurrection "by the hardness of faith".[154] This is something Bede does not want to happen to his own people.

So while Dryhthelm's taking the tonsure and moving to a "secret" part of the monastery might seem like a rejection of the temporal world, in Bede's mind it is actually bringing him deeper into the ecclesiastical and spiritually correct one. Bede in *Hist Abb* 1 wrote that Benedict Biscop had left temporal goods for the sake of Christ in order to receive in the present world "a hundredfold" and life everlasting in the afterlife. Elsewhere in his exegesis Bede had written that "the righteous … begin to live more truly when they reach the end of this life (*qui iusti tunc uerius uiuere incipiunt cum ad huius uitae finem peruenerint*)", while "the life of the wicked is short for the present, yet eternal death will follow it in the future".[155] And while it may seem extreme to leave his family, it is more important to highlight that Dryhthelm's actions are reminiscent of Jesus' words in Matt 19:29: "And every man who has forsaken home, or brothers, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands for my name's sake, shall receive his reward a hundredfold and obtain everlasting life." It also recalls the closing lines of Bede's commentary on 1 Jn 5:21 ("little children, keep yourselves from idols"), where, citing 1 Jn 2:17, he says that "the allurements of the world" are akin to idols, but "the world and its cravings will pass away (*transire*); but anyone who does the will of the Lord abides forever (*qui aeternus est Dei uoluntatem sequatur*)".[156] The dangers of the allurements of the world is exactly what Bede has in mind in his *Epistola,* and is a driving force behind the Dryhthelm vision.

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[153] See O'Reilly, Jarrow lecture, 6-7, 13.
[154] Ambrose, FotC.22, 191
[155] *Epistulas VII*, 215-6; CS.82, 54
[156] *Epistulas VII*, 294-95, CS.117, 228.

Dryhthelm is thus exemplifying this Bedan teaching. He quite literally begins "to live more truly" having died and been brought back to life, and at the same time he demonstrates for Bede and his readers the level of commitment that must be given if the English are to avoid "eternal death", that is, the death of the soul. Dryhthelm retires to an especially secluded part of the monastery, telling his story only to a select few who were "terrified by fear of the torments or delighted with the hope of eternal joys" and wanted spiritual advancement (including King Aldfrith, "a most learned man" who asked for Dryhthelm to be admitted to the monastery and who in *HE* 4.26 Bede notes restored Northumbria after Ecgfrith's disastrous campaigns), but leaving his family and possessions was a very public declaration that he is seeking spiritual reward over any temporal one. And while he would not speak to the "slothful", he "led many to salvation by his words and life" before he eventually dies; Bede does not say how long Dryhthelm lived after his resurrection, only that he had an "aged body" when he "was called away". The emphasis is on how many souls he saved through example, and how utterly dedicated he was to spiritual development and maintaining his spiritual purity. And although there is no sense that the wider reader is being urged to enter a monastery Bede in his homilies had said that the contemplative life is best, even if few attain it.

The separation from his family, while symbolising a focus on the fate of the soul as opposed to events in secular life, is less important than Dryhthelm's daily actions because these serve a function similar to the simple lives of the early missionaries to Kent after they were sent by Gregory. They had few resources and lived like the primitive Church, in simplicity, something Bede endorsed. [157] Their example got people interested in Christianity and brought them to conversion, a process Bede

[157] See homily 2.16, *Homeliarum*, 300: "*Ad quorum nos exemplum uitam moresque solerter aptare necesse est quia perfectum uitae magisterium est ecclesiae primitiuae semper actus imitari illamque aedificii spiritalis normam ad finem usque seruare quam ipsis apostolis in fundamento fidei liquet esse propositam*".

hopes will be repeated on an internal level in Northumbria, where the public aspect of Christian practice had seemingly, according to the *Epistola*, become degraded or less visible due to a lack of preachers and quality teachers. That Dryhthelm's penance was public is key because it shows he had embraced his need for moral rectitude and so could not be accused of hiding or shirking his spiritual responsibilities. Public penance had become a feature of Christianity by the fifth century and was codified more by the penitentials of the seventh, and so would have been familiar to Bede's contemporaries.[158] Bede generally puts a great emphasis on daily life as a shining example of Christian teachings, such as with King Oswald and his bishop, Aidan (d.AD651, see *HE* 3.3 and 3.5), who worked in tandem to spread Christianity in Northumbria and who exemplified Christian teachings in their daily lives.

The Dryhthelm narrative is clearly rich in exegetical and moral concerns, constructed by Bede so that it can educate a wide range of audience members. Of particular note for this approach is Gregory's *Moralia*, in which he says that scripture is like a river, shallow and deep, in which a lamb may walk and an elephant swim.[159] This meant the same passage could have multiple meanings applicable or apparent to audiences with different levels of Christian education. Bede took this to heart, so it is not surprising that the Dryhthelm vision can be understood on both literal and allegorical/spiritual levels. In his exegesis, and citing Gregory's *Regula pastoralis*, Bede notes that

> it is not possible for one and the same doctrine to be suitable for everyone. Surely the wise (*sapientes*) are to be taught in one way, the foolish (*insipientes*) in another; the rich in one way, the young in another; men in one way, women in another; celibates in one way,

[158] Alois M. Haas, 'Otherworldly Journeys in the Middle Ages', *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, eds. Bernard McGinn, John J. Collins and Stephen J. Stein, vol. 2 (London and New York, 2000), 442-66: 444.
[159] Scully, 'Introduction': 20.

> married persons in another; prelates in one way, subjects in another.[160]

And so he adapts his teachings to ensure a particular audience will get significant benefit from it. His audience in the case of the *HE* is its dedicatee King Ceolwulf, who had the influence and resources to implement a substantial moral reform programme. However, Bede was keenly aware that many in the English Church were in need of substantial education, so it should not be surprising that he manages to make the Dryhthelm narrative carry one message for those with little exegetical training ("beginners in the way of righteousness") and one for those who were well educated (or at least expected to be) such as ecclesiastical leaders.[161] His focus was always pastoral care, and he had said "It belongs to spiritual teachers (*doctorum spiritalium*) to discern most carefully which mysteries they should impart to be heard by each person".[162] Bede's pastoral concerns are derived in part from Gregory's, but as Markus has pointed out Gregory's pastoral concern lay behind revolutionary missionary initiatives such as the papal mission to the English, because they were the first time a pope had taken to heart the command to teach the nations.[163]

Although the end may not have been imminent, it was certainly coming. In *Dialogii*, Gregory wrote that when the night "is almost spent and the day begins to break, darkness and light become joined together, until the light of day banishes the dark perfectly". The end of this world is mingled with the next.[164] It is unsurprising then that Bede, seeing aspects of the next world crossing over with the temporal world in his own lifetime,

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[160] *De tab*, 26; TTH.18, 26, citing *RP* 2.11: "*Aliter namque sapientes aliter insipientes aliter diuites aliter pauperes aliter sani aliter infirmi aliter senes aliter iuuenes aliter uiri aliter feminae aliter caelibes aliter coniugati aliter praelati aliter subditi docendi sunt*."
[161] *De templo*, 196; TTH.21, 70-71.
[162] *De tab*, 80-81; TTH.18, 91.
[163] R. A. Markus, 'Gregory the Great's Europe', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 31 (1981), 21-36: 24.
[164] *Dialogii* 4.48: SC.265, 154: "*Sed quemadmodum cum nox finiri et dies incipit oriri, ante solis ortum simul aliquo modo tenebrae cum luce conmixtae sunt, quousque discedentis noctis reliquiae in luce diei subsequentis perfecte uertantur, ita huius mundi finis iam cum futuri saeculi exordio permiscetur, atque ipsae reliquiarum eius tenebrae quadam iam rerum spiritalium permixtione translucent*."

would be motivated to encourage moral reform through his history writing, because it was apparent that time was growing short. In his commentary on 1 Peter he says God's desire is that "we be put to death in the body but quickened in the spirit" ("*nos mortificari carne uiuifcari autem spiritu"*),[165] which is essentially what Dryhthelm has achieved, but as far as Bede was concerned the vision needed to be disseminated widely in order for many other English people to experience the same spiritual awakening. Rabin argues that for Dryhthelm himself, witnessing the otherworld was a personal experience and "implies no responsibility to testify to the unconverted" whereas "the narrator refuses to sever the act of witnessing from the demand to testify". Dryhthelm though does make decisions about whom to speak to. As Bede points out, he did not speak to those living "a slothful or careless life", but those looking to advance; the slothful in this case are already converted, but perhaps are not fully living up to the standard of Christian practice expected. They have been converted, but not wholly. Yet by including the detail of the vision and visit to the afterlife Bede is in fact the one speaking to those living a "slothful" life.

While Dryhthelm feels no compulsion to preach publicly, he was not instructed to by his *ductor* either. In fact the guide speaks only with regard to the lessons Dryhthelm can learn personally from his experience. Rabin is correct though to note that Bede's narrative construction "produces the reader as Christian subject by situating him as a witness who, in converting the episode's fragmented testimonies into a coherent text, must undergo an internal conversion as well".[166] This is typical of Bede, the teacher, who will often present the necessary information but leave it to the reader to make the final connection. Dryhthelm's lack of preaching, however, does not mean that he does not exemplify his message

[165] *Epistulas VII*, 252-3; CS.82, 109
[166] Andrew Rabin, 'Bede, Dryhthelm, and the Witness to the Other World: Testimony and Conversion in the Historia Ecclesiastica', *Modern Philology* 106.3 (2009), 375-98: 377.

through his daily life – and how he shows that the vision is more important than any physical comfort.

Dryhthelm, standing in frozen rivers declaring he had "seen it colder", shows a sense of mastering the elements while simultaneously demonstrating that the physical world no longer has mastery over him. He had already said that he returned to his body "with much distaste" following his revelation, because he "was greatly delighted with the sweetness and grace of the place [he] had seen and with the company of those whom [he] saw in it". It is a reflection of the profound spiritual change has has undergone. The body was no longer something to be cherished or concerned with, because the spiritual reward was greater. His standing in the river is likely a corollary with Bede's statement, quoting from Tyconius, that people are resurrected through baptism, because the "first resurrection in this life is through the remission of sins".[167] Dryhthelm has already died and then shed his old life by virtue of his revelation – now he is literally being washed clean. The river scene also has echoes of how Bede says "although all the saints who crucify the flesh with its vices and desires are the harpers of God and praise him with the psaltery and harp, how much more so are they who by the privilege of angelic chastity make themselves entire holocausts [ie, burnt sacrifices] to God, and who deny themselves utterly and taking up their cross, follow the Lord wherever he goes".[168] It also connects with Bede's commentary on Revelation, when he says that "from that holy and immaculate flock of the Church, they are chosen by the Holy Spirit as purer and holier victims on the merits of their will, whom the Apostle, having no commandment of the Lord concerning

[167] *Exp Apoc*, 509; TTH.58, 254: "*Prima resurrectio in hac est uita per remissionem peccatorum*".
[168] *Exp Apoc*, 421; TTH.58, 207, concerning Rev 14:2 and citing Gal 5:24, Ps 150:3, Matt 16:24, Mark 8:34, Rev 14:14.

them, urges to present their bodies a living sacrifice, holy, pleasing unto God".[169] Dryhthelm is embodying this concept of living sacrifice.

The image of Dryhthelm in the river also has a parallel in the narrative of St Theodore of Sykeon, who on the feast of the epiphany (January 6) would stand in the river until the readings and services had ended, even if it left him covered with icicles.[170] It was not unique in insular culture either; Cuthbert would often stand neck-deep in water to pray in a habit possibly adopted from his teacher Boisil, while in Muirchú's *vita* of Patrick the saint and his helper, Benignus, would pray in the middle of a river.[171] The idea generally behind these accounts is to show a level of superhuman endurance and physical mortification for the sake of piety, but also that religious revelation demonstrates that the temporal world matters less than what awaits in the next life. The river is warmer than what Drythelm saw of the afterlife, for instance. Similarly, when Fursa remembers his experiences during his vision-journey, he sweats profusely while wearing light clothing even in the middle of winter. In both cases, there is a symbolic meaning: both men have advanced beyond the worries of the temporal world being fully embracing the revelations granted to them.

Bede's work stresses the need for his readers to be converted at an internal level, to be wholly committed to their faith. However, in the case of Dryhthelm it can be seen that he has taken the important step for the reader by spelling out the reason for the vision. If Bede's design had strictly been to leave the reader knit together the various aspects of the vision in order to achieve their own internal conversion, he would not have stressed that its purpose was to "arouse the living from the death of the soul". Rather, by

[169] *Exp Apoc*, 425; TTH.58, 209, commenting on Rev 14:4 and citing 1 Cor 7:25 and Rom 12:1.
[170] Nora Chadwick, *Age of Saints in the Early Celtic Church* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1960), 103-5.
[171] Colin A. Ireland, 'Some Analogues of the Old English *Seafarer* from Hiberno-Latin Sources', *The Otherworld Voyage in Early Irish Literature: An Anthology of Criticism*, ed. Jonathan M. Wooding (Dublin, 2000), 143-56: 149.

stating this at the outset he ensures readers pick up on the various elements at play in the text and so come to an internal conversion by guidance rather than solely their own initiative. Dryhthelm's reluctance to talk about the vision seems to underscore that it was a very personal experience, but it may also be a literary tool to suggest that the reality of heaven and hell was hard to put into words.

It is therefore even more vital for Bede to include the narrative in the *HE*. It is the midway point of *HE* 5, marking a move toward the end of the overall narrative. It is a beautiful structural device laden with eschatological significance. *HE* 5 – indeed the whole *HE* – has been leading up to this point, and the vision is designed to linger with readers as they complete *HE* 5. Darby makes the case that *HE* 4.2 is the high point of the *HE* (and indeed of the Sixth Age), where Bede, referring to Theodore's time as archbishop in Canterbury (AD668), says the English had never had such "happy times", with brave kings and "the desires of all men … set on the joys of the heavenly kingdom".[172] This was the zenith of English Christian practice and robust, pious kingship. Darby points out also that toward the end of *HE* 4 Bede introduces a more pessimistic tone continued in *HE* 5, with Bede stating that the "hopes and strength of the English kingdom began to ebb and fade away" after Ecgfrith.[173] This then underscores the important structural role that *HE* 5.12 plays. It is a case study that shows readers what awaits them immediately after death and emphasises the levels of commitment they need in order to achieve salvation.

Rowley argues that the Dryhthelm account demonstrates that "individual salvation remains unknowable".[174] However, this thesis argues that the narrative and its intersections with Bede's exegesis are part of an effort by Bede to make individual salvation if not knowable, then more

[172] Darby, *Bede and the End of Time*, 208.
[173] Ibid.
[174] Sharon Rowley, 'The Role and Function of Otherworldly Visions in Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*', *The World of Travellers: Exploration and Imagination* (Leuven, 2009), 166-183: 169.

defined by giving a sense of the afterlife that awaits all the English upon death; indeed, the thesis argues that is the purpose of *HE* 5.12 and its location in the overall structure of the *HE*. It means that as readers complete the *HE* they are left with the vision of a local man who died and came back from the dead, a man who lived and died in the lifetime of many of the readers. Every other chapter of the *HE* is to be read in the light of Dryhthelm's experience. Bede's interjection at the start of the account emphasises the key role of the narrative in the overall *HE*. Readers are thus compelled to think about the fate of their souls while perusing the literal history, all the while aware from the overall *HE* that they are living in the AD period and thus the final era of the world. The drive for moral reform is thus granted great urgency.

While Gregory had expounded on several spiritual layers of biblical texts because his educated audience could appreciate them, Bede generally "worked alone with his superb patristic library for readers and listeners who had to be led very gently to recognise any subtlety in the text".[175] This caused him, for instance, to be explicit about passages in his Genesis commentary where he switches from the literal meaning to a symbolic one. He was not the only one of his milieu to express concern about the education of the English. His prologue to his commentary on Luke includes the request from Bishop Acca – who was often the dedicatee of Bede's works and to whom Bede acted as a sort of mentor when it came to scriptural exposition – calling on Bede to apply his skills to the text because other commentators, such as Ambrose, were too difficult for the English (including Bede's students). Bede had access to a library superior to most, which was to his advantage but also highlighted that some of his countrymen could not access or misunderstood patristic texts. He cites how some English monks had criticised his using the lion to symbolise the evangelist Matthew and the man for Mark, instead of the other way around

[175] McClure, 'Bede's *Notes on Genesis*': 22.

(as was traditional), not realising that he was quoting Augustine.[176] This is another manifestation of the spiritual weaknesses addressed in the *HE* and *Epistola*, in that not only are the English lazy and lukewarm but they do not have the tools to be educated to a higher level of Christianity. However, ignorance would be no defence at the Last Judgement, hence Bede's eagerness to explain the lesson the reader was to gain from the Dryhthelm account.

To elaborate on this it is necessary to examine the narrative's textual context, because this will better illustrate that the Dryhthelm account is not the only instance in Bede's oeuvre where he adapts and reworks received material to suit a local context, and most pertinently in contexts where he needs to instil an exemplary narrative.

Shaping accounts: Bede's adaptation of received narratives to his exegetical and moral concerns

This section argues that the Dryhthelm account and how Bede shapes it to reflect his own exegesis and eschatology of it has a precedent in his other work. It is intended to illustrate how Bede took information from other sources and reworked them to relate to his theological and contemporary concerns. For instance, it has been argued by Kendall that he may have composed a letter by Ceolfrith to King Nechtan of the Picts concerning the calculation of Easter (*HE* 5.21), a subject close to his heart and to his interest in unity and orthodoxy.[177] Meanwhile, Bede's history of Wearmouth-Jarrow is arguably an attempt to rewrite the history to smooth

[176] *In Luc*, 7-10. See also Brown, *Companion*, 60.
[177] See Calvin B Kendall, 'Bede and Education', *The Cambridge Companion to Bede* (2010), 99-112: 105. Peter Hunter Blair, in an earlier book, rejects such suggestions: *The World of Bede*, second ed. (Cambridge, 1990), 188. Higham, considering the phrase "*litteras scriptas in hunc modum",* suggests it may have been Bede's recollection of the letter. Higham, *(Re-) Reading Bede*, 181.

over and address the many tensions within the monastery.[178] More pertinent to the present study is that Bede had heavily rewritten the *vita* of St Cuthbert of Lindisfarne (completed c.721AD), possibly because Acca and other Wilfrdian clerics had threatened the monastery's episcopal status and the Lindisfarne monks had called on Bede to compose a text in response.[179] Lindisfarne also had a connection to the Dryhthelm narrative, in that the abbot of Lindisfarne in Bede's day, Aethelwold (d.AD740), "man of pious and sober life", was abbot of the monastery that accepted Dryhthelm. It is important to examine Bede's incorporation of contemporary issues into the Cuthbert *vita* because it is arguably a reflection of the same process that saw him ensure his Dryhthelm narrative was pertinent to contemporary eschatology and his drive for moral reform.

Cuthbert is one of the pastoral figures par excellence of the *HE*, exemplifying the emulation of the early Church and Gregory's *RP*. His Irish training and Rome-centred virtues made him a symbol of the concord arrived at Whitby.[180] He was therefore an example of an English holy man and also of how the English were a part of the core regions of Christianity. But, more importantly for the purposes of this thesis, Bede is careful to incorporate Cuthbert into *HE* 5, in that *HE* 5 opens with an account of Cuthbert's successor on Farne. This serves as a bridge between the golden days of Northumbria and the somewhat darker days of the present where people are living in "spiritual death" – the reader is able to trace a descent from spiritual strength to moral and spiritual weakness. By omitting Cuthbert as a narrative within *HE* 5 but still including references to him, Bede ensures that the saint's shadow is cast over the most potently

[178] Grocock, 'Separation Anxiety'.
[179] David P Kirby, 'The Genesis of a Cult: Cuthbert of Farne and Ecclesiastical Politics in Northumbria in the Late Seventh and Early Eighth Centuries', *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 46.03 (1995), 383-97; Karl Lutterkort, 'Beda Hagiographicus: Meaning and Function of Miracle Stories in the Vita Cuthberti and the Historia Ecclesiastica', *Beda Venerabilis*, 81-106; Carole E. Newlands, 'Bede and Images of Saint Cuthbert', *Traditio* 52 (1997); 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 (2012), 7-39.
[180] Thacker, 'Bede and History': 178.

eschatological of the *HE*'s books. This again is Bede's pastoral eschatology at work, in that the example encourages the inner reform and vigilance of the individual reader. In one of his homilies he refers to how "the faithful immolate themselves to the Lord on the altar of the heart ("*in ara cordis immolant"*)",[181] which emphasises the idea that one cannot be Christian in outward actions alone, but had to be inwardly Christian as well. Jesus was the "inward witness" ("*conspectu interni"*).[182]

Similarly he says that "the confession of faith alone is not at all sufficient for salvation when it lacks the witness of good works. But neither is the uprightness of works of any avail without faith and the simplicity of love."[183] Commenting on the Temple, but simultaneously commenting on the present day, he says "there are a great many at the present time who, content with [observing] the precepts of the law (*legalibus contenti praeceptis*)… believe that it will be enough for them merely if they merit entrance into life (*ad uitam uenire*)".[184] And in a pointed reference to the ecclesiastical weakness of his day, and probably specifically bishops who demanded payment for their services, it was the case that "those who do heavenly works not with the aim of heavenly reward (*opera caelestia non caelestis intentione*) but with a view toward temporal favour or advantage are doubtless stricken with the judgement of heavenly wrath (*caelestis feriuntur*)".[185] But in order to appreciate the importance of Cuthbert to Bede's mindset and also to his methodology, we need to look at the original source material and what Bede has done to it – this will show why his adaptation and development of the Dryhthelm account is not only a matter of style, but to suit his pastoral purposes. As we do not have the source material for the Dryhthelm narrative, we do not know exactly what has been changed. However, we can see that it is so closely related to Bede's

[181] Bede, Homily 1.18: *Homeliarum*, 133.
[182] *Epistulas VII*, 211-2, CS.82, 48.
[183] *Epistulas VII*, 336; CS.82, 162.
[184] *De templo*, 175; TTH.21, 42.
[185] *De tab*, 78-9; TTH.18, 88.

exegesis that it cannot have been incorporated verbatim into the *HE*, like Gregory's letters to Augustine were, for instance. So examing the Cuthbert *vita* will give a deeper insight into how he uses source material with eschatological themes in the context of his own eschatology.

The anonymous Cuthbert *vita* drew on the *vitae* of Antony and Martin of Tours, two pivotal saints of early Christianity, presenting Cuthbert as a saint in a similar vein and thus on a par with the earliest saints. However, in Bede's hands the prose *vita* of Cuthbert moves the saint away from being just a local manifestation of a Christendom-wide continuum and instead, as Alan Thacker has shown, made Cuthbert more relevant not only to Bede's particular reformist interests but to what the English author believed his society needed.[186] Bede cites sources for some miracles, which is a shift away from more traditional *vitae* which put more importance on a saint being holy enough that he or she might have worked a miracle rather than actually doing so.[187] The parallels to Martin are played down and, while the parallels to the ascetic Antony are highlighted, the emphasis of the prose *vita* is "to bring into focus the figure of the saint himself, as prior, hermit, and bishop … Bede stresses the saint's diverse roles as active monk, contemplative, and magister".[188] He is re-presented as an exemplar of Gregory's pastoral and contemplative ideals, an English equivalent of Benedict of Nursia.[189] The overall effect is to emphasise the importance not only of good pastoral care, but the usefulness of maintaining episcopal sees at monastic centres, as Bede emphasises in his *Epistola*. He had seen monastic centres being important sees throughout Northumbrian history, and it has been noted that monastic sites frequently supported or carried out pastoral work in the eighth century, so in this

[186] Thacker, 'Bede's Ideal of Reform': 136-43.
[187] Joan M. Petersen, 'Dead or Alive? The Holy Man as Healer in East and West in the Late Sixth Century', *Journal of Medieval History* 9 (1983), 91-8: 91.
[188] Thacker, 'Bede's Ideal of Reform': 138.
[189] Thacker, 'Bede and History': 182.

Bede may be highlighting the need to maintain and support – or indeed take advantage of – an existing system.[190]

Thacker notes that Bede actually rewrites one section of the anonymous *vita* "in such a way that it reads like a summary of the qualities later to be recommended in the letter to Egbert".[191] Not only does Cuthbert illustrate how Anglo-Saxons could exemplify the same qualities as early Christian saints, but the vita "provided a vivid illustration of Bede's ideals, and perhaps a vehicle for publishing them beyond the monastic elite who formed the audience of his commentaries".[192] That said, although the Bedan Cuthbert *vita* is considerably different from the original, Bede drew on correspondence and other investigations concerning the saint (*HE* pref) – it was also commissioned and endorsed by the community at Lindisfarne so was evidently credible enough as far as those monks were concerned. It also shows considerable stylistic parallels with Virgil and borrows phrases from pagan writers Juvencus, Sedulius, and Arator, even Ovid and Horace alongside Christian writers such as Augustine.[193] What it shows – and this is key to understanding his readiness to adapt the *HE* 5.12 narrative to match his purposes – is that Bede has no trouble taking varied source material and forming a narrative that he deems relevant to contemporary issues.

Whatever his precise intent, Thacker points out that the Cuthbert *vita* itself "is a portrait of an active and prayerful preacher, the very type of pastor Bede was to recommend to archbishop Egbert".[194] Bede's *Epistola* tells us that even priests and monks are without Latin, while in the *HE*

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[190] Coates, 'Role of Bishops': 179. See also Ian N. Wood, 'Monasteries and the Geography of Power in the Age of Bede', *Northern History* 45.1 (2008).
[191] Thacker, 'Bede's Ideal of Reform', 141.
[192] Ibid, 142.
[193] Brown, *Companion*, 82.
[194] Thacker, 'Bede's Ideal of Reform', 139. It is different from other pastoral models circulating at the time, for example Bishop Wilfrid, who was wealthy and learned but also fractious and expelled from his see a number of times. For a study of Wilfrid as the subject of hagiography, see Sarah McCann, 'Authority, Orthodoxy and Sanctity in Stephen of Ripon's Vita Wilfridi', unpublished MA thesis (University College Cork, 2002).

Bede says that, when Cuthbert travelled to preach, "it was the custom amongst the English people at that time" (*HE* 4.27; Cuthbert operated from the 660s to AD687) for everyone to come and hear the preacher, implying that it is no longer the custom. Indeed, in his commentary on Samuel, Bede refers to "slothful teachers" ("*magistros inertes"*) who are putting souls in danger through poor preaching, with their weakness putting the whole Church in danger.[195] This is paralleled by the reference to "modern slothfulness" contrasted by Aidan's industry in *HE* 3.5. The Samuel commentary, dealing as it does with faithlessness and sin, is one of those cases where "the events of the Old Testament had acute relevance for the present day" for Bede.[196] Bringing penitent heretics back into the fold may have, for him, been one of the key responsibilities of a good teacher.[197] This could also connect with his eschatological concerns, as heretics would be enemies of the Church during the reign of Antichrist and converting heretics back to orthodoxy would mean their souls were saved. Bede had argued that anybody could be a pastor "however small their house may be",[198] hence why his moral reform agenda in the *HE* includes not only those of a religious background, but also a secular one, like Dryhthelm.

Bede considers preachers to be "the eyes of the Lord, who with spiritual fire (*igne spiritali*) give light to the faithful, and to the unbelievers a conflagration".[199] He says "the high priest of our time … is obligated to intercede for the whole human race, and especially those who have come to know the truth [ie, Christianity] and who bear the sign of that faith on their foreheads [the sign of the cross]".[200] At a time of people living in "the death of the soul" the Christian message – and the apocalyptic message –

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[195] *In Samuhelis*, 122; for discussion see, DeGregorio, 'Nostrorum Socordiam Temporum': 113.
[196] Darby and Wallis, 'The Many Futures of Bede': 13.
[197] Thacker, 'Why Did Heresy Matter?': 58-59.
[198] Homily 1.7, *Homeliarum* 49: "*Non solum pastores episcopi presbyteri diaconi uel etiam rectores monasteriorum sunt intellegendi sed et omnes fideles qui uel paruulae suae domus custodiam gerunt pastores recte uocantur in quantum eidem suae domui sollicita uigilantia praesunt.*" See also Bede, *De templo*, 2.17.4; Bede, *Ezra and Neh*, 32.
[199] *Exp Apoc*, 245; TTH.48, 113.
[200] *De tab*, 123; TTH.18, 154

therefore needed to be spelled out in more graphic terms. Augustine had warned about the ambiguity of certain signs and texts, particularly where there were errors in translation or meaning and an audience was not scripturally or grammatically educated enough to realise this.[201] So it is not surprising then that Bede's pastoral eschatology is applied to the *HE*, and why Dryhthelm completely changes his way of life and living after his vision. Bede's argument is that the vision was so powerful and terrifying, while at the same time offering some hope, that an otherwise secular man felt the need to shed everything in order to focus on being in the right spiritual state before death and judgement. And so he crafts it in such a way that the message is made very clear.

We see this too in his exegesis. It was long ago noted that when it came to writing his commentary on Revelation, Bede borrowed from others but "fitted what he took into a plan which was his own".[202] Indeed, while his Revelation commentary largely draws on patristic works, the actual composition is both sophisticated and innovative.[203] Fitting source material into his own plan is his approach generally. For example, although he includes letters within the *HE*, Bede omits sections that do not suit his purpose, a "master … of the discreet silence".[204] We cannot know what the Dryhthelm *relatio* looked like – even the fact it existed depends on a statement in *HE* 5.12 – but what is clear is that the text Bede has composed is not only written in a style consistent with the rest of the *HE* but closely mirrors his pastoral eschatology. The allusions to Virgil and *Dialogii* suggest a conscious narrative formation on Bede's part in order to make Dryhthelm a figure more relevant to contemporary concerns and the *HE's* eschatology. But if an average Christian like Dryhthelm can be seemingly living a decent life and then show himself capable of profound

[201] *DCD* 2.41-56, and book 3 passim.
[202] Bonner, *Saint Bede*, 9.
[203] Wallis, 'Commentary on Revelation': 25-6.
[204] McClure and Collins, *Bede: The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, xix; "Silence": Brown, *Companion*, 95.

transformation in order to become an anagogical and eschatological pastoral exemplar, why then does Bede refer to Dryhthelm's contemporaries as living "in the death of the soul"? We turn now to discussing that phrase, because it elucidates and clarifies the depths of corruption to which Bede believed the English had descended.

"Death of the soul"

This section argues that Bede's vocabulary when introducing the Dryhthelm narrative is loaded with eschatological warning, and that it illustrates just how far the English have fallen in terms of spiritual condition. It connects the phrase *morte (mors) animae* with patristic authors and Bede's exegesis to argue that his usage is very deliberate and is a stark warning.

Although translated by Colgrave and Mynors as "spiritual death" (itself an accurate translation), the translation "death of the soul" shows more emphatically the danger Bede is trying to highlight. It also connects this account of an Englishman coming back from the dead with biblical and patristic eschatology, thereby showing such texts and thinking to have a direct connection with the English of eighth-century Northumbria, living at the ends of the Earth and the end of time. "Death of the soul" is the phrase Bede uses when describing the fall of Adam in his commentary on Genesis,[205] which connects the Dryhthelm chapter, and thus the current spiritual state of the English, emphatically with the initial fall of man. And elsewhere, Bede had written that Jesus had "died that we should not be afraid of dying; he rose from the dead that we also may hope to rise again through him".[206] This is, in essence, being roused from the death of the soul. However, to understand how and why Bede uses the phrase, because this

[205] "*Mortuus erat morte animae." In Genesim*, 63.
[206] *Epistulas VII*, 230; CS.82, 71.

sheds much light on his thinking and his application of exegesis to history, we must look at how it is used by Augustine and Gregory.[207] Although forms of the phrase *mors animae* occur relatively infrequently in Late Antique and early medieval sources available to Bede, such as Ambrose and Caesarius, we will focus on Augustine and Gregory because of their significance to Bede's thought and eschatology, particularly as it is applied to Dryhthelm and *HE* 5.[208]

With regard to Augustine, in whose thought Bede was thoroughly soaked,[209] one use in particular sums up the Christian message regarding the soul's condition: "*mors corporis necessaria: mors animae uolunaria"* ("the death of the body is necessary: the death of the soul is voluntary").[210] This is in regard to the death of the physical self, which is the "first death" in *DCD* and a legacy of Adam's fall, and the "second death" ("*secundam mortem"*), which Bede says carries with it "everlasting torments" ("*aeterna tormenta"*), is when the soul is cast into hell for not having merited salvation.[211] For Bede, commenting on Rev 2:11 ("he that shall overcome shall not be hurt by the second death"), those who "shall have remained faithful unto the death of the flesh, will not fear the death of the soul" ("*qui fidelis permanserit usque ad mortem carnis, mortem animae non timebit aeternam"*).[212] Wallis says it is difficult to trace Bede's interpretation of the second death as that of the soul, arguing that Augustine and Gregory saw it as a death including body and soul. Augustine, in *DCD* 20.9, said the second death is condemnation following judgement after the resurrection. And in *DCD* 13.2 he does say

[207] For the various forms as found in Augustine, see: *De Agone Christiana* 1.23; *Confessio* 6.15; Epistle 105 and 164; *De Doctrina Christiana* 3.5; *De genesi ad litteram* 6.22, 10.16; *In Iohannis euangelium tractatus* 46. 8, 49.2; *Enarrationes in Psalmos* (psalmus 118, sermo 10, par1 line 15); Sermon 62; Sermon 65; Sermon 173; Sermon 179a; Sermon 335B; *De Civitate Dei* 12.2; *Contra Secundium* 2; *De trinitate* 4.3; *De natura et gratia* 23.26. Bede was familiar with all of these texts. For Gregory, see *Dialogii* 2.3 and *Moralia in Iob* 31.24, both texts with which Bede was familiar.
[208] Ambrose, see *De Paradiso* 9, CSEL.32, a section Bede refers to in *In Genesim*, 49, although not that specific passage. For Caesarius, see Sermon 12 and 211.
[209] Thacker, *Bede and Augustine*, passim.
[210] Augustine, Sermon 62.
[211] *DCD* 20.9, 715-9, quoted directly in *Exp Apoc*, 508-9; TTH.58, 254.
[212] *Exp Apoc*, 255; TTH.58, 119. Wallis suggests this interpretation is inspired by the chapter heading of *DCD* 13.2 or from Tyconius.

that the second death refers to the death of the body (which derives its life from the soul) and the death of the soul (which derives its life from God). Bede certainly distinguished between the two – referring to the Antichrist pursuing the Church "with carnal or even spiritual death".[213] But we have seen that Bede is more interested in the fate and condition of the soul than the body; therefore, for him to equate the second death with the death of the soul is understandable, given that it was the absence of God and meant eternal destruction. The reference to the "death of the soul" may be another example of Bede developing and refining a concept present in patristic sources and adapting it to contemporary concerns, which fits with his pastoral eschatology.

It also means that humans are responsible for the condition of their souls before the first death, in that they have ample opportunity in temporal life to do good works or repent sincerely. So Dryhthelm's resurrection emphasises that physical death is only one transition toward salvation, because the English needed to focus on the condition of their souls before death, lest they be dragged into the pit along with the woman, cleric, and layman. The reflection of social groups within a vision narrative is a very common theme,[214] even if in this case it directly reflects Bede's own pastoral eschatology. But Gregory's use of "*mors animae"* is of great relevance, as it appears in, among other texts, *Dialogii* 2.3, when Gregory writes that Benedict of Nursia raised "from the death of the soul" many people who were willing to accept his instruction.[215] Here, Gregory is referring to how Benedict, having been made abbot of a monastery, leaves it because the inmates' inability to maintain life under a Rule threatened to diminish his own devotion to God. By leaving, he was able to continue

[213] *Exp Apoc*, 407; TTH.58, 201. "*Qui ecclesiam nunc uel carnali uel etiam spiritali morte persequitur*."
[214] Haas, 'Otherworldly Journeys in the Middle Ages': 447.
[215] *Dialogii*, SC.260, 148: "*Fortis etenim praelatior Dei teneri intra claustra noluit, certaminis campum quaesiuit. Unde isdem quoque uenerabilis Benedictus, si libenter audis, citius agnoscis, quia uiuus ipse indociles deseruit, quantos in locis aliis ab animae morte suscitauit.*"

preaching to a greater number of people who were willing to listen to his words, with the result that twelve abbeys were built under his authority and people entrusted their children to him in order that they may learn the Christian life. But this too reflects the idea present in Augustine's sermons that it is up to individuals to accept Christian teaching as part of their efforts to achieve salvation. In his seventh homily on Ezekiel, Gregory says that the scriptures, the two testaments written by God, can help to liberate humanity from the "death of the soul".[216]

From Bede's perspective, this shows preaching alone can raise people "from the death of the soul", and preaching is the cornerstone of the reform programme he articulates in his *Epistola*.[217] He expected Ecgbert "to rise up, Ezra-like [a corrector of wrongdoing], and set straight those clerics under him who had gone astray", in DeGregorio's words.[218] It was part of the programme to awaken people from spiritual death. It is worth also noting the use of the phrase *mors animae* in Gregory's *Moralia in Iob* (finished c.AD598), which was well known to Bede. Its use in *Moralia* is of particular importance. Commenting on Ps 75 (76):7, "they have all slumbered that mounted on horseback" (Gregory notes that "horse" can mean the temporal world or the life of the wicked), Gregory says: "That is, in the death of the soul, they, who trusted in the honour of the present life, have closed the eyes of their mind to the light of truth." [219] This is because "every one who sins is the servant of sin, and servants are upon horses, when sinners are elated with the dignities of the present life". [220] His argument is that focusing on temporal rewards leads to spiritual blindness,

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[216] Gregory, *Homiliae in Hiezechihelem prophetam*, ed. Marcus Adriaen, CCSL 142 (Turnhout, 1971), 93: "*Et rursum subditur: Quia spiritus uitae erat in rotis. Quod idcirco secundo dicitur uitae spiritus in rotis esse, quia Scripturae sacrae duo sunt Testamenta, quae utraque Dei spiritus scribi uoluit, ut nos ab morte animae liberaret*."

[217] Letter to Ecgbert, 343, 345.

[218] DeGregorio, 'Bede's in Ezram': 19.

[219] CCSL.143B, 1579 (SC, 258): "*Hinc rursum dicitur: Dormitaverunt qui ascenderunt equos* (Ps 75(76): 7); *id est, in morte animae mentis oculos a veritatis luce clauserunt, qui in praesentis vitae honore confisi sunt*."

[220] "*Omnis quippe qui peccat seruus est peccati, et serui in equis sunt cum peccatores praesentis uitae dignitatibus efferuntur*."

and that sin leads to more sin. Compare this to Bede's statement that "some sins are the cause of sin, others a punishment for sin, and others are both" – sins beget sins, which in turn leads to a wider spiritual decline and provoking of divine judgement.[221]

This is the patristic background behind Bede's use of the phrase "death of the soul". However, Bede's use of it has several layers of meaning: literal and allegorical. There is the literal exposition at the start of *HE* 5.12, which Bede uses to ensure the reader derives a precise meaning. In addition, readers who have some scriptural knowledge or familiarity with Bede's exegesis would be able to gain deeper meanings from the miracle. This is the "death" meant by the passage in Genesis forbidding Adam and Eve to eat the fruit of the tree: the death of the soul.[222] To this, Bede adds: "For man died in the soul when he sinned, because God, who is the life of the soul, withdrew from him".[223] In two homilies on Easter and one on the Ascension of Christ into heaven after his resurrection, used *morte animae* when referring to how Christ had resurrected mankind from the death of the soul.[224] Bede says that Christ, the second Adam, himself "died so that we would not fear to die (*mortuus est ne nos mori timeremus*); he arose in order to bestow on us the hope and faith of rising up again from death".[225] When seen in the light of the World Ages and the proximity of the English conversion to the end of time, the urgency behind the Dryhthelm account becomes more palpable. Similarly in his commentary on 1 John: "he who for our sake gave the death of his body, which he did not owe, freed us from the death of the soul, which we owed".[226] And on 1 John 3:14, he writes:

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[221] *Exp Apoc*, 464; TTH.58, 230.
[222] Genesis 2:17: "For in whatsoever day you eat of it, you shall die the death."
[223] *In genesim*, 52: "*Mortuus est enim homo in anima cum peccauit, quia recessit ab eo Deus, qui est uita animae.*"
[224]Bede, Homily 2.7, CCSL, 225; See also homilies 2.10, 2.16.
[225] *In genesim*, 91; TTH.48, 160.
[226] *Epistulas VII*, 287; CS.82, 164. "*Qui enim pro nobis mortem carnis indebitam reddidit nos a debita animae morte liberauit*."

> He who does not love remains in death [the passage in question]. He is speaking of the death of the soul (*mortem animae dicit*). For, *The soul that commits sin is the one that will die* [Ps 142:5 (141:6)]. The life, in truth, of the flesh is the soul, the life of the soul is God (*vita animae Deus est*); the death of the body is to lose its [life-giving] spirit, the death of the soul is to lose God (*mors est animae amittere Deum*). Hence it is clear that we are all born into this light [of life] dead in soul (*in anima mortui omnes*), deriving original sin (*peccatum originale*) from Adam, but by the grace of Christ to the faithful in giving them new life (*regenerando*) it is brought about that they can be alive in soul (*anima uiuere*).[227]

This is absolutely key to understanding *HE* 5.12. Dryhthelm is faithful before death and a monastic ascetic after resurrection, demonstrating how to be "alive in the soul". It emphasises, as *HE* 5.12 does, the need to be rigorous in one's moral conduct and committed in one's Christianity. However, it is not possible to rise from death into immortality unless one avoids the death of the soul, as argued by Augustine. By comparing these comments on Christ's resurrection miracles with the description of "death of the soul" in the *HE*, we see that Bede is taking what he has derived from scripture and applying it to an Anglo-Saxon context. Dryhthelm's resurrection signifies that the biblical miracles concerned with raising people dead in sin are happening in the current day, and were a sign that the English needed to pay heed to the condition of their souls, because they will be judged upon their immediate death and a wide-ranging moral decay could lead to a wide-ranging punishment by God. Bede's exegesis stresses that everybody who is alive at the time of the Last Judgement will be judged alongside everybody who had died in history.[228] It is unclear if this implies two judgements, because he is clear that one is judged upon dying, as illustrated in *HE* 5.12, 13, and 14. However, he may mean that one might be judged upon death only to receive greater reward after the Last Judgement – in *DTR* 71 he refers to how the faithful will experience "the more glorious perfection of eternal bliss" after the Last Judgement and resurrection – but there is also a connection with being restored to a

[227] *Epistulas VII*, 306-7; CS.82, 193.
[228] Darby, *Bede and the End of Time*, 127.

resurrected body. However, while he is looking forward toward the Last Judgement and the salvation of the English, he is also looking back and connecting Dryhthelm to "ancient times" and the earliest days of the Church.

A miracle 'like that of ancient times': Dryhthelm's vision and the connection of its contemporary concerns to the past

This section argues that Bede's reference to "ancient times" at the start of the Dryhthelm narrative is designed to connect Bede's Northumbria with the judgements of the past and to illustrate that God is not only watching the English but is actively sending them warnings of an impending judgement lest they fail to reform. It examines Bede's use of miracle accounts and how signs and visions had an eschatological dimension reflected in Gregory's *Dialogii* and the Bible. It looks at Bede's terminology and the difference between "*signa*" and "*miracula*", and what that says about Dryhthelm-era Britain in terms of conversion and spiritual weakness.

In his exegesis (and citing Gregory), Bede says miracles in the early Church were a way of watering the vine before it grew strong enough to fend for itself.[229] They were a way of catching the attention of pagans and of establishing God's power. Miracles in the *HE* tend to be clustered around a person or a place; such as Aidan (*HE* 3.17), the field where Oswald erected his cross (*HE* 3.9), the site of Alban's martyrdom (*HE* 1.8), or Chad (*HE* 4.3). This gives them more power from a literary point of view because the reader becomes aware of a series rather than an isolated incident, which may be a reflection of Bede's belief that the English need some sort of

[229] *In Marc*, 645-6, quoting Gregory, Homily 29 (CCSL, 247-8). "*Sed haec necessaria in exordio ecclesiae fuerunt, ut enim ad fidem cresceret miraculis fuerat nutrienda quia et nos cum arbusta plantamus tamdiu eius aquam fundimus quo usque ea in terra conualuisse uideamus, at si semel radicem fixerint irrigatio cessabit*."

divine intervention in order to be awakened from the death of the soul. The miracles are continuous even into his day, he writes, meaning they were ongoing signs of God's power and he could point readers toward the locations. In his *Vita Cuthberti*, Bede says the age of miracles ended because of man's sinfulness but that some holy men gained power over creation even now.[230] Gregory said the Church did now spiritually what the apostles had done physically through miracles, in that the Church worked to enhance faith.[231] However, Bede and Gregory believed miracles continued to happen. When describing earlier miracles in the *HE*, Bede says they are signs of sanctity; those of Oethelwald, hermit of Farne island, served to highlight his merits (*HE* 5.1). *HE* 5 thus opens with an Englishman of great sanctity working miracles as a reflection of his merits, and yet by *HE* 5.12 the English have declined to a state where a miracle "like that of ancient times" is required to arouse them from "the death of the soul". Indeed, of the miracles in the *HE*, more than half occur in the last two books, which concern Britain after the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons.[232] In fact the majority of the miracles in the *HE* take place in the hundred years or so before the book's publication.[233]

This puts them after the Gregorian mission to the English, making them evidence for Bede, and thus his readers, that God was actively sending signs to focus English minds on the Judgement to come, if only they would pay attention. Gregory, in *Dialogii* 4.43, said that "as the present era (*saeculum*) approaches its end, the era of eternity looms nearer, manifesting itself by ever clearer signs".[234] This must be emphasised when discussing Bede's miracle accounts. Signs were, for Bede, important reminders of the need to be morally upstanding: "when you see these things come to pass, look up and lift up your heads [Lk 21:28], that is, let

[230] Bede, *Vita Cuthberti* 21; as also noted in Colgrave, 'Bede's Miracle Stories'., 228.
[231] Gregory, Homily 29, *Homiliae in evangelia*, 247-8.
[232] Brown, *Companion*, 113.
[233] Lutterkort, 'Beda Hagiographicus': 94.
[234] SC.265, 154: "*Nam quantum praesens saeculum propinquat ad finem, tantum futurum saeculum ipsa iam quasi propinquitate tangitur et signis manifestioribus aperitur*."

your hearts rejoice".[235] And given that most of the *HE*'s miracle accounts take place following the Gregorian mission, up to the present day, this very closely parallels Gregory's statement. The miracles were tied to their conversion, so it is important to pay close attention to them because it makes the inclusion of the Dryhthelm miracle all the more important for understanding the *HE* as an apocalyptic text. They were warnings as well as signs of sanctity.

In his works, Bede puts a greater emphasis on why a miracle happened than what happened. Visions in particular had an eschatological dimension: Acts 2:17-21 had said that "in the last days … your sons and daughters shall prophesy: and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams". Bede says this passage shows that "the grace of the Holy Spirit was not to be granted, as formerly, only to individual prophets and priests, but to everyone in every place, regardless of sex, state of life, or position".[236] Darby points out that the three *HE* 5 vision narratives also fulfil the prophecy of Joel, preached by Peter in Acts:[237]

> In the last days (*in novissimis diebus*), God says; I will pour out my spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs (*signa*) on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.

This is a key prophecy because it emphasises that salvation will not be limited to a single people, but "all people", with visionary experiences not limited to ecclesiastics but people of all social standing. This is one of the key messages of the Dryhthelm vision and the three *HE* 5 visions as a unit: they are not limited to one kingdom, but all kingdoms, and represent

[235] *Exp Apoc*, 484; TTH.58, 241.
[236] *Expositio*, 18-19; CS.117, 32
[237] Darby, *Bede and the End of Time*, 209. Acts 2:17-21, Joel 2:28-32.

people of different backgrounds. The Old Testament prophecy says these will be supplemented by signs in the natural world such as eclipses, so Bede's use of the three vision narratives is designed to show his readers that ancient prophecies have partially come to pass, meaning that the rest of the prophecy must not be far behind. This emphasises the connection between contemporary Northumbria and miracles "like those of ancient times" exemplified by Dryhthelm. Bede is making the heightened sense of urgency very clear, and a discussion of his understanding of the miraculous will emphasise this.

The miraculous is important in Bede's *HE*. Miracles were a natural part of medieval history writing and theology: Gregory of Tours in his *Lives of the Martyrs* noted that if miracles did not continue to happen, then nobody would believe they had ever happened.[238] They became part of Gregory's attempt to build up the Church, a concern shared by Bede.[239] They were signs of divine intervention in the past as well as the present, but could be held up as warnings as well. They were also very real to Bede. Apart from the Dryhthelm resurrection, which took place in his lifetime, Bede says he himself was healed of a tongue malady through divine intercession while singing Cuthbert's miracles.[240] Brown points out that the phrase, "*per linguae curationem"*, can refer to a curing or guidance of the tongue, with modern scholars favouring "guidance".[241] It is worth suggesting, knowing Bede's literary abilities, that he meant both: The malady of the tongue could have been some equivalent of writer's block, for instance, or nervousness while preaching, as he would have done as an ordained priest and noted homilist. However, Bede's point is that Cuthbert was responsible for a miracle that involved him personally, which makes him a living witness to the miraculous power of God. Dryhthelm plays a

[238] Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Late Antiquity* (London, 1981), 82. Tours, *Glory of the Martyrs*.
[239] Petersen, 'Dead or Alive? The Holy Man as Healer in East and West in the Late Sixth Century': 95.
[240] In his preface to his verse *Vita Cuthberti*. As noted in Meyvaert, 'Bede the Scholar': 55.
[241] Brown, *Companion*, 81-82.

similar role in *HE* 5.12. Therefore it should be no surprise that his *HE* contains miracle stories, because not only did they have a physical effect on people but they reflected divine grace and the power of God at work in everyday life. From an eschatological point of view, this was important, because as the Bible made clear God could use his power to pass judgement as readily as to reward the righteous. This makes miracles' presence in *HE* 5 even more important, because it is the most eschatological and closest to the contemporary era.

One only had to look to the Old Testament for God's anger when his miracles went unappreciated. After the Israelites complained to Moses about marching through the desert, God says to Moses, "Am I to be always slighted by this people of mine? Will they never learn to trust in me, for all the marvellous deeds of mine they have witnessed? Enough; I will smite them with pestilence, and make an end of them; I will find a people greater and sturdier than this to march under thy leadership".[242] Faith and works worked in tandem in Bede's conception of moral reform, which is tied to his eschatology when he states that "*Mortua est enim in semet ipsa si non operibus caritatis, quibus reuiuscat animetur*".[243]And the links between the Old Testament and the present are made very clear in his exegesis. Bede, writing about Revelation, notes that "the manner of Scripture … is wont to place in the past what it knows will inevitably be fulfilled [in the future]"– this is, in a single line, the mindset we need to be aware of when analysing his commentary on scriptural history: it could foreshadow something that was to come in his day.[244] Accordingly, Bede's exegesis features many comments on divine judgement and the need for a moral, upstanding life, especially pertinent to the Dryhthelm vision.[245] So it is no surprise that the

[242] Numbers 14:11-12.
[243] *Epistulas VII*, 197; CS.82, 28-9: See Jm 20:21 and Rm 3:28.
[244] *Exp Apoc*, 427; TTH.58, 211.
[245] See, for example, Homily 2.7 on Matt 28:1-10 for Easter: "How much more blissful will be the souls of men and women equally, when, aided by heavenly grace, they have merited to triumph over death and enter into the joy of a blessed resurrection, while the condemned have been struck with trepidation and well-deserved punishment on the day of judgement."

HE features numerous depictions of and references to the judgement of the individual. This is particularly clear in *HE* 5, with its visions of the afterlife.

The miracles and other supernatural elements in the *HE* often seemed awkward for historians in previous years,[246] but are essential for understanding Bede's perception of history.[247] In Bede's history, there is not quite a miracle "on almost every page", as Bertram Colgrave, the co-editor and translator of the *HE* once said,[248] but there are certainly dozens, perhaps as many as 76.[249] This is not quite as many as in the *Dialogii* (about 118), but is more than Bede's *Vita Cuthberti* (38)[250] and is a considerable number all the same. And it is true that the last two books of the *HE*, particularly *HE* 5, contain more miracle stories than the earlier books, but stating that this represents "a step backward" does not fully understand Bede's concept of history.[251] More recent scholarship has better explored the role of miracles and exegesis in Bede's history. In the 1970s, J.T. Rosenthal argued that the increase in *HE* 5 is because by the end of *HE* 4 "all were believers"; the miracles stories were "an elevating form of gossip" to reward the faithful.[252] However, this overlooks Gregory's point that the miraculous could happen even without the faith of the beneficiary. In *Dialogii* 2.38, a mentally troubled woman who doesn't know where she is wanders into the cave of St Benedict. After sleeping there for the night she

[246] As noted, for instance, by Rex Gardner, 'Miracles of Healing in Anglo-Celtic Northumbria as Recorded by the Venerable Bede and His Contemporaries: A Reappraisal in the Light of Twentieth Century Experience', *British Medical Journal (Clinical Research Edition)* 287.6409 (1983), 1927-33; Meyvaert, 'Bede the Scholar'; Colgrave, 'Bede's Miracle Stories'.
[247] For more on Bede's understanding of miracles, see Ó Mathghamhna, 'Crisis and Reform', 60-2; McCready, *Miracles and the Venerable Bede*, passim; Eoghan Ahern, 'Bede's Miracles Reconsidered', *Early Medieval Europe* 26.3 (2018), 282-303.
[248] Colgrave, 'Bede's Miracle Stories': 201.
[249] McCready, *Miracles and the Venerable Bede*, 164. The count is disputed by Rosenthal, who puts the count at 51; McCready's distinction comes down to a definition and differentiation between miracles and miraculous events. Loomis puts the number at 52. Loomis, 'The Miracle Traditions of the Venerable Bede': 404-5. See J. T. Rosenthal, 'Bede Use of Miracles in the Ecclesiastical History', *Traditio* 31 (1975), 328-35: 329. For Bede's prose *Vita Cuthberti*, see Bertram Colgrave, *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert*, trans. Bertram Colgrave (Cambridge, 1940).
[250] Loomis, 'The Miracle Traditionns': 404.
[251] Rosenthal, 'Bede's Use of Miracles': 330, on Colgrave's assessment.
[252] Ibid., 330.

awakens to find herself cured. She did not pray for a miracle – rather, it was a sign of the potency of Benedict's relics even when not connected to his tomb.[253] Another argument against the *HE* miracles being elevating gossip is that they are reminders of divine power at a time when the end of the world is approaching.

Bede's general terminology is interesting.[254] Brown says that "miracles [in Bede's work] are not demonstrations of force or magic; Bede usually calls them *signa* as in the Bible … not *miracula*, for they are indications, signs of an inner meaning, not marvellous fireworks. They encourage, enrich, and confirm those who already have faith."[255] Dryhthelm's vision, for instance, is described as a miracle ("*his temporibus miraculum memorabile et antiquorum simile in Brittania factum est"*). Augustine, in *De doctrina Christiana*, wrote that a sign "is a thing which of itself makes some other thing come to mind, besides the impression that it presents to the senses"; this could be a footprint calling to mind an animal, or smoke calling to mind a fire.[256] Augustine's argument was mainly concerned with the interpretation of scripture, but Bede frequently uses the word "*signa"* when he could just as easily have used "*miracula"*, suggesting that he considers miraculous events to be tools for understanding greater lessons, such as those concerning the fate of the soul.[257] Augustine had argued that wonders had become small in esteem because of familiarity.[258] This sense of ennui meant everyday miracles needed to be supplemented by spectacular ones but those who carried them out in the current day still relied on Jesus for the power.[259] So they were demonstrations of divine

[253] SC.260, 246-48. Straw, *Perfection in Imperfection*, 57.
[254] For a discussion of the terminology, see Ahern, 'Bede's Miracles Reconsidered', esp 283-86.
[255] Brown, *Companion*, 113.
[256] *DCD* 2.2: "*Signum est enim res praeter speciem, quam ingerit sensibus, aliud aliquid ex se faciens in cogitationem uenire*" (CCSL.32, 32).
[257] Ward, *The Venerable Bede*, 71-2; Brown, *Bede the Venerable*, 95.
[258] Augustine, Letter 137.10.
[259] Michael Jackson, 'Miracles and 'Spiritual Correctness' in the Theology of St Augustine', *Studia Patristica* XXXVIII (2001), 184-9: 185-7.

power rather than an individual's, and Bede understood them in the same light.

Gregory, upon hearing that his missionary to the English, Augustine of Canterbury (d. AD604), had been working miracles, wrote to the bishop to remind him to stay humble and to point out that the miraculous works meant "the souls of the English are drawn by outward miracles to inward grace" (*HE* 1.31).[260] These were "outward deeds which you perform through the Lord's power". Bede, who had studied the natural world, points out that it is only when events happen outside of their right place or season that they are called portents or signs.[261] Thus, the miraculous was an event outside the natural run of events and so the reader should pay close attention to it (the resurrection of a dead man would certainly count as such). The Gospel of Mark associates preaching with signs – "And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working within them, and confirming the word by signs following" (Mark 16:20).[262] This is essentially the argument in *HE* 1.31; the miraculous was proof of God's power and was designed to ensure the onlooker's attention was caught and held, both on a literal and intellectual level. The same thinking lies behind Bede's approach to the Dryhthelm miracle, in that it is designed to draw English hearts back to God, achieving inward grace by an outward miracle. This, Bede says, was what Christ had done through his miracles, which Bede says brought people out of *mors animae*.

Wallace-Hadrill has argued that the reference to "like that of ancient times" means that the resurrection miracle is "of a conventional kind" – that it is part of an established tradition of tales of the afterlife.[263] Bede, however, uses a similar phrase in his discussion of the Temple, stating that "the just of ancient times (*antiqui*) awaited with much patience and

[260] "*Gaudeas uidelicet, quia Anglorum animae per exteriora miracula ad interiorem gratiam pertrahuntur*".
[261] See his reference to storms in *DNR*, 223.
[262] *Exp Apoc*, 281; TTH.58, 131.
[263] Wallace-Hadrill, *Historical Commentary*, 185.

forbearance the time when the Lord would appear in the flesh".[264] By this he means the Jews, but the point is that he is connecting "ancient times" with biblical times. This reinforces the argument that the Bede is connecting the resurrection of Dryhthelm with biblical miracles, and therefore associating eighth-century Britain with the conditions of the early Church.

It is also worth comparing the statement to that of Peter in *Dialogii* when, after hearing of the prior Nonnosus working miracles, he says "We have, as I perceive now, miracles after the imitation of old saints".[265] The miracles of Nonnosus happened nearby and were of recent memory, and as far as Peter was concerned they represented the works of days gone by being carried out in the present. Gregory follows Peter's statement by outlining how Nonnosus worked a miracle similar to one of the prophet Elisha by praying over a small quantity of oil (for anointing) which the next day had filled the monks' vessels. This recalls 2 Kings 4 1-7, where a woman in debt seeks Elisha's aid and he multiplies the small amount of oil she has until it is enough to pay her debts and allow her family a living. Gregory is therefore calling attention to how miracles of the biblical past could be worked in the present day, which for him would symbolise the ongoing force of God in human events and history.

Bede takes a similar approach in the *HE*. He wrote that things which "often happened in days gone by … could happen in our time too through the help of the Lord, who has promised to be with us even to the end of this age (*in finem saeculi*)" (*HE* 4.19). He is specifically referring to Queen Aethelthryth maintaining her virginity in marriage, but he says her body was miraculously left incorrupt sixteen years after burial as a testament to this. She is held up as an example par excellence of asceticism and devotion, who was granted the gift of prophecy and whose relics continue to heal people to the present day. Bede includes the account as an example

[264] *De Templo*, 162; TTH, 24.
[265] SC.260, 64-70. As noted in Rabin, 'Testimony and Conversion': 393.

of how staunch faith and good Christian practice are present among the English as reminders of how God blessed them when they committed to their religion. It is consciously recalled as a contrast to the decline of the present day, much as Dryhthelm is. Late Antique and patristic authors considered miracles of the earliest Christian period as tools to win over sceptics or to inspire people to consider how powerful the Christian deity must be if he could offer his followers such abilities. Bede's writings show he understood "ancient" to apply not only to pre-Christian sources such as Pliny but the early Church Fathers as well (his sources go back to the likes of Tertullian in the second century). Bede combines pre-Christian and Christian as "ancient" when referring to the "ancient documents" which helped him writing the *HE* (*HE* 5.24). This reinforces the argument that the Dryhthelm account is a reference to biblical miracles and their accompanying spiritual significance.[266]

Unlike most early Christian and medieval examples, no saint or holy man raises Dryhthelm from the dead: Bede simply says "*resurrexit*" (he/she/it was resurrected). Dryhthelm himself says he "suddenly found [himself], by what means I know not, alive and in the world of men"; the agent of his resurrection is hidden even from himself.[267] Peter Brown wrote that holy men were responsible for making a distant God "relevant to the particularity of human needs", with miracles forming part of this demonstration.[268] Bede needed to highlight this, because it showed God's active work in the world and how that work could affect the English. Augustine had written that all miracles, whether by angels or other means, provided they are wrought to commend the worship of God, were examples of God at work.[269] Bede is thus emphasising the divine aspect of

[266] For Pliny as ancient see Holder, 'Introduction': 29.
[267] "*Nec tamen aliquid ductorem meum rogare audebam; sed inter haec nescio quo ordine repente me inter homines uiuere cerno*."
[268] Peter Brown, 'The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity', *The Journal of Roman Studies* 61 (1971), 80-101: 97.
[269] *DCD* 10.12, 286-7.

the miracle – with no holy man involved there could be no disputing who was responsible.

We can see that all of Bede's eschatological thought is channelled through the vision of Dryhthelm and its account not only of the afterlife but of Dryhthelm's transformation as a Christian. However, there are other important afterlife visions in the *HE* that deserve discussion, because they show the traditions that are at play in the Dryhthelm account, as well as how Bede tied multiple strands of eschatological discourse in the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms to show how each was applicable to every kingdom. These include two Anglo-Saxon visions following that of Dryhthelm, and the vision of a monk at Wenlock. All of these speak to the idea of witness and how, for Bede, it was important that the reality of judgement after death be spelled out for each living Anglo-Saxon. Each account shows the milieu in which Bede was working and highlights the importance of Dryhthelm as an eschatological and pastoral figure, the importance of bearing witness to these revelations, as well as the structure of *HE* 5.

The Dryhthelm narrative and how it compares to other otherworld visions in the *HE* and those circulating in Bede's era

This section argues that the Dryhthelm narrative is considerably different from the other otherworld visions in the *HE*, but that taken as a whole they are designed to reinforce the concept of immediate judgement upon death and the proof of it, divine warnings, and also the possibility of redemption if reform is embraced. It argues that the visionaries in some cases are presented as witnesses because that reinforces not only the message but the reality of that message. The visions include that of Fursa but also, importantly, the two visions of judgement immediately after the Dryhthelm account, which are also strongly connected to Bede's exegesis.

Even Dryhthelm's body after resurrection is described as a witness to the events: "until the day of his death, he lived a life of such penance of mind and body that even if he had kept silence, his life would have declared that he had seen many things to be dreaded or desired which had been hidden from other men".[270] Dread, in Bede's eyes, is a good thing, because it causes the faithful to contemplate their bad deeds and fear that they "will undergo eternal punishments for them … When dread has been worn away by the long anxiety of sadness, a certain security is born concerning the anticipation of pardon, and the intellect is inflamed with the love of heavenly joys."[271] Everyday sins ("*peccata cotidianis*") could be washed away with tears and prayers.[272] So in the context of *HE* 5, the reader is filled with a sense of dread but can realise that as time progresses, as it does in the *HE* narrative, the prospect of heaven is also nearer, even if that also brings with it the warnings of judgement. Bede uses the Dryhthelm vision to provoke a sense of fear in the reader which will in time give way to an appreciation of spiritual reward provided one is earnest about seeking it. The fact that Dryhthelm is a real person whose existence and experience can be verified by people who are still living adds to this sense of veracity and awe, because he is therefore not a tall tale but rather an edifying Englishman. But Dryhthelm's is not the only body that becomes a living witness to the afterlife in the *HE*.

The Irish missionary Fursa (also known as Fursey, d.AD649), who preached to the East Anglians in the 630s, was known for his trance-like vision experiences. The *vita* to which Bede had access contains four visions, which its translator Oliver Rackham says came at key times in Fursa's life and dealt more with the failure of Christian practice, particularly among

[270] "*et ibi usque ad diem mortis in tanta mentis et corporis contritione durauit, ut multa illum, quae alios laterent, uel horrenda uel desideranda uidisse, etiamsi lingua sileret, uita loqueretur*".
[271] Bede, Homily 1.18. *Homeliarum*, 132.
[272] *De tab*, 132; TTH.18, 154.

leaders, than with approaches to converting pagans.[273] In one, he is encouraged to maintain his preaching, because his guide says "death was certain but the hour of death uncertain, as the Lord said, 'Watch, therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour' [Matt 25:13]" (*HE* 3.19); this approach to the end of time is close to Bede's heart, as we have seen. Fursa is one of the earliest Western visionaries, and his journey to the otherworld, related in Bede's *HE*, went on to influence wider ideas concerning purgatory and judgement.[274] Much of the Fursa *vita* would have been useful for Bede's purposes, for example when the angels tell Fursa "that the end of creation indeed is not yet as it were at hand, but the human race is to be vexed with famine and deadly pestilence", with the famine consisting of an "abundance of wisdom" yet not following the word of God, as well as "hardness of mind in abundance of riches".[275] It reflects a warning by Bede that there had been so many tumults in his day that the outcome of "these favourable times of peace and prosperity" (*HE* 5.23) would be left to a later generation to discover. It is not surprising then that he emphasises the physical reminders of divine judgement though the bodies of people like Dryhthelm and Fursa.

In one vision, Fursa encounters and is burned by the soul of a man whom he knew in life, a sinner from whom Fursa had accepted a gift. Fursa's jaw is scarred as punishment for accepting the man's robe, illustrating to the audience that even consorting with sinners and the unwholesome can have dire consequences. As Bede remarks: "When Fursa had been restored to his body, he bore for the rest of his life the marks of the burns which he had suffered while a disembodied spirit; they were

[273] Oliver Rackham, *Transitus Beati Fursei: A Translation of the 8th Century Manuscript* (Norwich, 2007), vi.
[274] M Dunn, 'Gregory the Great, the Vision of Fursey and the Origins of Purgatory', *Peritia* 14 (2001), 238-54; Marilyn Dunn, *The Vision of St Fursey and the Development of Purgatory* (Norwich, 2007).
[275] Rackham, *Transitus Beati Fursei*, 31.

visible to all on his shoulder and his jaw. It is marvellous to think that what he suffered secretly as a disembodied spirit showed openly on his flesh."[276]

Fursa's vision is not the only time that Bede makes a connection between consorting with sinners and punishment in this life. He says King Sigeberht of the East Saxons was murdered by kinsmen for being too forgiving, although "by this innocent death a real offence was punished": dining with a man excommunicated for an unlawful marriage (*HE* 3.22). Bede's lesson is one of sin and the real consequences that can accompany it, with the implication that one should avoid sin and repent as soon as possible in case they similarly suffer or are scarred. When the man touches Fursa in the otherworld, he leaves traces in the temporal world: therefore, anybody who meets or questions Fursa about his experiences can clearly see the evidence of the journey. Similarly, Dryhthelm's standing in the river is evidence that he has endured something potentially far worse. Also similarly, Bishop Laurence, when contemplating leaving Britain at a time of war, is "scourged ... hard and long" by St Peter himself, and his wounds "for the sake of salvation" cause such wonder and terror in the king that he bans idolatry (*HE* 2.6). This would also seem to have some correlation with the teachings of *Dialogii*, in which Gregory notes that "each one will be presented to the Judge exactly as he was when he departed this life" (*Dialogii* 4.41) and that, although there is forgiveness in both this life and the next, in the world to come nobody will be cleansed of even the slightest faults unless they deserve it for having done good works in this life.[277]

If "each one" goes to the Last Judgement "exactly as he was when he departed this life" then they would have no time to atone or reform, which is exactly the point Bede is trying to hammer home in *HE* 5. This is also why the reference in *HE* 5.12 to being freed from bonds ("I have

[276] "*Qui postmodum in corpore restitutus, omni uitae suae tempore signum incendii, quod in anima pertulit, uisibile cunctis in humero maxillaque portauit; mirumque in modum, quid anima in occulto passa sit, caro palam praemonstrabat*."
[277] SC.265, 148-50.

indeed risen from death which held me in its bonds") is so interesting – it carries with it a long biblical and patristic tradition concerning the efficacy of prayers and good works in the here and now for the sake of future reward. It is also proof for Bede's readers that actions in the present life can have lasting effects in any future life, which in turn would motivate them to embrace moral reform so any prayers of their descendants and families could help their souls reach heaven.

The three accounts of such intervention cited above – from Acts, Bede, and Gregory – all show that prayers can benefit the living. Bede's and Gregory's are different in that they argue that the intercession of the living can aid the dead (even if Imma is not actually dead, the prayers are intended to benefit a dead man). Dryhthelm is told regarding the souls in the valley that "the prayers of those still alive, their alms and fastings and especially the celebration of masses, help many of them to get free even before the day of judgement". However, we can argue that the Imma and *Dialogii* accounts fall under the heading of miracles because they refer to supernatural events taking place in the temporal world. Dryhthelm serves to show that temporal activities can have an influence in the spiritual world, which would have been vital for Bede and his eschatological mindset: It was vital encouragement for the English to conform to morally upright religious practice, as it would benefit not only those living but their ancestors in the afterlife. It should also be considered that the Imma and *Dialogii* accounts of being set free from the chains of sin through masses and fasts may well reflect Gregory's statement that miracles and signs would occur as the end days approached, because it meant a crossing over of the present world and the world to come. And this crossover, as has been seen, was considered by Gregory to be a sign that the end was coming, which for Bede would have made the drive for moral reform all the more important. So it is no surprise then that he includes a number of contemporary visions to emphasise his argument that the contemporary English need to be conscious that the end was coming.

Although there are other visions in the *HE*, particularly of the soul of a saint being taken up to heaven (*HE* 3.8, 4.3, 4.9, 4.23; cf *Vita Cuthberti* 4), the fundamental difference with the *HE* 5 visions (*HE* 5.12-14) is that they include glimpses of hell given to English people of different social classes. Darby notes that the pan-class approach of the three vision narratives is paralleled in Bede's *De die iudicii*, where crowds from "everywhere" ("*undique*") will be called to the Last Judgement by God.[278] The emphasis in the poem is on the universal nature of judgement at the end of time, even if in the *HE* Bede is applying such teaching to a local context. One previous vision, that of Bishop Chad in *HE* 4.3, is a visitation by an angel to tell him he will be taken to heaven in seven days; elsewhere, Caedmon prepares peacefully for death as if he had foreknowledge of his death (*HE* 4.24). Both of these latter examples illustrate that the English were able to reach heaven directly. However, these accounts both refer to consecrated individuals. The *HE* 5 visions though suggest to the reader that all classes are to benefit from the narratives, because the same punishments apply to all parts of society. They teach in particular that hell is a very real place and should be feared. However, the Dryhthelm account must be taken as part of a vision triad, as it is followed by two other chapters regarding visions. This is a structural device to emphasise Bede's pastoral eschatology and promote moral reform and spiritual regeneration across all parts of Northumbrian society. These following vision chapters are short and do not contain the same level of exegesis as with Dryhthelm, but Bede makes sure their meanings are clear and that they contribute to the inward reflection and moral reform of the reader.

In the second (*HE* 5.13), a soldier is on the verge of death but has so far refused to confess his sins, despite having been urged to do so for some time by King Cenred (fl.AD704-9) "before sudden death robbed him of all opportunity of repentance and amendment". The soldier had in life

[278] Darby, 'Apocalypse and Reform', 86.

"pleased the king by his outward industry, [but] displeased him by his inward negligence".[279] When ill, he tells the king he will repent later when he feels stronger, in case people think he only did it because he was sick and afraid of dying. He is visited by two sets of messengers at his bedside, and presented in turn with two ledgers, one small white one recording his good deeds, and an "enormous" black one recording his evil ones, even his thoughts. After his vision, he tells the king there is no point in trying to encourage him to repent, because the "evil spirits with horrible faces" who had brought the black book had inserted daggers into him and he would die as soon as they met.

Much as with the Dryhthelm narrative, Bede also takes time to explain the narrative's meaning: "it is clear, as the blessed Pope Gregory writes about certain people [*Dialogii* 4.40], that he saw his vision not for his own benefit, because it did not profit him, but for the sake of others; so that they, hearing his fate, may fear to put off their time of repentance while they still have the opportunity, and not be cut off by sudden death and die impenitent".[280] It recalls the statement in Isaiah 59:2, of which Bede would have been aware, that "sin of yours has come between you and your God; guilt of yours has estranged him that he denies you audience" – in effect, one is responsible for meeting or not meeting God after death based on the character of their life. But it is also the case that good works can overshadow bad ones: Bede says the man had done good in his youth but his later life had obscured it, though repentance would have led to him "hiding [evil deeds] from God's eyes by well-doing", allowing him into heaven. However, "because he failed to submit for a brief spell to the penance which would have brought him the fruit of pardon", he is

[279] "*sed quantum pro industria exteriori regi placens, tantum pro interna suimet neglegentia displicens*".
[280] "*De quo constat, quia, sicut beatus papa Gregorius de quibusdam scribit, non pro se ista, cui non profuere, sed pro aliis uiderit, qui eius interitum cognoscentes differre tempus paenitentiae, dum uacat, timerent, ne inprouiso mortis articulo praeuenti, inpaenitentes perirent.*"

condemned.[281] Compare this to how the souls in the valley, although seeming miserable to Dryhthelm, will get to heaven on judgement day because they made confession while on their deathbeds. Compare this also to how Dryhthelm immediately sets about living "in a very different way" from his previous life, and takes to monasticism because it allows him time for penance and contemplation on the life to come. Dryhthelm's is an extreme case, and Bede is illustrating with the soldier's account that moral reform and entering the correct spiritual condition before judgement can be done with a reasonable, and perfectly achievable effort. It is worth considering in his note regarding Ps 144 here: "The Lord keeps all them that love him: but all the wicked he will destroy. He associates cowards with those who doubt, because he who lacks confidence in the victor's prize fears to engage in the peril of the contest."[282] The soldier lacks enough faith to reform himself spiritually while alive, whereas Dryhthelm commits himself entirely to inner reform because he has internalised the message about what awaits him in the afterlife.

The soldier's account contains another of the rare first-person references by Bede, "I thought I ought to tell this story simply, just as I learned from the venerable Bishop Pehthelm [d.AD736], for the benefit of those who read or hear it", which again is Bede calling attention to himself as compiler and editor. Interestingly, angels keep a record of good and bad deeds in the *Visio Sancti Pauli* as well, as is the case in apocryphal apocalypses like 1 Enoch, 2 Enoch, and Zephaniah.[283] However, the concept is rooted in scripture: in Exodus 32:32-33 God tells Moses that he will strike from his book those who have sinned against him. Bede is therefore applying scripture to English events and demonstrating that the soldier is

[281] "*At contra, faber iste tenebrosae mentis et actionis, inminente morte, uidit aperta tartara, uidit damnationem diaboli et sequacium eius; uidit etiam suum infelix inter tales carcerem, quo miserabilius ipse desperata salute periret, sed uiuentibus, qui haec cognouissent, causam salutis sua perditione relinqueret.*"
[282] *Exp Apoc*, 523; CS.82, 262.
[283] Hilhorst, 'Previous History and Afterlife': 9.

exemplifying this divine prophecy and is being struck from the Lord's book, with all the horror that implies.

There is an implied connection here to Bede's early exegesis. In *Exp Apoc*, he makes no mention of the idea that a soul will be judged on death, which is clearly the case with Dryhthelm's vision; instead, he writes that all souls will be judged at the end of time. The passage (20:13-15) reads: "And I saw the dead, great and small, standing in the presence of the throne, and books were opened, and another book was opened, which is the book of life, and the dead were judged by the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds … and whoever was not found written in the book of life [was sent into the pool of fire]." Bede, quoting Tyconius, says that "the book of life" means "the memory of our deeds" and "the consciences of each individual, and their deeds made manifest".[284] This is all presented as happening at the end of time. There is no sense that the people in question are just those who were alive at the time of the Second Coming, with their ancestors having had some indication of their ultimate fate. So those who have died and been judged previously will also face the Last Judgement, much like Dryhthelm. But compare it to the nobleman in *HE* 5.13. He is shown books containing his good and bad deeds, with the bad far outweighing the good and thus condemning him to hell. There is no indication that he is going to one of the waiting places in the Dryhthelm narrative; Bede says he "suffers everlasting and fruitless punishment", with the tense making it clear that the soldier is suffering as Bede writes, not that he will be suffering at some future point after Jesus has returned. It is also "fruitless", meaning it is not some sort of chastening but true punishment – it is not analogous to the idea in Gregorian and Bedan works that tears or mourning lead to purification, for instance. The books in *HE* 5.13 then are evidently a reference to the judgement depicted in Rev 20:13, although Bede does not call direct attention to it. Wallis notes it in her introduction to

[284] *Exp Apoc* 515; TTH.58, 258-9. "*Librum uitae uniuscuiusque memoriam dicit gestorum nostrorum, non quod librum habeat commemoratorium occultorum cognitor*."

his Revelation commentary and Plummer also suggests a parallel with the *Visio Sancti Pauli* in which an angel presents a document containing the sins of an individual who is pleading for mercy.[285] It is another example of how deeply connected the *HE*'s eschatology is to Bede's scriptural works.

The soldier's tale is very much a tale of punishment, because not only does he see his place in hell, but he does not receive the eucharist before death and he is buried away from the rest of the monks, without masses or prayers said for him. The eucharist is of particular importance. As well as being the body of Christ, it was an important public part of religious ritual and the care of the deathly ill. The eucharist has a special relevance in Gregory's *Dialogii*, where it is used in prayers for sinful nuns and is placed on an invalid's tongue to heal him.[286] It was essential in Gregory's conception of the universe. As Straw describes it, it "is the most potent form of mediation because it symbolises a healing of all the divisions caused by the Fall [of man from Eden] … The Eucharist becomes the pivotal point of cosmic rest".[287] It was the point where human and divine met on a daily basis through the mass. We see then how Bede would have seen the soldier's refusal to take the eucharist as spiritually lethal. We have already seen how prayers and masses could be positive intercessions for the dead, but in this case the soldier seems to be culpable in his own fate (regardless of sins), saying "there is no time now for me to change my way of life, since I have already myself seen judgement passed upon me". Rather than using the vision as a motivator to at least try to atone for some of his past actions, he gives up.

However, there is a suggestion that he could have been saved, because when he falls ill the king visits him and urges him to make a confession – this is a key reference, because Bede is presenting it as

[285] Wallis, 'Revelation Introduction': 83; Wallace-Hadrill, *Historical Commentary*, 186; 'Visio Pauli': 627.
[286] SC.260, 268.
[287] Straw, *Perfection in Imperfection*, 104-6.

example of what a Christian English king should do in attempting to defend his people spiritually. This somewhat mirrors the death rituals of sixth-century Europe which looked toward the return of physical health while being also concerned with spiritual condition, with sickness held as a reminder to think more about the spiritual life than the temporal one – and if death was near the main goal was to ensure the eucharist was received by the sick person.[288] Bede describes God as a physician in his poem on judgement, a "*medicus*" capable of spiritual cleansing.[289] Bede had also associated spiritual and physical health: "Many persons on account of sins committed in the soul (*peccata in anima*) are struck with sickness or even death of the body" – with major sins described as "leprosy" (this had a broad definition in the medieval period), implying they can bring about severe physical as well as spiritual damage.[290] The Mercian soldier, however, refuses to make a confession until he is well again; "he imagined that he was speaking brave words but, as was afterwards apparent, he had been miserably deceived by the wiles of the devil". In this narrative, it is the soldier's decision not to attempt repentance, and he suffers damnation because of it – even when he had time to atone for his sins he would not, proving Bede's argument that failure to reform oneself in the present could have dire spiritual consequences in the immediate future. Interestingly, in the *Visio Sancti Pauli* God tells one soul he is only interested in his sins in the five years leading up to death, which suggests a wider thematic interest that the activities later in life could eclipse any wrong deeds in the more distant past.[291]

Bede too is very much putting the emphasis on actions in the present and how these can have spiritual benefits – in effect he is showing how English history has taught them what happens to sinners who do not

[288] Frederick S. Paxton, *Christianizing Death: The Creation of a Ritual Process in Early Medieval Europe* (Ithaca and London, 1990), 45.
[289] Darby, 'Apocalypse and Reform', 88.
[290] *Epistulas VII*, 221-2; CS.82, 62-3.
[291] 'Visio Pauli': 627.

atone. The soldier's narrative is in effect a case study that follows on from Bede's statement in *HE* 5.13 that some visions are sent to inspire people to repent lest death come suddenly. As with the soldier's vision, it also emphasises that it is up to every individual whether or not they wish to be morally upright; as Bede notes, "it happened to him as people say, that he who is not willing to enter the church gate humbly of his own accord, is bound to be carried against his will to the gates of hell, a damned soul". As the Dryhthelm and soldier account had emphasised previously, the actions of daily life influence the outcome in the afterlife.

The account is also interesting because of its geography: It takes place in Mercia. Mercia was Northumbria's great rival, and Mercian kings had killed some of Northumbria's most heralded rulers, such as Edwin and Oswald. However, this vision's inclusion in the *HE* suggests that the message the narrative conveyed fulfilled Bede's purpose, likely because it was very easy for him to make the connection between somebody not repenting and going to hell, while also stressing the need for the individual to get their spiritual house in order immediately rather than risk sudden death and being judged unworthy of heaven. It showed the universality of judgement and also its being passed in all kingdoms, not just in northern Britain but other English kingdoms such as Kent. It also stresses the importance of lay pastoral figures, such as kings, taking an active interest in the spiritual wellbeing of their people. In the context of the overall *HE*, it also shows vision narratives and miracles are not limited to the more documented kingdoms, Northumbria and Kent. Rather, they are occurring across the island of Britain at roughly the same time. And the subsequent vision also takes place at the same time – Bede says it "happened lately in the kingdom of Bernicia", one of the constituent parts of Northumbria.

The third account (*HE* 5.14) is also remarkable in that it is a narrative from Bede himself: "I myself knew a brother, and I would that I had not known him, whose name I could mention if it were any use. He

himself belonged to a noble monastery but lived an ignoble life." He avoids church services, which are a pillar of monastic life, and is "much addicted to drunkenness and the other pleasures of a loose life". Readers of the *Epistola* and Bede's commentary on Ezra would pick up on this description. His is very much a tale of punishment, because not only does he see his place in hell, but he does not receive the eucharist before death and he is buried away from the rest of the monks, without masses or prayers said for him. This is not only a physical removal from the community but a spiritual sundering, showing that he is at risk (and probably now fated to) the "second death". It is one man standing as a case study of a wider issue, lukewarm Christians – or the Britons – in a supposedly Christian kingdom.

It has been seen how prayers and masses could be positive intercessions for the dead, but in this case, perhaps because he says himself that "there is no time now for me to change my way of life, since I have already myself seen judgement passed upon me". However, there is a suggestion that he could have been saved, because when he falls ill and tells his brethren that he sees the place of punishment awaiting him, his colleagues urge him to repent. It was his decision not to attempt repentance, and he dies immediately after saying he believes there is no time for him to amend his life. It is actually a case study that follows on from Bede's statement in *HE* 5.13 that some visions are sent to inspire people to repent lest death come suddenly. Bede also stresses that this particular vision had had a positive pastoral effect: "The story spread far and wide and rouse many people to do penance for their sins without delay. And may the reading of this account of ours have the same effect!" It is clear that Bede hopes the Dryhthelm vision will have the same effect. As with the soldier's vision, that of the monk also emphasises that it is up to every individual whether or not they wish to be morally upright; as Bede notes, "it happened to him as people say, that he who is not willing to enter the church gate humbly of his own accord, is bound to be carried against his will to the gates of hell, a damned soul". As the Dryhthelm and soldier

account had emphasised, the actions of daily life influence the outcome in the afterlife. This is a natural progression from Dryhthelm, who saw what all Englishmen will face upon death, to the soldier who saw his good and bad deeds noted in ledgers, to monastic corruption, a theme which drives Bede's *Epistola*. In fact the unnamed monk is a singular representation of the corruption castigated in the *Epistola* and which causes the ruin of Coldingham. Taken as a whole, the three visions show that judgement applies equally to all social classes: lay man, soldier, and ecclesiastic. However, Bede's inclusion of them and placement of them one after the other forms part of his didactic eschatology, in that he is being relentless in proving his case that judgement is very real and will happen at the immediate moment of death. They are also evidence that God is giving glimpses of the afterlife to all English kingdoms as well, emphasising the fact that judgement affects all peoples.

However, there is another eschatological clue in the chapter after the visions, which concerns Abbot Adomnán of Iona's efforts to bring the island monastery into line with the Roman Easter.

Again, Bede says this occurred at about the same time as the monk's vision. Adomnán (d.AD704), the abbot of Iona and author of the *Vita Columbae*, while on a visit to Northumbria "was earnestly advised by many who were better instructed than himself that he, in company of a very small band of followers, *living in the remotest corner of the world* [my emphasis], should not presume to go against the universal custom of the church in the manner of keeping Easter" (*HE* 5.15). He brings most of Ireland into line, though Iona holds out until after his death. However, this is an important signifier of wider Christian unity across Britain and Ireland, and the conversion of Iona to the Easter calculation "offers a foretaste of the unity to come at the end of time when Jew and Gentile alike join

together".[292] This should be considered in the light of Matt 24:14 and the idea that the consummation will come after the gospel is preached to the "whole world". Ireland and Britain were the most remote parts of the inhabited world, so an island off those islands would be considered more remote still. Therefore, because Bede draws specific attention to the remoteness of the island, his signifier that Iona is about to come into communion regarding the Easter calculation can be interpreted as an important eschatological reminder that the ends of the Earth and end of time were interlinked. This paschal harmony was one more element of the faith being preached to all islands.

Bede also stresses that it is his opinion that including details of the Holy Land "will be useful to readers" of his *Historia*.[293] When read in the context of the previous three chapters, which all concern visions of the afterlife, and in the context of the chapter after (*HE* 5.16), which is about the Holy Land, we can see a very deliberate structure and the influence of eschatology on the formation of *HE* 5. An enlightened English reader, understanding that the miracles of ancient times and visions of the afterlife were happening in the present day in their own country, could not help but be struck by the immediate references to Christian unity and Jerusalem, which was allegorically seen as the Church and the city of God in heaven.[294] Bede wrote that the Jerusalem above was "the mother of us all" ("*mater omnium nostrum*").[295] This would emphasise Bede's overall intention of inspiring moral reform ahead of the apocalypse, because if the English failed to purify themselves spiritually then they would be left outside the heavenly Jerusalem. This may explain why Dryhthelm's vision is the first of the three, because it contains examples of purgation as well as

[292] Scully, 'Introduction': 37.
[293] "I think that it will be useful to readers to make some extracts and put them into this History": "*De cuius scriptis aliqua decerpere, ac nostrae huic historiae inserere commodum fore legentibus reor.*"
[294] For a full study see R. Aist, *From Topography to Text: The Image of Jerusalem in the Writings of Eucherius, Adomnán and Bede* (Turnhout, forthcoming). This was in preparation as the present thesis was completed.
[295] *In genesim*, 239, quoting Gal 4:22-26. See chapter three, below.

statements about what can cause a soul to be left in a valley of fire or a field outside heaven.

The vision narrative is compelling and detailed, but it was not definitive. It was noted by Carroll that Bede only ever gives an incomplete picture of judgement, and that his ideas are somewhat confused.[296] This is not surprising, as there were many portrayals of judgement in biblical and patristic writings, with apocryphal vision texts such as Peter and Paul only obscuring the matter further. There was no single definitive teaching on the specifics of judgement in Bede's era, nor indeed was there one view of how the Judgement would be passed. It was, as Palmer puts it, a "disunited intellectual landscape", one in which Bede wrote argumentatively in order to persuade a "heterogenous" intellectual world.[297] But then, Bede would have argued that the matter was up to God anyway and each sinner would be punished according to the measure of his or her sins. However, the fact that the *HE* is one of his last works would suggest that the views he puts forward in it are the views he held toward the end of his life, so they are as close to a complete Bedan picture as we can come. By looking at the traditions in which he was working we can gain a clearer idea of what mental processes and concepts he is bringing to bear on the vision of Dryhthelm, thus sharpening his audience's understanding of the afterlife and the steps it would have to take to ensure it arrives in heaven, or at least the meadow outside it.

In his commentary on the Temple (finished c.731AD) he says "we are unclean on account of the death of our soul" but suggests that the blood of Jesus has helped to cleanse humanity.[298] That the *HE*, written about the same time as *De templo*, does not make suffering explicit against the backdrop of "the death of the soul" tells us that Bede either did not want to

[296] Carroll, *Venerable Bede*, 176-7.
[297] James T Palmer, 'The Ends and Futures of Bede's De Temporum Ratione', *Bede and the Future*, 139-60: 140-46.
[298] *De templo*, 158: "*Ubi nos apertissime designati sumus qui immundi super morte animae nostrae, et procul adhuc positi a populo Dei*."

burden what he hoped would include a secular audience – and that the *HE* is dedicated to King Ceolwulf suggests this – by debating theological fine points, or, more likely, that he felt it was more practical to ensure his audience was encouraged and exhorted toward moral reform rather than being threatened into doing so. While the time of Theodore of Tarsus (d.AD690) may have been a golden era – "for having such brave Christian kings, [the English] were a terror to all the barbarian nations, and the desires of all men were set on the joys of the heavenly kingdom (*HE* 4.2)" – as a strong military supported a growing Church, a situation Bede hopes will come about again, Bede would have read in Gregory's letters that potential converts were not to be threatened, but rather guided by example. The message of eternal punishment was terrifying enough in Bede's mind. As a teacher, he would likely have found that a lesson sinks in more effectively when the student has to make some of the connections. Augustine wrote that "no one disputes that it is much more pleasant to learn lessons presented through imagery, and much more rewarding to discover meanings that are won only with difficulty".[299]

The content and structure of the Dryhthelm narrative, followed as it was by two further accounts of damnation from his era, applicable to people of different social classes and kingdoms, suggests that it contains the exact messages Bede believes are the most appropriate for his people in the context of their time and location. This becomes apparent when we compare it to another Anglo-Saxon vision narrative which was in circulation at about the same time: that of a monk at Wenlock.[300] It has similarities to Dryhthelm's account, such as a resurrection following a journey to the afterlife, and indeed Foot, citing Carozzi, suggests the author was familiar with Bede's narrative. However, there are important differences which show that Bede's Dryhthelm narrative more closely

[299] *DCD*, 2.13.
[300] Emerton, *Letters of Boniface*, letter 2, p3-9.

articulates his own eschatology.[301] We can argue therefore that Dryhthelm was more suitable to include this account which was in keeping with his own style rather than turning to accounts which were circulating in his era.

The Wenlock vision – an important vision of the afterlife circulating as the Dryhthelm narrative was written

This section argues the vision of a monk at Wenlock includes much of the same theological and eschatological thought as that of Dryhthelm, but that Bede's Dryhthelm account differs in key respects which more closely reflect his exegesis, suggesting he found that Dryhthelm more suitable as a vehicle for his contemporary concerns.

The vision is contained in a letter by Boniface, the West Saxon bishop born between AD675 and 680 and martyred in 755 by pagan Frisians.[302] The date of the vision account is uncertain, but Boniface's letter is from AD716 or 717. In the letter, from the 730s, he writes that he was asked by an Eadburg to retell the vision account he had learned from the abbess Hildelith. Hildelith was an abbess in Barking, Essex,[303] who governed a foundation that Bede praises in *HE* 4.7-11, where he says that "many signs and miracles were performed" and that accounts of these events "are in the possession of many people" (*HE* 4.7). Bede's extracts in the *HE*, which concern miraculous events, are taken from a work assembled in Barking and Bede praises Hildelith in one (*HE* 4.10), where he says she was "most energetic in the obersvance of the discipline of the Rule" and that her order to translate the bones of monastic handmaidens to a particular church was matched with miraculous signs and "heavenly light". It is unknown if Hildelith had committed the Wenlock vision to

[301] Sarah Foot, 'Anglo-Saxon Purgatory', 90.
[302] For an overview of Boniface's missionary career and its legacy, see John Seville Higgins, 'The Ultamontanism of Saint Boniface', *Church History* 2.4 (1933), 197-210.
[303] Identified in *HE* 4.10. See also Patrick Sims-Williams, 'A Recension of Boniface's Letter About the Monk of Wenlock Vision', *Latin Learning and English Lore*, eds. Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe and Andy Orchard (Toronto, 2005), 194-214: 196.

writing, and indeed Sims-Williams points out that even if she had Boniface says that he heard it from the visionary directly.[304] However, there were evidently clear lines of communication between Wearmouth-Jarrow and Barking that would have allowed such an account to be shared before Bede completed the *HE*. Sims-Williams argues that it would have been easier for the Dryhthelm account to travel south to Barking, in the form of Haemgisl's *relatio*, than it would have been for the Wenlock vision to travel north.[305] His assumption is that Bede copied Haemgisl's work more or less verbatim; the present thesis has argued that it is more likely to be a Bedan narrative than one simply transcribed into the *HE*.

In the Wenlock vision, a man "who recently died and came to life again" and to whom Boniface had spoken personally sees "in one view all parts of the earth and all seas and peoples" while being borne by angels.[306] The monk's sins and virtues are given voices, each declaring what he had done while alive, sins he had "neglected to confess and many which he had not known to be sinful" and virtues that, while "imperfect", are magnified by angelic defenders.[307] But for our purposes it is his report on the division of the afterlife that is most interesting.

He refers to five places. He sees "many fiery pits vomiting forth terrible flames and, as the foul flame arose, the souls of wretched men in the likeness of black birds sat upon the margin of the pits clinging there for a while wailing and howling and shrieking with human cries, mourning their past deeds and their present suffering; then they fell screaming back into the pits".[308] The angels tell the monk that these souls will be given eternal rest after Judgement Day, and that their brief time out of the flames serves as a taste of this eternal rest. But beneath the fiery pits "as it were in

[304] Ibid, 197.
[305] Ibid, 197-98.
[306] Emerton, 3.
[307] Ibid., 4-5.
[308] Ibid., 5-6.

a lower hell" (perhaps signifying the *sheol* of Old Testament tradition),[309] there are "weeping souls of distress": these souls are condemned to eternal fire. Thus, a punitive fire is above an eternal fire, perhaps suggesting to the reader/audience that there is a fine line between the sins that can be burned off by fire and sins that will drag a soul into "a lower hell". The suggestion therefore that these bird-like souls are in a form of hell denotes certain traditions of punitive purgation that are completely absent from the Dryhthelm vision. The suffering of the souls in the Wenlock vision is made clear: they mourn their deeds, they acknowledge their suffering, they fall screaming. In Dryhthelm's account, the souls do not speak or otherwise indicate that they feel any pain.

In the Wenlock vision, there then follows a brief mention of "a place of wondrous beauty, where in a multitude of very handsome men were enjoying extraordinary happiness". This sweet-smelling region is referred to as "the famed Paradise of God", but it is unclear if it definitely refers to a purgative region like that in Dryhthelm's account or an interim paradise such as the garden of the righteous found in the apocryphal *Apocalypse of Peter*. As Kabir notes, this garden is empty in Jewish vision literature such as 1 Enoch but is populated by the patriarchs in the Christian era.[310] Regardless, it is peculiar because the next space the monk refers to is one of clear purgation. "Holy and glorious" souls walk over a log placed across "a pitch-black fiery river"; this bridge motif is also found in the *Dialogii*.[311] Some make it without a problem, while others fall in, variously covered up to their necks or knees. This sort of graduated immersion is quite common in medieval vision texts, such as the *Visio Sancti Pauli* and Patrick's Purgatory,[312] but is again missing in Dryhthelm's account. Once the souls emerge from the river "each one of those who fell came up on the opposite

[309] See Gen 37:35; 1 Sam 2:6, 28:13-14; Ps 18:5, 116:3. Sheol, although a place below the world, was not a place of torture. Le Goff, *Birth of Purgatory*, 26.
[310] Kabir, *Doomsday*, 18.
[311] See *Dialogii* 4.37, SC.265, 124-134
[312] As noted in Carol Zaleski, 'St Patrick's Purgatory: Pilgrimage Motifs in a Medieval Otherworld Vision', *Journal of the history of ideas* 46.4 (1985), 467-85: 475, n.29.

bank far more brilliant and beautiful than when he fell"; the angels say these souls committed "trifling sins" in life and needed "kindly correction from a merciful God". They are thus purified enough that they can enter the last space of the vision, which the angels tell him is the "heavenly Jerusalem where those holy souls shall live in joy forever", as the angels tell him. But this is all we read about the new Jerusalem: the walls are so bright that the monk cannot look on them. The rest of the vision concerns expounding that devils are always seeking to capture souls for hell, while good works and thoughts in life will ensure angelic protection. The most important aspect of this is the fate of King Ceolred of Mercia.

As Boniface relates, the monk saw the king "who, at the time these visions were seen, was unquestionably still alive", being "tormented ... with indescribable cruelties" when angels withdraw their protection after acknowledging that the devils have a greater claim to the king's soul.[313] The king is to be dragged to hell. According to Bede, Ceolred died in AD716 (*HE* 5.24), the same year in which Boniface wrote his letter (and also the same year King Osred of Northumbria was killed in battle, to be succeeded by Coenred, brother of Ceolwulf). It is therefore quite unusual that a story regarding the condemnation of the king of the neighbouring kingdom would not make its way to Northumbria within the next decade and a half, particularly as Bede includes another vision narrative from Mercia (*HE* 5.13), showing there were clear and active lines of communication between the kingdoms.

Bede does not refer to this letter even though he gives some detail about English missions to Germany in *HE* 5. Given his interest in these missions, because they showed the missionary industry of the English as well as further evidence that the remote parts of the world were being converted to Christianity[314] (which in turn brought the end of the world

[313] Emerton, *Letters of Boniface*, 8.
[314] O'Reilly, 'Islands and Idols'.

closer), it is unlikely that Bede knew nothing at all of Boniface. Kabir argues that Bede may have received a version of Boniface's Wenlock vision via Pehthelm, Bishop of Whithorn, who corresponded with both clerics; Sims-Williams rejects this.[315] The possibility of this vision transmission is there but the evidence is scant. We can say that Boniface knew of Bede, writing in AD746/7 to Wearmouth-Jarrow requesting copies of Bede's scriptural commentaries to help him,[316] and later asking Bishop Ecgbert of York for copies of Bede's homilies.[317] Boniface had served in a mission to Archbishop Bertwald of Canterbury between AD692 and 731, and Bede had much contact with Canterbury in assembling his information for the *HE* (*HE* pref). With such close points of contact, it seems unusual that Bede, with his interest in the German missions, makes no mention of Boniface.

The Wenlock account could have been of enormous use for Bede, particularly as *HE* 5 is designed to suggest that the English are now capable of witnessing, experiencing, and dealing with such events by themselves, as opposed to through vision accounts attributed to non-English individuals, such as Paul. The Wenlock imagery is certainly more graphic than that of the Dryhthelm account, and would have underlined the need for reform if the English were to avoid punishments in the afterlife. Kabir has suggested that Bede, in the Dryhthelm account, is in fact stripping away vision motifs that had become attached to the vision tradition only after Gregory's era;[318] however, the present thesis argues that it is in fact down to it not supporting the message he wishes his audience to derive from the material. The fact Bede does not include the narrative suggests he either was unaware of it – either in Boniface's work or from the original source – or, perhaps more likely given the number of ways with which he could have become familiar with it, that it conflicted with the next-world

[315] Kabir, *Doomsday*, 96-97; Sims-Williams, 'Letter of Boniface', 197-98.
[316] Emerton, *Letters of Boniface*, 112; it is letter 60 in Emerton's translation, letter 76 in Tangl's Latin edition in the Monumenta Germaniae Historiae.
[317] Ibid., 146. Letter 75 in Emerton's edition, 91 in Tangl's.
[318] Kabir, *Doomsday*, 87.

view Bede wanted to convey to his readers. Dryhthelm's account spoke to him in a way the other available accounts did not, and served his needs when it came to eschatological and exegetical teachings. Bede tries not to confuse the reader, and it can be argued that the inclusion of a differing contemporary otherworld vision, though from an English source, would have led to confusion about which was more accurate.

As we have seen, even though Bede draws on multiple sources he has a reformist agenda in mind. Dryhthelm's account could more accurately convey his reformist thinking, with different audiences gaining different depths of meaning from it, while at the same time all being inspired to inward contemplation and thus reform, with their examples hopefully inspiring others living at the ends of the Earth to reform themselves as the last Age of the world came to a close. This urgency was particularly sharpened by the profound military and ecclesiastical crisis that blighted Bede's era.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that the Dryhthelm narrative serves as a case study for what awaits each individual Anglo-Saxon when they die and face judgement. It has argued that the account, said to have been derived from a *relatio* of the priest Haemgisl, is heavily indebted to Bede's exegesis and contemporary concerns regarding the moral weakness of his era. It has argued that his explicit reference to the vision being "like a miracle of ancient times to arouse the living from the death of the soul" is a reflection of this, and that he felt the need for reform was so urgent that he made the meaning of the account clear at the beginning. The chapter has also explored how Bede's use of the phrase "death of the soul" connects emphatically with Bede's own exegesis and eschatology, such as his work on Genesis, while also showing that he is aware of patristic debate and

scholarship on the subject and phrase – the "second death" of Augustine's work being, in fact, the "death of the soul", a final and categorical death from which there was no return. The chapter has also argued that the narrative reflects debate with contemporary vision accounts, such as that of the *Visio Sancti Pauli*, and the work of Gregory the Great, as well as concerns and debates regarding the purgation of sin. It examined how Bede's inclusion of three Anglo-Saxon vision accounts is part of an effort to reinforce that judgement faces all Englishmen, regardless of status or kingdom. In addition, the chapter examined how there were other circulating vision accounts, such as that of Wenlock, which is much more explicitly punitive and graphic than the Dryhthelm narrative, which Bede could have drawn on but that he instead wove a different account that matched his exegesis and the message he wished to convey to his reader: That judgement was coming and one needed to reform. It is that theme, albeit on a grander and national scale, which is the subject of the following chapter.

Chapter 3

Crisis and reform: How Bede drew on Gildas's *DEB* as a framework for understanding moral and political crisis in the 730s

This chapter argues that the eschatology of Bede's *HE* was profoundly influenced by what he saw as a severe moral and political crisis in contemporary Northumbria, as outlined in his *Epistola ad Ecgbertum*. The chapter argues that this crisis should be seen in the context of his exegesis, such as his commentary on Revelation. It also argues that Bede, reviewing his historical sources, was particularly struck by the parallels between his day and the moral and political crisis outlined by Gildas in his *De Excidio Britanniae*. Both Bede and Gildas were conscious of Britain's remoteness, which is an undercurrent in their eschatology and should be noted during the following discussion. The chapter argues that Bede uses this text as a prism through which to view Anglo-Saxon history, and that the biblical cycle of sin, repentance, lapse, and divine punishment evident in *DEB* is recurring in his own day. The Old Testament is replete with punishments of the Israelites being carried out by kingdoms and other peoples, such as the Assyrian invasion of the northern kingdom [1] and the Babylonian conquest of Judah.[2] The Old Testament books tend to describe cycles of spiritual and temporal prosperity, a decline into sin, and a punishment, usually through the agency of an empire. Such a cycle occurring in Bede's day would lead to a potential divine judgement on a national scale, the consequence of which would be to leave the Anglo-Saxons destroyed or dispossessed in this world and outside salvation.

The chapter opens with a discussion of the ways Bede presents the crisis as manifesting in his *Epistola* and exegesis. It locates this discussion in the context of dynastic instability but also instability and upheaval in Bede's own monastery, which seems to have deeply affected him. The chapter then discusses the parallels between the Britons of the sixth century and the English of the eighth century, emphasising how Bede used Gildas as a model and how he saw biblical cycles playing out in his own era, which echoes the discussion of miracles "like that of ancient times" in the

[1] Prophesied in Am 6:1; 7 and recorded in 2 Kings 17.
[2] 2 Kings 24.

previous chapter. It then discusses the references to corrupt clergy in Bede and Gildas, to highlight the significance of the spiritual crisis Bede sees. It then examines how Bede uses the burning of the monastery of Coldingham as a case study for how the English were being watched and judged on a scale grander than the individual level discussed in chapter one of the present thesis. However, for Bede there were signs of hope and possibilities for reform, through giving attention to pastoral care.

'Wars and inward conflagrations': Crisis in contemporary Northumbria

This section argues that the moral crisis of Bede's era heightened his eschatology and how he dealt with this sense of crisis in the *HE*. The section argues that Bede's *Historia* response is rooted in his exegesis, and that the eschatological and crisis elements serve to emphasise the urgency of moral reform. The section first explores the nature of the moral and political crisis in Northumbria, as described in his *Epistola*, and sets this in the context of dynastic and ecclestasical upheaval.

In the prefatory letter to his commentary on Revelation, Bede refers to the "wars and inward conflagrations of his Church".[3] These can be understood as a general comment on the Church in a temporal world but can also be understood as a reference to the instability of contemporary Northumbria. Bede uses his kingdom as a case study for all the English.[4] His writings present what seem to be contrasting depictions of the state of the nation, one negative and one positive – but these are in fact complementary. He closes *HE* 5 with a reference to "these favourable times of peace and prosperity" and depicts an island of many peoples either

[3] *Exp Apoc*, 221; TTH.58, 101.
[4] On Bede and his relations to and depictions of kings, see Higham, *English Empire*; Higham, *Convert Kings*; Henry Loyn, 'Bede's Kings: A Comment on the Attitude of Bede to the Nature of Secular Kingship', *Trivium* 26 (1991), 54-64; McClure, 'Old Testament Kings';Tugene, 'Reflections on "Ethnic" Kingship in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*'.

united with Rome as Christians or having either peace treaties with or being under the dominance of the Anglo-Saxons. The idea of peace is examined in his exegesis, where he gives it an allegorical meaning: In his exegesis on the Temple, Bede writes that "the reason why the house of the Lord is built on the vision of peace is that the Church which is spread throughout the world consists in one and the same faith and fellowship of universal truth".[5] So on the surface, his depiction of Britain puts it on a par with the heavenly peace of the Temple.

However, in his *Epistola*, he says there has been a proliferation of false monasteries – i.e., they are monastic in name only – filled with people with "no love for God", and that these monasteries are treated as extensions of secular life.[6] This would seem to be a reflection of his comment on Revelation, where he refers to John of Patmos describing "*falsos christianos et hereticos"*, false Christians, and heretics during the last days.[7] This reference is important because apostates would join the persecution of the faithful during the reign of the Antichrist before the Last Judgement (2 Thess 3). So for Bede to state that there were "false Christians" in his day suggests he is conveying a dire warning as to the spiritual state of his people, and also suggestive that the end times were drawing near.

The *Epistola* contains a polemic on ecclesiastical corruption and weakness, noting for instance the number of hamlets which do not hear from a preacher, while also advocating a reform programme. Specifically, Bede calls for the creation of more bishoprics at monastic centres, the tearing up of charters for false monasteries, and the use of the Bible to educate new preachers alongside close readings of Gregory's *Regula*. Although the *Epistola* has been described as "the last swansong of an old pessimist" and "one long lament over the ecclesiastical evils of the time", it

[5] *De templo*, 188; TTH.21, 19.
[6] Bede, 'Letter to Ecgbert'. Plummer, 405-23.
[7] *Exp Apoc*, 359, TTH.58 175.

is more accurately, as DeGregorio writes, "dire ... but not hopeless".[8] The *Epistola* was written shortly before Bede's death and not long after the completion of the *HE*, and its concerns of the letter underpin the *HE* and shape his depiction of the recent past.[9] We have seen in the previous chapter that King Ecgfrith had suffered disastrous reverses against the Picts, and that the kingdom had been diminished despite the work of King Aldfrith. However, Aldfrith's death in AD705 brought about decades of political instability. A short discussion of the *Epistola's* content will show how weak Bede believes the kingdom has become, while at the same time highlighting how straightforward reform could be, provided there was sufficiently robust leadership.

The lands given to these false monasteries have reduced the amount of land available for soldiers, which he says leaves the kingdom in a profound state of weakness.[10] Some monasteries were sizeable – the dual foundation of the orthodox Wearmouth-Jarrow had about six hundred monks, so each monastery founded in the kingdom should be thought of as potentially housing large numbers, who in turn would need substantial land to support themselves.[11] Meanwhile, in the *Epistola* Bede states that bishops are demanding money from congregations and no longer visit every part of their diocese, while a shortage of quality preachers means many villages never see a cleric, implying they are vulnerable spiritually because they are not being educated and corrected. Rather, bishops are

[8] Gerald Bonner, 'The Christian Life in the Thought of the Venerable Bede', *The Durham University Journal* 63.1 (1970), 39-55: 39, in reference to John Smith's 18th-century edition of Bede; Plummer, *Opera Historica*, xxxiv; DeGregorio, 'Nostrorum Socordiam Temporum': 109.
[9] See for example Ó Mathghamhna, 'Crisis and Reform'; Simon Coates, 'The Role of Bishops in the Early Anglo-Saxon Church: A Reassessment', *History* 81.262 (1996), 177-96; Simon Coates, 'The Bishop as Benefactor and Civic Patron: Alcuin, York, and Episcopal Authority in Anglo-Saxon England', *Speculum* 71.3 (1996), 529-58; Alexander R Rumble, *Leaders of the Anglo-Saxon Church: From Bede to Stigand* (2012), 30-36; Scott DeGregorio, 'Monasticism and Reform in Book IV of Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People', *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 61.04 (2010), 673-87.
[10] For more on this theme, see John Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford, 2005), 100-05.
[11] *Hist abb* chap 17.

surrounded by men who fall prey to "the seductions of soft life".[12] This soft life includes laughter, jokes, and inebriation – three indulgences which, as Darby points out, Bede says will come to an end with the Last Judgement.[13] DeGregorio suggests that, given Bede's general admonition to Ecgberht to watch his speech and to read more, he may be chastising the bishop himself.[14] Gregory's *Regula*, one of the key influences behind Bede's *Epistola*, encourages watching one's conduct; it is not surprising then that Bede here fulfils his duty to remind the invigilators to remain vigilant. It speaks too to his exegesis.

Bede had written that "while the secrets of his [God's] law are indeed heavenly things grasped only by the more perfect, even so the weak do not lack an opportunity for salvation, if they will eagerly and humbly listen to the wisdom of the elders".[15] Similarly, in his commentary on Ezra (quoting Daniel 12:3) he refers to how "those who are learned shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who instruct many to righteousness, like stars for everlasting eternities" – teachers should teach well and in turn find themselves caring less for temporal things.[16] And yet the opposite appears to be the case in Northumbria. When Bede makes reference to exemplary preachers in his works these references should be understood as part of a wider reform agenda given a sense of urgency by the approaching end of the world, because poor or corrupt preachers were a danger: "For the Lord says that those who cause others to fall (*auctores scandali*) will suffer like punishment (*poena*)".[18] The *Epistola* has been described as "the final link in a chain of topical commentary that runs throughout the Bedan corpus", a "booming crescendo" to his theme of

[12] Bede, 'Letter to Ecgbert': 344.
[13] Darby, 'Apocalypse and Reform', 89.
[14] Scott DeGregorio, 'Visions of Reform: Bede's Later Writings in Context', *Bede and the Future*, 207-32: 210.
[15] *De tab*, 5; TTH.18, 1.
[16] *In Ez*, 248; TTH.47, 16-17.
[18] *Exp Apoc*, 485; TTH.58, 242; citing Matt 18:6.

reform.[19] DeGregorio has argued it is designed to incite rather than inform.[20] But how does this fit with the eschatology of the *HE*? A brief analysis of the content of *HE* 5 will show how these moral reform concerns, heightened by a sense of coming judgement, allow the *HE* to be understood as a heavily eschatological text.

The references to crisis in the *Epistola* were rooted in reality. There was great instability in Northumbria at this time, which affected Bede's writing and presentation of history. In the thirty years or so preceding the *HE* there were five kings, which is not only indicative but causative of instability.[21] His own works occasionally refer to instability in his own monastery – this commentary on Acts refers his work on Luke being delayed by a cryptic time of hostile uproar ("*obstrepentes causae*"), while elsewhere he refers to the personal upset and chaos following Ceolfrith's departure as abbot in AD716.[22] It is possible that Ceolfrith was a kinsman of Wearmouth-Jarrow's founder, the revered Benedict Biscop (d.AD690), and so this led to upheaval beyond simply a change of individual leader, Ceolfrith having been appointed by Biscop rather than being elected.[23] O'Brien, building on recent scholarship, notes that the anonymous *Vita Ceolfridi* and Bede's *Historia abbatum* may have been written in part to shore up the authority of the new leader, Hwaetberht (d. after AD747).[24] If so, then that suggests significant unhappiness and conflict within the monastic foundation, to the degree that the monastery's history needed to be, if not rewritten, then recast in light of events in the present day.

Away from Jarrow, in the *HE*, Bede notes Ceolwulf's reign was "filled with so many and such serious commotions and setbacks that it is as

[19] DeGregorio, 'Nostrorum Socordiam Temporum': 113.
[20] DeGregorio, 'Visions of Reform: Bede's Later Writings in Context': 209.
[21] Barbara Yorke, *Kings and kingdoms of early Anglo-Saxon England* (London 1990), 87.
[22] Bede refers to how Ceolfrith's departure led to a pause in his commentary on Samuel (*In Samuhelis*, 212). For *obstrepentes causae*, see *Expositio Actuum Apostolorum*, preface, with translation in Martin, *Commentary on the Acts*, 3-6.
[23] O'Brien, 'Reforming of Wearmouth-Jarrow', 304-5.
[24] Ibid, 305.

yet impossible to know what to say about them or to guess what the outcome may be" (*HE* 5.23). On exactly what these "commotions and setbacks" were Bede is silent, although the continuations/annal list added to the *HE* tell us Ceolwulf was captured and forced into a monastery for a brief period during AD731, the year in which the *HE* is generally considered to have been completed (although Plummer argued, based on manuscript dates, that Bede may have added this entry,[25] this cannot be known for certain).[26] What can be considered for certain is that this was a standard Germanic technique for removing a political rival,[27] suggesting there was considerable political instability and in-fighting between rival factions. There is a specific reference to him being tonsured, and in Germanic kingdoms cutting a king's hair was to strip him of power (Clotild, widow of Clovis, preferred that her children be murdered than have their hair cut during a conflict over dynastic succession).[28] That Ceolwulf, who Bede praises as having "zeal for the spiritual well-being of us all" (*HE* pref), would return to the throne in the same year also suggests that no faction could gain control for long, leading to a prolonged sense of instability. However, this thesis argues that Bede would have seen examples in Anglo-Saxon history of kings being restored for a divine purpose. It is worth examining one such account now because it offers a glimpse of how Bede may have interpreted Ceolwulf's return to rule.

Bede says that King Cealwealh (r.AD642-73) of the West Saxons was driven from his kingdom because he did not accept Christianity (*HE* 3.7). He spurned the sister of Penda, the Mercian king and nemesis of

[25] Plummer, *Opera Historica*, 345.
[26] This list, the Moore Annals, is added to fol.128r of the Moore Bede, one of the earliest extant manuscripts of the *Historia ecclesiastica*. Reproduced in Peter Hunter Blair and R.A.B. Mynors, *The Moore Bede: Cambridge University Library MS.Kk.5.16* (Copenhagen, 1959). Translated, with further continuations from other manuscripts, McClure and Collins, *Ecclesiastical History*, 296-98.
[27] Stancliffe, 'Kings Who Opted Out': 155.
[28] Averil Cameron, 'How Did Merovingians Wear Their Hair?', *Revue belge de Philologie et d'Histoire* 43.4 (1965), 1203-1216: 1212.

Northumbria, and so Penda drove him from his kingdom.[29] Bede presents this as the agency by which Cealwealh is divinely punished for refusing Christianity. However, he is baptised while in exile and is returned to his kingdom (AD648), and Bede presents the king himself recognising that he was restored through divine agency: he "called to mind that it was unbelief that had once driven him from his kingdom and his acknowledgement of faith in Christ which had restored him". It can be argued that this has some parallel here with Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 5:20-26: Daniel states that "his heart was lifted up, and his spirit hardened unto pride, he was put down from the throne of his kingdom, and his glory was taken away. And he was driven out from the sons of men, and his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild asses, and he ate grass like an ox, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven: till he knew that the most High ruled in the kingdom of men, and that he will set over it whomsoever it shall please him."[30]

The key point is that these were rulers who underwent individual transformations that in turn benefited their peoples, illustrating the connection Bede sees between the spiritual welfare of a monarch and his subjects. In both instances, monarchs are restored (spiritually in Nebuchadnezzar's case) but for the explicit purpose of ensuring the well-being of their peoples – however, restoration only comes after divine punishment and some form of suffering to bring about an inner conversion. Nebuchadnezzar, according to Daniel, comes to an inner realisation of the power of God and God's rule over man; Cealwealh is reborn as a pious king after baptism and political restoration. Scully, commenting on a similar event in Bede's *Chronica Maiora*, has noted a Judaic parallel: Bede

[29] The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* A manuscript puts Penda coming to power in AD626 and says he reigned for 30 years, though Bede (*HE* 2.20) says he ruled for 22 years "with varying success".

[30] Daniel was the subject of patristic commentary of which Bede would have been aware, with Jerome's one of the most important (*Commentariorum in Danielem*, CCSL.75A (Turnhout, 1964)). For studies of Daniel as a text, see John J. Collins, *Daniel: With an Introduction to Apocalyptic Literature* (Grand Rapids, 1984) and John J. Collins and Peter W. Flint (eds), *The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception* (Leiden, 2001).

says of Manasseh of Judah: "On account of his crimes, he was carried off, chained and shackled, to Babylon, but was restored to his kingdom because of his penitence and prayers".[31] It can be argued, then, that Ceolwulf falls into a similar situation. Having been usurped and restored, his restoration is presented as an opportunity not only for inner conversion and spiritual progress, but the opportunity for the spiritual restoration of the English people.

However, the crisis was not limited to secular rulers. Bede makes an oblique reference in his commentary on the Temple to "the present anguish of temporal affairs".[32] This may not be a topos to encourage thinking on future rewards. Even in Wearmouth-Jarrow, Ceolfrith's successor Hwaetberht (elected AD716) went to great lengths to establish monastic authority, translating the body of his tutor Sicgfrith next to the altar of St Peter's and so elevating it, and the man, to a greatly enhanced status. This, O'Brien has argued, is a reaction to a kinship-led burial hierarchy instituted by Biscop, and in effect rejecting the idea that kin was superior to spiritual leadership.[33] This can be seen as a bold political and reforming statement by Hwaetberht, moving the monastic foundation closer to the Rule of Benedict. He was inaugurating a new model of commemorating previous abbots. O'Brien also argues that this seems to have been part of a move to a more scripturally learned faction coming to rule the foundation, with Sicgfrith and Hwaetberht – nicknamed Eusebius, and to whom Bede dedicated his *Expositio apocalypseos* – described as men of great learning, whereas, as O'Brien notes, Biscop acquires a great library but is never described as scholarly.[34]

Meanwhile, the fact that Bishop Acca of Hexham, to whom many of Bede's commentaries were dedicated, was "driven from his see" in the

[31] Scully, 'Bede's Chronica': 61.
[32] *De templo*, 144: "*praesentes rerum temporlium angores*".
[33] O'Brien, 'Reforming of Wearmouth-Jarrow', 309-10.
[34] Ibid, 310-13.

same year Ceolwulf was deposed suggests the instability extended to the wider Northumbrian Church as well.[35] In *HE* 5.23, Acca is listed as presiding at Hexham and there is no indication that his position is under threat; Wallace-Hadrill has suggested his removal may be because he was a supporter of Ceolwulf.[36] He does not seem to have been restored after Ceolwulf returned to power, leading Darby to argue that Bede's *De die iudicii* could potentially date to Bede's later life because its epilogue refers to Acca but not as a bishop.[37] Indeed, the poem urges Acca to follow the example of John of Patmos and dwell more on future reward than on bitter experiences in his lifetime. So it is clear then that Bede is writing at a time of spiritual and temporal crisis which he is experiencing first hand. It is worth paralleling this with the Cealwealh passage as well because in that, Bede says the king "realised ... that a kingdom which was without a bishop was, at the same time, justly deprived of divine protection".[38] This reiterates the point made above in the present thesis, that, placed in the context of historical and biblical precedent, Bede is presenting Ceolwulf as a restored monarch who can ensure the political and spiritual welfare of his people.

When seen in the light of *HE* 5's eschatology, and particularly the teachings contained in the vision of Dryhthelm, this is a potentially disastrous situation, especially when seen in the context of the parallels between the *HE* and *DEB*. However, we cannot ignore the role of dynastic politics both on the immediate period and on Bede's writing, because he was writing in response to the contemporary situation marked by instability. An examination of the dynastic situation will illustrate how the political crisis impacted on ecclesiastical and spiritual matters in

[35] On Bede and Acca, see 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 (2012): 7-39, and Paul Hilliard, 'Acca of Hexham through the eyes of the Venerable Bede', *Early Medieval Europe* 26.4 (2018), 440-61.
[36] Wallace-Hadrill, *Historical Commentary*, 207.
[37] Darby, 'Apocalypse and Reform', 81.
[38] See also Ó Mathghamhna, 'Crisis and Reform', 63.

Northumbria, even if Bede is careful to omit specifics of immediate significance.

Kirby has suggested that the text of the *HE* was sent to Ceolwulf in AD731 and circulated about three years later,[39] although there is no mention in it of Ceolwulf being temporarily deposed or of Bede's diocesan bishop Acca being expelled from his see at Hexham. Nor, indeed, is there mention of Ecgberht, to whom Bede's *Epistola* was addressed, taking the see at York in AD732 following the removal of Wilfrid II, who had succeeded John of Beverley, who had ordained Bede. Thacker sees the political changes as "almost certainly … the inauguration of a new regime".[40] Ecgberht was Ceolwulf's cousin and his brother, Eadberht, would rule Northumbria from 737 to 758, making Ecgbert part of the ruling dynasty, the Leodwaldings, who replaced the direct descendants of Aldfrith, who were of the Eoppingas line, descended from Ida.[41] Ceolwulf had succeeded Osric in 729, and Osric had in turn succeeded Ceolwulf's brother Cenred in 718, just two years after Cenred had succeeded the boy-king Osred, the son of Aldfrith and later the adopted son of Bishop Wilfrid of York who the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* says died "south of the border" (suggesting he was either fighting the Picts or the Mercians). Bede says merely that Osred, who in his metrical vita of Cuthbert he had celebrated as a "new Josiah", a great reformist king of the Old Testament, was "killed" ("*interfectus*", *HE* 5.22). Bede does not specify what happened but the use of "*interfectus*" implies that his death was not natural and so in battle or through intrigue; a letter of Boniface in AD746 says he was assassinated after defiling nuns and killing nobles.[42] This decline of Northumbrian power in the north had come as Mercia to the south expanded its influence. Bede says the Mercian ruler Aethelbald (r.716-57), heir of a new line descended from a brother of Penda, by 731 was overlord of a huge part of

[39] Kirby, *Bede's Historia Ecclesiastica*, 2-6.
[40] Thacker, 'Bede and History': 178-9.
[41] For discussion of the Northumbrian lineages, see Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms*
[42] Michael Lapidge, 'Bede's Metrical *Vita Cuthberti*', 78.

Anglo-Saxon Britain.[43] Kent, Essex, Wessex, East Anglia, Hwicce, and the kingdom of Lindsey: "all these kingdoms and the other southern kingdoms which reach right up to the Humber, together with their various kings," were subject to him (*HE* 5.23). Bede says no more, possibly so as not to denigrate the authority of Ceolwulf, but this represents a major decline in the fortunes of Northumbria, several rulers of which had previously held such overlord status. His silence on ecclesiastical shifts is also interesting, because of what it suggests about Bede's interaction with ecclesiastical politics – the argument of this thesis being that part of Bede's discreet silence is the fact that he is seeking moral reform on a broad scale, and that raising certain contemporary issues of concern ran the risk of fostering resistance to that reform programme.

It could be that Acca's expulsion was down to his ties to Wilfrid, who had been very powerful in the Northumbrian government while Osred was a child. Bede is somewhat ambivalent about Wilfrid, possibly because the bishop presided over the dinner at which Bede was accused of heresy and did not defend him, and possibly because Wilfrid's rule at Lindisfarne had caused serious trouble to the community.[44] But he was still a major figure in the Church who, likely, still had supporters in Bede's day, so any sort of slight could have affected the reception and dissemination of the *HE*. While Wilfrid's death in 709 does not seem to have in itself caused widespread instability, it is possible that no moves were made against the throne until after Osred had reached his age of majority in about 716, and as very little is known about Osred's rule it is possible that something he did had triggered clashes between rival factions in Northumbria. As with the reasons for Acca's departure, this is a suggestion based on scant evidence, but would fit with the impression given by other royal and

[43] For discussion of the rise of Mercian power following Penda's defeat of Oswald, see D.P. Kirby, *The Earliest English Kings* (London and New York, 1991), 60-74, and for discussion of Oswald's influence over Penda up to that point see Higham, *Convert Kings*, 218-19 and Stancliffe, 'Most Holy and Most Victorious', 53.
[44] Darby, *Bede and the End of Time*, 186; Thacker, 'Bede and History'. See also McCann, 'Authority, Orthodoxy and Sanctity'.

episcopal changes that members of the old guard were being pushed out in favour of a newer, nascent dynasty. While there is mention of royal and episcopal successions in the *HE*, the general sense of chaos and instability is missing from Bede's prose, possibly because he wished to help to portray an image of a strong, stable kingship around Ceolwulf. For example, in *HE* 5.22 Bede simply notes that "in the year of our Lord 716", "Osred was killed and Cenred became ruler of the Northumbrian kingdom";[45] but the chapter is focused on the death of Egbert of Iona, celebrated because of his role in bridging the gap between the unity of the English Church and that of the Irish at Iona.

It is possible too that Bede made no significant mention of the chaos because it was better for his own position. His monastery had ties to the Bernician ruling dynasty, which had come to an end with the death of Osred. Recent scholarship has overturned the idea that Wearmouth-Jarrow was somehow immune to the interference and influence of aristocratic families.[46] The surviving texts emphasise the unity of the two monastic sites, this scholarship argues, precisely because it was so fiercely contested. The monastery was founded on land granted by Oswald's nephew, King Ecgfrith [48] there was therefore quite a solid connection between Wearmouth-Jarrow and Northumbrian dynasties, and political disruption could thus affect the strength and internal consistency of the monastery. There are clues, however, in Bede's exegesis about his silence concerning the regime changes of his era.

As shown above, earlier in his exegetical career Bede had believed it was wrong to criticise priests even if they were evil – but he also believed that one should suffer under a king even if they were tyrannical because

[45] "*Siquidem anno ab incarnatione Domini DCCXVI, quo Osredo occiso Coenred gubernacula regni Nordanhymbrorum suscepit, cum uenisset ad eos de Hibernia Deo amabilis, et cum omni honorificentia nominandus pater ac sacerdos, Ecgberct, cuius superius memoriam saepius fecimus, honorifice ab eis et multo cum gaudio susceptus est*."
[46] For discussion of this recent scholarship, see O'Brien, 'Reforming of Wearmouth and Jarrow', 302-305.
[48] *Hist abb* 1.

the king was placed over a people by God.[49] For Bede as well as other Anglo-Saxon authors, the model for this is Saul, the model of a brave warrior-king who rules poorly, and who is compared with David, the model of a good king despite his many personal flaws.[50] As Bede had noted in his commentary on Tobit, "sometimes, typologically speaking, men's good deeds have a bad meaning and their bad deeds a good meaning".[51] The Saul comparison is no light one; it is laden with eschatological meaning.

Bede makes an explicit connection between King Aethelfrith (d.AD616 and father of Oswald) and Saul. He states that Aethelfrith (*HE* 1.34) was ferocious against the Britons, and could be compared with Saul except that he "was ignorant of the divine religion". And he quotes Genesis 49:27 to say that the blessing "Benjamin, a ravening wolf; in the morning he shall devour the prey and at night shall divide the spoil" could be applied to the English king.[52] O'Reilly notes that this comparison to Benjamin appears frequently in patristic exegesis as a reference to St Paul, originally Saul, who was also from the tribe of Benjamin. Jerome, citing Genesis 49:27, said it was a prophecy regarding Paul, "in that he persecuted the Church in his youth and in his old age was a preacher of the Gospel".[53] This *topos* of youth and age, morning and evening, is thus being applied by Bede to the English people themselves, with Aethelfrith's successors Oswald and Oswiu working toward the conversion of the English.[54] The Genesis reference in the Aethelfrith account may seem oblique, but it is an argument by Bede that his people have fulfilled a biblical prophecy with their conversion, and therefore a reflection of his concerns that they have

[49] George Hardin Brown, 'Bede's Neglected Commentary on Samuel', *Innovation and Tradition in the Writings of the Venerable Bede*, ed. Scott DeGregorio (Morgantown, 2006), 121-42: 130.
[50] Henry R. Loyn, *The Governance of Anglo-Saxon England* (London, 1984), 14.
[51] *Tobias*, 5; Connolly trans, 41: "*Ne mireris lector quod aliquando bona typice malum aliquando bonum mala hominum facto significant*."
[52] "*Beniamin lupus rapax; mane comedet praedam, et vespere dividet spolia*."
[53] O'Reilly, Jarrow Lecture, 9. See also 8-11 for discussion of Aethelfrith and Saul.
[54] Ibid., 11.

fallen away in piety and strength. It would, arguably, strengthen the case for being silent on the specifics of the contemporary political crisis, because recalling Aethelfrith as an exemplar for the modern day was more important. And in Bede's work he accepts that sometimes what might seem like cruel actions could have a wider, positive outcome.

It may be argued that in the *HE*, he had even largely glossed over the murder of King Oswine, ruler of Deira, by King Oswiu because in the long term it ensured both parts of the kingdom, Deira and Bernicia, were under the rule of a sole monarch; it ended bitter feuding between the two rival Northumbrian dynasties.[55] Crucially, Oswiu also called and presided over the Synod of Whitby (AD664), effectively and conclusively settling the Easter question in his kingdom and ensuring harmony with Rome.[56] What mattered was the salvation of the English, which required moral reform and the continuation of them as a political entity: Bede emphasises Ceolwulf's "zeal for spiritual well-being" and devotion to learning about his people's past, and so hoped the ruler would do all possible to maintain a strong, united kingship. Another study has suggested that Bede used the saint-king Oswald as a template for Ceolwulf, because Oswald had held firmly to his Christian faith even when faced with death and had transformed the kingdom from one of apostasy to one of durable Christianity.[57] In the *Epistola*, Bede says the decline began with the death of the scripturally learned King Aldfrith, who restored the "shattered" kingdom after Ecgrfith's death, albeit within a smaller border (*HE* 4.26). This may mean Aldfrith maintained unity, but his scriptural learning and exile for Christ[58] are important factors in Bede's estimation of him as a monarch: it would make Aldfrith the last good Christian king, after whom

[55] T.M. Charles-Edwards, 'Nations and Kingdoms: A View from Above', *After Rome*, ed. T.M. Charles-Edwards (Oxford, 2003): 36.
[56] Bede (*HE* 3.25) and Stephen of Ripon's *Vita Sancti Wilfridi* are the two earliest sources for the synod.
[57] Ó Mathghamhna, 'Crisis and Reform', passim.
[58] Bede, *Vita Cuthbert* 24.

the kingdom decayed. Ceolwulf was thus being exhorted to replicate the deeds and lifestyle of successful kings.

Bede had seen the decay and destruction of a people before, when reading the *DEB* of Gildas. For him, this was the key text when it came to understanding the cycles of history on the island in an eschatological and exegetical context. The present thesis turns now to Bede's use of Gildas, because this will show why he has spent so much time on Dryhthelm's vision and the miraculous passages present in *HE* 5, as well as why he believed the contemporary situation had become so dire.

Gildas: Bede's model for applying scripture to history

Gildas was a sixth-century British monk who may have lived in what is now Wales. Very little is known about him, with two *vitae* having only been written centuries after his death. Even the meaning of his name is obscure.[59] What is known for certain is what he tells the reader in *DEB*: That he was forty-four at the time of writing, and that he is an ecclesiast (*DEB* 26.1). He is best known for his *De excidio Britanniae*, a vital source for the history of Britain between the Roman withdrawal and coming of the Saxons. It is a polemic in the style of Late Antique public speeches and may have been written in the context of ecclesiastical debate in the British Church.[60] Columbanus (d.AD615) and other Irish sources held Gildas in high regard.[61] It is the only source written by a contemporary and Bede drew heavily on it for his narrative of Britain before the Saxons in *HE* 1.

[59] Scully, 'Atlantic Archipelago', 84.
[60] Higham, *The English Conquest: Gildas and Britain in the Fifth Century* 4; E.A. Thompson, 'Gildas and the History of Britain', *Britannia* 10 (1979), 203-26: passim; Karen George, *Gildas's De Excidio Brittonum and the Early British Church* (Woodbridge and New York, 2009), 10, 106-9. For the possible influence of John Cassian on *DEB* see Stephen Lake, 'Usage of the Writing of John Cassian in Some Early British and Irish Writings', *The Journal of the Australian Early Medieval Association* 7 (2011): 95-121.
[61] Scully, 'Atlantic Archipelago', 87.

DEB, which is laden with scriptural references, is broken into three distinct sections: A narrative of British history, a condemnation of corrupt and weak kings, and a condemnation of corrupt clergy. It is both a literal and allegorical account of the conquest and corruption of the Britons. It includes a description of the island's geography (*DEB* 3), its paganism (*DEB* 4), the Roman conquest (*DEB* 5-7), the conversion and outbreaks of heresy during the persecutions (*DEB* 8-12), and how the Britons had been savaged by Irish and Pictish raiders after the withdrawal of Roman power (*DEB* 14).[62] The historical narrative is designed to illustrate that the Britons had been shown divine favour when they sincerely repented in the past (*DEB* 15-21) but had turned their back on God immediately after defeating invaders (*DEB* 21-22). It is also designed to show that the Britons had been shown divine warnings (*DEB* 21-22) and that they were at risk of a major, catastrophic judgement if they failed to pay heed to these warnings. The country's cities are in ruins and the land heavily depopulated through battle and plague, while its people "rush" to hell (*DEB* 26) even as its rulers are corrupt and tyrannical (*DEB* 27). The island has tyrannical rulers (*DEB* 27) and priests who "do not look to the good of their people, but to the filling of their own bellies" (*DEB* 66.1). Effective Christian leadership is almost non-existent: clerics pursue women and have "grabbed merely the name of priest – not the priestly way of life" (*DEB* 6.3, 6), not unlike the laymen who pay Northumbrian nobles in order to obtain land "under the pretext of building monasteries, in which they can give freer rein to their libidinous tastes".[63] For Gildas, "everything [the Britons] did went against their salvation" (*DEB* 21.6).[64] They are a chosen people, a "latter-day Israel" (*DEB* 26.1) but, because of their sins, God has decided to purge them (*DEB* 22). Unable or unwilling to defend themselves against the Irish and Picts,

[62] For a study of Gildas's phraseology when it comes to describing the impact of barbarians on visits to shrines, see Michael Garcia, 'Gildas and the "grievous divorce from the barbarians"', *Early Medieval Europe* 21.3 (2013), 243-53.
[63] Letter to Ecgbert, 351.
[64] See also D.N. Dumville, 'Sub-Roman Britain: History and Legend', *History*.62 (1977), 173-92: 189.

they recruit Anglo-Saxons, who enact a "just punishment" by destroying the British (*DEB* 24.1).[65] Gildas concludes his history with the Anglo-Saxons restrained but the Britons wracked by civil war. He says most of the Britons "daily rush headlong to hell" (*DEB* 26.3)[66] because of their sins and a shortage of exemplary Christians to teach them otherwise. He states that in the past the Britons were rewarded for their faith with prosperity, and that, for instance, they suffered defeats against the Anglo-Saxons because they failed to maintain moral fortitude, but in the present day prayers and repentance had seen God grant them victory against the English, holding them in check (*DEB* 26.1). He later says there are "very few" (*DEB* 69.1) genuine Christians left but they have not risen up to denounce the corruption (*DEB* 69-70).

The *DEB's* structure means that the reader is conscious of a looming judgement before they come to Gildas's condemnations of the kings and clergy, which in turn were designed to show how fragmented and spiritually weak the Britons had become. Gildas's work uses apocalpyptic rhetoric to encourage reform, much like Salvian of Marseille (AD440s).[67] However, while neither Gildas nor Salvian discuss the end of the world in their texts they argue that Christians are being punished by barbarians and that judgement was being passed as communities grew old and rotten.[68]

This section of the thesis argues that, for Bede, *DEB* was a framework for understanding the divine hand in history as well as a source of factual information.[69] It argues that Bede, looking back on the Gildasian period through the prism of subsequent events, understood that Gildas had

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[65] "*Confovebatur namque ultionis iustae praecedentium scelerum causa de mari usque ad mare ignis orientali sacrilegorum manu exaggeratus, et finitimas quasque civitates agrosque populans non quievit accensus donee cunctam paene exurens insulae superficiem rubra occidentalem trucique oceanum lingua delamberet*."

[66] "*exceptis paucis et valde paucis qui ob amissionem tantae multitudinis, quae cotidie prona ruit ad tartara, tam brevis numerus habentur ut eos quodammodo venerabilis mater ecclesia in suo sinu recumbentes non videat, quos solos veros filios habet*."

[67] Palmer, *Apocalypse*, 36-7.

[68] Ibid., 37.

[69] Gameson, 'Augustine of Canterbury', 4, argues that Bede knew little of the time bar Gildas and a handful of other sources.

warned of a national judgement that had later come and been sweeping. Indeed, Bede would have understood that his people, the English, had been divine agents of punishment who were in later times rewarded by temporal power following their conversion to Christianity and missionary efforts. And he shares Gildas' concerns about ecclesiastical corruption. Gildas' *DEB* is fundamental to appreciating the eschatology of Bede's *HE*. The section argues this by discussing the parallels between the Britons and Jews in *DEB*, and how Bede also draws parallels between the present day and biblical history. Particular attention is paid to examples of how the Britons and English are presented as having spurned chances of salvation, and to the scriptural allusions Gildas and Bede make.

Bede, reading Gildas, would have seen how the Britons had lapsed into repeated cycles of sin, punishment, reform, sin, and punishment (*DEB* 2). At the time Gildas was writing, the Britons had managed to mount some resistance to the Saxons – Gildas writes that at the battle of Mount Badon (sometime in the sixth century) the Britons, under Ambrosius Aurelianus, had defeated the Saxons, but emphasises that they had only been granted this victory because they had shown some spiritual repentance and prayed. However, by the time Bede was writing his history, the Britons had been supplanted and defeated by the English in what is now England and beyond. This allowed him to read Gildas as a prophetic warning, the literal application of divine punishment to a people living on the island of Britain.[70] This, in turn, allowed him to interpret contemporary history in the same light of cycles of sin, punishment, reform, and judgement.[71] This thesis will argue that Bede highlights one particular event, the burning of Coldingham monastery, as effectively the sins of the Britons in miniature

[70] For more on the parallels, see M Miller, 'Bede's Use of Gildas', *The English Historical Review* 355 (1975), 241-61; Patrick Sims-Williams, 'Gildas and the Anglo-Saxons', *Cambridge medieval Celtic studies* 6 (1983), 1-30; Ó Mathghamhna, 'Crisis and Reform'. See also Nicholas Perkins, 'Biblical Allusion and Prophetic Authority in Gildas's *De excidio Britanniae*', *The Journal of Medieval Latin* 20 (2010): 78-112.

[71] For more on Bede's approach to Gildas, see Luca Larpi, 'Bede's Use of Gildas: Two Different Chronological Frameworks', *The Anglo-Saxons: The World Through Their Eyes*, ed. Gale Owen-Crocker (Oxford, 2014): 7-15.

and a case study of how divine punishment can be catastrophic on a community that has sinned, repented somewhat, and then lapsed back into sin. Following this, this present section will examine Bede's application of biblical parallels to history.

Bede had written that "the smoke of hell … is close at hand", implying that damnation was always near.[72] This is why his use of Gildas is so important, because it shows how he used the history of Britain as support for his eschatological reading of contemporary history.

Like Bede, Gildas was a providential historian. However, Gildas also cast himself in the role of an Old Testament prophet, particularly Jeremiah (*DEB* 1.4-10).[73] Gildas, commenting on the destruction of Jerusalem and other calamities of the Old Testament prophet, "gazed on these things and many others in the Old Testament as though on a mirror reflecting our own life" (*DEB* 1.7). It is not unlike how the author of Revelation critiques the present "by the use of a contrast between the glories of the future and inadequacies of the present" while offering an "outline of future history … as the basis for a change of heart" in its audience.[74] Bede does something similar with his gallery of good examples in the *HE* preface, which by implication are to inspire people of the current "slothful" era (*HE* 3.5) by recalling a glorious golden age. Bede's Ezra commentary also refers to how bishops and priests need to appoint good teachers, but that this has been thwarted by "the slothfulness of our times" ("*nostrorum socordiam temporum*"), a passage DeGregorio notes as one that draws the Ezra commentary and the *Epistola* together.[75] He also uses the phrase when describing Aidan, an almost ideal teacher whose industrious life is "in great contrast to our modern slothfulness", which ties together

[72] *Exp Apoc*, 479; TTH.58, 239.
[73] For a fuller discussion, see George, *De excidio*, 20-5 and 29-47. See also N. J. Higham, *The English Conquest: Gildas and Britain in the Fifth Century* (Manchester, 1994), 67-89, and Sims-Williams, 'Gildas and the Anglo-Saxons': 2.
[74] Rowland, 'New Testament Church': 63.
[75] *In Ez*, 277; TTH.47, 62; DeGregorio, 'Visions of Reform: Bede's Later Writings in Context': 227.

the need for good teachers articulated in the *Epistola* and his presentation of good examples in the *HE*. It is a strand present in his exegesis: "By thus considering the virtues of those who are greater, [the faithful] are able to become great also".[76] Biblical models are an important part of this.

Gildas draws a connection between himself and the prophet Jeremiah, saying that he saw in Jeremiah and the other Old Testament books "a mirror reflecting on our own life" (*DEB* 1.7). He does not say that he is a prophet but constructs his narrative in such a way that the reader understands that his text is a contemporary reflection of the Old Testament prophets. While Bede is less explicit about comparisons between his *Epistola* and the Old Testament, it was argued by George Hardin Brown that the *Epistola's* tone is "that of a prophet exhorting a high priest".[77] It is worth an examination of the role of prophets in Bede's works so as to understand better the connections he is making between his day and biblical models, but also to understand better that the *Epistola* is not a rhetorical work but something rooted in eschatology. There is a focus in his work on failing to adhere to correct Christian living which parallels the general arguments in prophetic texts but also Gildas's *DEB*.

It has been noted that the clergy of Bede's time "were not just imitators of examples from the Old Testament, they were the prophets and priests of their own time".[78] And Bede does demonstrate an element of this. The *Epistola* has parallels with Revelation: Rev 2:4-5 is about people who have lost faith, while Rev 3:17-18 concerns Christians who think highly of themselves and their position but are spiritually poor through corruption and laxity.[79] Regarding Rev 2:4 he explains that it means: "in the presence

[76] *De tab*, 80; TTH.18, 90.
[77] Brown, *Bede the Venerable*, 79.
[78] Davidse, 'The Sense of History': 653.
[79] Rev 2:4: "There is one charge I make against thee [the people of Ephesus]: of losing the charity that was thine at first. Remember the height from which thou hast fallen, and repent, and go back to the old ways, or else I will come to visit thee, and, when I find thee still unrepentant, will remove thy candlestick from its place." Rev 3:17: "I am rich, thou sayest, I have come into my own; nothing, now, is wanting to me. And all the while, if thou didst

of some you have abandoned the love (*amorem*) you started with, and unless these people recover it, I shall deprive them of the reward of light which I promised".[80] Other chapters of Revelation, such as 9:20-21 concern what Rowland describes as "the kind of misguided devotion to evil which has to be rooted out before God's kingdom can finally come",[81] not unlike Bede's polemic against false monasteries. Indeed, in Bede's commentary on Revelation he writes of lukewarm Christians: "Content with faith alone, you lay claim to the riches of righteousness in vain. But if you wish truly to be rich, set everything else aside and purchase the fervour of charity (*caritatis*)".[82]

Bede certainly sees biblical history as a parallel for current events; we must bear in mind that "prophet" in the Old Testament sense is one who interprets the will of God, not who necessarily predicts the future. When describing the exile into Babylon and destruction of the Temple from Kings, he says "the allegory of so lamentable a history fits so well with the negligence of our own time (*neglegentiae nostri temporis*)"[83], by which he means the decline of the Church in his own country. However, it was a prophetic warning, a reading of history and scripture applied to the present day rather than just a topos. The biblical text he is analysing concerns the destruction of Jerusalem and its conquest by an outside power. This had not happened in Bede's Northumbria – and yet in that commentary he is writing to Acca, bishop of Hexham, to tell him that what he has read in scripture is comparable to the present day. It can be argued that this thought process lies behind the tone of the *Epistola*, in that Bede had seen an allegory for his day in the destruction of the Temple, and he was working to try to prevent that from coming to pass.

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but know it, it is thou who art wretched, thou who art to be pitied. Thou art a beggar, blind and naked; and my counsel to thee is, to come and but from me what thou needest, gold, proved in the fire, to make thee rich, and white garments, to clothe thee, and cover up the nakedness which dishonours thee; rub salve, too, upon thy eye, and restore them to sight."

[80] *Exp Apoc*, 251; TTH.58, 117.

[81] Rowland, 'New Testament Church': 64.

[82] *Exp Apoc*, 273; TTH.58, 130.

[83] *Quaestiones XXX*, 320; TTH.28, 136, on 2 Kings 24:14.

Indeed, decline and lapses into sin were not necessarily an indication that all was lost. He would have seen the passage in Gregory's *Moralia* where he says God at times "terrifies [the elect] with threats, now with beatings, now with revelations, so that those hardened in deadly security may be softened with healthful fear, so that they may return, even if late, and at least blush with shame that they have been so long awaited". [84] Highlighting and exegetically interpreting historical and present-day ailments allowed Bede to apply this sort of thinking to his local context. The *HE*, and especially *HE* 5, also fulfils prophetic duties by implying how the English will be judged. This is quite traditional in the Old Testament, where prophets explain divine workings in temporal affairs. Amos, for instance, in the eighth-century BC, argues that God will use the Assyrians to punish the Israelites for their sins (Am 2:4-6; 7:1-9), and makes it clear that divine will is at play: "you have turned judgement into bitterness, and the fruit of justice into wormwood … behold, I will raise up a nation against you, O house of Israel, says the Lord the God of hosts, and they shall destroy you from the entrance of Emath even to the torrent of the desert" (Am 6:13, 15).[85] But there would be restoration if the Jews corrected their behaviour: "Behold the eyes of the Lord God are upon the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from the face of the earth: but yet I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob, says the Lord" (Am 9:8).[86] Gildas uses Amos as an example of a biblical prophet whose work and warnings applied to present-day Britain (*DEB* 53), specifically the passages stating that the Israelites have traded justice and good for material wealth

[84] Moralia 29.9.20 (CCSL.143B, 1,447): "*Sed quia plus conditor facturam suam non deserit … Cum duras atque insensibilies mentes respicit, modo eas minis, modo uerberibus, modo reuelationibus terret, ut quae pessima securitate duruerant, salubri timore mollescant, quatenus uel sero redeant, et hoc ipsum saltem, quod diu exspectati sunt erubescant*". As translated in Straw, *Perfection in Imperfection*, 194.

[85] "*Numquid currere queunt in petris equi, aut arari potest in bubalis? quoniam convertistis in amaritudinem judicium, et fructum justitiae in absinthium. Qui laetamini in nihilo; qui dicitis: Numquid non in fortitudine nostra assumpsimus nobis cornua? Ecce enim suscitabo super vos, domus Israel, dicit Dominus Deus exercituum, gentem, et conteret vos ab introitu Emath usque ad torrentem deserti*."

[86] "*Ecce oculi Domini Dei super regnum peccans: et conteram illud a facie terrae; verumtamen conterens non conteram domum Jacob, dicit Dominus*."

and so are threatened with destruction, but if they "seek they Lord" they shall be saved (Am 5:6).[87]

This line of thinking concerning national judgement and warnings exists in both Gildas and Bede, but is more pronounced in *DEB*. The form of the *DEB* also has parallels with the speech of Stephen before his martyrdom, where in Acts 7 he gives a compressed and select history of Israel which he uses to make his point about the Israelites of today.[88] By appealing to biblical models and saturating the text with allusions and direct quotations from scripture, Gildas is drawing on what is essentially divine authority for what he is saying about the present day.

The scriptural allusions in *DEB* emphasise the parallels between the Britons and the Old Testament Israelites for the most part, but Gildas also parallels them with biblical pagans.[89] Like Bede and other Christian writers, Gildas uses the Bible as a method for understanding the current day. Gildas stresses that God did not spare the Israelites just because they were his chosen people (*DEB* 1.13). The Bible, though historical, was also used as a key to interpreting contemporary events. In essence, Gildas, seeing in the Bible the completion of cycles of sin, repentance, lapses, and punishment, interpreted his people's activities in light of that cycle, with the exception that the great catastrophic judgement had not yet come. The Jews had lost their Temple and their kingdom had been destroyed, but the Britons had not quite lost their kingdom to the Saxons. However, as with the Jews of the Old Testament, a judgement always follows a period of corruption and moral lapse, and, as Bede would later do with the *HE*, Gildas uses history to try and steer his people back onto what he considers to be the right path.

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[87] The Amos passages used in *DEB* 53 are: 2:4-7, 5:6, 5:10, 7:14-17, 8:4-5, 8:7-8, 8:10, 9:10.

[88] Rex Gardner, 'The New Testament Motivation of Gildas and His Friends', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion, new series 1* (1995): 5-26: 5.

[89] For Gildas's use of scripture, see Francois Kerlouegan, *Le De Excidio Britanniae de Gildas. Les destinées de la culture latine dans l'île de Bretagne au VIe siècle* (Paris, 1987), and D.A. Brooks, 'Gildas' *De excidio Britanniae*: Its revolutionary meaning and purpose', *Studia Celtica* (1983-84), 1-10.

And he was certainly seen as a valid and useful source for historical information.

That Bede regarded Gildas as a trustworthy source is evident from his vocabulary: They are the only two men referred to as historian (*historicus*) in the *HE*, Gildas in *HE* 1.22 and Bede himself in *HE* 3.17.[90] This is hugely significant, because it demonstrates that Bede has not only taken Gildas's work to heart but that he is presenting himself as working in a similar method, driving for reform through using history as a mirror. In both cases, Bede uses the term when he and Gildas document events and practices that do not display their people in a great light – but then neither do the books of prophecy in the Old Testament, such as Amos. Bede says that Gildas, "their own historian", highlighted the "crimes" (*scelerum*, "sins") of the Britons, the greatest of which, for Bede, being that they did not preach to the English. Following Gildas, he presents the Britons as suffering a long spiritual and military decline and an unwillingness to reform themselves. In the *HE*, Bede, as "a truthful historian" (*HE* 3.17) related the account of the Irish missionary Bishop Aidan, praising what needed to be praised and preserving his memory – he is in almost every way a pastoral bishop par excellence – even though Aidan followed a different cycle for calculating Easter from that used by Rome, a divisive and potentially very damaging variance. Bede is therefore stating that he will discuss what will be of the most benefit to his audience, even if there are facets of an individual's practice that he "detests". Aidan is one of the key figures for Bede when it comes to reform, a figure of piety and industry who works closely with the king for the spiritual wellbeing of the whole kingdom. The important issue was that Aidan could serve as a

[90] "*Qui inter alia inenarrabilium scelerum facta, quae* ***historicus*** *eorum Gildus flebili sermone describit, et hoc addebant, ut numquam genti Saxonum siue Anglorum, secum Brittaniam incolenti, uerbum fidei praedicando committerent*" and "*sed quasi uerax* ***historicus****, simpliciter ea, quae de illo siue per illum sunt gesta, describens, et quae laude sunt digna in eius actibus laudans, atque ad utilitatem legentium memoriae commendans*".

demonstration of how learned and sincerely Christian the English needed to become.[91]

Gildas was himself learned. His text is packed with scriptural allusions, making up a four-page appendix in the critical edition.[92] He refers to his work as "*epistola*" but also "*historia"*, connecting it with the authority of Rufinus's *Historia ecclesiastica*, which he had read along with the work of Jerome and Orosius.[93] He was on that evidence attempting to show British history as part of a wider Christian continuum, much as Bede would do with his chronicles and *HE*. As an epistola that connects the sins of a people and their ruin, his work resembles that of Patrick.[94] Gildas' relentless and effective use of scripture in the context of history would have suggested to Bede that the *DEB* was a valid and highly useful source, especially as it would have included criticisms that not only parallel Bede's criticisms of the Britons, but shed light for him on the patterns of his own day and their possible conclusion. Gameson has argued that Bede "knew pitifully little about England in the period from 411 to 596" and that he "made the best use of what was available to him", largely Gildas' *DEB* and Constantius of Lyon's *vita* of St Germanus of Auxerre (c.AD480).[95] But Gildas is used as a theoretical framework as much as a historical reference.

Gildas calls the Britons, who had once been akin to the archetypal idolators of Egypt (*DEB* 4.2, where he says some of the "monstrosities" still stand), the "latter-day Israel", and portrays them as being on the verge of a

[91] For a recent study of Aidan and the Irish in Bede's work, see Sarah McCann, '*Plures de Scottorum regione*: Bede, Ireland, and the Irish,' *Eolas: The Journal of the American Society of Irish Medieval Studies* 8 (2015), 20-38.
[92] Gildas, *The Ruin of Britain*, 156-9.
[93] Scully, 'Atlantic Archipelago', 93. For Gildas and Orosius, Neil Wright, 'Did Gildas Read Orosius?', *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 9 (1985), 31-42 For the origins of Orosius, see Donnchadh Ó Corráin, 'Orosius, Ireland, and Christianity', *Peritia* 28 (2017): 113-34.
[94] Kerlouegan, 35-36; Scully, 'Atlantic Archipelago', 93-94. See also Michael Herren, 'Patrick, Gaul, and Gildas: A New Lens on the Apostle of Ireland's Career', *Gablánach in Scélaigecht: Celtic Studies in Honour of Ann Dooley*, eds. Sarah Sheehan and Joanne Findon (Dublin, 2013), 9-25.
[95] Richard Gameson, 'Augustine of Canterbury: Context and Achievement', *St Augustine and the Conversion of England*, ed. Richard Gameson (Stroud, 1999), 1-40: 4.

final, catastrophic judgement: as he presents it, the Saxons were held in check – albeit uneasily with no sense in the text that the troubles have gone, only being in remission for now – because the Britons had prayed and God had given them victory. Bede, reading Gregory's letters, would have seen how the pope saw the English as a new chosen people, so for him the parallels between the decline of the Britons and the decline of the English were cautionary. Gildas says God sent the Saxons to "purge" his family, the Britons (*DEB* 22.1).[96] But there was a chance for reform, if only they heeded the warnings. Bede draws from the same well of ideals in his commentary on Ezra when he highlights unseasonable storms as a divine sign that the Israelites had sinned following their release from captivity; "when they noticed the rains were pouring down more than was usual even for this wet season, they were brought back to their conscience and understood that this had happened because of their sins and that heavenly wrath was imminent. Admonished by this disturbance of the sky, they grew frightened" and penitential ("*paenitentiae et humilitatis*").[97] This for Bede was a biblical example of a people reforming themselves after correctly interpreting a divine message and showing genuine penance. But what he had seen in the Britons' history, through Gildas, and what he saw as inidications of in his own era, were peoples who did not or were not properly internalising messages sent by God.

Indeed, he is concerned that the English will go the way of the Britons, who Bede says "cast off Christ's easy yoke". Despite a plague that wiped out a huge part of the population, "those who survived could not be awakened from the death of the soul which their sins had brought upon them either by the death of their kinsmen or by fear of their own death"

[96] "*Interea volente deo purgare familiam suam et tanta malorum labe infectam auditu tantum tribulationis emendare, non ignoti rumoris penniger ceu volatus arrectas omnium penetrat aures iamiamque adventus veterum volentium penitus delere et inhabitare solito more a fine usque ad terminum regionem*."
[97] *In Ez*, 332; TTH.47, 145-6.

(*HE* 1.14).[98] And so they call upon the Saxons for aid, which Bede says "was ordained by the will of God so that evil might fall upon these miscreants".[99] By AD731, he says, the Britons are "opposed by God" and largely under the rule of the English.

Their opposition by God is important to note. They are outside the universal Church because they hold to their own customs and the incorrect Easter. This particularist approach means they are the one people disrupting Bede's image of a united island in *HE* 5.23. But even then he is careful to show that they are over-ruled, both by the moral authority of universal Christians and the political authority of the English. The idea of unity is important from an eschatological point of view, because it indicates that the peoples united by their faith have a chance of salvation when the Last Judgement comes. The fear of being outside the Church is quite fundamental to Bede's eschatology, as was shown in the previous chapter of the present thesis with the monk who was buried away from his brethren without prayers to mark his memory. This was a scenario where one could "perish" and die the "second death", the death of the soul (the first death being that of the body), from which there would be no resurrection after the Last Judgement, and therefore no salvation. Bede saw the devil in part as being responsible for such ruin, saying that he inflicted "spiritual death … in the arrogance of fleshly wisdom" on his followers after being cast out of heaven.[100]

The English have a chance to redeem themselves, a chance the Britons had spurned. However, this is not the only parallel with *DEB*. Both Bede and Gildas parallel the decline of their day with a reference to

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[98] "*Interea subito corruptae mentis homines acerba pestis corripuit, quae in breui tantam eius multitudinem strauit, ut ne sepeliendis quidem mortuis uiui sufficerent; sed ne morte quidem suorum, nec timore mortis hi, qui supererant, a morte animae, qua peccando sternebantur, reuocari poterant.*"

[99] "*placuitque omnibus cum suo rege Uurtigerno, utSaxonum gentem de transmarinis partibus in auxilium uocarent; quod Domini nutu dispositum esse constat, ut ueniret contra improbos malum, sicut euidentius rerum exitus probauit*". "Miscreants" is a colourful translation.

[100] *Exp Apoc*, 341; TTH.58, 165.

contemporary prosperity: but it is temporal prosperity at the expense of spiritual ruin. Compare *DEB* 26 (the "present quiet") with *HE* 5.23: "In these favourable times of peace and prosperity". Gildas makes the contrast between temporal wealth and spiritual poverty explicit, while the *Epistola* is needed to establish this when it comes to Bede.

Bede's *Epistola* depicts a kingdom in a similar state of spiritual complacency and weakness to the Britons of *DEB*. This includes bishops demanding payment for preaching and monasteries filled with people who have no love for God, but rather have brought a secular life into the cloister. It is not unlike how Gildas had presented preachers and ecclesiastical leaders who had bought their offices, and who were actively harming people by teaching them a bad example (*DEB* 66, 67 and 76). In his exegesis, Bede refers to how famines can be caused by rulers demanding taxes greater than the populace are able to pay. And he says:

> We see that this occurs among us in the same manner every day (*Quod apud nos cotidie eodem ordine fieri uidemus*). For how many are there among God's people who willingly desire to obey the divine commands but are hindered from being able to fulfil what they desire not only by a lack of temporal means and by poverty but also by the examples of those who seem to be endowed with the garb of religion (*habitu religionis*), but who exact an immense tax and weight of worldly goods from those whom they claim to be in charge of while giving nothing for their eternal salvation either by teaching them or by providing them with examples of good living or by devoting effort to works of piety for them? Would that some Nehemiah might come in our own days and restrain our errors, kindle our breasts to love of the divine, and strengthen our hands by turning them away from our own pleasures to establishing Christ's city![101]

This could have been a passage from the *Epistola* or *DEB*. It is a plea for a pious ruler to ally himself firmly with the Church and to reinvigorate Christianity among the English. Bede's commentaries were for an ecclesiastical audience, and so this plea forms an ecclesiastical parallel to

[101] *In Ez*, 360; TTH.47, 184.

the call on Ceolwulf in the *HE* to work for the spiritual wellbing of his people.

The *De tab* passage above is also a plea to ecclesiastical leaders to seek out a ruler like Nehemiah who would work with them to restore moral order. Like the *Epistola*, it suggests that sincerely Christian people are being hampered by a lack of willing or educated preachers and spiritual leaders: What was needed was a king or leader who would put the spiritual wellbeing of the English at the heart of a reform process (Nehemiah restored correct moral practice in Jerusalem twice). As outlined in the introduction to the present thesis, any statements about weak rulers or the need for strong rule should be read in the light of 2 Thess 2:3, where the sons of perdition would come as political rule declined.[102] The call for a new Nehemiah was an eschatological statement that certain conditions for the rise of the Antichrist were being fulfilled. That said, prosperity was not necessarily a bad thing, because Bede argued it could be used to support the Church.[103] In this, he is following scripture on using resources to support religious organisation (see Mark 12:41-44; Luke 8:1-3). But with regard to the *HE* statement Bede has the sense of 1 Tim 6:10 – and 1 Tim is one of the books Bede recommends in his *Epistola* as suitable for a pastor-bishop – in mind: "For the desire of money is the root of all evils; which some coveting have erred from the faith, and have entangled themselves in many sorrows"; that is, the pursuit of temporal things for their own sake.[104]

However, the concern that leadership of a monastery would be left to kin was one shared by the founder of Wearmouth-Jarrow (at least in the text passed down to us by Bede), who said he would rather the monastery revert to "wilderness" than its leadership be down to a "brother in the

[102] "Let no man deceive you by any means, for unless there come a revolt first, and the man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition" ("*Ne quis vos seducat ullo modo: quoniam nisi venerit discessio primum, et revelatus fuerit homo peccati filius perditionis*").
[103] Paul C Hilliard, 'Prosperty, Adversity and Bede's Hope for the Future of Northumbria', *Bede and the Future*, 181-206: 202.
[104] "*Radix enim omnium malorum est cupiditas: quam quidam appetentes erraverunt a fide, et inseruerunt se doloribus multis*."

flesh" (ie, as opposed to a good Christian, a kingroup or family appointment rather than one that followed the good practise of the monastic rule).[105] The upheaval in Jarrow after its abbot left in AD716 may have caused Bede to think he was living among people demonstrating attitudes and mindsets more appropriate to heretics.[106] Bede had in his exegesis said that the "abundance of luxury (*luxuriis*) makes [men] poor rather than rich",[107] and these false monasteries would seem to chime with that sentiment. It is worth noting that Gildas too says "luxuries from overseas" used to be brought to Britain, while in his day civil wars raged throughout the land (*DEB* 3.1, 26.2). A luxurious past has become a fractured present. It is emphasised by Isaiah 3:11-15, 10:1-3, and 28:7-8, quoted almost as a single statement in *DEB* 78, which castigate those who have extorted from the people and oppressed the weak, as well as given into drunkenness, all of which Gildas says is directed at priests.[108] The decline of monasteries, for Bede, would have been rich with eschatological meaning: the fourth trumpet of Revelation signals "the fall of the false brethren (*falsorum fratrum*) [symbolised] by the darkening of the stars".[109] Elsewhere he says that "the evil which the church suffers in false brethren remains so far uncorrected for the most part".[110] These false brethren are heretics and apostates. Gildas, although scathing, does not "indulge in pointless vituperation. He is challenging his fellow clergy to a new

[105] Bede, 'The Lives of the Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow', 198-9.
[106] Thacker, 'Why Did Heresy Matter?': 60-61.
[107] *Exp Apoc*, 477, quoting Tyconius 6.24, Caesarius 260.6-8, Beatus 10.1.4.
[108] *DEB 78: "Esaiam quoque sanctum prophetam de sacerdotibus hoc modo loquentem audite: 'Vae impio in malum, retributio enim manuum eius fiet ei. Populum meum exactores sui spoliaverunt et mulieres dominatae sunt eius. Populе meus, qui beatum te dicunt ipsi te decipiunt et viam gressuum tuorum dissipant. Stat ad iudicandum dominus et stat ad iudicandos populos. Dominus ad iudicium veniet cum senibus populi sui et principibus eius. Vos depasti estis vineam meam, rapina pauperis in domo vestra. Quare atteritis populum meum et facies pauperum commolitis? dicit dominus exercituum'. Et item: 'Vae qui condunt leges iniquas et scribentes iniustitiam scripserunt, ut opprimerent in iudicio pauperes et vim facerent causae humilium populi mei, ut essent viduae praeda eorum et pupillos diriperent. Quid facietis in die visitationis et calamitatis de longe venientis?' Et infra: 'Verum hi quoque prae vino nescierunt et prae ebrietate erraverunt, sacerdotes nescierunt prae ebrietate, absorpti sunt a vino, erraverunt in ebrietate, nescierunt videntem, ignoraverunt iudicium*."
[109] *Exp Apoc*, 333; TTH.58, 161.
[110] On Acts 1:16, CS.117, 17.

dedication".[111] Bede is doing the same. Indeed, Gildas says he uses the words of the prophets as "shafts" directed at "imperfect shepherds … so they can sting and so heal them" (*DEB* 76).[112] Compare this to how Bede, in his Habakkuk commentary, says that "Christ's darts are his words by which the hearts of men are pierced so that, when the saving wound is inflicted, the faithful soul can say: I have been wounded by love."[113]

Elsewhere in his Habakkuk commentary, he writes that "on contemplating the condition of the present world, the prophet had seen the peace enjoyed by sinners and the afflictions of the upright" but had been struck by his recollection that this was all part of a providential design by God.[114] The sort of political and social upheaval evident in Bede's Northumbria could be interpreted eschatologically. Similarly in his work on 1 Samuel, he says that "for the most part I have seen (*uiderim*) that precisely now the times are approaching which were once foretold, in which with iniquity abounding, the charity of many is growing cold (Matt 24)" – which, as Darby has pointed out, is a rare first-person reference by Bede.[115] It may be that, following the death of Osred, the departure of Bede's beloved abbot Ceolfrith amid a political crisis in the kingdom,[116] and Iona adopting the Roman Easter, Bede saw this passage as paralleling contemporary decline and the fulfilment of New Testament prophecy, that "the start of the end-time sequence is close and moving ever closer".[117] One should bear in mind though that Paul's 2 Thess 2:7 said "the mystery of iniquity is already at work", something quoted in Bede's commentary on 1

[111] Gardner, 'The New Testament Motivation of Gildas and His Friends': 24.
[112] "*Igitur confugientes solito more ad domini misericordiam sanctorumque prophetarum eius voces, ut illi pro nobis oraculorum suorum iacula inperfectis pastoribus, ut antea tyrannis, quis compuncti sanentur, librent, videamus quid dominus per prophetas ad desides et inhonestos sacerdotes et non bene populum tarn exempla quam verba docentes minarum loquatur*."
[113] *Habacuc*, 398; Connolly trans, 90, quoting Sg 5:8.
[114] *Habacuc*, 381-2; Connolly, 65-6.
[115] *In Samuhelis*, 222, as translated by Darby, *Bede and the End of Time*, 183. "*Neque haec ita prosecutus sum, quasi non et hodie multos existere multos semper extituros perfectos in fide et ueritate crediderim sed quod maxima in parte uiderim iam iamque instare tempora quae olim praedicta sunt in quibus abundante iniquitate, refrigescat caritas multorum*."
[116] *Hist abb* chapters 16-18.
[117] Darby, *Bede and the End of Time*, 184.

John in relation the statement in John's letter that "it is the last hour".[118] So Bede would have seen how the eschatological threat of rising iniquity could be used as a warning to different contemporary audiences but that at the same time it was always relevant, because it was a sign that the end was coming.

His use of iniquity in commentaries on Genesis and 1 Samuel is also suggestive of how the temporal and spiritual worlds are beginning to overlap as described in Gregory's *Dialogii*. However, the first-person approach allows him to articulate an idea that he has rooted in scripture, while providing for enough distance between sharing the idea and stating it categorically. Bede does not use the first person lightly, usually maintaining a third-person stance or citing from patristic or scriptural sources, which carry with them their own (usually) undeniable authority. It is worth briefly looking at other examples in his exegesis because they indicate the sorts of ideas that he wishes to raise without falling foul of criticism.

Another first-person reference appears in his comments on "the flesh of horses" in Rev 19:18: "These, I think (*reor)*, are those horsemen whom he had described at the opening of the seals as issuing forth against the white horse of the Lord [Rev 6:1-8]".[119] In this instance it would seem to be a caveat, in that Bede's text here is not drawing on any obvious patristic or biblical authority and so he may have been wary of making the connection with absolute authority. He also says "I think" when discussing the twelve gates of Revelation, and there is a substantial (by his standards) first-person address at the end of that section in which he says why he "perhaps … discussed the precious stones at greater length than was suitable for this summary style of commentary … I beseech the reader to give thanks to God if he sees that I have travelled along the right path. But

[118] Wallis, 'Commentary on Revelation': 34.
[119] *Exp Apoc*, 501; TTH.58, 250.

should he detect that it has turned out other than as I wished, let him pray with me that God may forgive my error."[120] It can be argued that this may not simply be a modesty *topos* but a deliberate construction that allows Bede to advance an argument or interpretation while having soom room to retract it should the interpretation prove unpopular. However, in his Samuel commentary the reference to the charity of many growing cold is directly from Matt 24, which suggests he was more confident of that interpretation because he could directly link it to one of Jesus' prophecies. The moral decline outlined in Bede's *Epistola* would reflect such iniquity. In the *Dialogii*, Gregory says the coming of the Lombards, who ravaged Italy during his lifetime, had meant that "in this land of ours the world is not merely announcing its end, it is pointing directly to it" (*Dialogii* 3.38).[121] Gregory had also written to King Aethelberht of Kent saying the king may see wars and other apocalyptic signs, but that the end would likely come after their lifetime; nonetheless, Bede therefore had patristic precedent for associating decline among the English with a coming judgement.

A corrupted clergy, the destruction of Coldingham, and ways of reform

This section emphasises the central role Bede sees for preaching as part of overall moral reform, and argues that the burning of Coldingham monastery is shown as an example of divine judgement, and is a case study for the sins of the wider English, connecting it to Bede's comments about the "death of the soul". It then discusses the consequences of poor preaching and leadership, particularly in the context of his exegetical references to false Christians and those who love the temporal world, as opposed to how he treats those who leave that world behind. Bede's

[120] Gates: *Exp Apoc*, 527; I wished, 559; TTH.58, 264, 277.
[121] SC.260, 430: "*Occupauerunt bestiae loca, quae prius multitudo hominum tenebat. Et quid in aliis mundi partibus agatur ignoro, nam hac in terra, in qua uiuimus, finem suum mundus non iam nuntiat, sed ostendit*."

argument is that one-off gestures are insufficient to achieve salvation, which the present thesis has shown is especially significant as their conversion helped to fulfil key biblical eschatological prophecy, but that the English need to demonstrate an internalised and ongoing commitment to Christianity at all levels of society. This included lay people, such as Dryththelm, as well as monastic figures. The section discusses references to lay pastoral figures in Bede's homilies as a way of demonstrating how he anticipated and desired a wholesale societal reform. It concludes by returning to the theme of landscape and Bede's demonstrations in the *HE* of how pious Christianity can lead to mastery over physical matters.

Gildas' attack on priests is savage but designed to get a reaction and encourage inward reflection and reform:

> Britain has priests, but they are fools (*insipientes*); very many ministers, but they are shameless; clerics, but they are treacherous grabbers (*raptores*). They are called shepherds, but they are wolves all ready to slaughter souls. They do not look to the good of their people, but to the filling of their own bellies. They have church buildings, but go to them for the sake of base profit. They teach the people – but by giving them the worst of examples, vice, and bad character … They do not reprimand the people for their sins (*peccata*), indeed they do the same things themselves … they canvass posts in the Church more vigorously than in the kingdom of heaven; they get them and keep them like tyrants, and bring to them no lustre of lawful behaviour. (*DEB* 66.1-4)

This is a polemic against a clergy which is doing the opposite of what it should be doing. It is not just rhetoric, but an attempt to stimulate moral reform by being deliberately provactive, either to inspire those priests directly through their reading of the texts or to inspire a new generation of ecclesiastics who will commit to the moral reform of the Britons. A comparison with Bede's letter shows he is presenting more or less the same image: Bishops go out among their flocks only to get payment, while monasteries are filled with people who are seeking positions but without the labour required to earn them. Gildas writes that the clergy of his day

"have grabbed merely the name of priest – not the priestly way of life" (*DEB* 66.6). Bede, looking on Gildas' work and looking at the world around him, could not have failed to pick up the parallel, with all the warning overtones it carried about imminent divine punishment. Gildas, too, wrote that bishops were "crowning the whole wicked structure of their lives with a kind of roof that can protect all their evils", meaning none could reproach them (*DEB* 67.2). Even well-intentioned clerics come in for criticism, with an extensive rhetorical section asking if they have lived up to biblical and martyr exemplar figures (*DEB* 69-74). It is no wonder, then, that Bede implores Ecgbert to ordain more well-trained bishops and tear up monastic charters so as to start afresh with a new, truly Christian impetus.

In *De tabernaculo* (completed c.721), Bede says "a sign of our unhappy time" is that some priests and teachers face eternal damnation "because they prefer the fire of cupidity to the fire of heavenly love".[122] DeGregorio argues that *De tabernaculo, De templo,* and *In Ezram* (all works that deal with ecclesiastical issues and reform) "were written to form a coherent whole, something like a trilogy; and further that they were intended as an exegetical counterpart to the *Historia ecclesiastica*".[123] While the texts appear to have been written at approximately the same time (720s on), Bede would have seen exegesis and history as two aspects of the same spiritual renewal programme. It is just as likely that his reforming impulse and thoughts had been heightened by continuing research and the application of eschatology to the contemporary period. The *HE* and the *Epistola* indicate the situation in Northumbria has reached a point where failure to denounce would do more harm than good given that the English were living in "the death of the soul", as examined in the previous chapter of the present thesis.

[122] *De tab*, 96; TTH.18, 110.
[123] DeGregorio, 'Visions of Reform: Bede's Later Writings in Context': 223.

In the *HE*, Bede tells of a corrupt priest damned and unmourned because he did not make confession (*HE* 5.14), and hopes his fate will inspire change in the reader. In the letter, Bede says bishops have "promised to be … protectors" of the people, but are failing in this duty.[124] One solution to the bishops' failure is prayer, ideally in Latin but at least in English.[125] In his exegesis, Bede describes prayer as armour against vainglory, because it shows humility, which is essential for spiritual salvation.[126] The lack of prayers (or at least their quality) has allowed the retention of pagan traditions such as amulets and charms, which puts this salvation at risk (see the East Saxon reversion to idolatry during plague in *HE* 3.30). To assure salvation, Bede advocates taking communion daily. He saw the Eucharist as fundamental to spiritual defence.[127] However, he writes that even the most religious only receive it at Christmas, Epiphany, and Easter.[128] It means the English are suffering spiritual neglect, which helps to explain his references to spiritual death.

Thus to describe his people as being in a state of "the death of the soul" (*HE* 5.12) immediately connects the Northumbria of the 700s with the Britain of the 540s and the judgements of the Bible. Benedicta Ward has argued that, as in Genesis, he had seen in early British history, through Gildas, "the story of a Fall, of Christianity established but then lost by sin".[129] He had seen this occur in Britain's past and feared it would occur in Britain's future. The burning of Coldingham monastery – which Darby argues comes at a time of peace and security[130] – is an important case study for this. Not only does it stand as a singular treatment and example of the corrupt monasteries depicted in the *Epistola*, but Bede's presentation of its

[124] Letter to Ecgbert, 348.
[125] Letter to Ecgbert, 345-6.
[126] Bede, Homily 2.15; for more see Carroll, *Venerable Bede*, 198-215, citing *In Lucam*, 99-100.
[127] Carroll, 107.
[128] Letter to Ecgbert, 355.
[129] Ward, *Venerable Bede*, 117.
[130] Darby, *Bede and the End*, 195-96.

destruction is, for him, proof of how God is watching and judging the English.

Coldingham was established in the seventh century prior to the plague of AD664.[131] It held considerable status, as it received Queen Aethelthryth (d. AD679) as an inmate in AD672 (*HE* 4.19) when its abbess was Aebbe, sister to deceased King Oswiu and aunt of the reigning king, Ecgfrith, to whom Aethelthryth was married. However, Aethelthryth departed after only a year to found a monastery at Ely, meaning she was absent when Coldingham was destroyed between AD679 and 683.[132] O'Reilly points out that the defeat and death of Ecgfrith is immediately preceded by the Coldingham account[133] – it is in effect a demonstration that judgement is being passed on the English even as their kingdoms are declining. As with the Dryhthelm account, Bede takes pains to inform the reader of the deeper meaning to the event before giving details of it: He says that God had not failed to give warning of approaching judgement "so that they might have been led to amend their ways" like the people of Nineveh (Jonah 3:3-10) – a statement O'Reilly shows resembles Gildas's statement that if the Britons had repented sincerely they would have been spared, like the Ninevites.[134] Again, structure is important in Bede's narrative. The burning of the monastery takes place, he says, at about the time the poet Caedmon of Whitby monastery died (*HE* 4.24). So just as one Englishman is touched by divine influence in order to write poetry in English (and allegorically and literally showing the rewards of good Christian practice), a monastery is destroyed by divine punishment.

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[131] J.R. Maddicott, 'Plague in Seventh-Century England', *Past & Present*.156 (1997), 7-54: 29.

[132] The E-manuscript of *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* puts the burning "by divine fire" in AD679, the year of Aethelthryth's death, whereas Bede locates it after the death of Aebbe, which is traditionally ascribed to AD683. Michael Swanton, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, revised ed. (London, 2000), 39.

[133] O'Reilly, Jarrow Lecture, 19. See also 18-23.

[134] O'Reilly, Jarrow Lecture, 19.

The message Bede wants to convey is that God is willing to reward as well as punish, and as Caedmon's piety and sincerity had been rewarded with the gift of eloquent Christian poetry, so the sins of the corrupt monastery were rewarded with fire. Both are also double monasteries, in that they house congregations of monks and nuns in separate buildings under a single abbess. However, Colgrave notes that it is the only such monastery of which we hear scandal.[135] It has been argued that Bede's presentation of the monastery was motivated by misogyny, but this was rebutted in a recent study by Jenny Coughlan.[136] Whatever the uniqueness or commonness of the behaviour at Coldingham, it suited Bede's call for reform and polemic against corruption. His words are clear:

> About [Caedmon's] time [c.680s] the monastery of virgins at Coldingham … was burned down through carelessness. However, all who knew the truth were easily able to judge that it happened because of the wickedness of those who dwelt there and especially of those who were supposed to be its leaders. But God in His mercy did not fail to give warning of approaching punishment so that they might have been led to amend their ways and, by fasting, tears, and prayers, to have averted the wrath of the just judge from themselves as did the people of Nineveh [who fasted and repented sincerely after Jonah preached to them; Jonah 3:5-10]

The sins are listed by a visionary figure who appears to the penitent Irishman Adomnán (not to be confused with the abbot of Iona). This figure says he has visited every cell of the monastery and found Adomnán to be the only one concerned with spiritual welfare. The other inmates are either sleeping for sleeping's sake or awake to sin. "The cells that were built for praying and for reading have become haunts of feasting, drinking, gossip, and other delights", while the nuns dress elaborately and "make friends with strange men. So it is only right that a heavy vengeance from heaven should be preparing for this place and for its inhabitants in the form of

[135] Colgrave, *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert*, 318.
[136] Coughlan, 'Saints and Scandals', 136-57.

raging fire."[137] This can be compared to the situation in the *Epistola*, where men obtain land from kings under the pretence of building monasteries but only so they can "give freer rein to their libidinous tastes", and where men rejected from other monasteries ("cohorts of the deformed") are recruited.

Had there been any mention of a dream guide telling Bede what to include in his *Epistola*, it would be very close indeed to *HE* 4.26. When referring to how Aaron's sons were destroyed by divine fire for illicit offerings to God, he writes "This is not far from being a sign of our unhappy time (*miserabilis nostri temporis*), in which some who have attained positions as priests and teachers – merely to mention it is both distressing and sad enough – are consumed by the fire of heavenly vengeance because they prefer the fire of cupidity to the fire of heavenly love; their eternal damnation was figured by the temporal death of Aaron's sons".[138] This statement of in Bede's exegesis is a precursor to the criticisms of the *Epistola* and *HE* – it demonstrates also that there was a growing spiritual crisis in the English Church from the 720s. It is a direct connection between the love of the temporal world – or the flesh – and divine fire that is later found in the Coldingham account.

The lifestyle of the Coldingham inmates is the lifestyle Bede has in mind when he writes that people are "living in the death of the soul". In particular, it is a case study of the failure of Christian leadership – all of this had been taking place under the nose of the abbess. In his exegesis, Bede had written that "a good governor … ought to restrain evildoers and reward those who behave properly".[139] This is equally applicable to bishops and kings, but Coldingham encapsulates this because the monastery's leaders had not restrained those under their charge, nor had they rewarded those who behaved properly. The monastery recovered somewhat due to a

[137] "*Unde merito loco huic et habitatoribus eius grauis de caelo uindicta flammis saeuientibus praeparata est*."
[138] *De tab*, 96.
[139] *Epistulas VII*, 139-40; CS.82, 91.

reinvigorated leadership, but the fact it descended back into its old ways after the death of the leader who tried to reform it makes it a cautionary tale of what could happen to Northumbria if strong, durable Christian leadership was not in place. As he would have seen in Mark 8:36, Jesus asked, "For what shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his soul?" And hence the danger of living at a time of prosperity, for one could be lulled into a false sense of security. So did the community at Coldingham see itself as living in "peace and safety" (*HE* 4.23) right before it was destroyed for failing to fully reform itself[140] – this is a reference to 1 Thess 5:2-3: "For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord shall so come as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, peace and security; then shall sudden destruction come upon them, as the pains upon her that is with child, and they shall not escape". Bede had noted that the Britons had seen an "abundance of corn" and "increase of luxury" even as their crimes multiplied – and that they had failed to pay heed to a plague sent by God and so were judged (*HE* 1.14).

Gildas himself had written that the love of luxury before the coming of the Saxons was a "virulent famine" at a time of relative peace (*DEB* 21.1-2). And as Bede had written, "God … changed [the English] from sons of darkness into sons of light through the water of regeneration, not because of our merits but because of the generosity of his will".[141] The English therefore did not have an innate right to eternal salvation – it was dependent on God's will, and the English needed to work constantly to stay in God's favour. And so Bede takes great pains to provide evidence for his arguments and for his vision narratives.

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[140] "*Qua diuulgata uisione, aliquantulum loci accolae paucis diebus timere, et se ipsos intermissis facinoribus castigare coeperunt. Uerum post obitum ipsius abbatissae redierunt ad pristinas sordes, immo sceleratiora fecerunt. Et cum dicerent, 'Pax et securitas,' extemplo praefatae ultionis sunt poena multati*." See 1 Thess 5:2-3: "*Ipsi enim diligenter scitis quia dies Domini, sicut fur in nocte, ita veniet: cum enim dixerint: Pax et securitas: tunc repentinus eis superveniet interitus, sicut dolor in utero habenti, et non effugient*."

[141] *Epistulas VII*, 189-90; CS.82, 17: "*per aquam regenerationis de filiis tenebrarum nos in filios lucis mutauerit*".

The inmates of Coldingham are the very people, Bede believes, who would be left outside the Church and thus damned when universal judgement comes, and would certainly be outside the Church when they as individuals die and go to be judged. He had written that "there is no one who has lived on earth for even one day who is without sin … no one who does not need to be reborn in Christ, no one whose spirit does not need to be cleansed by fire".[142] In his commentary on Mark he had said "it is better to serve the lord naked than by cleaving to the things of the world, to court the danger of being tested and being removed from God to one's enemies". [143] This eschatological warning from his earlier career is developed and becomes more pronounced in *HE* 5, hence the importance of pastoral care at all levels of society and the urgency of reform. And it is a reform call Bede draws attention to at the end of *HE* 4.23: The Coldingham account is also unusual in that Bede not only introduces it with an explanation, but concludes it with one as well.

> It seemed desirable to include this story in our History so as to warn the reader about the workings of the Lord and how terrible [ie, terrifying] He is in His dealings with the children of men, in order that we should not at any time indulge in fleshly delights nor pay so little heed to the judgement of God that His wrath should come suddenly upon us and He should in His righteous anger afflict us with temporal loss or, it may be, judge us still more sternly and bear us away to everlasting perdition (*perpetuam perditionem*)[144]

These editorial interjections are relatively few in the *HE*, but used more often in his commentary on Samuel to challenge the reader into paying attention to his points.[145] Such an address also ensures that even the casual reader or listener can derive the precise spiritual benefit that Bede desires

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[142] *De tab*, 133; TTH.18, 155: "*in Christo renasci et spiritus eius igne mundari*".
[143] Brown, *Companion*, 62-3.
[144] "*His temporibus monasterium uirginum, quod Coludi Urbem cognominant, cuius et supra meminimus, per culpam incuriae flammis absumtum est. Quod tamen a malitia inhabitantium in eo, et praecipue illorum, qui maiores esse uidebantur, contigisse, omnes, qui nouere, facillime potuerunt aduertere. Sed non defuit puniendis admonitio diuinae pietatis, qua correcti per ieiunia, fletus, et preces iram a se, instar Nineuitarum, iusti Iudicis auerterent*."
[145] Brown, 'Bede's Neglected Commentary on Samuel': 134-5.

to come from the text. His preface to his commentary on Revelation refers to the "sloth" of the English ("*gentis inertiae*"), which is why, Bede says, he wrote his Revelation commentary in a relatively simple and digestible format.[146]

Given the complex nature of the subject it is not surprising then that he pares it back to what is digestible by his audience. In the *HE*, he says that "in accordance with a true law of history I have tried to set down in simple style what I have collected from common report, for the instruction of posterity" (*HE* pref).[147] At a time of corruption and potential judgement on a national scale, if meaning was lost it would spell disaster. His concerns regarding eschatology and apocalypticism meant reform had to be brought about now, but that widescale reform needed the support of the authorities but the understanding of the rest of society. This, in turn, would lead to a greater internalisation of the faith which, in Bede's eyes, would see the English stand a better chance of avoiding the fires of judgement.

Although the Coldingham narrative forms part of *HE* 4, structurally it establishes the condition of the English before the overall *HE* moves to more recent events and the fuller expounding of the theme of corruption and the need for reform in *HE* 5. By placing it toward the end of *HE* 4, Bede ensures that when the reader gets to *HE* 5, he or she is already aware of the nature of divine punishment and its reality. It is also an account told to him by a monk he knew personally, Eadgisl, who Bede says had been living at Coldingham at the time of its destruction, which means he is showing it to be of impeccable provenence. The narrative is followed by a chapter documenting a disastrous campaign against the Picts by Ecgfrith, which leads to the death of him and many of his men and the subsequent decline in Northumbrian power. This put the kingdom at risk of raids by the Irish

[146] *Exp Apoc*; TTH.58, 106.
[147] For Bede's use of the phrase, which is taken from Jerome, see Roger Ray, 'Bede's Vera Lex Historiae', *Speculum* 55.1 (1980), 1-21: 13. See also Walter Goffart, 'Bede's "Uera Lex Historiae" Explained', *Anglo-Saxon England* 34 (2005), 111-16

or Picts, much as the Britons of *DEB* had been at risk of conquest by the English. Bede had already established that the Britons had been given a prophecy by Augustine the missionary that they would be defeated by the English for not accepting universal Christianity (*HE* 2.2).

The English could not afford to rely on one-off gestures, but required a true commitment. As Bede notes in his commentary on 1 Peter – specifically 1 Peter 4:8: "Above all, however, having a mutual and lasting love for one another because charity covers a multitude of sins" – that "all the good works we perform wipe away and cover the faults which we commit", although one should strive for a lasting love of one's neighbour, though he later acknowledged that the "world's night" was "filled with dark temptations".[148] In *De Templo*, completed shortly before the *HE*, Bede says "there are a great many at the present time (*hoc in tempore*) who, content with [observing] the precepts of the law … believe that it will be enough for them merely if they merit entrance into life" rather than striving to embrace the faith completely.[149] In the same passage he writes also that "there are others who, striving for perfection, sell all they have and follow the Lord, mindful of his promise whereby he foretold that in the resurrection not only life but special honour will be given"; Dryhthelm exemplifies this, unlike the denizens of Coldingham.

For a providential historian concerned with the end of time and the salvation of his people, Coldingham was a warning sign that disaster could come without a moment's notice. The poor leadership at Coldingham is paralleled with Bede's exegesis. The black horse in Revelation 6:5 is equated by Bede with such false priests and poor leaders: "The black horse is the troop of false brothers (*falsorum fratrum*), who hold the scales of profession [of the faith], but who harm their companions by the works of

[148] *Epistulas VII*, 253-4; CS.82, 110, 132. 1 Pet 4:8: "*Ante omnia autem, mutuam in vobismetipsis caritatem continuam habentes: quia caritas operit multitudinem peccatorum*."
[149] *De templo* 175; TTH.21, 42.

darkness … Beware, he says, lest by your bad example (*ne exemplo pessimo*) you scandalise your brother for whom Christ has died".[150] It is not surprising then, that in the *Epistola* Bede advocated destroying the charters for corrupt monasteries. This was a radical step, but in his eyes would be essential reform if it meant providing land for soldiers. Bede turns to scripture for examples of kings "aided by the spirit of God acting through the holy prophets and priests" who overturned "the illegal decisions of some princes".[151] The kings he mentions are from the Old Testament, "from David to Solomon to Zedekiah"; the first two are among the greatest in Jewish history, while Zedekiah (Sediacas) was the last Jewish king, who "did evil" despite the warnings of his prophet, Jeremiah, leading to the destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of the Babylonians (2 Kg 24:19); we have seen that Gildas associated himself with Jeremiah. Zedekiah ruled after most of the Israelites had been taken into captivity in Babylon (2 Kg 24:14): as discussed above Bede says in his exegesis, "the allegory of so lamentable history fits so well with the negligence of our own time".[152]

However, Bede has in Gregory a precedent when it comes to radical change: the pope initially urged Aethelberht to destroy pagan temples (*HE* 1.32). He later softened his stance after realising a gentler approach was required (*HE* 1.30); it was a turning point in Gregory's overall missionary strategy.[153] Given the shortage of land and soldiers, Bede's time is not one for gentle approaches. The false monasteries are "useless to God and man" but have come about partly because kings and bishops have allowed the situation to continue rather than intervene and assert their authority – much as Coldingham degraded due to the invigilance of its invigilators.[154]

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[150] *Exp Apoc*, 297-9; TTH.58, 142-3.
[151] Letter to Ecgbert, 351.
[152] *Quaestiones XXX*, 320. "*Cuius tam deflendae historiae quia multum neglegentiae nostri temporis congruit non opinor allegoriam esse reticendam*".
[153] Markus, 'Gregory the Great and a Papal Missionary Strategy': 36-7.
[154] Letter to Ecgbert, 351.

There is a clear eschatological link between the false monasteries and the end of the world. Bede's *Exp Apoc* had warned that "false brethren" ("*falsi fratres*") would wage war against the Church in tandem with Jews and heathens.[155] This must have been a daunting prospect: In effect, he is saying that agents of the Antichrist are not only in Britain but are active in his own kingdom. He is clear in his commentary on parts of Isaiah that those who side against the Church will perish, as they had throughout history as a way of showing how God punished the wicked in this life as well as the afterlife.[156] This adds another dimension to his references to and depictions of false preachers and false monks: The implied warning is that such people should be shunned because they are active agents of evil. His depiction of Coldingham should be read through this prism of understanding the world. It is curious that he does not make the connection between "false brethren" and the battle at the end of time more explicit in the *HE*. However, it is possible that he had in his thoughts the idea that criticising priests was wrong, because if he gave more detail he would risk naming such priests or at least allowing them to be identified. With Coldingham he was on safer ground: The monastery was destroyed and its inmates dead or long gone. Therefore he could point to it as a case study of divine judgement on a small scale while at the same time having the safety net of time and distance, and the fact that the leaders of the monastery were dead allows him to say the monastery was ruined by poor leadership without alienating a contemporary (Ceolwulf being descended from a different line of succession). Instead we need to draw parallels and strands together from his different texts, much as we have been doing all the way through this thesis.

For instance, he warns that the Last Judgement will be severe on "those who love the earth" ("*amatoribus terrae*"), meaning those who are enamoured with temporal things and material wealth, the sort of

[155] *Exp Apoc*, 461; TTH.58, 228-9. As noted also by Darby, *Bede and the End of Time*, 213.
[156] *Isaias*, 708; TTH.28, 48.

description that fits the inmates of false monasteries.[157] Gildas too writes that the people of his day knew only prosperity, with the majority rushing to hell. Bede is explicit about the destructive role of people preoccupied with material goods, saying that "those who, in their pride, seek worldly things … are debauched by the enticement of the world, and the lust for vice, and they are made drunk by the madness of their mind".[158] By contrast, "the more [people] free themselves from desiring things below, the more capable they become of contemplating things above".[159] So it was not only desirable, but quite possible, for somebody to relinquish worldly desires (the "things below") in favour of spiritual success. Bede, in his Samuel commentary, connects being worldly and motivated by desire for things as effectively putting one on the side of heretics in their attack on the Church.[160] This is not just a topos; the *HE* is replete with examples of individuals who set aside the cares of the world in favour of their souls – with Dryhthelm the most pertinent example.

Drawing on Tyconius and Primasius, he says of the "merchants of the earth" in Rev 18:2: "They are said to be rich in sins who in a doleful commerce trade their own souls for temporal gain. For abundance of luxury makes them poor rather than rich."[161] Bede prefers a simpler pastor in the model of the early church, who had little or no possessions. However, in a Bedan context preaching should be seen as part of a reform agenda motivated by pastoral eschatology. Thacker notes that Bede's pastor "was a ruler placed over spiritual subjects" who was bound to guide and correct the faithful.[162] Bede himself wrote that preachers "pore out the vials of wrath of God in two ways – when they impose by spiritual judgement the punishment of the ungodly (*poenas impiorum*) upon the

[157] *Exp Apoc*, 345; TTH.58, 167.
[158] *Exp Apoc*, 465, citing Primasius. "*Reges enim et habitatores terrae sunt singuli terrena superbe petentes, quos inlecebra saeculi uitiorum libidine constuprat et insania mentis debriat*".
[159] *In cantica*, 218 on Sg 2:8; Holder trans, 73.
[160] Hilliard, 'Prosperty, Adversity and Bede's Hope for the Future of Northumbria': 184.
[161] *Exp Apoc*, 475-77; TTH.58, 237.
[162] Thacker, 'Monks, Preaching and Pastoral Care': 154.

impious themselves … and when by preaching they show [the ungodly] to the Holy Church".[163] The vials are in reference to the seven vials that would be poured on the Earth at the end of time to destroy the agents of the beast. He also says that the angel that lights up the world in Rev 18:1 represents Jesus but also "the teachers of the Church (*ecclesiae doctores*)… [who] imbued with heavenly light, proclaim the fall of the world, saying the kingdom of heaven is at hand (*Adpropinquabit regnum caelorum*) [Matt 4:17]."[164] The last clause of that sentence is Matthew's report of what Jesus said while preaching; Bede is thus equating good preaching with eschatology and the imitation of Christ. Therefore Bede has from his earliest exegesis linked preaching with the end of time, with the idea that good pastors would maintain the moral standards of the converted while simultaneously bringing non-believers or corrupt Christians into their flock. Nobody could "be incorporated into the members of the Church" without having been ministered to by a preacher,[165] while a poor pastor would be called to account for leading people to spiritual ruin, something he had seen with the burning of Coldingham.

Compare this with how in his commentary on Revelation he says that white linen indicates "mortification of the flesh in those who teach, as it is written [in 1 Cor 9:27]: But I chastise my body and bring it into subjection; lest perchance when I have preached to others, I myself should become a castaway".[166] It was essential that preaching be of high quality and that preachers be constantly vigilant of their conduct and emotions lest the people suffer along with them. Commenting on Rev 2:28, "I know your works, that you have the name of being alive; and you are dead", Bede writes "It seems to you that you are alive [spiritually], but if you are not vigilant to correct the wicked, you will be reckoned as already amongst the [spiritually] dead … the works of a leader (*rectoris*) are not perfect before

[163] *Exp Apoc*, 447-49; TTH.58, 222.
[164] *Exp Apoc*, 475-77; TTH.58, 236-7, and citing Matt 3:2, 4:17, 10:7.
[165] *Exp Apoc*, 447; TTH.58, 221.
[166] *Exp Apoc*, 445; TTH.58, 220.

God if he does not exert himself to stir up others".[167] Similarly, poor preaching would "bring forth punishment (*poenam*) [for the preacher] and for their listeners".[168] He was not alone in thinking this way. The author of the *VSP* had reserved the most harsh punishments for clerics who had neglected their duties, with hell in that vision text "a tool of discipline, a means to consolidate the institutional framework of the Church".[169] The punishments seen in the *VSP* resonated with the laws and punitive actions of the late antique world – except they were eternal.[170] While Bede does not present clerics as being tortured, he shows one being dragged into hell during Dryhthelm's sojourn in the afterlife. He would have understood the significance of this given the ecclesiastical decline of Northumbria outlined in the *Epistola*. The message was clear: A leader had to be proactive and observant about the spiritual condition of his flock, much as Aidan and the earliest bishops in Northumbria had been (and in Bede's writings "*rector*" often refers to bishops). It recalls his remoulding of the Cuthbert *vita*, discussed in the previous chapter. While Bede often writes about the work of bishops, his strongest examples combine the contemplative and active, something missing from the leaders of Coldingham; he was influenced by the work of Augustine and Cassian who promoted what Coates calls "a social and communal form of asceticism marked by the need to live in and serve a community rather than to pursue a life of total withdrawal and solitude".[171] In fact one aspect of originality in his writing is that he "integrated history and contemplative reality into one all-encompassing totality".[172]

Much as their love of the world has corrupted them, so the world is corrupted by the number of people who love its material nature. Under his

[167] *Exp Apoc*, 265; TTH.58, 125.
[168] *Exp Apoc*, 359; TTH.58, 174, blending Tyconius and Primasius..
[169] Istvan Czachesz, 'Torture in Hell and Reality', *The Visio Pauli and the Gnostic Apocalypse of Paul*, 130-43: 131-3.
[170] Palmer, *Apocalypse*, 51.
[171] Coates, 'Role of Bishops': 181.
[172] Davidse, 'The Sense of History': 650-1.

pastoral eschatology then, destroying the monastic charters could mean the beginning of genuine Christian monastic life under the eye of royal authority. Indeed, in the *Epistola* he transforms a reference from Isaiah to ensure scriptural support for this: "loose the bands of wickedness, undo the bundles that oppress, let them that are broken go free, and break asunder every burden" becomes "break the bonds of legal contracts obtained by violence; let the parties thus divided go their own way in freedom, and obliterate every evil document".[173] Changing a Bible verse is quite a dramatic rhetorical device from a man who extolled scripture as the basis for theological and eschatological argument. It is symptomatic of how heightened his sense of foreboding had become, and how radical he believed the authorities needed to be to restore the English.

This should be compared to his passage on Aethelberht of Kent, where he says the king "had learned from his teachers and guides in the way of salvation that the service of Christ was voluntary and ought not to be compulsory" (*HE* 1.26). There is a growing sense, then, that relying solely on the principle of voluntary participation was not achieving the desired goals, and thus required the king to exercise his legitimate authority to reform the kingdom's land holdings. The Isaiah reference to bondage is the same as that paralleled in Dryhthelm's vision, and for a master of concordance exegesis such as Bede that parallel could not have gone unnoticed. However, he is using it here in a slightly different context. Although the main concern is that these monasteries are corrupt, and thus corrupting the people and landscape generally, Bede fears that without putting the land to better use Northumbria may become unable to defend itself from barbarians such as the Picts.

[173] Isaiah 58:6 (translation of Vulgate "*Dissolve colligationes impietatis*, *solve fasciculos deprimentes*, *dimitte eos qui confracti sunt liberos*, *et omne onus dirumpe*"), Letter to Ecgbert, 350. The initial translation is taken from the Douay-Rheims Bible. The point was also made in McClure and Collins, 428, but with a different modern translation of the Vulgate.

Despite the seemingly widespread and endemic corruption of monasteries along with secular weakness, the reform programme advocated by Bede is both fundamental and achievable: preaching. The present thesis has discussed, in the context of *DEB* and the *Epistola*, how it could raise people from the death of the soul. However, the present thesis has also argued that the increase in false monasteries had left swathes of the countryside "useless to both God and man". This in turn is connected to his concerns about the landscape and ensuring the land is put to the best use for God and its people, which is to support preachers and orthodox monasteries.

The burning of Coldingham and references in the *Epistola* to the need to go to preaching to every hamlet show that Bede had a very real concern about the landscape (natural and man-made), and particularly how it connected with the strength of Christianity in Northumbria. Taken in an eschatological context, the decline of the landscape, in tandem with the moral and military decline of the kingdom, were all warning signs of a possible divine judgement. Gildas had written that old idols remained outside city walls, illustrating that the Britons had not fully internalised the Christian message. Bede's references to the landscape also show a connection between the landscape and the inner spiritual condition of the people.

Gregory had argued that Christians who had lapsed were on a par with unbaptised pagans, with both being sinners who needed conversion.[174] Sinners were wounded but preachers were physicians who could restore them.[175] Bede carries this idea forward and applies it to the very landscape itself. His landscape references are used to illustrate how

[174] For this theme see, for example, his *Ep* 5.46 (CCSL.140, 339-40), the reference to how correction follows excess in *Moralia* 35.12.22 (CCSL.143B, 1788), For discussion of this point see R.A. Markus, 'Augustine and Gregory the Great', *St Augustine and the Conversion of England*, ed. Richard Gameson (Stroud, 1999), 41-49: 43; Straw, *Perfection in Imperfection*, 194-235.
[175] Gregory, *Hom in Ez*, CCSL.142, 152.

the Northumbria of the recent past had wholly embraced Christianity, while holding it up as a mirror to the kingdom littered with false monasteries of his day. This also explains why he is concerned with lay pastors, because they had a role in Christianising the landscape and thus the kingdom, while also being an important asset for wide moral reform.

From a Bedan perspective this was more pertinent than ever given the pressing need for moral reform. This emphasised the need for royal-ecclesiastical partnership, such as the tearing up of charters. One should not take the importance of kingship lightly. In Aethelberht's era, for instance, conversion was not to be taken lightly. As a king, his people's wellbeing was his responsibility and he had to cater for the spiritual as well as material needs of his subjects – a king had to "move in harmony with his nobles, and with regard to the broader political implications of change".[176] This was not an era of absolute power as would characterise later medieval kingships; there had been a few overlord-kings (and the level of authority those decribed as such had is debatable) but by and large society was violent, often turbulent, and dynasties were inclined to rise, break apart, or fall with kings, their sons, and kin frequently under attack.[177] So a king responsible for nurturing Christianity also had to encourage his nobles to follow his lead, and the more authority he had, the more likely he was to get his way, which in turn would provide protection and opportunities for the Church. Yet the situation in Northumbria – where monasteries were being divinely punished for sin – suggested that Bede saw leadership and piety as needing a wide base: This may be why Bede has such an emphasis not only on exemplars but on the role of the lay person in Christian teaching and orthodoxy. There was no higher lay exemplar than the king, but Bede's pastoral eschatology also demonstrates his awareness that non-

[176] Gameson, 'Augustine of Canterbury: Context and Achievement': 19.
[177] Brown, *Companion*, 3; Barbara Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms of Early Anglo-Saxon England* (2002), 89.

nobles had a valuable role to play and so needed models of their own if they were to avoid the fate of Coldingham.

While the *Epistola* advocates the training of priests and teachers, Dryhthelm comes to represent how a lay but sincere Christian can transform himself completely for the sake of his soul. In doing so, he becomes a pastoral figure to counter the degradation evident in the *Epistola* and Coldingham narrative, even if he does not actively go out and preach to people. In this he parallels, among others, Antony (d.AD356), the great Egyptian ascetic, who had sought to be a hermit for the sake of his soul but received so many visitors he had to become a spiritual guide as well.[178] Bede is integrating his narrative firmly into patristic works though: Gregory's *Regula* emphasises leading by example and devoting oneself "entirely to setting an ideal of living" (*RP* 1.10, 2.3), because a bad example could lead his flock to a precipice (*RP* 1.2, 1.11). A bad example could see a pastor lead his flock to or over a precipice, like at Coldingham. Leading by example is an approach Bede praises in missionary figures and kings alike, and he particularly notes its effectiveness in conversion. King Aethelberht and many other Kentish figures convert to Christianity by seeing the missionaries practise what they preached, with their "truth confirmed by performing many miracles (*HE* 1.26)". Judith McClure has noted that, Bede, like Gregory, interprets teachers in the widest possible sense.[179] This makes sense, as it would allow pastoral care to permeate all households and social levels. Gregory felt that rulers should have a pastoral role, much as David and other Old Testament kings had had.[180] Given the wide influence of a king, this is understandable. The *Epistola* shows Bede believes the same, but he goes beyond this in his homilies.

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[178] Athanasius, 'Life of Antony', trans. Carolinne White, *Early Christian Lives*, ed. Carolinne White (London, 1998), 1-70: sections 14-15, pp.18-9. A fourth-century text written in Greek by Athanasius, Bede knew the text in its Latin translation by Evagrius. Laistner, 'The Library of the Venerable Bede': 238. Quotations are from the English translation of this Latin version.

[179] McClure, 'Bede's *Notes on Genesis*': 29.

[180] R.A. Markus, 'Gregory the Great on Kings: Rulers and Preachers in the Commentary on 1 Kings', *Studies in Church History* 8 (1991), 7-22.

There are two preached around the Christmas period that make this clear, and we will see that the liturgical timing is of huge importance. The first homily is that on Lk 2:15-20.[181] The passage concerns the shepherds who saw the angel announcing Christ's birth, and their journey to Bethlehem to see him. Bede explains the symbolism behind "shepherds". "The shepherds did not hide in silence [about their revelation] ... but they told whomever they could." This is the duty of a spiritual pastor, to show that scriptural teachings "are to be marvelled at". But he adds:

> It is not only bishops, presbyters, deacons, and even those who govern monasteries, who are to be understood as pastors, *but also all the faithful* [my emphasis], who keep watch however small their house may be [or "over the little ones of their house"], are properly called 'pastors', insofar as they preside with solicitous watchfulness over their own house.[182]

This is quite a remarkable call for all members of the Christian community to function not only as pastors, but to be recognised as such. It demonstrates that Bede sees the full Christianisation of the English as not something that can be brought about only by professional Christians such as bishops and monks, but that secular households had a significant role to play. However, they are expected to demonstrate good leadership. They are expected to be watchful – compare this to how Adomnán's vision guide in the Coldingham account specifically says that he had examined and watched the inmates and found none keeping correct practise. While he turns the address to the brethren, the unexpected elaboration of "but also all the faithful" not only expands the meaning of pastor, but gives Bede's fellow monks an indication of what they should be teaching any lay people they interact with. It may also be an admonition of sorts, a reminder to the brethren that they should not be conceited in their office.

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[181] Bede, Homily 1.7. Martin and Hurst translation, 65-72.

[182] *Homeliarum*, 49: "*Non solum pastores episcopi, presbyteri diaconi uel etiam rectores monasteriorum sunt intellegendi sed et omnes fideles, qui uel paruulae suae domus custodiam gerunt pastores recte uocantur in quantum eidem suae domui sollicita uigilantia praesunt*."

For Bede, as for Gregory, humility was "first among the virtues", and Gregory's *Regula* is replete with instructions in how to maintain humility while carrying out pastoral works.[183] Bede's Genesis commentary says good works should be carried "with humility of mind";[184] this echoes the frequent exhortations of Gregory's *Regula* that one should remain watchful of their own pride when correcting others. Gregory encouraged humility when performing miracles and a miraculous interpretation of a preacher's successful pastoral work.[185] Elsewhere in his exegesis, Bede stressed that "a teacher, *or any one of the faithful* [my emphasis], frequently has need of careful discretion lest by chance vices should hide under the guise of virtues or wear something wolfish under sheep's clothing (Mt 7:15)".[186] But despite these monastic overtones, the homily, much like the above quote from *In cantica*, represents a very broad interpretation of pastor – but it is not the only such broad interpretation. It has an echo in his homily on the Feast of St John the Evangelist (December 27, on John 21:19-24).[187] Here, Bede explains the active and contemplative lives, the active being engagement with the temporal world and the contemplative involving withdrawal to focus on the spiritual. He holds Peter up as an example of the active life, while John represents the contemplative.

> "[T]he active is the way of living common to [all] the people of God. Very few ascend to the contemplative, and these more sublime ones [do so] after [achieving] perfection in good deeds. The active life is Christ's zealous servant devoting himself to righteous labours: first to keeping himself unspotted by this world, keeping his mind,

[183] Carroll, *Venerable Bede*, 225, *In Gen* 3.49. See also *Dialogii* 4.1.
[184] *In Gen*, 172; TTH.48, 249.
[185] Butler, 'The Whitby Life of Gregory the Great: Exegesis and Hagiography', 86-9.
[186] *In cantica*, 321, on Sg 7:4, Holder trans, 205.
[187] The passage reads: "And this he said, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had said this, he said to him: Follow me. Peter turning about, saw that disciple whom Jesus loved following, who also leaned on his breast at supper and said: Lord, who is he that shall betray you? Him therefore when Peter had seen, he says to Jesus: Lord, and what shall this man do? Jesus said to him: So I will have him to remain till I come, what is it to you? Follow me. This saying therefore went abroad among the brethren, that that disciple should not die. And Jesus did not say to him: He should not die; but: So I will have him to remain till I come, what is it to you? This is that disciple who gives testimony of these things and has written these things: and we know that his testimony is true."

> hand, tongue, and the other members of his body from every stain of tempting fault, and to perpetually subjugating himself to divine servitude; and then also to coming to the aid of his neighbour in need, according to his ability, by ministering with food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, clothing to those who feel the cold, by receiving the needy and the wandering into his house, but visiting the sick and burying the dead, by snatching a destitute [person] from the hand of one stronger than he, and a poor and needy man from those laying hold of him; and also by showing the way of truth to the erring, (Jm5:19-20; cf *Regula Pastoralis* 2.6) by delivering himself up for others in services of brotherly love, and by struggling, moreover, for justice even to the point of death.[188]

This is the emulation of Peter and Paul, the latter of whom holds himself up as an example of Christian living in his epistles. More importantly, it is the model of Christian preaching that the *Epistola* stresses is needed in Bede's Northumbria: selfless and dedicated to the betterment of the wider people rather than enriching the individual. In his commentary on Revelation, Bede says that the Church is "made perfect in [its] faith and deeds", which is an important window onto his pastoral eschatology because that particular passage concerns the world after judgement.[189]

However, while Paul says that one should model one's life after his in order to be a good Christian, he says that in reality all he is doing is emulating Christ (1 Cor 11:1, Gal 2:20). In Bede's work, the emulation of Christ, the perfect pastor, is the best way to go about a Christian life. And in the above homily he makes clear: "The active life is proposed as something to be entered upon not only by monks in community, but ... by all the people of God". Every Christian, therefore, can have a pastoral role. In Dryhthelm's division of his property – he keeps one third of his estate but gives it to the poor – we are presented with a man shedding himself of worldly possessions before taking holy orders. Bede says the man "freed himself from the cares of this world". In his exegesis, he says that one should "forsake the desires of this world and of earthly ways and seek after

[188] Bede, Homily 1.9. CS.110, 85-95: 90-1.
[189] *Exp Apoc*, 527-29; TTH.58, 265.

heavenly things with your whole mind",[190] which is effectively what Dryhthelm does. There is an association then with the death to one world, the temporal or active, and a new life in another, the spiritual or contemplative. In particular, it is a lay man entering directly into a deeper sense of the contemplative, rather than spending years as a novitiate, and undergoing his transformation as an eschatological warning to his contemporaries.

For Gregory, contemplation was a way of penetrating the heights of heaven itself (*Dialogii* prologue).[191] This sort of division of life, and the preference for the contemplative, would have been clear from Gregory's *Regula*, although both Gregory and Bede would have acknowledged that the active life (for example, going out and preaching) was necessary. Oswald, for example, is intimately tied up with the affairs of the wider world due to his rule of the kingdom, but in his prayers and charitable acts he does attempt to include elements of the contemplative, meaning there is an element of "humility of mind" despite his temporal power. His achievement is made clearer by Bede's acknowledgement in exegesis that "it is not easy for the mind at one and the same time to be anxious for worldly affairs, tribulations, cares, and sorrows, and to contemplate those joys of the heavenly life (*caelestis uitae*), at ease and in a tranquil frame of mind".[192] That is not to say that a king cannot aspire to do so or in some way to offer service to the strengthening of faith – even though Dryhthelm is in a "secret" part of the monastery, it is worth noting again that he is admitted to the monastery at Melrose at the request of King Aldfrith, the last king before the crisis began. The message here, apart from establishing a line of verification, is that the secular parts of society had just as

[190] *In Tobias*, 19; TTH.28, 77.
[191] See also Gregory, *Moralia* 5 (CCSL.143, 262), *Moralia* 32 (CCSL.143B, 1641-42), Homily 2 (PL.76, 1249). For discussion of the ideas, see Straw, *Perfection in Imperfection*, 40-46.
[192] *Exp Apoc*, 549; TTH.58, 274.

important a role to play in reinforcing the Christianity of the English as the clergy did. And we see aspects of this too in Bede's sermons.

The sermons usually address monks. But Andreas van der Walt and Alan Thacker have noted that Bede's homily on Holy Saturday addresses both baptised and soon-to-be baptised people, suggesting that Jarrow hosted an "augmented" congregation at certain times in the Church calendar.[193] It is reasonable to argue that a similar situation exists in the homilies around Christmas, when one would expect non-brethren to attend the monastery's church, and that Bede is addressing lay congregants as a way of inspiring them to be dutiful pastors.[194] It would be understandable, as encouraging lay people to carry out pastoral duties, or at least to attempt to watch out for the spiritual wellbeing of their families and neighbours, would allow the instilment of Christian ideals on a wider scale.

This brings the discussion back to the man-made landscape and Bede's interest in ensuring it is used for the benefit of God and the people. Twice Bede remarks on how Oswald completed the stone church of St Peter in York that Edwin began (*HE* 2.14, 2.20), and in doing so replaced a weaker wooden structure, and Higham has argued that this now-lost church had been intended as a burial place for Edwin and his dynasty.[195] The double reference to completing a stone church draws on Bede's exegesis, where he refers to Jesus as a stone inserted into the Church, with the faithful as living stones (1 Pet 2:5)[196] – so Oswald is symbolically replacing a transient wooden structure with a more permanent stone one, thus embedding a more durable Christianity into the landscape. However, in the *Epistola* the permanent structures have become corrupted, with the

[193] See A.G.P. van der Walt, *The homiliary of the Venerable Bede and early medieval preaching* (unpublished PhD thesis, University College London, 1980); Thacker, 'Monks, Preaching and Pastoral Care': 141.
[194] See Lawrence T. Martin, 'Introduction', trans. Lawrence T. Martin and David Hurst, *Bede: Homilies on the Gospels*, *Book One: Advent to Lent* (Kalamazoo, 1991), xi-xxiii: xi-xiii.
[195] Higham, *Convert Kings*, 171. See also Wallace-Hadrill, *Historical Commentary*, 73.
[196] *Epistulas VII*, 234-35.

landscape dotted with corrupt monasteries in direct contrast to the architectural demonstrations of piety exhibited by rulers from the kingdom's golden age. In the case of Coldingham, the ruins, which Bede suggests are still evident, it was a literal example of the consequences of allowing monasteries to become corrupt on a par with those referenced in the *Epistola*.

Bede had a profound interest in architecture and its spiritual significance.[197] In this case, Oswald is completing the conversion process that had been initiated under Edwin but regressed after his death. There is a sense not only of physical but spiritual building – one thinks of his note on the jasper walls surrounding the heavenly Jerusalem, which he says is a manifestation of 1 Pet 2:5: "Peter urges: Be also built up as living stones, a spiritual house".[198] Mercians are, in *HE* 4.3, compared to "living stones" when Bede describes a plague that carries many of them from the earth to the heavenly realm, which he parallels with the "scattering of stones" from Ecclesiastes.[199] Elsewhere, he presents the temple of Jerusalem as symbolising the Christian Church,[200] which transcends a single physical centre in favour of a transnational, transcontinental shared spiritual identity. It is clearer, then, why it is included in *HE* 5 – a timely reminder in an era of instability and moral decline. However, in his commentary on Ezra-Nehemiah, Bede argues that the co-operation of secular and ecclesiastical indicates that "both the orders dedicated to God and the shared devotion of all the people should build his holy church, each according to their own capacity".[201] There is a sense, then, that Oswald and strong pastoral rulers like him could build a strong Church that in some way represented a heavenly Jerusalem, in the sense of being a devout

[197] *De templo*, passim; *De tab*, passim; *In Ezra*, passim; *Exp Apoc*, 525-63, TTH.58, 263-79. The symbolic significance of it being built in stone will become clear when discussion turns to the potential agents of judgement against the English, below.
[198] *Exp Apoc*, 531; TTH.58, 266. See O'Reilly, 'Introduction', *Bede: On the Temple*, xxiv-xxv.
[199] For discussion, see Orsbon, 'Bede's Sacred Order', 25.
[200] *De templo*, prologue.
[201] *In Ezra*, 278; TTH.47, 64; DeGregorio, 'Bede's in Ezram': 13.

region concerned with spiritual wellbeing: Hence the appearance of a temporal Jerusalem in the midst of the eschatological tracts of *HE* 5. The physical world was a reminder of the spiritual world to come, which was what the readers of *HE* 5 were to aspire to enter. It was all the more important for the country to be visibly Christian.

This should be put alongside the *Epistola*. Bede says there are villages that never see a bishop, whereas bishops should "preach the word of God in every hamlet and field".[202] In the 660s, when Bishop Cuthbert was active, "it was the custom" (*HE* 4.27), Bede says, for everyone to come and listen to a preacher when he arrived in a village, implying that less than 100 years later it is no longer the case. And when discussing Cuthbert, Bede makes clear that the bishop "used especially to make for those places and preach in those villages that were far away on steep and rugged mountains". In the letter, Bede says the king should ensure land is dedicated to things "useful to God or to lay society".[203] Bede himself, quoting Tyconius and Primasius, had said the Church "is dedicated to the duty of preaching (*praedicationis*)",[204] though judging by the letter, this practice of preaching in so-called wild lands – all of which could be considered deserts away from civilisation[205] – has died out, but it is praised in the *HE*.

We see an example of this when Cedd, bishop of the East Saxons, is offered land by the Deiran king Oethelwald on which to build a monastery (*HE* 3.23, in the AD650s). Cedd's acceptance of the request suggests that he accepted the place and usefulness of the secular elite in building up the Church's presence. But it is his choice of location that is most pertinent here:

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[202] 'Letter to Ecgbert': 345.
[203] Letter to Ecgbert, 351.
[204] *Exp Apoc*, 333; TTH.58, 161.
[205] Patricia Dailey, 'Questions of Dwelling in Anglo-Saxon Poetry and Medieval Mysticism: Inhabiting Landscape, Body, and Mind', *New Medieval Literatures*, *8*, eds. Rita Copeland, David Lawton and Wendy Scase (Turnhout, 2006), 175-214: 189-93.

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

By calling on Isaiah, Bede shows that Cedd's actions are carried out with scriptural authority. Bede even provides exegesis, in that he explains the meaning of the passage from Isaiah. This makes his message clear. And he knew that Gregory had interpreted the reeds as the word of God and preachers and the rushes as people who are new to the word.[206] The dragons, Gregory says, represent the Jews, who through pride and love of temporal things neglected the eternal and spiritual. It should be noted here that for Bede, the Jews were people who had rejected the teachings of Christ and denied that he was God, but who still had the potential to be saved.[207] But he only quotes part of Isaiah 35, which begins: "The land that was desolate and impassable shall be glad, and the wilderness shall rejoice and shall flourish like the lily". It is a vision of the restored Israel after the divine judgement of Isaiah 34, so there is a strong sense of progression and even divine favour in taming the landscape. The key point is that Bede had seen occasions when the land of Britain itself, and not just its people, had been converted and purified – but Gildas had shown Bede that conversion could not be taken for granted, while his *Epistola* and Coldingham account were being given as evidence of a decline on a par with that experienced by the Britons.

There are a number of factors at play in the Cedd account: royal regulation and influence on ecclesiastical affairs, removal from the temporal world, and the conversion of the landscape. Oswiu, Oswald's successor, had built a dozen monasteries across his kingdom as thanks for

[206] See Gregory, *Moralia*, 1470.
[207] Bede, Homily 1.23; see also Scully, 'Introduction': passim; Andrew P. Scheil, *The Footsteps of Israel: Understanding Jews in Anglo-Saxon England* (Ann Arbor, 2004), passim, but particularly 24-43.

divine favour in battle (*HE* 3.24). This was not only an act of piety but an effort to ensure the spiritual defence of his people as well, ensuring more support for preachers. The decline of bishops' activity in the *Epistola* must also be compared to how Bishop Cuthbert, in the 660s, travelled around the kingdom using preaching to combat idolatry and corruption (*HE* 4.27) – it again is an example of how the English had declined.

Bede says Cuthbert used especially to make for those places and preach in those villages that were far away on steep and rugged mountains, which others dreaded to visit and whose poverty and ignorance kept other teachers away". Rosenthal considers Britain of the sixth and seventh centuries to be "a shrinking human universe" as population fell and wilderness encroached.[208] So there was a general decline, even as travelling bishops go out and tame landscapes and their people by bringing the Christian message, much as Cedd had tamed the landscape with his monastery. Even Cuthbert's choice of hermitage is an act of landscape conversion. The island, Farne, "was frequented by evil spirits" and so "was ill suited for human habitation; but it became in all respects habitable as the man of God wished, since at his coming the evil spirits departed" (*HE* 4.28). Cuthbert and his brother monks then follow this by building a place for Cuthbert to live, which includes an oratory. The island's purification is thus followed by the consolidation of a Christian identity through the transformation of the landscape. But the message of the *Epistola* and *HE* 5 – where the focus turns to the need for reform immediately after the *HE* chapters showing high points of Christian practice – is that the kingdom is slipping backwards.

The casting out of evil spirits and exorcisms have a long tradition in post-biblical Christian literature.[209] They were a fact of life in the eyes of

[208] J.T. Rosenthal, 'Bede's Ecclesiastical History and the Material Conditions of Anglo-Saxon Life', *The Journal of British Studies* 19.1 (1979), 1-17: 4.
[209] See Eric Sorensen, *Possession and Exorcism in the New Testament and Early Christianity* (Tubingen, 2002), Daniel van Syke, 'The Human Agents of Exorcism in the

many. The Cedd account should be compared with Late Antique holy men, many of whom perform exorcisms; as Brown points out, the act of exorcism sees the man "assert the authority of his god over the demonic".[210] This is, perhaps, a simplified view of the ritual, but part of its importance lies in the public demonstration of power. In Cedd's case, he is not only purifying a landscape, he is doing so in full view of the local populace, thus demonstrating by his example the power of the Christian God over whatever legacy sins or folk spirits may inhabit it. This should be considered in light of Dryhthelm's public mortification of his body in the cold river; this is the sort of public example that seems to be sorely lacking in Bede's day. Cedd's ritual can also be considered in a scriptural context, such as the call for "living sacrifice" in Romans 12, or the gospels, in which Christ uses fasting as a way of enacting exorcisms and working miracles: fasting and prayer are tools to battle Satan. In Mark's gospel, the apostles are unable to drive out a demon, but Christ can because the child's father believed in Him.[211] Christ says prayer and fasting are necessary,[212] while Bede says prayers are armour against pride.[213] "The great devotion of charity (*deuotio caritatis*)" was one of the weapons the saints would use to battle the Antichrist.[214] However, as the *Epistola* makes clear, Bede believes there are too few monks taking part in prayers and fasts, which would in turn imply that they now lack the tools to battle the devil. J.M. Wallace-Hadrill has said that "[t]he pollution from which the site had to be cleared … was not that of pagan shrines but of evil spirits that inhabited any deserted place".[215] He believes this and the Farne episode show Bede's

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Early Christian Period: All Christians, Any Christians, or a Select Few Christians?', Antiphon 16.3 (2012): 179-223.

[210] Brown, 'The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity': 88.

[211] Mark 3:22-3.

[212] It is also present in Christian historical writings: according to Eusebius-Rufinus' *Historia ecclesiastica*, which Bede knew, the emperor Theodosius armed himself before war with prayer and fasting rather than weapons, and he achieved victory. See Rufinus, *Historia eccleiastica* 11.33. Trans. Philip R. Amidon, *The Church History of Rufinus of Aquileia* (New York and Oxford, 1997).

[213] Bede, Homily 2.15; for more see Carroll, 198-215, citing Bede, *In Lucam* 1.

[214] *Exp Apoc*, 421; TTH.58, 207.

[215] Wallace-Hadrill, *Historical Commentary*, 120.

acceptance that evil spirits exist;[216] if this is the case, then it is all the more important to Christianise the landscape because these spirits are active alongside Christians at the world's "remotest parts" as the end of the world draws near.

Conclusion

Bede drew extensively on Gildas's *DEB* for information and as a framework for understanding how cycles of biblical history had come to pass in the history of Britain, and as a way of understanding how the English could be judged if they did not embrace moral reform. The moral and spiritual crisis affecting Northumbria was widespread and profound, encapsulating not only dynastic instability and factionalism but disrupting Bede's own monastery at Wearmouth-Jarrow. His *Epistola ad Ecgbertum* was a staunch polemic on a par with Gildas's *DEB* that urged ecclesiastical leaders to enforce a rigorous programme of preaching, which Bede saw as the ideal way to reverse the moral decline of the English. This decline was best exemplified by the burning of Coldingham monastery, which was not only a failure of leadership but a demonstration that God was actively watching and punishing the English – but it was up to them to pay heed to the warnings.

[216] Ibid., 171.

Chapter 4

Signs of the end times and the Saracens as agents of judgement

This chapter argues that Bede believed the Saracens were potential agents of divine punishment, and that the English were at a very real risk of seeing them sent by God to chastise them for their sins. It argues that the Saracens need to be seen in the context of Bede's writings about warning signs concerning the end times, and that the Saracens' eschatological role can be seen by combining these writings about the end times with Bede's presentations of Arabs and Saracens in his historical, exegetical, and didactic works (as all were interconnected). The chapter first examines the interpretation of signs in the natural world, most notably comets and eclipses, as precursors to the end times but also as indicators of significant change as Bede makes clear in his work as a whole. The chapter then examines how Bede articulates that divine judgement is looming but not necessarily going to happen in his day. The chapter subsequently turns to the Saracens and argues that the eschatological threat they pose is best understood by comprehending how Bede has seen the decline of other peoples, drawing a parallel between the Britons and the Jews.

Firstly, a brief note on terminology. In Late Antique and early medieval thought there were Arabs and there were Saracens, even though they were sometimes used interchangeably. There was practically no knowledge of Islam in Western Europe, and certainly not in Anglo-Saxon Britain. The interchangability of terminology allowed early Christians to locate these peoples in established traditions, particularly scriptural traditions.[1] Jerome, for example, refers to both "Arabs and Hagarenes, who are now called Saracens".[2] He also describes the Arabs as "*gens latrociniis dedita*", a people dedicated to robbery. The origin of the name "Saracen" (which is often perjorative) may be Greek (no Arab used it), but Jerome argued it showed how they had "falsely taken the name of Sarah [from whose husband, Abraham, they were descended] in order to claim to be descendants of a free and sovereign woman", while it may refer to how

[1] Tolan, *Saracens*, 4.
[2] Jerome, *Epistolae*, CSEL 56, 170.

they were sent away from Sarah empty ("Sarrah-kene").[3] John Cassian (d.AD435) seems to distinguish between the Saracens, desert-dwellers, and the Arabs, a settled people.[4] W.R. Jones has noted that they are occasionally described in patristic sources as "*barbarus*", such as in Leo the Great's *De Manichaeorum Haeresi et Historia* (AD447).[5] McClure and Collins, in their translation of the *Chronica Maiora*, favour "Arabs"[6] though the Latin is "*Saraceni*", so the present thesis follows Wallis (and Bede) in rendering it "Saracens".

Signs of the end manifesting in nature and events

This section argues that Bede interpreted things like comets and eclipses as signs of great change and possible judgement. It argues that he read the natural world in a particular way in order to warn the English of judgement, and their presence in *HE* 5 emphasises this. It then examines how Bede used aspects of the *HE* and his exegesis, such as that on Revelation, that the end was not necessarily imminent but that signs were to be taken seriously as encouragement toward reform.

While Bede was an exegete and interpreted events in an allegorical light, he was clear that often an event in the natural world was simply a natural event. However, in *De natura rerum* 24 he combines quotes from Pliny and Isidore that comets signal change: "Comets are stars with flames like hair. They are born suddenly, portending a change of royal power or plague or wars or winds or heat. Some of these move in the manner of planets, others remain immobile."[7] This section is in the middle of a description of the planet, with the preceding section explaining why the

[3] Jerome: Tolan, 'Saracens and Ifranj': 13; 'Sarrah-kene': John C. Lamoreaux, 'Early Christian Responses to Islam' in ed., John Tolan, *Medieval Perceptions of Islam*: 3-32: 10.
[4] Scarfe Beckett, *Anglo-Saxon Perceptions*, 93.
[5] W.R. Jones, 'The Image of the Barbarian in Europe', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 13.4 (1971), 376-407: 88.
[6] Bede, 'The Greater Chronicle', *Bede: The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, eds. Judith McClure and Roger Collins (Oxford, 1994), 305-40: 336.
[7] *DNR*, 216; TTH.56, 89. He is citing Pliny's *Historia Naturalis* 2.22.89, Isidore's *Etymologiae*, 3.37.17, and Isidore's *DNR* 26.13.

sphere of the Earth prevents eclipses in some regions and the following section explaining the air and sky. He is drawing on older sources to reinforce the credibility of what he is saying, while also demonstrating that certain signs needed to be read in an eschatological manner.

For Bede, the natural world was ultimately subservient to God, so God would and could use seemingly 'natural' agents (be they wars, plagues, or comets) as signs to the people on Earth. His *De die iudicii*, following Irish eschatological models, focused on how the natural world would signal the end through changes in the sky or the darkening of the sun and unusual brightness of the moon – all themes derived from Matt 24:19.[8] His *De natura rerum*, while following in Classical and patristic models of writing about the cosmos, was groundbreaking. As Darby notes, in it Bede "revolutionised cosmography … Bede's explanation of the natural world drew upon the concepts and language employed by the ancients, but it presented all of the different parts of the universe as a product of divine creation".[9] This meant that the natural world and its events, along with time and its events, were all part of the same, divinely-ordered whole and emphasised the role of God's power in the universe. There was an eschatological link to things like plague: Jesus, in Matt 24, had said that the coming of the end times would be preceded by, among other things, plagues and earthquakes in diverse places. Bede's exegesis says that the "trumpets of the angels [in Rev 8:13] do not bring the plagues into the world, but rather, each of them proclaims those that are coming, or shall come, in its own time".[10] He follows this by stating that people would say "peace and security" before being judged. So they could be seen as foretold incidents in themselves, which would be proof of biblical prophecy. But his inclusion of the biblical phrase "*pax et securitas*" which he uses many years later in the *HE* shows that he is connecting the *historia* and

[8] For discussion see Darby, 'Apocalypse and Reform', 86-87.
[9] Darby, *Bede and the End of Time*, 98.
[10] *Exp Apoc*, 345; TTH.58, 167.

his earliest eschaological works. Not only that, but he is emphasising the connections between the days of eighth-century Britain and the Bible, something the present thesis explored when discussing Dryhthelm. In addition, the earthquake that accompanies the opening of the sixth seal in Revelation (Rev 6:12) "will be throughout the world",[11] as opposed to felt locally, marking it out as of supernatural importance. Patristic authors saw earthquakes in Revelation as allegorical, with Caesarius of Arles saying they were a symbol of persecution.[12] Bede's poem *De die iudicii* hails the trembling earth as the first sign of the end, and the trembling will come "unexpectedly".[13] The emphasis was on reading natural signs allegorically, something Bede demonstrates.

For example, when noting that sometimes the "whole of the summer season is transformed into tempests and wintry blasts", Bede says that "these are called 'storms' when they come in their own season, but when they come at other times they are called 'portents' or 'signs' (*prodigia, signa*)."[14] Nevertheless, noting such disruption in the natural world at a time of disruption in the human world (both in false monasteries and the struggles for succession in Northumbria) would have suggested for Bede that God was signalling that great change was on the way, meaning it was vital to be especially vigilant. The Britons, after all, had been visited with a terrible plague that "swooped brutally on the stupid people" and killed so many that they could not bury the dead (*DEB* 22.2). Gildas's argument is that, following Solomon's statement that the "stubborn servant is not corrected with words", the Britons had not been paying sufficient attention to the word of God, but needed something far more drastic to get their attention – "but not even this taught them their lesson". Many years later, plagues had affected English monasteries as well, but Bede shows that they had more robustly maintained their faith and been rewarded with heaven

[11] *Exp Apoc*, 305; TTH.58, 146.
[12] Palmer, *Apocalypse*, 41.
[13] As highlighted in Darby, 'Apocalypse and Reform', 85.
[14] *DNR*, 223; TTH.56, 94.

(eg, *HE* 4.14). Indeed, he had written that plague had seen the English, while remaining formally Christian, revert to faith in amulets and charms but that this was corrected by Cuthbert's preaching. However, time was going to run out eventually, with Bede's commentary on Isaiah and his poem on Judgement Day describing "earthquakes, comets, and the darkening of the sun and moon" as things that would happen prior to the judgement,[15] meaning that people should pay close attention to the world and closer attention to their moral character. This is where Bede's linking of the Saracens and natural events – specifically comets – is so important, because it illustrates how he understands them to be a significant threat.

The Saracens make one appearance in the *HE*, in the short chapter considering the events of recent history (*HE* 5.23). Bede's words speak for themselves:

> In the year of our Lord 729 two comets appeared around the sun striking great terror into all beholders. One of them preceded the sun as it rose in the morning and the other followed it as it set at night, seeming to portend dire disaster to east and west alike. One comet was the forerunner of day and the other of the night, to indicate that mankind was threatened by calamities both by day and by night. They had fiery torch-like trains which faced northwards as if poised to start a fire. They appeared in the month of January and remained for almost a fortnight. At this time a terrible plague of Saracens ravaged Gaul with cruel bloodshed and not long afterwards they received the due reward of their treachery in the same kingdom.[16]

In this passage Bede is quite literally shining a light on the potential Saracen threat. To say that the comets preceded and followed the sun, and signalling disaster for east and west, was to reiterate that he is thinking in

[15] Darby, *Bede and the End of Time*, 103.
[16] "*Anno dominicae incarnationis DCCXXVIIII apparuerunt cometae duae circa solem, multum intuentibus terrorem incutientes. Una quippe solem praecedebat, mane orientem; altera uespere sequebatur occidentem, quasi orienti simul et occidenti dirae cladis praesagae; uel certe una diei, altera noctis praecurrebat exortum, ut utroque tempore mala mortalibus inminere signarent. Portabant autem facem ignis contra Aquilonem, quasi ad accendendum adclinem; apparebantque mense Ianuario, et duabus ferme septimanis permanebant. Quo tempore grauissima Sarracenorum lues Gallias misera caede uastabat, et ipsi non multo post in eadem prouincia dignas suae perfidiae poenas luebant*."

terms of a catastrophe that transcends the borders of a kingdom or even of an island. His statement that mankind was "threatened by calamities both by day and by night" is a reminder that a threat could come at any time – indeed it resembles the biblical prophecy that the Day of the Lord shall come as a thief in the night (1 Thess 5:2) – and that there could be no escaping it. It is both an eschatological statement on the nature of judgement and a warning that people needed to be heedful at all times, because a threat could come from anywhere.

Tolan has argued that the Saracen incursion here and defeat is a parallel with the Old Testament "followed by a reversal that proved Christian superiority in a satisfying manner".[17] However, it can be argued that Bede is suggesting something else: that it is a danger to be heedful of. Bede does not take it for granted that his audience will know how to interpret a comet, but takes pains to explain precisely how they should be interpreted. And he then introduces the Saracens as representative of the "dire disaster" predicted by the comets. They are presented in biblical terms – as a "plague", reminiscent of the plagues on Egypt. Tolan too equates the phrase with Old Testament plagues visited upon the Hebrews.[18] However, Wallace-Hadrill notes that the phrases Bede uses, "*grauissima Sarracenorum lues*", has a parallel in the "*grauissima lues*" Gregory of Tours' (d.AD594) *History of the Franks* 5.34;[19] this refers to the plague of dysentery that swept the Franks in the 580s after many celestial signs, including a comet (6.14; see also 4.31). And while Bede knew Gregory of Tours' work,[20] the scarcity of detail on the Saracen attack, to McClure and Collins, suggests that Bede's sources for contemporary events

[17] Tolan, 'Saracens and Ifranj', 33.
[18] Tolan, *Saracens*, 74.
[19] Wallace-Hadrill, *Bede's Europe*, 13; Wallace-Hadrill, *Historical Commentary*, 199.
[20] Levison, 'Bede as Historian': 111, 32. See also Colgrave and Mynors, xxix and 14 n1.

in Gaul were sparing at best, as they are largely absent from the *Chronica* as well.[21]

However, in the context of the *HE* passage and *HE* 5's structure and eschatology, more detail may not have been necessary: the focus is on the comets and the portents they bring, with the Saracens then as the detail to prove Bede's argument. Indeed, Kendall points out that the Latin used highlights the prophetic significance – the comet that preceded the rising ("*orientem*") sun was a portent of disaster to the east ("*Orienti*"), while the comet following the setting ("*occidentem*") sun was a portent of disaster to the west ("*Occidenti*"), where Britain was located.[22] It can be argued that this is also a reminder of universality and salvation, a reminder that Christianity had spread from the east to the very furthest western extremities and that salvation was open to all regions and peoples – but so was judgement.

Meanwhile, Bede's statement that the Saracens paid the price for "treachery" suggests two possibilities. One: that he was referring to a well-known attack and had no need to include further information. Two: that he had no further information but wished to imply some act of deception, as the Latin used, "*perfidiae*", implies faithlessness, treachery, or perfidy. Tolan argues that it is used in the sense of religious error, associating it with other peoples who waged war before being converted, such as the Kentish or Picts.[23] It is also apparent in Northumbrian history, as recounted by Bede. When King Edwin dies the kingdom reverts to its two constituent sub-kingdoms, Bernicia and Deira (*HE* 3.1), and Bede says the two sub-kings who ruled "betrayed the mysteries of the heavenly kingdom" and reverted to idolatry. He says they were punished for their perfidiousness ("*perfidorum*") by both being killed by Caedwalla, king of the Britons. He is

[21] McClure and Collins, 418.
[22] Kendall, 'Bede and Islam': 111. Darby, in correspondence, has disputed the suitability of this interpretation.
[23] Tolan, 'Saracens and Ifranj', 33; *Saracens*, 74

therefore showing that *perfidia* has been an aspect of his people's history, he and equates it solidly with idolatry. This had eschatalogical implications because of how the "*falsorum fratrum"* would join the attacks on the Church in the last days. It shows that when Bede writes of "*perfidia*" he may be thinking of idolatry and of turning one's back on Christianity. It is also reflected in Christian attitudes toward Jews, with one of the Good Friday prayers specifically referring to "*perfidis Judaeis*" (not changed until the twentieth century) and hoping that the "veil" will be removed from their hearts (2 Cor 3:13) so they will acknowledge Jesus. The idea of perfidy here refers both to faithless but also paganism.

And Bede had seen it applied to a British context before, with Gildas. Gildas writes that the Romans "slaughtered many of the treasonable" ("*perfidorum*") Britons who had rebelled against them (*DEB* 7), while the Arian heresy is referred to as "treason" ("*Arriana perfidia*") (*DEB* 12.3), and Stephen, the protomartyr, had been stoned "for the mere crime of having seen God when the faithless ("*perfidii*") had been unable to see him" (*DEB* 73.3). The latter is a call to the priests of Gildas's day to live up to a Christian example but is also a reference to the Jewish audience that would not listen to Stephen (Acts 7:58). Bede would also have seen references in patristic writings connecting perfidy and Judaism: Ambrose in a letter to Emperor Theodosius described a synagogoe as "an abode of unbelief, a home of impiety" in which Christ is blasphemed (Letter 40).[24] With "*perfidia*" standing for treason, heresy, Judaism, and faithlessness it is therefore clear that Bede conceives it as having multiple contexts and applications, but the argument of the present thesis is that it is firmly linked with the idea of opposition to the Church both in the present life and the last days.

Indeed, the senses of treachery and faithlessness, as well as idolatry, would sit well with how the Saracens appear in Bede's exegesis, where they

[24] Trans. Mary Melchior Beyenka, *Saint Ambrose: Letters*, FotC.26 (New York, 1954), 12.

are in constant opposition to other peoples and to Christians in particular. It is possible, given how sparing his material for Saracen movements and campaigns is, that he had interpreted the destruction of Carthage as violating the treaty with Justinian – the *Chronica* text suggests that the Arabs attacked while it was in effect. The message from the Gaulish incident is clear: the Saracens were defeated in punishment for treachery. But that their approach was signalled by a comet showed they were to be seen as a divine warning, much as the plagues and Saxon attacks were divine warnings to the Britons, which they failed to interpret correctly or to act on (*HE* 1.14).

There are no recorded Saracen/Arab attacks on Gaul in AD729, although Bede is quite clear on the year because he says the incursion took place in the same year that Bishop Egbert died and Ceolwulf was made king by his predecessor. This is the passage that tells of the "commotions and setbacks" accompanying his reign. It is possible that Bede is referring to recorded Arab attacks in AD721 or AD725, or that he or someone else has re-edited the text after AD731 to incorporate the Arab attack of AD732/3, which was defeated at Tours by Charles Martel.[25] There were several Arab campaigns against the Franks in the 720s, so it may have been some reference to one of those. Tolan suggests that it refers to the AD721 Battle of Toulouse, where the Eudes of Aquitane threw back Emir al-Samh.[26] It is reasonable to agree with Kendall that it seems unlikely that it refers to the Martel battle, and Wallace-Hadrill has gone from thinking it "reasonable to associate this report" with the 732 attack to saying there is "no reason why Bede should be thinking" of this.[27] There can be no consensus, save the discovery of manuscript evidence directly pointing to a source or editor of this section. However, given the eschatology and concerns discussed in the present thesis, including the demonstration of

[25] McClure and Collins, 418.
[26] Tolan, *Saracens*, 74.
[27] Wallace-Hadrill, *Bede's Europe*, 13; Wallace-Hadrill, *Historical Commentary*, 199.

how Bede blended different sources for his reform purposes, it is quite possible he conflated two pieces of information – comet sightings and an Arab attack – due to the portents of the comets and the devastation of the attack.

The comets are not necessarily signs of the end times, but rather serve as signifiers of change and reminders to be watchful of one's conduct. As Darby notes, one comet is recorded at a time of significant change during a conflict between King Ecgfrith and Bishop Wilfrid – with Bede saying more about the comet than the dispute (*HE* 4.12).[28] In the recapitulation of *HE* 5.24, Bede draws attention to the changes that have followed celestial signs. He mentions two eclipses which do not appear in the text of the overall *Historia*, one in 538 and one in 540. There are no other details given for these years, which could mean that he had no more detail to give or perhaps that he was still reviewing the text when he died in 734. However, there is another possibility, because the next entry in the sequence, for 547, is that "Ida began to reign, from whom the Northumbrian royal family trace their origin". In the light of *De natura rerum*, it is entirely possible that Bede, putting his sequence together, considered the two eclipses to be signals of impending change to the throne. It is unclear why Ida, despite the seemingly vital role he played in the legacy of Northumbrian politics, does not appear in the *HE* either.

The other celestial signs mentioned in Bede's recapitulation are:

> 664. There was an eclipse. King Eorcenberht of Kent died and Colman and his Irish returned to their own people [following the Synod of Whitby, unmentioned here]. There was a visitation of the pestilence. Chad and Wilfrid were consecrated bishops of the Northumbrians.
>
> 678. A comet appeared. Bishop Wilfrid was driven from his see by King Ecgfrith [following a quarrel and forming part of Theodore of

[28] Darby, *Bede and the End of Time*, 99.

> Tarsus' plan to reconstitute the English Church]. In his place Bosa, Eata, and Eadhard were consecrated bishops.
>
> 729. Comets appeared. St Egbert [who converted Iona to the Roman Easter] passed away and Osric [king of Northumbria] died.[29]

What Bede omits from the entry on 729, thus keeping the focus on Northumbria, is that it was the year the Saracens "ravaged Gaul with cruel bloodshed" before being turned back (*HE* 5.23). But the structure of this passage in *HE* 5.23 is interesting, because it can only be described as a paragraph of misery. The comets struck "great terror into all beholders" and lasted for about two weeks in January. "One comet was the forerunner of the day and the other of the night, to indicate that mankind was threatened by calamities both by day and by night." Following this sentence the Saracens attack Gaul, Egbert dies, Osric dies, and Ceolwulf takes the throne: "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 guess what the outcome may be."[30] Comets and Saracens are thus tied into the overall instability examined by the present thesis, instability so pronounced at the political and ecclesiastical level that predicting the future is impossible.

It is understandable then that, as Darby notes generally, Bede "chose not to tie his vision for the end of time to the fortunes of any political entity".[31] This made it distinct and preserved its sense of being unknowable. Bede, perhaps still stung by the defamation he suffered concerning the World Ages, is always reluctant to connect particular examples of signs explicitly with the end times. His commentary on

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[29] *"Anno DCLXIIII, eclypsis facta; Earconberct rex Cantuariorum defunctus, et Colman cum Scottis ad suos reuersus est; et pestilentia uenit; et Ceadda ac Uilfrid Nordanhymbrorum ordinantur episcopi."*
"Anno DCLXXVIII, cometa apparuit; Uilfrid episcopus a sede sua pulsus est ab Ecgfrido rege; et pro eo Bosa, Eata, et Eadhaeth consecrati antistites."
"Anno DCCXXVIIII, cometae apparuerunt, sanctus Ecgberct transiit, Osric mortuus est."

[30] "*Coenredi regis, cuius regni et principia et processus tot ac tantis redundauere rerum aduersantium motibus, ut, quid de his scribi debeat, quemue habitura sint finem singula, necdum sciri ualeat*."

[31] Darby, 'Bede's History of the Future': 136-7.

Revelation sees him often avoid passages that could suggest an imminent apocalypse, "nor did he hint that he could see any current events or conditions that would suggest that this was so" – rather, he "closed the door to using Revelation as a cipher of any and every crisis".[32] In this he is following Tyconius by treating it more as allegory than literal prophecy. However, the suggestion that he did not hint he could see current events that suggested an apocalypse can be debated given the eschatological elements of *HE* 5 and Bede's exegesis that have been examined by the present thesis. These elements were designed to a engender sense of urgency in his readers.

And yet the presence of the comets in *HE* 5, a text written much later than that on Revelation, serves as an indicator of what may come: more change, more disruption, perhaps even more terror. Structurally speaking, this chapter of *HE* 5 is quite mixed, as it covers 725 to 731 in two-and-a-half pages of the printed Oxford translation. There are a lot of deaths and successions, with bishops and kings dying and being replaced before the text concludes on a brief mention of peace treaties, the domination of the Britons by the English, and "favourable times of peace and prosperity" that have led many to enter monasteries. This is the real end of the *HE*: the recapitulation and Bede bibliography of *HE* 5.24 is more of an appendix. So Bede concludes the *Historia* with a summation of deaths and misery, ending on what appears on a literal level to be a hopeful note but on an allegorical level is a warning to remain vigilant, because as the history he had told recounted it would be easy for "favourable times of peace and prosperity" quickly to turn into times of destruction and famine should a people become morally corrupt, especially given the likelihood of a comet or eclipse appearing in the sky. Darby points out that Bede's commentary on Habakkuk had observed that the prophet "on contemplating the condition of the present world … had seen the peace enjoyed by sinners

[32] Wallis, 'Revelation Introduction': 40, 76.

and the afflictions of the upright".[33] This is the sense of contemporary prosperity that prefigured judgement in *DEB*, and the sense of contemporary prosperity in the Epistola. However, comets were not the only potential sign of change or warning.

Eclipses are also one of the foretold signs, which Bede had seen described in Acts 2:17-20. In the passage, Peter quotes Joel's prophecy (Joel 28-32) that "in the last days … [the Lord] will show wonders in the heaven above, and signs on the earth beneath: blood and fire, and vapour of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood, before the great and manifest day of the Lord to come." In Acts, this follows the apostles being blessed with the Holy Spirit (2:2-5), and is addressed to the men of Israel to show that Jesus had come to fulfil the signs, and followed by a reference to the apostles working wonders and signs in Jerusalem, with "great fear in all" (i.e., at those powers; Acts 2:42-43). Regarding the Joel prophecy, Bede in his commentary on Acts notes that these are events, along with an earthquake, which coincided with Jesus' execution and which would be seen again closer to the Last Judgement.[34] He says the turning of the sun to darkness and moon to blood "is believed partly as something which had been done at the Lord's passion, and partly as something to be done in the future, before the great day of the Lord, that is, the day of judgement".[35] So it can be argued that any references to eclipses were, in Bede's mind, reminders of the coming Last Judgement, which was to come at some undefined point in the future. Darby notes that the commentary "conveys no sense that these signs can be seen in the present and there is no reason to suspect that [Bede] expected them to be accomplished in the near future".[36] There is a strong sense from his other exegesis and *HE* 5 though that some of the signs were manifesting, and that his readers needed to be mindful.

[33] Darby, *Bede and the End of Time*, 213. See Bede, *Habakkuk*, 65.
[34] Bede, *Acts*, 32-3.
[35] Ibid., 33.
[36] Darby, *Bede and the End of Time*, 190-1.

It is entirely possible that his interests turned more to the explicitly eschatological as his career progressed. Darby notes how his later commentaries, such as *In Genesim* (AD717-25) and *In primam partem Samuhelis* (the first three books preceded Ceolfrid's departure, the fourth refers to it), have a significantly different allegorical method from his earlier line-by-line commentaries.[37] However, in *DTR* 66 (under the entry AM 4622), completed in AD725 well after the commentary on Acts (c.AD709-10), Bede states that the eclipse of 664 was still remembered (and as it was in the same year as the Synod of Whitby, it would have stood out in memory), so it is unlikely that he believed such signs could not have been present in his era by that stage.[38] The synod was responsible for bringing Northumbria into the universal fold when it came to calculating and observing Easter. This was a major event as far as Bede was concerned. It bound the English to Roman practice and ensured that the island was in sync with the rest of the Christian world regarding one of the most fundamental occasions in Christianity. It now followed what Bede had previously referred to as the "canonical custom" imparted via the teaching of the pope (*HE* 3.3).

However, while that was a change for the better in Bede's eyes, the year brought misery elsewhere. In *HE* 3.27, Bede says that in the year of the eclipse "a sudden pestilence first depopulated the southern parts of Britain and afterwards attacked the kingdom of Northumbria, raging far and wide with cruel devastation and laying low a vast number of people … The plague did equal destruction in Ireland." This was not just a plague affecting one monastery or kingdom: it did not respect political or even island boundaries. However, Egbert, who converted Iona, survived the plague due to his prayers and vows when faced with death from the

[37] Ibid., 195. Kendall, in *Bede: On Genesis*, 53, argues that *In genesim* was compiled in several stages from AD717-725.
[38] The comet has been dated to both May 1 and May 3 due to discrepancies in calculating the calendar. See Wallis, 'Commentary': 326-32; Jennifer Moreton, 'Doubts About the Calendar: Bede and the Eclipse of 664', *Isis* 89.1 (1998), 50-65.

plague. It is designed to recall the doom of the Britons for not being truly penitential by showing an example of steadfastness.

The connection of celestial signs to doom was by no means original. However, Bede had seen how the English had been warned of them with Gregory the Great's letter to Aethelberht of Kent:

> We would wish your majesty to know that the end of the world is at hand, as we learn from the words of Almighty God in the holy scriptures; and the kingdom of the saints which knows no end is near. As the end of the world approaches, many things threaten which have never happened before; these are changes in the sky and terrors from the heavens, unseasonable tempests, wars, famine, pestilence, and earthquakes in divers places. Not all these things will come about in our days, but they will all follow after our days. (*HE* 1.32)[39]

This letter is an explicit recognition of the connection between the ends of the Earth and the end of time. Gregory is specifically telling the new converts in Britain that they will see signs of the coming Last Judgement, and is a distillation of exegesis. Gregory's letter draws on scripture – the characteristics of the end times mentioned references the Joel prophecy as well as Jesus' prophecy in Matt 24 (wars: nation against nation), Luke's gospel (earthquakes, famines, pestilences), and Paul's prophecy in 2 Thess 2-3. Gregory does not seem overly fretful about such signs in the sky, possibly because having lived through plagues and the devastation of the Lombards in the 590s, he saw whatever came after as a relief. Indeed, the next line of his letter to the English would have had profound resonance for Bede as he steadily built his moral reform agenda in Northumbria. Gregory tells the Kentish king:

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[39] "*Praeterea scire uestram gloriam uolumus, quia, sicut in scriptura sacra ex uerbis Domini omnipotentis agnoscimus, praesentis mundi iam terminus iuxta est, et sanctorum regnum uenturum est, quod nullo umquam poterit fine terminari. Adpropinquante autem eodem mundi termino, multa inminent, quae antea non fuerunt; uidelicet immutationes aeris, terroresque de caelo, et contra ordinationem temporum tempestates, bella, fames, pestilentiae, terrae motus per loca; quae tamen non omnia nostris diebus uentura sunt, sed post nostros dies omnia subsequentur*."

> So if you see any of these things happening in your land, do not be troubled in mind; for these signs of the end of the world are sent in advance to make us heedful about our souls, watching for the hour of death, so that when the Judge comes we may, through our good works, be found prepared.[40]

Gregory's advice to the king refers to 2 Thess 2, where Paul writes that his correspondents should not be terrified as if the day of the Lord were at hand. Gregory's argument is that these are, ultimately, good things because they would – or at least should – inspire inner reflection and encouage individuals to take responsibility for their souls. Even though the end was known only to God, the warning signs would be sent to prepare people. The present thesis has argued that Bede had seen the Britons failing to heed the signs and feared that the English were doing likewise. Yet he could point to them having been warned at the earliest time of their conversion.

The end times would not be pleasant, but Gregory's teaching was that "signs of the end of the world" were to be welcomed, provided one used them as a catalyst for ensuring inner spiritual and moral correctness. Most of his argument is not that the end is nigh, but that it could happen at any time: in his exegesis Bede cites the idea that the hour of Jesus' return is unknown and will be akin to a thief in the night,[41] and he is as much concerned with the episcopal invigilators being vigilant as he is with the destruction of the temporal world. He had described how "the unexpected advent of the Judge will catch people in the act [of their sin], compelling them all to fear, and to think only of the recompense for their own

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[40] "*Uos itaque, siqua ex his euenire in terra uestra cognoscitis, nullo modo uestrum animum perturbetis; quia idcirco haec signa de fine saeculi praemittuntur, ut de animabus nostris debeamus esse solliciti, de mortis hora suspecti, et uenturo Iudici in bonis actibus inueniamur esse praeparati*."

[41] Bede on Rev 3:3, "If then you shall not watch, I will come to you as a thief and you shall not know at what hour I will come to you", *Exp Apoc*, 265; see also his reference to the concept in his comment on Rev 8:13. See 2 Peter 3:10 and 1 Thess 5:2, "the day of the Lord shall come as a thief"; see also Matt 24:42-4: "Watch therefore, because you know not what hour your Lord will come. But know this: that, if the goodman of the house knew at what hour the thief would come, he would certainly watch and would not suffer his house to be broken open. Wherefore be you also ready, because at what hour you know not the Son of man will come."

works".[42] Bede had seen in Rev 18:19 that desolation of the world could come "in a single hour", and would be "swift and unexpected".[43] As Wallis points out, Bede uses similar phrasing (*Exp Apoc* is "*repentinam improuisamque deflere ruinam saeculi fallentis"*) in his commentary on Genesis, when he says "the unexpected hour of the Last Judgement is signified by the sudden inundation of the Flood".[44] And indeed, Gregory's advice to be watchful is also a theme in Bedan eschatology.

In one homily, Bede preached that "we do not know the time of our own resurrection, although we are in no way uncertain that it will come to pass; and so at all times let us keep careful watch while we wait for it".[45] In his commentary on 1 Peter, he agrees with 1 Peter 4:7 ("For the end of all things will approach. Accordingly, be prudent and watchful in prayers") that people should not think the end is far away, and quotes Christ's words in Lk 21:36 as support: "In the Gospel, in view of the indefinite time of the end, the Lord has also admonished us to pray always and to be watchful. For he says, speaking of the day of judgement, *Accordingly, be watchful at all times, praying that you may be held worthy of escaping all those things which are to come and standing before the Son of Man*."[46] He would have seen the stark warning in Mark 13:35-37: "Watch therefore (for you know not when the lord of the house comes, at even, or at midnight, or at the cock crowing, or in the morning): Lest coming on a sudden, he find you sleeping. And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch." What we see in *HE* are signs that the English are not being "watchful" at all times – for instance, Coldingham, which collapsed into sin due to the lack of vigilance by its leaders – and reminders in *HE* 5 of the necessity to watch at all times. In *DTR*, Bede says that the "evening" of the Sixth Age, "darker than all the others, will come in Antichrist's persecution" (*DTR* 10). Dryhthelm has been raised from the

[42] *Isaias*, col 704; TTH.28, 43.
[43] *Exp Apoc*, 483; TTH.58, 241.
[44] *In genesim*, 102; TTH.48, 172.
[45] Bede, Homily 2.7. *Homeliarum*, 229-30; CS.111, 58-68: 64-65.
[46] *Epistulas VII*, 253; CS.82, 109.

dead after visiting the afterlife to remind the English of the realities of heaven and hell, there are comets in the skies, and there is an increasing abundance of miracle stories against a backdrop of political dissent and factionalisation.

Darby's analysis of Bede's treatment of eschatological ideas argues that the monk's perspective changed somewhat as his career progressed.[47] For instance, Darby argues that Bede suppressed the elements of Revelation that seem to suggest the end was imminent, for example Rev 1.3: "Blessed is he that reads and hears the words of this prophecy and keeps those things which are written in it. For the time is at hand." Bede, in his commentary on Revelation, replaces "*tempus enim prope est*" with "*et cetera*" and does not comment on it, which Darby reads as a sign of neutralising the apocalyptic element.[48] Similarly, Bede makes no substantial comment on the second clause of Rev 14:7, "for the hour of his judgement has come".[49] However, the comment he does make fits with the approach of his later exegesis and the *HE*, which is that one should focus on spiritual correctness in the here and now. He says the prophet means: "You who fear God, the make of the world, and not the temporal tyranny of the Beast: look forward all the more to your salvation, the more swiftly your reward awaits you – a reward which will remain changeless for eternity".[50] Bede certainly does refrain from comment on several Revelation passages that refer to Jesus returning soon (Rev 2.6, 22.12, 22.7), and it is hard to disagree with Darby that the "cumulative impression … is that Bede made a conscious decision to overlook some of the more explicit statements of eschatological urgency that he encountered in the Book of Revelation".

[47] Darby, *Bede and the End of Time*, 190-5.
[48] Ibid., 188.
[49] Rev 14:7: "Saying with a loud voice: Fear the Lord and give him honour, because the hour of his judgment has come. And adore him that made heaven and earth, the sea and the fountains of waters."
[50] *Exp Apoc*, 427; TTH.58, 210.

However, while Bede omitted "behold, I come quickly" from his writing on Rev 22:7, in his note on Rev 22:10, entirely quoting Primasius, he includes the biblical phrase "the time is at hand" and adds "the judgement which is to come is drawing near".[51] In addition, as Darby notes, Bede had already used the prefacing letter to state that the biblical text should not be interpreted literally, and indeed in the opening comments he stresses that when the text says "shortly" it really means "[things] which are to happen to the Church in the present time".[52] This would explain the absence of comment on the more urgent eschatological passages, as he may not have felt it necessary to repeat the same statement over and over. In his later *De Tabernaculo*, he cites Isaiah 61:1-2 when writing that Jesus had "declared that now is the time for pleasing the Lord, but the day of universal judgement is coming".[53] The approach in *Expositio apocalypseos* puts the focus on the Church in the present, as opposed to discussing the future.

However, there may be another facet to Bede's omission of these passages: the controversy over *De temporibus*. *Expositio apocalypseos* was completed before 710, and the accusations Bede faced regarding heresy over the calculation of time in 708 may have encouraged him to sanitise his Revelation commentary and emphasise the typological and allegorical over the literal, though this was a standard approach in exegesis. After all, other New Testament passages stressed that man knew neither the day nor the hour of Jesus' return. He may also have wished to continue his programme of rebutting those who believed in an imminent apocalypse, or at least a predictable apocalypse, by emphasising that Revelation concerned the Church. Wallis has argued that *De temporibus*, *De rerum natura*, and the

[51] *Exp Apoc*, 469; TTH.58, 283. See also the comment by Wallis at ibid., 74.
[52] Darby, *Bede and the End of Time*, 11.
[53] *De tab*, 36; TTH.18, 39. Isaiah 61:1-2: "The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me: he has sent me to preach to the meek, to heal the contrite of heart, and to preach a release to the captives, and deliverance to them that are shut up, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God."

Revelation commentary were issued at around the same time as part of a concerted effort to dissuade people from speculating on the end of time.[54]

As Revelation was the only canonical Christian prophetic text, it would have been important for him to absorb it into his own reformist and eschatological agenda. Bede's *Epistola ad Pleguinam* (AD708) expresses frustration with the constant approaches of "*rustici*" asking him when the world was ending – *Expositio apocalypseos* would therefore be his first major exegetical undertaking in an overall approach to time and judgement. Darby argues that these "*rustici*" may not reflect the beliefs of the wider Northumbrian populace and that they "may well have been influenced by popular traditions circulating outside the monastic environment", although they were part of Bede's milieu and so offer insights into the intellectual world in which he worked.[55]

Either way, it is clear that Bede expects the world to live on beyond his own generation, or at least that he wants his readers to share that belief. Perhaps, influenced by Gregory's letter to Aethelberht which says the end times will come after us, he believed the end of the Sixth Age was coming but not necessarily in the next handful of years. All the Ages had ended with decline and strife (*DTR* 71) so it was important to note times of strife in case they foretold the end. Overall, the important thing was to focus on becoming spiritually orthodox and united in this life rather than putting it off for a future generation, because as Bede notes in his computistical work, "the rest of the Sixth Age is known to God alone" ("*reliquum sextae aetatis Deo soli patet*"; reminiscent of Isidore's statement that "the remainder of time cannot be known to human investigation").[56] A Christian should be patient in waiting for the return of Jesus and Last Judgement, much like a

[54] Darby, *Bede and the End of Time*, 32-3.
[55] Ibid.
[56] *De temp*, 611; TTH.56, 131. Isidore, *Chronicon*, PL.83, 1058.

servant awaiting the return of his or her master from a wedding feast (*DTR* 67).[57]

However, that did not mean one had to be patient about reform, especially at a time of crisis. It is important in that context to look at how whole nations of Christians can slip into reprobacy, because this emphasises how real he feels the danger is to them facing a catastrophic judgement. He does this by drawing parallels with the Britons and Jews, and highlighting physical – and simultaneously allegorical – reminders of Jerusalem. In addition, he raises the spectre of a new threat and agent of judgement – the Saracens.

Failing as Christians and the threat of the Saracens

This section argues that the threat of the Saracens can be understood in the context of how Bede fears the English may lose their status as a chosen people, as part of the wider Christian community. To discuss this, the section examines parallels between the Britons and the Jews, with the Britons an example of a people who have fallen from grace but who could be saved, much as the Jews would be converted before the Last Judgement. This should be understood in light of the discussions in the present thesis of heretics as persecutors of the Church. The essential point is that Bede had seen the decline of a Christian people on the island of Britain and feared the same happening to his own people. The section then discusses how the Saracens can be seen as one of the barbarian threats to Northumbria. The section then discusses Bede's portrayal of the Saracens in his work to highlight the role they play in his eschatological thought.

[57] "And because none of the five Ages [*aetatum*] in the past is found to have run its course in a thousand years, but some in more, some in less, and none had the same total of years as another, it follows that this [Age] likewise, which is now running its course, will also have a duration uncertain to mortal men, but known to Him alone who commanded His servants to keep watch with loins girded and lamps alight *like men waiting for their lord, when he shall return from the marriage feast* [Lk 12:35-36]".

As seen in chapter one of the present thesis, Bede presents many parallels between Britain and the Promised Land of the Bible. This establishes the island as a new paradise and is suggestive of its inhabitants thus being a chosen people. Foley and Higham, citing Robert Hanning, have described *HE* 1 as showing Bede's model of a sinful people, the Britons, being replaced by the English as a new Israel and paralleling the transition from an Old Testament to a New one.[58] Bede's Anglo-Saxon Church was part of the universal Church which originated before the incarnation[59] – it is a deep and profound connection. While the English can be seen as a new chosen people, a parallel Bede drew from Augustine's mission to Kent, in the *HE*, the Britons of the eighth century in many ways stand for the Jews.[60] By this it should be understood in the light of faithlessness, schism, and opposition to the universal Church (it should also be understood that there were no Jews in Britain that we know of, and that they were known mostly from the Bible and literature). Jews before Christ could be seen as faithful and pious, such as Tobias. They were to be praised: Bede says those living at "the ends of ages" could love "those faithful who were in the beginning of the world", whom Christians would love and whom would be embraced in kind.[61] However, refusal to accept Christ marked a break: The Jews after this were typically seen in Bede's exegesis as blind, faithless, and unbelieving. He had written that "the primitive Church (*primitiua ecclesia*) bloomed mainly from Jewish soil" but has grown its own fruit.[62] Olsen has argued that Bede saw the Church as having retained Jewish elements in its earliest years, when the Gentiles

[58] W. Trent Foley and N. J. Higham, 'Bede on the Britons', *Early Medieval Europe* 17 (2009), 154-85: 154-55.
[59] Conor O'Brien, 'Bede on the Jewish Church', *Studies in Church History* 49 (2013), 63-73: 63.
[60] See particularly Foley and Higham, 159-71.
[61] *De tab*, 62; TTH.18, 69.
[62] *De templo*, 183; TTH.21, 52.

were first being converted, before ultimately deeming those elements unacceptable as it developed.[63]

This becomes a theme at the Synod of Whitby, where Wilfrid forcefully argues for the adoption of the Roman Easter by stressing that it was necessary for the early Church to avoid "scandalising the Jews", but that it was no longer necessary for holding to the old Mosaic law (*HE* 3.25). For writers like Bede, the Jews held to their own particularist ways despite what Christians saw as a new covenant. It is paralleled in Bede's work by the Britons holding to their own ways and not preaching to the English, and later in not accepting the correct Easter practice. They were schismatic, "opposed by God", and a theme in Christian exegesis is the comparison of schismatics to Jews. Foley and Higham have argued that in Bede's *HE* Jews, who believe they are the one covenanted people, resemble the Britons, who believe they are the one covenanted people in Britain.[64]

Both Britons and Jews, as far as Bede was concerned, were stubbornly refusing to accept the Christian truth that was in front of their eyes, though Scheil describes this as "rhetorical fantasy".[65] This idea of Old Testament particularism is a teaching advanced by Paul in his letter to the Romans, in which he says those who hold to physical (i.e., outward) circumcision are Jews but those who follow the circumcision of the heart (i.e., inward) are truly saved, because they are practising what they preach rather than just portraying it for public view (Rom 2:17-29). Bede, who in his *Epistola ad Ecgbertum* advocated reading Paul's works as a fundamental exercise for anybody who was being trained as a preacher,[66] would have understood the relevance this passage had to his own day, in which some men carried the name of priest or monk but lived as a secular noble. While

[63] Glenn Olsen, 'Bede as Historian: The Evidence From His Observations on the Life of the First Christian Community at Jerusalem', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 33.4 (1982), 519-30.
[64] Higham and Foley, 168.
[65] Scheil, *Footsteps of Israel*, 26-32.
[66] *Letter to Egbert*, 344.

discussing hypocrisy in his homily on John 10:22-30, he said "there are some who keep the faith in word only and cover their brutish hearts under the guise of sheep".[67] As noted in the previous chapter, this was the sort of corruption to be feared as the latter days approached, because people like this would take part in the persecution of the faithful. Any sort of separation or particularism could give rise to such a threat. Indeed, O'Brien points out that in Bede's commentary on Mark he says that God destroyed the Temple to protect Christians weak in faith because Christians knew it had been established by God and used by the prophets, which could cause a reversion to Judaism.[68] It can be argued that Bede also meant a reversion to faithlessness, given his use of "*perfidia*" with regard to Jews and heretics. And he equated Jews and heretics in one of his homilies (1.18), where he notes that many Jews and Gentiles had rejected Christ's cross outwardly, while the "false brethren" have rejected it inwardly.[69]

By Bede's day, the Britons, although Christian, were out of step with Rome and the Christianity practised by the English and Irish. Bede considers the most "monstrous" crime (and sin, *scelera*) of the Britons to be that they did not preach to the English, unlike the Irish, who he says were rewarded for their endeavours by becoming one with the universal Church on Easter. Even pre-Christian Jews, Bede writes in his exegesis, had preached to and converted Gentiles, with the Old Testament prophets on a par with the apostles.[70]

Scheil argues that such missionary work led to Bede adopting a "commisserative" tone toward the Jews because without faithful Jews at the start, there would have been no Church.[71] O'Brien argues that Bede's views on Jews became more positive and concilatory following the Synod

[67] Bede, Homily 2.24, CS.111, 245.
[68] O'Brien, 'Jewish Church', 69-70.
[69] As noted in Scheil, *Footsteps of Israel*, 70.
[70] *De tab*, 27-28, 31; *De templo*, 157; *In genesim*, 239. See O'Brien, 'Jewish Church', 65-67.
[71] Scheil, *Footsteps of Israel*, 68.

of Whitby, in that it parallels bringing the Columban missionary legacy into the universal fold.[72] Foley and Higham see Bede's approach to the Britons' lack of preaching to the English as projecting English-British rivalries from his own day back to the initial mission to the English, and they argue the Britons had been converting their neighbours.[73] Bede considers missionary work an important, even essential activity. In his commentary on 1 Peter, he says Christians must preach to non-Christians so that the latter "may be alive spiritually (*spiritaliter uiuant*)".[74] This idea of being alive "spiritually" echoes the concerns raised in the vision of Dryhthelm. The thinking is the same in both texts: in one, preaching arouses the living from the death of the soul, while in the other a miraculous event "like that of ancient times" achieves the same aim. In the *HE*, Bede refers to English missionaries and the benefits they confer on their own people and those to whom they mission. For example, Egbert, who converted Iona to the Roman Easter calculation,

> lived a life of great humility, gentleness, temperance, simplicity, and righteousness. He brought much blessing both to his own race and to those among whom he lived in exile, the Irish and the Picts, by the example of his life, the earnestness of his teaching, the authority with which he administered reproof, and his goodness in distributing whatever he received from the rich. (*HE* 3.27)[75]

This is an emulation of the primitive Church, and also the Augustinian missionaries, who Bede specifically says lived in the manner of the primitive Church. Bede returns to English missionaries in *HE* 5, when he refers to Anglo-Saxons who have gone to their ancestral kin in Germany. The "soldier of Christ" Egbert had planned to preach to the Frisians, Rugians, Danes, Huns, Old Saxons, and Bructeri among others, but "divine

[72] O'Brien, 'Jewish Church', 70-73.
[73] Foley and Higham, 'Bede on the Britons', 156.
[74] On 1 Pet 4:6, *Epistulas VII*, 253; CS.82, 109.
[75] "*Duxit autem uitam in magna humilitatis, mansuetudinis, continentiae, simplicitatis, et iustitiae perfectione. Unde et genti suae et illis, in quibus exulabat, nationibus Scottorum siue Pictorum, exemplo uiuendi, et instantia docendi, et auctoritate corripiendi, et pietate largiendi de his, quae a diuitibus acceperat, multum profuit*."

revelations and interventions prevented him from carrying out any of these plans" (*HE* 5.9).

While chronologically speaking it is natural for Egbert to appear in *HE* 5, as he died within Bede's lifetime, it is interesting that his missionary excellence is promoted earlier on in the text. It is worth noting that, exegetically speaking, the presence of English missionaries in Germany meant more of the Gentiles were being converted, which in turn implied that the time was near for the conversion of the Jews (which Bede says is under way albeit in small numbers),[76] which was a prerequisite of the arrival of the Antichrist and subsequently Christ. It is not clear why Bede added the reference to Jews, unless he is thinking of "Jews" as synonymous with those who have been presented with spiritual truth and rejected it in favour of their own beliefs. This would represent not only Jewish people in that case but schismatic Christians coming back into the fold – and *HE* 1.22 suggests that the Britons too could be saved, with Bede saying that "God in his goodness did not reject the people whome he foreknew". Higham and Foley have argued that this definitely means the Britons, and not the English, citing it as contrary to Bede's usual approach to the Britons.[77] That said, the Church would be made up of Jews and Gentiles, so Bede may be emphasising union of the faithful even amid the eschatological threat from the faithless. He had stressed that Jews had prefigured the sacrament of the eucharist, celebrating "the sacrament of the Lord's passion (through which each of the two peoples has been redeemed) in the flesh and blood of sacrifices".[78] Bede comments in his exegesis on Revelation that once the Jews were converted, Jesus would "shed light upon the hidden things of

[76] *De tab*, 65; TTH.18, 72-3. "For it is not plausible either that at any time before the Lord's incarnation there were lacking those form among the Gentiles who believed, or that now, however grievously the people of the Jews may be damned on account of faithlessness, there are not some among them, even if only a very few, who live in exile among Christians and come to salvation every day by believing." See also *Quaestiones XXX*, 297; TTH.28, 93. This passage reads: "For some Jews, if only a few of the common stock as well as the priestly, now flee daily to the Church for refuge, but when the whole number of the Gentiles has entered, then all Israel will be saved."
[77] Higham and Foley, 170-71.
[78] *De tab*, 124; see O'Brien, 'Jewish Church', 65.

darkness and show how beneficial the coming of Antichrist is, either for testing the faith of the Church, or for blinding the Jews *who did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved*".[79] The line in italics is from 2 Thess 2:10, but the biblical text refers generally to "souls that are doomed" because they refused to accept the truth.

In his commentary on Habbakuk he says that the Jews' temporal ruin matches the "eternal death" sent by God to those who rejected Christianity, and while commenting on Tobit he says such unbelievers, lacking good teachers, would now meet spiritual death.[80] Nevertheless the blindness of such people is presented as beneficial for the faithful, probably because it serves to illustrate the potential post-mortem punishments for people who know of Jesus but do not follow him. *De tabernaculo* refers to how the gospel is being preached "throughout all regions of the world into which the Holy Church is spread",[81] which would imply that the conversion of the Gentiles has almost finished – meaning that time was still of the essence in order for reform to be achieved, even if there was still enough time to get things right. So not only does Egbert's exemplary life work as a suitable foil to the obstinacy of the Britons, it establishes early on that the English had matured in many ways to become a great spiritual and missionary people, as well as serving as a reminder of the kind of Christian life that was needed so that the English of Bede's day did not make the same mistakes as the Britons of Gildas's era.

However, that is not to say that the Britons of the present day, despite being spiritual outsiders, were entirely without hope. Bede's exegesis treats the Jews and Gentiles as two branches of God's people, though the former had refused to accept Jesus (but would at the end of time, he argues). The Gentiles owed a debt to the Jews: not only had the received their Church from them, they had learned "to observe the days of

[79] *Exp Apoc*, 447; TTH.58, 221.
[80] Scully, 'Introduction': 30.
[81] *De tab*, 16; TTH.18, 14.

the week" from them as well (*DTR* 8). In Bede's commentary on the Canticle of Habakkuk, he says that, like a fig tree which once bore fruit, the Jews had been glorious when in God's favour but had become barren by not accepting Jesus.[82] This means that while the Jews are currently outside the sphere of Christian salvation, they have not been cut off and will be welcomed into the fold at the right time.[83] In his commentary on 1 Samuel 4:21, Bede says that the Ark of the Covenant, lost to the Philistines, represents how faith has been transferred from the Jews to the Gentiles, but would be returned at the end of the world.[84] The essential argument is that a willingness to reform, and to embrace Christianity, would lead to an eternal reward. In light of this, and in the context of having examined "*perfidia*" and the Briton-Jewish parallels, it is worth exploring more what Bede understands about Jews, given how he equates them with heresy. This will help to emphasise the risks of particularism but will also show how early missionaries to the English confronted the Britons' stubborness and spiritual blindness, which in turn is a lesson to Bede's contemporay readers about the need for embracing the faith wholly.

There is a distinction, in Christian exegesis, between the Jews of the Old Testament and those of the New. In the Old, they were the chosen people following God's commandments to the best of their ability and overall operating within divine law. For an exegete, it was typological and foreshadowed the Christian era; writers such as Bede would have read Heb 10:1, "the law is only a shadow of the good things to come", and understood that they were to derive lessons from the Old Testament to help them understand the New.[85] Bede, writing about the Old Testament, cast their teachings in an eschatological light: "Among the many hidden things that were revealed to the prophets … [was that] salvation would come not in their days but rather in yours, who are born at the end of

[82] *Habbacuc*, 406; Connolly trans, 91.
[83] A particular theme of *Tobias*.
[84] For fuller discussion of this passage, see Darby, *Bede and the End of Time*, 176-8.
[85] See also Rom 15:4, 1 Cor 10:11, and Acts 3:24, as well as Bede, *In Sam* 1, prologue.

ages."[86] Bede often quotes 1 Cor 10:11, "all these things happened to them in a symbolic way for they are written on account of us".[87] In his seventh homily on Ezekiel, Gregory says that the scriptures, the two testaments written by God, can help to liberate humanity from the "death of the soul".[88] The coming of Jesus had signified a new beginning, resulting in fundamental philosophical conflict between Judaism and the nascent Christianity. In Bede's words: "our Lord through the miracles (*miracula*) he wrought in the flesh showed the Jewish people from whom he had taken flesh that he was the Son of God and the angel, i.e., the messenger of his Father's will". [89] Those who saw the miracles and did not turn to Christianity had thus rejected Jesus as son of God and remained obdurate.

Bede's homily on John 5:1-18 teaches that "the letter of the law [ie, Judaism] taught the ignorant what was to be done and what avoided, yet it did not aid those taught to fulfil its decrees [so they remained ill and enfeebled] … The grace of the gospel, however, through faith and the mystery of the Lord's passion, heals all the illnesses of our iniquities, from which we could not be justified in the law of Moses".[90] Bede often refers to Jews as blind or sick, or sometimes mad.[91] This should be understood as a reference to them being blind to Christ's teachings; Bede's homily on Lk 1:57-68 considered the Christian message in a geographical and eschatological context: "at the time of our Lord's resurrection, when the Spirit had been sent down from above and the glory of his name was made known to the world by the apostles a most salutary fear struck the hearts, not only of the Jews … but also those of foreign nations, even to the ends of

[86] On 1 Pet 1:12; CS.82, 75.
[87] Davidse, 'The Sense of History', 661, highlights *In Genesim* 3, *De tab* 1.1-9, Homily 2.24.
[88] *In Hiezech*, 93: "*Et rursum subditur: Quia spiritus uitae erat in rotis. Quod idcirco secundo dicitur uitae spiritus in rotis esse, quia Scripturae sacrae duo sunt Testamenta, quae utraque Dei spiritus scribi uoluit, ut nos a morte animae liberaret*."
[89] *Tobias*, 7; TTH.28, 62-63.
[90] Bede, Homily 1.23, CS.110, 223-4.
[91] Scheil, *Footsteps of Israel*, 24-43.

the earth".[92] Isidore too had drawn attention to Jewish blindness when it came to recognising Christ and persisting with the old law even after the Temple had been destroyed, even if they would believe at the end of the world.[93] But it is important to remember how Bede contrasts Jesus' power to heal with humanity's diseased condition[94] – sickness was not the exclusive domain of Jews. Elsewhere he refers to the Antichrist's power to make war on the saints (Rev 13:7) is in part "a condemnation of the Jews who accepted a lie, and did not believe in the truth".[95] In effect, he says peoples across the world knew of Jesus' message, but he shows that the "blind" Jews ignored it. Gildas had also called the pagan Britons "a blind people", with the spiritually corrupt Christian Britons of his day ruled by blind bishops leading the blind (*DEB* 4.2, 95.4).

For Bede, the Jews of the present era represent the spiritually blind who refuse to acknowledge truth. His type for this is Tobias: "Tobias' blindness thus represents how, as the Aposte says, *blindness fell partly upon Israel* [Rom 11.25]".[96] There is, in some of his writings, a hardness toward the Jews. For example, he expounds on the word "winter" in John 10:22 by saying "why did the evangelist trouble to record that it was winter time, except that he wished to dictate by the harshness of the winter winds and storms the hardness of the Jews' unbelief".[97] This has a parallel with the Britons, who have seen Christianity brought to the English by Rome and yet refused to accept it: they too are remaining spiritually blind and obdurate.[98] Their bishops meet with Augustine at Augustine's Oak (*HE* 2.2), and Bede states that they not only failed to keep the correct Easter, but "did other things too which were not in keeping with the unity of the

[92] CS.111, 207.
[93] Tolan, *Saracens*, 14.
[94] Homily 2.14 on Lk 11:9-13; *Homeliarum*, 272-89; CS.111, 124-34.
[95] *Exp Apoc*, 405; TTH.58, 200, quoting Jerome's commentary on Daniel.
[96] *Tobias*, 51; TTH.28, 60.
[97] Bede, Homily 2.24, *Homeliarum*, 358-67; CS.111, 242.
[98] The same point is made in O'Reilly, 'Islands and Idols': xxxvi.

Church".[99] Despite the meeting, "after a long dispute they were unwilling, in spite of the prayers, exhortations, and rebukes of Augustine and his companions to give their assent [to conform], preferring their own traditions to those in which all the churches throughout the world agree in Christ". In his exegesis, Bede argues that the Christian message is "the footprints of the truth" in the listener's mind (Bede, *In Hab* 13), which by extension implies that those who have heard the message and disregarded it are not following the true path. Jennifer O'Reilly has noted that "The British Christians do not represent the Jews of the Old Covenant depicted in [Bede's] *De Templo*. Rather, they are faithless Jews, meaning the obdurate and spiritually blind: 'no healing or benefit was obtained from their ministry'. Augustine [the missionary from Rome to the English] heals the blind and shares the faith (*HE* 2.2)".[100]

In his homily on John 10:22-30, Bede said the Jews of the past and present showed a "lack of sense" and would never "cease to err until at length they accept the Antichrist in place of Christ".[101] Bede tells his congregation that they should avoid such mistakes and accept Christ as divine, which is to say accept the Church's teachings, rather than fall into particularism or schism. Interestingly, Augustine, when forced by "necessity" – the stubbornness of the Britons – performs a miracle to show them that he is in the right, the miracle is the healing of a blind Englishman. Augustine prays that Jesus "would restore his lost sight to the blind man, and, through the bodily enlightenment of one man, would bring the grace of spiritual light to the hearts of many believers" (*HE* 2.2).[102] He is healed immediately and it is the only miracle Bede records in association

[99] For more on Augustine and the Britons, see Stancliffe, 'The British Church and the Mission of Augustine'.
[100] O'Reilly, 'Introduction': xxxvi.
[101] CS.111, 243.
[102] "*Quod cum aduersarii, inuiti licet, concederent, adlatus est quidam de genere Anglorum, oculorum luce priuatus; qui cum oblatus Brettonum sacerdotibus nil curationis uel sanationis horum ministerio perciperet, tandem Augustinus, iusta necessitate conpulsus, flectit genua sua ad Patrem Domini nostri Iesu Christi, deprecans, ut uisum caeco, quem amiserat, restitueret, et per inluminationem unius hominis corporalem, in plurimorum corde fidelium spiritalis gratiam lucis accenderet*."

with Augustine; [103] however, the Britons, though acknowledging Augustine's righteousness, still refuse to conform without holding a conference on the subject, emphasising the schism.

The Britons' doggedness, as we have seen, was spiritually risky because it meant being out of step with the Church when the end, or at least judgement, could come at any moment. The history of the Britons, viewed in an eschatological context, had shown that judgement could be decisive and ruinous. In chapter three of the present thesis in particular it was seen that Bede believed the same could happen to the English, should the people and particularly the monasteries not fall into line. As the subjugation of the Britons had been "ordained by the will of God" on account of their failure to pay heed to divine warnings, so the English, "threatened by barbarians", could suffer a similar fate. But whereas Gildas makes the agents of punishment explicit – the Saxons – Bede does not. As with much of his criticism, it is oblique, and he implies a decline of the English rather than the rise of another people. For instance, when discussing Theodore of Tarsus (d.AD690), Bede says his career in Britain coincided with the greatest times of the English.[104] "Never had there been such happy times since the English came to Britain; for having such brave Christian kings, they were a terror to all the barbarian nations, and the desires of all men were set on the joys of the heavenly kingdom of which they had only lately heard" (*HE* 4.2).[105] The great days of the English, then, were when both Church and kingdom were strong and sincerely Christian. As a model this had some scriptural backing as well; one thinks of Ezra and Nehemiah. Biblical figures like David, Saul, and Solomon taught the reader

[103] Gameson, 'Augustine of Canterbury: Context and Achievement': 36.
[104] For studies of Theodore and his impact on the English, see Michael Lapidge (ed.), *Archbishop Theodore: Commemorative Studies on his Life and Influence* (Cambridge, 1995), and Michael Lapidge, 'The School of Theodore and Hadrian', Anglo-Saxon 15 (1985), 45-72.
[105] "*Neque umquam prorsus, ex quo Brittaniam petierunt Angli, feliciora fuere tempora; dum et fortissimos Christianosque habentes reges cunctis barbaris nationibus essent terrori, et omnium uota ad nuper audita caelestis regni gaudia penderent, et quicumque lectionibus sacris cuperent erudiri, haberent in promtu magistros, qui docerent.*"

that kingship was associated with legitimate authority, and that, as Loyn argues, "legitimate Christian authority over a settled people was unthinkable except in royal terms".[106]

This is a motif that recurs in the *HE*. And yet, a century later, the English were being threatened by barbarians. Having argued that Bede sees a real risk of biblical prophecies being fulfilled, such as wars and false brethren, and how he has shown what can befall peoples who refuse to accept Christ, it will be argued now that the chief threat among these barbarians are the Saracens.

Based on his location and the political history of Northumbria, the most obvious potential "barbarian" conquerors would seem to be the Picts, the Britons to the west of Northumbria, or the Irish, either from Dál Riada (in western Scotland and northeastern Ireland) or from the island itself. Ecgfrith's campaign on the Irish mainland would suggest that there were political conflicts between Anglo-Saxon and Irish kingdoms, and Thomas Charles-Edwards has suggested that the attack was part of Ecgfrith's attempt to assert lordship over the Uí Néill.[107] There were therefore several readily available actors Bede could have cast in the role of agents of judgement. But instead Bede takes pains to stress the unity of the archipelago, and the chapter on current events would seem to argue that no people in Britain is a threat to the English.

"The Picts now have a treaty of peace with the English and rejoice to share in the catholic peace and truth of the Church universal. The Irish who live in Britain are content with their own territories and devise no plots or treachery against the English" (*HE* 5.23). While the Britons "oppose the English through their inbred hatred"[108] and the Church through their incorrect Easter, God and man are against them. "They cannot obtain what

[106] Loyn, *The Governance of Anglo-Saxon England*, 14.
[107] Charles-Edwards, 'Nations and Kingdoms : A View from Above'.
[108] "*Brettones, quamuis et maxima ex parte domestico sibi odio gentem Anglorum*".

they want in either respect. For they although they are partly their own masters, yet they have also been brought partly under the rule of the English".[109] The *HE* paints a picture of the English as masters of the island, powerful enough to be unchallenged by traditional foes such as the Irish and Picts and to have conquered old foes such as the Britons. And yet the *Epistola ad Ecgbertum* makes it clear that the kingdom is threatened by barbarians, or at least Bede wants Ecgbert to acknowledge the possibility that it is. At first reading there do not appear to be any barbarians capable of disrupting English supremacy. However, *HE* 5 does contain references to a potential agent of judgement, a people not present in the islands but active in the Mediterranean world and increasing in strength – the Saracens.

By Bede's day they had had significant military success against the Byzantine empire, North Africa, and Spain.[110] They may have been "an ill-defined, fierce, hostile, mighty force"[111] but that likely suited Bede's purposes. Tolan argues that Bede sees the Saracens as "no better than the other 'pagan' persecutors that plundered Europe: rod of divine chastisement that would in the end either be crushed or converted".[112] However, as will become now evident, the sense of unknowing but fear of their clear military strength would have very much caught Bede's eschatological attention.

That the Saracens could be a force to fear should not be surprising. Militarily, they were achieving great success in Bede's lifetime, and were moving steadily westwards and northwards through Africa and Spain as

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[109] "*quippe qui quamuis ex parte sui sint iuris, nonnulla tamen ex parte Anglorum sunt seruitio mancipati"*.

[110] For a recent overall study of the conquests, see Robert G. Hoyland, *In God's Path: The Arab Conquests and the Creation of an Islamic Empire* (Oxford, 2015). For studies of contemporary responses to the Saracnes, see for instance Walter Emil Kaegi, 'Initial Byzantine Reactions to the Arab Conquest', *American Society of Church History* 38 (1969), 139-49, and Samuel Ottewill-Soulsby, ''Those same cursed Saracens': Charlemagne's Campaigns in the Iberian Peninsula as Religious Warfare', *Journal of Medieval History* 42 (2016), 405-428.

[111] Calvin Kendall, 'Bede and Islam', *Bede and the Future*, 93-114: 114.

[112] Tolan, *Saracens*, 75.

the Christian world declined and kingdoms waned. But set in an exegetical context, they were more than valid agents of judgement: After all, in the Old Testament, God punished the Israelites through invasions by non-Jews, and we have already seen the parallels between Britain and the Holy Land. The essential point for the present thesis is that the Saracens are an indicator for Bede that God could work through peoples far removed from Britain. They are a warning, in Bede's eschatological mind – his chronicle in *DTR* and the *HE* both end with Saracen attacks.

Bede had very little direct knowledge of the Saracens, though he could draw on works by Jerome and *De Locis Sanctis* by Adomnán of Iona.[113] The *Liber pontificalis* often ascribed to Jerome was another important source for his historical material. Bede would not have known about Muslims' monotheistic religious beliefs, nor the difference between the pre-Islamic Arabs and those of his own day.[114] Generally, the Saracens "were a written phenomenon in Anglo-Saxon England", in that there was little or no direct contact.[115] Wallace-Hadrill has argued that Bede saw the Saracens as "a disruptive force" and that his attitude toward them hardened after the Saracen invasion of Spain in 711.[116] It is, however, curious that he never refers to the Saracens as being in Spain. Kendall says there is "no surviving evidence" that Bede knew of the invasion of Spain but that he may have heard "vague rumours",[117] although this seems like an understatement given that Bede refers to later Saracen attacks in Gaul.

The Saracens have been described as "a distant and vague threat" in Bede's work, like clouds on the horizon.[118] They appear in a few scattered mentions in his exegesis and his historical texts. However, what he does

[113] On Bede and the Saracens see Scarfe Beckett, *Anglo-Saxon Perceptions*, 124-39; J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, *Bede's Europe*, Jarrow Lecture (1963), passim; Kendall, 'Introduction': 21-8; Kendall, 'Bede and Islam', passim..
[114] Kendall, 'Bede and Islam': 94-5.
[115] Scarfe Beckett, *Anglo-Saxon Perceptions*, 15.
[116] Wallace-Hadrill, *Bede's Europe*, 8.
[117] Kendall, 'Bede and Islam': 102.
[118] Tolan, 'Saracens and Ifranj', 32-33; John Tolan, *Saracens: Islam in the Medieval European Imagination* (New York, 2002): 72-78.

say about them connects with the themes and concerns this thesis has discussed so far.

The Saracens were generally considered to be the descendants of Ismael, "a wild donkey of a man" (Gen 16:12), the eldest son of Abraham from whom God said a great nation would descend (Gen 17:20), albeit one always "in hostility to his brother" (Gen 16:13). His mother was Hagar, a slavewoman, with whom the eighty-six-year-old Abraham conceived a child as his wife, Sarah, was too old to bear children (Gen 16:1-5). However, God promised Abraham that Sarah would indeed have a son (Gen 20:16-18), and she did: Isaac, from whom the line of David (and thus Christ) descended. Abraham and Sarah, who had loved Ismael, grew cold toward him and drove Hagar and Ismael into the desert. Bede is silent on God's promise in Genesis that the descendants of Ismael would be made into a great nation (Gen 17:20, 21:13), instead ending his commentary with Ismael being exiled into the desert and thus ending *In Genesim* with the typology of his line being cast out of the chosen people.[119] This suggests that either Bede was more preoccupied with the Saracens as a mobile, militarily successful group, or that he was concerned that highlighting a prophecy of the Ismaelites as a great nation would give them too great a scriptural legacy. Kendall has argued that Bede's presentation of the Saracens hardened over time as they achieved greater success across the Mediterranean.[120]

Bede's exegesis makes it clear that he believed the Saracens were the same as the Ismaelites. His *Nomina locorum* says that the "deserto Faran" was the dwelling place of Ismael and the Ismaelites, who are now called Saracens.[121] They are a hostile people: they are descended from "Ismael, of whom it is said: 'his hand shall be against all, and the hands of all against

[119] Kendall, 'Bede and Islam': 109-10.
[120] Ibid.
[121] Bede, *Nomina Locorum*, CCSL.119, 277. "*In deserto autem Faran scriptura commemorat habitasse Ismahelem unde et Ismahelitae qui nunc Sarraceni*." The parallel of the two is also made in *In cantica*, 195.

him', the truth of which presentiment is demonstrated today by the nation of the Saracens, hateful towards all, which sprang from him".[122] Bede's *In cantica canticorum* restates that this prophecy came true. The Faran desert was the wilderness into which David descended after Samuel's death. In *In cantica* he refers to Cedar, son of Ismael, of whom it was said that every hand will be against him. Bede says the "truth" of this is that the Saracens, descended from Cedar, are "hated by everyone" ("*exosa omnibus*").[123] He says also that they "never took the trouble to be at peace with anyone at all", suggesting he saw the Saracen hostility toward the European territories as something deep in their character. And he makes an almost identical comment on Faran and the Ismaelites in his commentary on Samuel.[124] In that commentary he says the Saracens "particularly ... are to be considered "as enemies of the church" ("*Sarracenos specialiter adversarios ecclesiae"*). This could mean Bede sees them alongside heretics and false brethren. The present thesis has already noted that heretics would oppose the Church in the last days. However, just as importantly it is worth noting that Revelation 20:7 says that Gog and Magog would join the last persecution after Satan was released from his prison. Palmer has argued that in this context "Gog and Magog" should be read as meaning outsiders.[125] Bede's familiarity with Revelation may therefore have seen him realise that, should outsiders join the last persecution, then they would not only be enemies of the Church but peoples from outside Britain and Ireland.

But his thought on the subject is quite dense, and so it is worth including it in full.

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[122]*In Cantica*, 195. Translation from Scarfe Beckett, *Anglo-Saxon Perceptions*, 133, n78. "*Cedar Ismahelis fuit filius de quo dictum est: Manus eius contra omnes, et manus omnium contra eum. Cuius praesagii ueritatem et exosa omnibus hodie Sarracenorum qui ab eo ortu sunt natio probat*."

[123] *In cantica*, 195, on Sg 1:4; Holder trans., 44.

[124] *In Samuhelem*, 231.

[125] Palmer, *Apocalypse*, 35. For more on this theme and Gog and Magog, see James T. Palmer, 'Apocalyptic Outsiders and Their Uses in the Early Medieval West', in eds. W. Brandes, F. Schmieder and R. Voss, *Peoples of the Apocalypse: Eschatological Beliefs and Political Scenarios* (Berlin and Boston, 2016): 307-320.

> For scripture proclaims [Hagar] to have led Ismael (from whom came the race of the Saracens) to the desert of Paran and to have lived there - namely, he of whom it is said: 'Cast out the handmaid and her son, for the son of the servant shall not be heir with the son of the free'. At whose troubling proximity the son of the free (that is, the population renewed in spiritual grace, shuddering, complains, saying: 'Woe is me that my sojourning is prolonged! I have dwelt with the inhabitants of Kedar', and the other [comments] until the end of the psalm [119] which in general describe all the Saracens particularly as enemies of the Church (*Sarracenos specialiter adversarios ecclesiae*). But as, with regard to the son of the slavewoman (that is, the people serving this worldly age), Christ would call them too to liberty and would make them the sons of the promise according to Isaac, having fled the arrogant Jews he went down into the desert of Faran; that is, he filled the hearts of the Gentiles with humility and the grace of his piety[126]

In this passage, Bede is making David a type of Christ, living in peace among the hostile Ismaelities. But the reference to Isaac is particularly important, as Isaac was the younger son of Abraham, the one from whom the chosen people – and David, and Christ, and thus all Christians, including the English – were descended. In his commentary on Genesis, Bede writes that "Isaac ... prefigured the New Testament", while Ismael "signified the Old Covenant".[127] That is, Isaac represents the new, spiritual law, while Ismael, and thus all those descended from him, hold to the old, carnal law that for Christians had been superseded by Christ. Isaac, he says, was not born to Abraham according to the carnal, but out of the promise of God to Abraham that his wife would bear a child ("*Non ... secundum carnem natus est Isaac Abrahae, sed ex promissione*"). [128] This symbolism of the two sons and two testaments is from Paul's letter to the

[126] Ibid. Translation is from Scarfe Beckett, *Anglo-Saxon Perceptions*, 130, n65. "*Narrat enim scriptura Ismahelem a quo genus duxere Sarraceni in deserto Faran habitasse illum uidelicet de quo dictum est: Eice ancillam et filium eius, non enim heres erit filius ancillae cum filio liberae. Cuius uicinitatem turbulentam horrescens filius liberae, id est populus spiritali gratia renouatus, queritur dicens, Heu me quod incolatus meus prolongatus est, habitaui cum habitanibus Cedar, et cetera usque ad finem psalmi quae Sarracenos specialiter aduersarios ecclesiae cunctos generaliter describunt. Sed ut etiam de ancillae filiis, id est de huic saeculo seruientibus populis, Christus ad libertatem uocaret hosque secundum Isaac promissionis efficeret filios fugatus a superbis Iudaeis descendit in desertum Faran, hoc est humiliata gentilium corda suae gratia pietatis infudit*."
[127] *In Genesim*, 209; TTH.48, 287.
[128] *In Genesim*, 239.

Galatians, which Bede quotes: "For these are the two covenants. The one from Mount Sinai, engendering unto bondage, which is Hagar. For Sinai is a mountain in Arabia, which has affinity to that Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But that Jerusalem, which is above [the future Jerusalem], is free, which is the mother of all of us."[129]

In his Genesis commentary, Bede aligns the Saracens with the Jews, in that they have both rejected Christ.[130] In the case of the Ismaelites, the birth of Isaac and the continuation of the Israelites in a legitimate patrilinear fashion, as opposed to the illegitimacy of Ismael, son of the concubine Hagar, meant that Ismael and his descendants were left outside salvation, even though they remained major actors within Bede's understanding of providential history. They were an "other", even a reflection of how the Jews could have turned out had Isaac not been born.

Bede's perspective on the Saracens generally is that they are external adversaries of the Church, but his texts suggest that they can be seen as heretical or non-orthodox Christians. In his commentary on Acts he suggests paganism, explaining "Remfam" as signifying "Lucifer, the morning star, to the worship of which the Saracen people were devoted, in connection with the honour paid to Venus".[131] Remfam, or Remphan, was one of the pagan Egyptian gods the Israelites turned to after their exodus from slavery. Specifically, Acts 7:43 refers to the Israelites bringing "figures" to adore Remfan and another pagan god, Moloch, meaning they were worshipping idols. So the Saracens, according to Bede's Acts commentary, were idolatrous, something he abhors and criticises in his exegesis. However, in Damascus, where Christians worship in the church of John the Baptist, the Saracens "have erected and consecrated another church for themselves".[132] Adomnán, in a source text for Bede's work on

[129] *In Genesim*, 238; TTH.48, 318, quoting Gal 4:22-26.
[130] Kendall, *Bede: On Genesis*, 25-6; Kendall, 'Bede and Islam': 113.
[131] Bede, *Acts*, 75.
[132] *De locis sanctis*, 277; TTH.28, 23.

the holy places, refers to it as "*ecclesia incredulorum*", "church of the unbelievers",[133] a detail Bede omits.[134] Tolan suggests this is so the reader will come to the conclusion that the Saracen king is a Christian.[135]

The Saracens may well be heretic Christians in Bede's eyes, as King Mauvias "who lived during our lifetime" mediated in a quarrel between Christians and Christian Jews over the headcloth of Christ. To do this, "he lit a large pyre and implored Christ, who had deigned to wear the cloth on his head for the salvation of his own, to serve as judge".[136] So at least one Saracen king has respect for Christ, although he may have simply decided to leave the decision up to the God of the quarrellers. Mauvias (Mu'awiyah I, ruled AD660-80) had relied on Christians and Hellenistic culture to foster his state in Damascus,[137] so one should not be surprised by his willingness to intervene, even if Bede was evidently unaware of this. Bede omits the line from Adomnán's *De Locis Sanctis* where the Saracen ruler describes Jesus as "the saviour of the world" ("*Christus mundi Saluator"*).[138] Why Bede chose to omit this detail is unclear, and may indeed support Wallace-Hadrill's view that Bede grew more hostile to the Saracens after they had conquered Spain. Tolan too argues that Bede began to see them as more of a danger once they had advanced across North Africa and Spain.[139] But if Bede had become more hostile to them after the conquest of Spain, the reader would expect some harsh mention of this in his *Chronica* or his exegesis. Indeed, Tolan comments that Bede's *De locis sanctis* gives "no sense that these Arabs are more important players on the world scene than they had been a century before".[140] An analysis of how they are treated in

[133] Adomnán, *De Locis Sanctis*, 193.
[134] On the veracity of Adomnán's text see T. O'Loughlin, *Adomnán and the Holy Places: The Perceptions of an Insular Monk on the Locations of the Biblical Drama* (2007).
[135] Tolan, *Saracens*, 73.
[136] *De locis sanctis*, 260; TTH.28, p11.
[137] Wallace-Hadrill, *Bede's Europe*, 5.
[138] Adomnán, *De locis sanctis*, p193.
[139] Tolan, *Saracens*, 72.
[140] Tolan, *Saracens*, 73.

Bede's histories will, though, demonstrate that they take on a growing importance.

The descriptions of the Saracens in the *Chronica* are not flattering. In the reign of Constantine IV (AD652-85), "the Saracens invaded Sicily, and then returned to Alexandria, taking with them much booty".[141] As a description, it is in keeping with Jerome's reference to them as raiders and mercenaries, although in this case they have gone from raiding along the desert border to being sea-borne and attacking cities around the Mediterranean: they have thus become much more dangerous. This is the first mention of them in his *Chronica maiora*, and so their introduction into Bede's world history is therefore as raiders and pirates, but organised and well armed enough to overpower the defences of a Roman city and escape. His source for this is the *Liber Pontificalis*, so he would have understood it to be a work of some authority. That the incident took place during a sharp decline of imperial power in the eastern Mediterranean[142] – coinciding with the expansion of Christianity in Britain (Theodore's mission) – would hardly have gone unnoticed by Bede, who notes that there was a solar eclipse before "many and unprecedented raids" led to the murder in his bath of Constans II (AD630-68).[143] This eclipse (AD664) takes place at the same time Northumbria was ravaged by plague, a time which saw a brief revival of pagan practices which were themselves stamped out purely through the influence of Cuthbert's teaching. The eclipse therefore was a sign of disaster on a national and international scale.

The Saracens return to Bede's history when Justinian II (r. AD685-95, AD705-11) "made a ten-year peace on land and sea with the Saracens [AD685]. But the province of Africa was brought under the control of the

[141] DTR 66, AM 4639.
[142] Norman Davies, *Europe: A History* (London, 1997), 245; R.H.C. Davis, *A History of Medieval Europe: From Constantine to Saint Louis*, second ed. (Harlow, 1988), 87-95; Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples* (London, 2002), 22-38; Judith Herrin, *Byzantium: The Surprising Life of a Medieval Empire* (London, 2008), 88-9; Karen Armstrong, *Islam: A Short History* (London, 2000), 42-4.
[143] DTR 66, AM 4622.

Roman Empire. It had been occupied by the Saracens and Carthage itself was captured by them and destroyed".[144] The source material for this, the *Liber Pontificalis,* reads: "With the Lord's help this clement prince [Justinian] established a ten years' peace by land and sea with the unspeakable Saracen people; and the province of Africa was subdued and brought back into the Roman empire."[145] Arab forces under Hassan ibn al-Nu'man would indeed destroy the city in AD698, although as part of a campaign that began after the end of the treaty and which included over-running Asia Minor (something Bede makes no mention of).[146] Justinian, however, is an unjust ruler and held a "heretical synod" – one which would sharply divide the western and eastern churches – and so is dethroned. Bede's accounts of these AM entries make it clear that the Saracen attacks come at times of great crisis and chaos in large kingdoms, crises that have spiritual as well as temporal dimensions. He was not the first to suggest that the Arabs could be associated with divine punishment: eastern Christians who came to live under their rule, such as Sophronios, told their congregations that Arab military success was punishment for sins, and that they were a divine punishment of a biblical sort who would ultimately be destroyed.[147] A similar theme is evident in the early seventh century *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius,* while Boniface wrote that Saracen occupation of Spain and Provence was punishment for fornication.[148] These, though, are all after the fact: Where Bede is different is that he is anticipating a potential judgement through Saracen agency.

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[144] DTR 66, AM 4649. The Latin reads: "Hic *constituit pacem* cum *Sarracen*is *decennio terra marique. Sed et prouincia Africa subiugata est Romano imperio*, quae fuerat tenta a Sarracenis, ipsa quoque Carthagine ab eis capta et destructa." CCSL.123B, 529. Italicised sections are material from the *Liber Pontificalis* 84.3.

[145] *Liber pontificalis* 84.3. Translation used is Raymond Davis, *The Book of Pontiffs: The Ancient Biographies of the First Ninety Roman Bishops to Ad715*, Second ed. (Liverpool, 2000), 83.

[146] For contemporary accounts of the era, see J.D. Howard-Johnstone, *Witnesses to a World Crisis: Historians and Histories of the Middle East in the Seventh Century* (Oxford and New York, 2010).

[147] Tolan, *Saracens*, 42-3.

[148] Tolan, *Saracens*, 78.

The final appearance of the Saracens in the *Chronica* is the most interesting and significant for our discussion, although it should be read in light of the previous two references. There are three AM entries that focus on the strength of the papacy and the restoration of orthodox synods, as well as how "many of the English, both nobles and commoners, men and women, leaders and people in private life, were wont to go from Britain to Rome, inspired by divine love", including Bede's former abbot, Ceolfrid.[149] There is thus a sense of increasing Christian spirituality and development, as the Empire returns to a more pious footing (amid some battles) and the still-newly evangelised English internalise the faith and begin pilgrimages to holy places. However, the image of a nation returning to Christianity and turning to piety while under threat from outsiders should be compared to Bede's references in *HE* 5.23 to peace and prosperity. Having constructed his chronicle narrative thus, the Saracens launch another attack, this time on Constantinople itself, a city which for Bede would have all the significance of not only a Roman capital but the city founded by the first emperor to support Christianity. This time (AD717/8), however, during the reign of Leo III they are not as successful.

> The Saracens, coming to Constantinople with an immense army, besieged it for three years until, with the citizens *calling on God on numerous occasions*, many of [the Saracens] died of hunger, cold and pestilence, and withdrew, as if wearied of the siege. As they retreated, they started a war with the people of the Bulgars on the river Danube, and being likewise defeated by these people, they fled and sought their ships. When they were on the high sea, a storm suddenly blew up and many were killed when their ships were sunk or wrecked upon the shore.[150]

Compared to *HE* 5.23 and the *Epistola ad Ecgbertum*, the manner of the Saracens' defeat is of greatest relevance. It comes about through something Bede says is in decline in his kingdom: prayer. The English of his day do not know how to pray, and even "ignorant priests" have to be taught to

[149] DTR 66, AM 4671.
[150] DTR 66, AM 4680.

pray in English because they cannot do so in Latin. And yet here is an example of a people turning to prayer and achieving victory. So too the Britons, when they according to Gildas repented and prayed, were granted victory by God over the Saxons (*DEB* 25.2; Bede does not cite this in *HE* 1.14). In the *Chronica* entry, the Saracens are not only sent away, but suffer horribly through cold and disease before being beaten in a second war and subsequently drowned en masse. And there is another detail of this account that should be read in the light of the letter and *HE*: the people of Constantinople maintained their faith for three years despite the vast army at the walls (although the *Liber Pontificalis* says two years). They do not make a plea for divine aid just once, but on numerous occasions, again highlighting that they believed and continued to practice their Christian beliefs despite not achieving immediate success.

Bede, seeing the hand of God in everything, would have considered such a drastic defeat for the Saracens to be of divine provenance; they are not only beaten, but routed, first by natural causes, then by the Bulgars and then the forces of nature. This thesis has shown the importance of the natural world in Bede's exegetical and historical thought, and there is nothing to suggest that this mental framework could not be taken from Northumbria and applied elsewhere. The message that comes across is that, at a time of spiritual decline, there have been examples of how spiritual strength has achieved temporal victory and secured divine aid.

Conclusion

By examining his scriptural comments and then how he introduces the Saracens into his history writings, and then how he incorporates them into the increasingly warning passages of *HE* 5, it can be seen that Bede is greatly concerned about them. His history texts show a steady movement north, while there is also a move west; Constantinople would seem to break

this but is at the same time essential in order to show the power of the Saracens and, as a counterweight, the power of prayer and faith. If nothing else, the presence and activity of the Saracens on the continent, getting ever closer to Britain as they penetrated into Gaul, would serve as a warning that there were other peoples out there who could be agents of judgement. While Bede's audience would have expected attacks from the north and west, from the traditional foes of the English, the activities of the Saracens serve as a warning to be prepared for the unfamiliar. As Gregory had warned in *Moralia*, people should prepare their souls as if the Last Judgement was going to happen at any moment. Bede, then, is warning the English to initiate reform immediately lest they be found in a similar situation when judgement – whether national or universal – comes. He had seen from Gildas that the Britons had failed to heed such warnings and so were conquered. But not only were they defeated, they are the only people on the island of Britain left outside the universal Church, which, as far as he was concerned, meant they were at risk of the "second death" mentioned in his Genesis commentary.

Conclusion

Time was never far from Bede's mind. The end was both near and vague, describable but at the same time unknowable. Laden with deep exegesis and expectancy, Bede's eschatology was much like scripture as analogised by Gregory the Great: A river that was shallow and deep, in which a lamb may walk and an elephant swim.

We have seen that an interest in time and what comes after did not emerge toward the end of Bede's life, although there was certainly a heightened eschatological aspect to his later works. While time was an abstract concept, it was so bound to the fundamentals of Christianity that it could be measured in some respect, quantified and distilled down to what the audience needed to know. Bede's mastery of exegesis and biblical concordances allowed him to present eschatology as a theme that could be understood differently by different audiences based on their education and needs. The lay person could relate to Dryhthelm, after a fashion, while a scriptural master or member of the ecclesiastical elite could understand it as much more than just a horror story, but rather a reflection on the dire state of contemporary Christianity in Northumbria and how one should go about reforming oneself in order to emphasise what really mattered – what happened to the soul upon judgement. This is why Dryhthelm's narrative occupies as much space as it does, at almost the halfway point of *HE* 5. It is a pause for reflection, both on the power of God through miracles and on an individual's conduct. That all classes of society are seen as being dragged into the pit is not a monastic or polemical trope, but rather is intended to be seen as a spiritual reflection of the contemporary world, a world that according to *HE* 5 and the Epistola is increasingly corrupt and becoming spiritually weak. Dryhthelm, a lay man who goes through a profound transformation, is designed to recall the power of God in raising one from the dead and to also act as a case study for the individual reader. A reader with little by way of exegetical education will get one, visceral meaning from it, while a reader who is more familiar with scripture and biblical commentary will get a deeper, but still visceral meaning. Both are

equally valid: They are designed to educate all classes of Northumbrian society as to the power of God and the reality of judgement immediately upon death.

An overarching theme of what has been read is that while the situation is deteriorating and the English are at genuine risk of missing out on salvation, everything could be restored and repaired if the will was there. Bede's pastoral concerns, and his pastoral eschatology, saw him mould *HE* 5 so that all possible audiences were warned as to their conduct, but given enough good examples that they could emulate a way to achieve salvation. His emphasis on how Dryhthelm returned from the dead with a vision of the afterlife so as to awaken his contemporaries from the death of the soul is telling: This was a real risk, and once the Last Judgement came there would be no chance to redeem themselves, meaning the English had to be spiritually robust immediately. As seen, this one chapter of *HE* 5 intersects with all of Bede's teachings and thought on eschatology and his pastoral reform programme. Every aspect of the narrative is connected to the most intricate and complex aspects of his pastoral eschatology, and unearthing the depth of the Dryhthelm narrative allows us to fully understand just how much eschatology shaped his theology and his approach to reform. He was not merely continuing in the tradition of monastic polemic and pleas for reform, but rather he saw it as vital and of immediate need because the end of time and the Last Judgement were coming, and could be here at any moment. There would be no second chance once it arrived.

Bede's world was one wracked by political turmoil, ecclesiastical weakness, and threats from abroad. All of these were distilled by Bede into a text that was at once celebratory of the achievements of the English – "these favourable times of peace and prosperity", where the island is under the mastery of the English – and yet repudiatory of their conduct, always reminding them of how they had behaved in the past and been rewarded

or punished, and how they were behaving in the present day, and being rewarded and punished. His use of cosmic signs in *HE* 5 serves to remind the reader that there is a metaphysical dimension to everything they do – they are being watched and weighed. The burning of Coldingham monastery was an illustrative case study of corruption in a monastic house, the need for an outside influence (Adomnán) to watch, interrogate, and inspire reform, the turnaround that was possible through strong leadership, and the calamity that could befall once that reinvigorated leadership was removed. Like all the eschatological examples in *HE* 5, it was one that illustrated how God was watching and judging the English on a daily basis, and that this divine judgement was very real. Read in the light of the Epistola, it was an obvious reference to the corrupt monasteries that Bede presents as dotting the landscape of Northumbria, monasteries which should be broken up so the spiritual and military needs of the kingdom are met. This is why he puts so much emphasis on converting and managing the landscape – the English needed reminders that they were Christians in a Christian kingdom, surrounded by functioning monasteries and the protection of a Christian warrior king. His reading of scripture and history, and Northumbrian history in particular, had emphasised the need for king and Church to work together to ensure peace and a robust Christianity that would endure. He had outlined examples in earlier parts of the *HE* where bishops or kings had faltered to the spiritual detriment of their people, and he was eager to ensure that this did not happen again at a time when many of the conditions for the Last Judgement had been met.

The English, in his writings, were a chosen people. But what has become clear is the very real fear Bede had that the English were at risk of being cast out of the ranks of chosen people due to their own spiritual negligence. The thought that the English were at risk of throwing away this inheritance and embracing the death of the soul through ignorance, bad ecclesiastical leadership, and love of luxury clearly pained Bede, especially when he had examples of disruptive ecclesiastical politics in his own

monastic house. Christ had given them an easy yoke, and yet many of his contemporaries seemed willing to throw it off by forgetting that it was intended to save their souls. For Bede there could be no greater thing than the salvation of souls. His work is soaked in pastoral theology, and he uses eschatological concerns in *HE* 5 to heighten the anxiety levels in the reader, emphasising the dangers and at the same time the rewards for maintaining a good Christian life.

While *HE* 5 was very much focused on the conduct of the English and Northumbrians in particular, the thesis has argued that it was part of Bede's project to integrate seamlessly his people into universal history. This had been a factor throughout his writings, most notably in his chronicles, but the combination of local and universal in *HE* 5 is striking. Its conclusion with events happening not only in the English kingdoms but on the continent and further afield emphasises how the English could not take anything for granted, and had to look at themselves as part of the wider world, a world where threats could come from anywhere. The whole structure of *HE* 5 was designed to show the divine grace that had been shown to the English, the heights of spirituality to which they had ascended (and so could again), and then sharply show how they had fallen. Far from articulating the development of the Church, it shows the English in need of awakening, with warnings of punishment and bad conduct giving way to literal and figurative reminders of what they should be focusing on – the new Jerusalem at the end of time. Yet following this reminder, the English are seen to be still at risk, with the sense of danger and instability increasing as *HE* 5 continues, especially for his more learned readers. The sudden appearance of Saracens attacking Gaul in an ecclesiastical history of the English people was not by accident; rather, it was to reinforce the idea that there were very real political and military threats out there that could strike at the English kingdoms with short notice. Bede may have known little about the Saracens, but the key thing was that they were strong and active, and seemingly in the ascendancy.

They were symbolic of how judgement could be sent from abroad, much as Bede's reading of Gildas had shown him that the English, then pagans brought from abroad, were sent as part of a divine agency to punish the reprobate Britons. The parallels with the Jews would have struck him, because they were once a chosen people who had rejected Jesus' teachings and so were also cast out. It had happened with the Jews, it had happened with the Britons, and so Bede could see it happening to the English if they were not careful. The time was short, and the time to act was now.

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