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BRIDES OF CHRIST, ROYAL MARRIAGE AND THE  
CONVERSION OF THE ENGLISH IN BEDE'S *HISTORIA*  
*ECCLESIASTICA*

by

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Submitted for the degree of Ph.D.,  
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December 2007

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for my parents,  
with love and thanks

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## Abbreviations

ACW	<i>Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation</i> , ed. J. Quasten and J.C. Plumpe (The Catholic University of America, Washington D.C.)
ANF	<i>Ante-Nicene Fathers</i> , ed. P. Schaff
BMLC	<i>Bryn Mawr Latin Commentaries</i> , ed. J. Haig Gaisser and J.J. O'Donnell
CCSL	<i>Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina</i> (Turnhout)
FOTC	<i>Fathers of the Church: a new translation</i> (The Catholic University of America Press, Washington D.C.)
HE	Bede, <i>Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum</i> ( <i>Ecclesiastical History of the English People</i> ), ed. C. Plummer, <i>Venerabilis Baedae Opera Historica</i> (Oxford 1896, repr. 1969); ed. and tr. B. Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford 1969, repr. 2001); tr. L. Sherley-Price and rev. R.E. Latham (London 1955, repr. 1965, 1968, 1990)
MGH SRM	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores Rerum Merovingicarum</i>
NJBC	R.E. Brown, J.A. Fitzmyer, and R.E. Murphy, ed., <i>The New Jerome Biblical Commentary</i> (London 1968, repr. 2000)
NPNF	<i>Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers</i> , series 1 and 2, ed. P. Schaff
ODCC	F.L. Cross and E.A. Livingstone, ed., <i>The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church</i> , 3 <sup>rd</sup> edition (Oxford 1997)
PG	<i>Patrologia graeca</i> , ed. J.-P. Migne
PL	<i>Patrologia latina</i> , ed. J.-P. Migne
SC	<i>Sources Chrétiennes</i> (Paris)
TTH	<i>Translated Texts for Historians</i> (Liverpool University Press, Liverpool)
WSA	<i>Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century</i> (New York)

All Scriptural quotations, unless otherwise specified, are from Douay 1609.



## Introduction

To write a full-length doctoral study on any aspect of Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* after decades of scholarship devoted to Bede and his writings may seem a superfluous exercise suggesting great conceit on the part of the candidate. Indeed, when this project was begun such an end product, if it had been considered at all, would have seemed inconceivable. However, after initial study of the theme of conversion in Insular sources in general and the *Historia Ecclesiastica* in particular, it gradually became apparent that the role of women in the *HE*, including those whose royal marriages often facilitated the spread of Christianity, would be a worthwhile subject of investigation which might make a contribution to our understanding of Bede's objectives, sources and techniques in his presentation of the conversion of the *Angli*. The Introduction will begin by surveying contemporary scholarship on Bede in order to locate the thesis in the current debates. This will focus on three areas that have received much comment in recent years: Bede's attitude to women and marriage, the relationship between Bede's *HE* and his other writings, and Bede's likely objectives in writing the *HE*.

### **Bede in modern scholarship**

#### *(i) Bede and Women*

While much work has been done in recent years on the position of women and marriage in Anglo-Saxon England, women and marriage in Bede's *HE* have not been considered in the context of the work as a whole or in the light of Bede's intellectual and cultural background. In general surveys the lives of Anglo-Saxon women in the pre-conversion period are often presented very positively with the corresponding argument that the situation for women deteriorated with the arrival of Christianity.<sup>1</sup> However, Klinck has persuasively challenged this view in a comprehensive study of law codes from the Anglo-Saxon period. She argues that most women's rights and their freedom with regard to marriage or entering the

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<sup>1</sup> See S.C. Dietrich, 'An Introduction to Women in Anglo-Saxon society (c.600-1066),' in B. Kanner, ed., *The Women of England: From Anglo-Saxon times to the Present* (London 1980) 32-56.

monastic life came from the influence of the Church and are first found, in an Anglo-Saxon context, in the *Penitential* of Theodore.<sup>2</sup> However her argument for the positive influence of the Church on the lives of women based on solid evidence in law texts is often over-looked in favour of the traditional view, which goes unproved, that pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon women were in a better position than their descendants.<sup>3</sup> The most influential treatment of women in Anglo-Saxon England has been Stephanie Hollis' full-length study, *Anglo-Saxon Women and the Church: sharing a common fate*, which surveys women in Anglo-Saxon society from the period of the conversion to the eleventh century, covering a wide range of sources.<sup>4</sup> However, while this is in many ways well researched, some of her generalizations about marriage and women in Anglo-Saxon society are unhelpful when dealing with specific sources. Her comments on Bede's attitude to women are particularly problematic. While demonstrating an awareness of the Christian concept of marriage, she does not consider this particularly relevant in reading Bede's work and argues throughout her book that he attempted to suppress women's roles in the conversion of England because of his anti-woman bias. Considering most of our information about Anglo-Saxon women in the seventh-century comes from Bede, this view is difficult to up-hold and will be repeatedly challenged with regard to specific cases in this thesis.<sup>5</sup>

There are also a number of works that focus specifically on the women featured in Bede's *HE*. These often attempt to glean all the available evidence relating to women in the text and from this create a picture of women's lives in Anglo-Saxon England.<sup>6</sup> Various studies of specific women in the book – always Hild or Æthelthryth and usually a study of one involves comparison with the other – have also been carried out, which often attempt to place these women's

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<sup>2</sup> A.L. Klinck, 'Anglo-Saxon Women and the law,' *Journal of Medieval History* 8 (1982) 107-121.

<sup>3</sup> See J. Luecke, 'The unique experience of Anglo-Saxon Nuns,' in L.T. Shanks and J.A. Nichols, ed., *Medieval Religious Women, II, Peaceweavers* (Kalamazoo 1987) 55-65.

<sup>4</sup> S. Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women and the Church: sharing a common fate* (Woodbridge 1992).

<sup>5</sup> See especially Chapters Two, Three and Four. This is not, of course, to argue that Bede was in any sense 'pro-woman.' It is an attempt to read his work in the context of its own time, rather than inappropriately applying what are essentially modern labels to a text from a different age.

<sup>6</sup> See J. Nicholson, 'Feminae Gloriosae: women in the age of Bede,' in Baker, ed., *Medieval Women* (Oxford 1978) 15-29. C. Neuman de Vegvar, 'Saints and Companions to Saints: Anglo-Saxon Royal Women Monastics in Context,' in P.E. Szarmach, ed., *Holy Men and Holy Women* (Albany 1996) 51-93.

lives in their historical context with varying degrees of success.<sup>7</sup> These also often attempt to differentiate inappropriately between history and hagiography, or fact and storytelling in Bede's accounts of these women's lives.<sup>8</sup> It is important to recognise that, while Bede does provide us with much information about seventh-century Anglo-Saxon women which adds greatly to our knowledge of women in this period, it is not possible to pick and choose evidence from these accounts and disregard the rest as 'a good story', without considering his reasons for writing the book the way it is written. Bede's accounts of women (and everything else in the text) need to be considered in the light of his intellectual heritage as this informed his presentation of Anglo-Saxon history in the *HE*.<sup>9</sup> Most recently, Bede's descriptions of women in the *HE* have been read through the lens of literary criticism.<sup>10</sup> While this demonstrates awareness that the *HE* is not merely narrative history, some literary scholars tend to ascribe motives to Bede that are wholly inappropriate to his context, leading to anachronistic interpretations of the text.<sup>11</sup> There is a particular obsession, for example, with what Æthelthryth's body meant for Bede.<sup>12</sup> While there has occasionally been some recognition that patristic thinking influenced Bede in his writing, the

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<sup>7</sup> See C.E. Fell, 'Hild, abbess of Streonæshalch,' in H. Bekker-Nielsen, P. Foote, J. Højgaard Jørgensen, and T. Nyberg, ed., *Hagiography and Medieval Literature: A Symposium* (Odense 1981) 76-99. N. Bauer, 'Abbess Hilda of Whitby: All Britain was lit by her splendour,' in M. Schmitt and L. Kulzer, ed., *Medieval Women Monastics: Wisdom's Wellsprings* (Collegeville, MN 1996) 13-31. C.E. Fell, 'Saint Æðelþryð: A Historical-Hagiographical Dichotomy Revisited,' *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 38 (1994) 18-34. P.A. Thompson, 'St Æthelthryth: the making of history from hagiography,' in M.J. Toswell and E.M. Tyler, ed., *Studies in English Language and Literature* (London 1996) 475-492. V.A. Gunn, *A Study of Bede's 'Historiae'*, unpub. Ph.D Thesis, Univ. of Glasgow (1999) 235ff.

<sup>8</sup> See Fell, 'Saint Æðelþryð', 27-29. Bauer, 'Abbess Hilda of Whitby', 15, suggests that Bede's account of Æthelthryth must be 'carefully sifted to separate truth from propaganda and reality from what made a good story.'

<sup>9</sup> See further below.

<sup>10</sup> See C.A. Lees and G.R. Overing, 'Birthing Bishops and Fathering Poets: Bede, Hild, and the Relations of Cultural Production,' *Exemplaria* 6 (1994) 35-65. See also their comments on Hild in their *Double Agents: Women and Clerical Culture in Anglo-Saxon England* (Philadelphia 2001). C.E. Karkov, 'The Body of St Æthelthryth: Desire, Conversion and Reform in Anglo-Saxon England,' in M. Carver, ed., *The Cross Goes North* (Woodbridge 2003) 397-411. V. Blanton, *Signs of Devotion: The Cult of St. Æthelthryth in Medieval England, 695-1615* (Pennsylvania 2007) 1-63.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. J. McClure's 'Review of J.A. Nichols and L.T. Shanks, ed., *Medieval Religious Women: Distant Echoes* (Kalamazoo 1984),' *English Historical Review* 102 (1987) 1005, who warns about the dangers of using 'interpretative models which owe more to the influence of modern feminism than to the period under discussion' and suggests that the evidence is often treated 'within an unsound conceptual framework'. She notes that the volume she is reviewing provides 'grounds for questioning the self-conscious approach of some medieval women's studies.'

<sup>12</sup> See Karkov, 'The Body of St Æthelthryth'. Blanton, *Signs of Devotion* 31-56.

complexity of these ideas have not been considered.<sup>13</sup> Chapter Four will examine modern interpretations of Æthelthryth in detail in an attempt to demonstrate the limitations of such studies when reading Bede. Indeed, much of this thesis is concerned with redressing the balance in contemporary scholarship by attempting to present Bede's treatment of women and marriage in the context of the book.

(ii) *Bede's HE and Bede's exegesis*

In the period following the publication of *Famulus Christi: Essays in Commemoration of the Thirteenth Centenary of the Birth of the Venerable Bede* (1976), Bede's biblical commentaries and homilies have become more widely known and there has been growing acceptance among scholars that the *Historia Ecclesiastica* needs to be read in conjunction with these other works, which constitute the largest part of his output and are far from being mere summaries of the fathers. At an early stage in this development in Bedan studies Roger Ray recognised exegesis as 'the driving force of all Bede's learning' and Calvin Kendall demonstrated something of the complexity of Bede's historical writing and its use of rhetorical techniques.<sup>14</sup> James Campbell noted the important historical dimension in much of Bede's exegesis and was one of the first to emphasise not only the influence of Eusebius and early Christian historiography on the *HE* as a work of Christian instruction and edification, but also some of the features of Bede's work which make it distinctive.<sup>15</sup> Numerous studies have argued that some of the specific themes and images in biblical and patristic traditions evident in Bede's exegetical works are relevant to an understanding of his historical writing. Henry Mayr-Harting drew attention to some parallels between Bede's commentary on Solomon's temple and the *HE*, following Paul

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<sup>13</sup> See Blanton, *Signs of Devotion* 28 ff.

<sup>14</sup> R. Ray, 'What do we know about Bede's Commentaries?' *Recherches de Théologie ancienne et médiévale* 49 (1982) 5-20 at 8. See also R. Ray, 'Bede, the Exegete, as Historian,' in G. Bonner, ed., *Famulus Christi* (London 1976) 125-140. C.B. Kendall, 'Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica*: The Rhetoric of Faith,' in J.J. Murphy, ed., *Medieval Eloquence: Studies in the Theory and Practice of Medieval Rhetoric* (Berkeley 1978) 145-172.

<sup>15</sup> See J. Campbell, 'Bede,' in T.A. Dorey, ed., *Latin Historians* (New York 1966) 159-190, repr. as 'Bede I,' in J. Campbell, *Essays in Anglo-Saxon History* (London 1986) 1-27.

Meyvaert's view that they were written contemporaneously.<sup>16</sup> Jennifer O'Reilly has further suggested that Bede's spiritual interpretation of the temple sheds considerable light on his objectives in writing the *HE*.<sup>17</sup> Alan Thacker influentially demonstrated that Bede's later works – including his commentaries, homilies, hagiographies and histories – share an interest in church reform and are concerned with the figure of the pastor, which significantly affects our reading of the embodiment of some of these ideals in the *HE*.<sup>18</sup>

In the last decade a number of enlightening studies on various uses of this approach in relation to Bede's thought have been published.<sup>19</sup> Jennifer O'Reilly has shown how the biblical and patristic traditions underlying the *HE*'s pervasive image of islands and idols at the ends of the earth can illuminate various features of Bede's presentation of the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons.<sup>20</sup> In the recent collection of essays, *Innovation and Tradition in the Writings of the Venerable Bede* (2006), Arthur Holder has drawn important parallels between Bede's Commentary on the Song of Songs and the *HE*, as will be seen.<sup>21</sup> This change in attitude to the *HE* has reached even those who until recently were quite dismissive about the Christian influence on Bede's writing of history. From disregarding Bede's view of providence in his *An English Empire* (1995), Nicholas Higham in his most recent book, *(Re-)Reading Bede* (2006), acknowledges the importance of Bede's Christian faith in his presentation of

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<sup>16</sup> H.M. Mayr-Harting, *The Venerable Bede, the Rule of St Benedict, and Social Class*, Jarrow Lecture 1976, repr. in *Bede and his World, Vol. I, The Jarrow Lectures 1958-1978* (Aldershot 1994) 405-434. P. Meyvaert, *Bede and Gregory the Great*, Jarrow Lecture 1964, repr. in *Bede and his World, Vol. I, The Jarrow Lectures 1958-1978* (Aldershot 1994) 103-132. See also H.M. Mayr-Harting, 'Bede's Patristic Thinking as an Historian,' in A. Scharer and G. Scheibelreiter, ed., *Historiographie im frühen Mittelalter* (Munich 1994) 367-374 at 373-374.

<sup>17</sup> J. O'Reilly, intro., S. Connolly, tr., *Bede: On the Temple* (Liverpool 1995) xvii-iv.

<sup>18</sup> A.T. Thacker, 'Bede's Ideal of Reform,' in P. Wormald, D. Bullough, and R. Collins, ed., *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford 1983) 130-153.

<sup>19</sup> See S. DeGregorio, Intro. to S. DeGregorio, ed., *Innovation and Tradition in the writings of the Venerable Bede* (Morgantown 2006) 1-10, which considers the development in Bedan studies in recent years.

<sup>20</sup> J. O'Reilly, 'Islands and Idols at the Ends of the Earth: Exegesis and Conversion in Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*,' in S. Lebecq, M. Perrin and O. Szerwiniack, ed., *Bède le Vénérable entre Tradition et Postérité* (Lille 2005) 119-145. For discussion of the classical traditions in Bede's treatment of the ends of the earth theme, see J.(D.)A. Scully, *The Atlantic Archipelago from Antiquity to Bede: The Transformation of an Image*, unpub. D.Phil Thesis, N.U.I. Cork (2000).

<sup>21</sup> A.G. Holder, 'Christ as Incarnate Wisdom in Bede's Commentary on the Song of Songs,' in S. DeGregorio, ed., *Innovation and Tradition in the Writings of the Venerable Bede* (Morgantown 2006) 169-188.

Anglo-Saxon history.<sup>22</sup> The present thesis is influenced by these recent developments in Bedan studies and will attempt to read Bede's *HE*, particularly its use of the image of marriage, in the light of his scriptural commentaries and patristic inheritance.

(iii) *Bede's reasons for writing the HE*

Bede's reasons for writing the *HE* have been much discussed among modern scholars and many different theories have been proposed. That Bede's work was intended to be edifying for his audience, as Bede states in his preface to the book, has long been accepted as one of the main reasons for writing it.<sup>23</sup> However this is often given a specifically contemporary dimension. James Campbell noted that much of the *HE* is a criticism of the Church in Bede's own day.<sup>24</sup> Alan Thacker's identification of the links between the *HE* and Bede's other writings about Church reform, particularly his *Letter to Egbert*, has been very influential.<sup>25</sup> Walter Goffart develops this argument, suggesting that the work came from Bede's belief that the Northumbrian Church needed to be reformed and in response to the various saints' *Lives* (namely *The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great*, *The Anonymous Life of Cuthbert* and Stephan's *Life of Wilfrid*)<sup>26</sup> being produced in the kingdom at the time, perhaps indicating a struggle for supremacy within the Northumbrian Church. He notes that all of these other *Lives* were outdone by Bede's work. Goffart further links the writing of the *HE* with the, ultimately successful, attempt to re-create the archbishopric of York.<sup>27</sup> Eric John

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<sup>22</sup> N.J. Higham, *An English Empire: Bede and the early Anglo-Saxon kings*, (Manchester 1995) esp. 198 concerning Edwin's accession to power in Northumbria with the help of Rædwald. N.J. Higham, *(Re-)Reading Bede: The Ecclesiastical History in Context* (London 2006). However, Higham's primary concern is still the political background to the text, see further below.

<sup>23</sup> P. Hunter Blair, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation and its importance today*, Jarrow Lecture 1959, repr. in *Bede and his World, Vol. I, The Jarrow Lectures 1958-1978* (Aldershot 1994) 19-33. J. Campbell, 'Bede II,' repr. in J. Campbell, *Essays in Anglo-Saxon History* (London 1986) 29-48 at 35.

<sup>24</sup> Campbell, 'Bede I'.

<sup>25</sup> Thacker, 'Bede's Ideal of Reform'. See also S. DeGregorio, "'Nostrorum socordiam temporum": the reforming impulse of Bede's later exegesis,' *Early Medieval Europe* 11:2 (2002) 107-122.

<sup>26</sup> *The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great: By an anonymous monk of Whitby*: Colgrave (1968). *Vita Cuthberti Auctore Anonymo (The Anonymous Life of Cuthbert)*: Colgrave (1940). *The Life of Bishop Wilfrid by Eddius Stephanus*: Colgrave (1985).

<sup>27</sup> Walter Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History (AD 550-800)* (Princeton 1988). W. Goffart, 'The *Historia Ecclesiastica*: Bede's Agenda and Ours,' *The Haskins Society Journal: Studies in Medieval History* 2 (1990) 29-45.

similarly locates the writing of the *HE* in a political context, as does David Kirby, who argues for the influence of King Ceolwulf on the creation of the book.<sup>28</sup> Kirby also relates this to the Northumbrian attempt to gain the archbishopric for York.<sup>29</sup> While both Kirby and Goffart read the *HE* in a similar light, they disagree on the specifics of the contemporary political situation.<sup>30</sup> Nicholas Higham argues that the book was intended to teach kings about the role that Bede believed that they should play in society. In his most recent book he recognises that the *HE* fits ‘naturally alongside his works of exegesis’ but he locates the book firmly in terms of a political agenda.<sup>31</sup> Victoria Gunn argues that Bede set out to enhance the status of Wearmouth-Jarrow in the *HE* at the expense of the other monastic houses. Bede does this, she suggests, partly by undermining the spiritual authority of Iona and Columba, thereby tainting the houses associated with them, including Hild’s Whitby, and partly by understating Wilfrid’s power in Northumbria.<sup>32</sup>

However, there were other reasons for Bede writing the *HE* the way that he did. James Campbell suggests that he wanted to do for the history of his Church what Eusebius had done for the whole Church and also notes the influence of Orosius and Gregory of Tours.<sup>33</sup> Hanning similarly notes that the *HE* is influenced by the work of Eusebius and Orosius and suggests that it is concerned with recording the spiritual progress of a chosen barbarian nation.<sup>34</sup> Stephens argues that the work is a history of the faith and was perhaps intended

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<sup>28</sup> E. John, ‘The Social and Political Problems of the Early English Church,’ *Agricultural History Review* 18, (1970), Supplement, J. Thirsk, ed., *Land Church and People*, 39-63. D.P. Kirby, ‘King Ceolwulf of Northumbria and the *Historia Ecclesiastica*,’ *Studia Celtica* 14/15 (1979-1980) 168-173.

<sup>29</sup> D.P. Kirby, *Bede’s Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum: Its Contemporary Setting*, Jarrow Lecture 1992, repr. in *Bede and his World, Vol.II, The Jarrow Lectures 1979-1993* (Aldershot 1994) 903-926.

<sup>30</sup> See W. Goffart, ‘Bede’s History in a Harsher Climate,’ in S. DeGregorio, ed., *Innovation and Tradition in the Writings of The Venerable Bede* (Morgantown 2006) 203-226 at 214 ff.

<sup>31</sup> Higham, *(Re-)Reading Bede*, esp. 53-100. Higham’s earlier works repeatedly state the political dimension to Bede’s work, often to the detriment of everything else. See *English Empire; The Convert Kings: Power and religious affiliation in early Anglo-Saxon England* (Manchester 1997); ‘Dynasty and Cult: the Utility of Christian Mission to Northumbrian Kings Between 642 and 654,’ in J. Hawkes and S. Mills, ed., *Northumbria’s Golden Age* (Stroud 1999) 95-104. Cf. D.P. Kirby, *The Earliest English Kings* (London 1991). R. Abels, ‘The Council of Whitby: A Study in Early Anglo-Saxon politics,’ *Journal of British Studies* 23:1 (1983) 1-25.

<sup>32</sup> Gunn, *A Study of Bede’s ‘Historiae’* 79-114. Gunn also argues that Bede’s *Letter to Egbert* may have been an attempt to create a new bishopric at Wearmouth-Jarrow as this was one of the only large monasteries not to have its own bishop at this time, 113-114.

<sup>33</sup> Campbell, ‘Bede I,’ 5.

<sup>34</sup> R.W. Hanning, *The Vision of History in Early Britain*, (New York and London 1966) 67.

as a Christian replacement for the epic, which showed the Anglo-Saxons that they were part of a longer history than they realised. He continues to suggest that it is an apostolic saga or a Germanic *Acts*.<sup>35</sup> Jennifer O'Reilly sees the book as a fulfilment of biblical prophecies that conversion will spread to the ends of the earth and reach all peoples.<sup>36</sup> Arthur Holder believes that there are various levels at which the *HE* can be interpreted and acknowledges that it draws on a series of major biblical images, including those to be studied here. Following on from the suggestions of others, Holder concludes:

while Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica* is indeed the story of a chosen people coming to a promised land, and a blueprint for constructing a holy temple, and the extension of the apostolic mission to the ends of the earth, it is at the same time a song of love in which a bridegroom calls and a bride answers, in which a mother feeds and children are nourished, in which Divine Wisdom takes flesh and human souls sigh with longing for a vision of their God.<sup>37</sup>

His recognition that the *HE* needs to be read in the light of biblical models is very different from the political readings of the text coming from Goffart and others. If nothing else, the wide variety of interpretations reveals the sophistication and complexity of the book, and may suggest why it is still compelling reading for a modern audience.

While this thesis does not wish to deny that Bede was aware of contemporary politics and may well have wished to influence the behaviour of kings, it seems unlikely that such worldly matters were his only reason for writing the book in the way that he wrote it. As Holder has suggested, there are many different images and levels of interpretation at play here and each of the four major themes that he has referred to above are relevant in interpreting Bede's intentions throughout the book. The present thesis also recognises the important influence of Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* on Bede's *HE* as a work of providential history, charting the progress of Christian conversion among the Anglo-Saxons at the ends of the earth. It edifies its readers by providing positive role models for people at different levels of society;<sup>38</sup> it is a work of instruction

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<sup>35</sup> J.N. Stephens, 'Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*,' *History* 62:204 (1977) 1-14.

<sup>36</sup> O'Reilly, 'Islands and Idols'.

<sup>37</sup> Holder, 'Christ as Incarnate Wisdom in Bede's Commentary on the Song of Songs,' 188.

<sup>38</sup> While the book presents examples of good kings, saintly bishops, discerning teachers, holy abbesses, and Christian queens, the lower levels of society are not neglected. There is the healing



that can be read on different levels depending on the capacity of the audience to understand the message;<sup>39</sup> and it is Christian history in its truest form, as throughout we are reminded about the Incarnation, Passion and Resurrection of Christ, which allows for the spreading of salvation throughout the world. Indeed it is partly for this reason that we are constantly reminded about the importance of Easter at various stages in the book.<sup>40</sup> It has long been recognised by many scholars that this is not merely a need to assert Roman supremacy at the expense of Iona or an obsession about correct practices, but is a comment on the life of the Church.<sup>41</sup> If Christians are unwilling to eat together on this great feast (as is evident in Aldhelm's letter to King Geruint and the letter from Bishops Laurence, Mellitus and Justus to the bishops and abbots in Ireland),<sup>42</sup> then this leads to unnecessary disunity in the Church, which will not be reflected at the heavenly banquet and should therefore be avoided. It will be argued in this thesis that marriage imagery is one of the means used by Bede to demonstrate the theological significance of the two miraculous events in Christ's earthly life, his Incarnation and Resurrection, and that these have a bearing on the lives of all Christians at all times.

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of the blind laywoman at Barking monastery (*HE* IV.10, 364-365), Cædmon's miraculous gift of poetry (*HE* IV.24(22), 414-421), and the holiness of various – if somewhat insignificant – monks and nuns in various monasteries throughout the Anglo-Saxon Church, *e.g.* Owine of Chad's monastery at Lichfield (*HE* IV.3, 338-345) and Begu from Hild's monastic foundation at Hackness (*HE* IV.23(21) 412-415).

<sup>39</sup> Marriage imagery is particularly relevant in this case, see below.

<sup>40</sup> *HE* II.2, 134-139, we are introduced to the British bishops' erroneous Easter reckoning; *HE* II.4, 144-147, the Irish Easter is introduced; *HE* II.9, 164-165, the failed assassination attempt on Edwin and the birth of his daughter, Eanflæd, take place on Easter Sunday; *HE* II.14, 186-187, Edwin's baptism at Easter, along with many of his retainers and common people, is related; *HE* II.19, 198-201; Bede refers to the letters of Popes Honorius and John to the Irish about Easter; *HE* III.3, 218-219, Aidan's erroneous Easter practice is introduced, though Bede recognises that the southern Irish follow the Roman Easter; *HE* III.4, 224-225, the Ionan Easter practice is described but excused; *HE* III.6, 230-231, Oswald's beneficence to the poor when sitting down to dinner with Aidan one Easter Sunday is related; *HE* III.25, 294-309, the Synod of Whitby is described; *HE* III.29, 318-323, Pope Vitalian's letter to Oswiu following the Northumbrians' 'conversion' to the Roman Easter is included; *HE* V.15, 504-507, some Britons adopt the canonical Easter and Adomnán's conversion of most of the Irish to this is presented; *HE* V.16, 508-511, Adomnán's description of the holy places of the Lord's Birth, Passion and Resurrection are included; *HE* V.18, 514-515, Aldhelm's criticism of the British Easter and his conversion of many Britons to the canonical practice is mentioned; *HE* V.21, 532-553, Ceolfrith's letter to Nechtan of the Picts on Easter is presented; *HE* V.22, 552-555, the conversion of Iona to the Roman Easter through the work of Egbert is related.

<sup>41</sup> See O'Reilly, intro., *Bede: On the Temple*.

<sup>42</sup> Aldhelm, *Letter IV, to Geruint*: Lapidge and Herren (1979) 158. *HE* II.4, 146-147. See Chapter Three.

## Thesis Outline

This thesis is an attempt to determine the role of marriage and women in the overall context of Bede's *HE*. It is not intended to comment on the position of women or the importance of marriage in Anglo-Saxon society, although at times this will be referred to, but will endeavour to read Bede's text in the light of his scriptural commentaries, based on his biblical and patristic inheritance. Bede's understanding of marriage is firmly based on the Christian conception of this institution and this underlies everything that he writes about marriage in the *HE*. Christian marriage is important because the earthly institution is a figure of the relationship between Christ and the Church, and within this the relationship between every Christian soul and Christ can be identified. This thesis will demonstrate that the different levels at which marriage can be understood in a Christian context are at work in Bede's *HE*. In reading the book, the proper practice of Christian marriage is revealed in Bede's descriptions of real marriages (usually royal examples). Marriage as an image of the union between Christ and his Church is also revealed in the book through Bede's presentation of the conversion of new peoples to Christianity. A third level, that is the spiritual view of marriage, which teaches that every Christian soul is united in holy matrimony to Christ, the true Bridegroom, is also evident in his accounts of people dedicated to the virginal life from love for their heavenly spouse, Christ. These different aspects repeatedly interlink, as without the physical marriages discussed the peoples would not have been brought into the Church and, similarly, as every Christian soul is the Bride of Christ, all these souls together make up the Church, which is the true Bride of Christ and will be joined to him at the end of time. These three levels are at play throughout the book, so that Christian instruction is provided to every reader depending on their capacity to receive it.

Chapter One introduces the biblical and patristic understanding of marriage imagery as it relates to Christ's union with the Church, and the union of the divine and human natures in Christ, and argues that this ecclesiological image underlies Bede's presentation of Anglo-Saxon conversion in the book. Chapter Two examines the marriage of Edwin and Æthelburh in detail, as Bede's narrative reveals that this marriage brought the king to Christianity. Within this it

suggests that Bede is instructing his audience about the proper practice of Christian marriage, and the role of a Christian wife. Chapter Three considers Bede's account of the conversion of Northumbria following Edwin's baptism and examines his use of marriage imagery in presenting Paulinus' mission. It also discusses Eanflæd's role in the build-up to the Synod of Whitby and suggests that her marriage to Oswiu helps the reader to understand the division caused by the Easter controversy in the whole kingdom. Chapter Four is concerned with Bede's account of Æthelthryth, which has received much comment in recent years. It will focus on his description of the former Northumbrian queen as a bride of Christ, assessing what that means in patristic thinking, and the influence of this on Bede's presentation of her life. These three central chapters recognise the role that queens played in the development of the Church in Northumbria and follow a chronological sequence, as they are successively presented as queens of Northumbria in Bede's book. Chapter Five considers Bede's account of Hild and her role in the Northumbrian Church, as her life spanned the most important decades in its early development and she personally knew many of the most significant figures of this period. It will continue to demonstrate that various other holy women, who are introduced (often very briefly) throughout the book, are important in understanding the building up of a Church among a new people. They reveal that Christianity extends to all peoples, in all walks of life, who are simultaneously at very different levels of conversion. It will argue that Bede's presentation of marriage and women in the *HE* can tell us much about his view of the Christian life and that an understanding of these women's lives in the overall context of the book can help us to understand Bede's view of the importance of Christian salvation in the life of a new people of God.

## C.1 – Marriage Imagery in the New Testament, Patristic Thought and the Writings of Bede

Bede's *HE* is a work of providential history that describes the means by which the Anglo-Saxon peoples were brought to Christianity and became members of the universal Church. This extension of the Christian faith is demonstrated in different ways through historical narrative, using documentary sources, oral tradition and a variety of dating techniques, but also through themes and images which reflect Bede's long experience of biblical exegesis. It will be argued here that marriage imagery is one of the means by which Bede described this process. In Judaeo-Christian thinking marriage is often used to represent God's relationship with his chosen people. In the Old Testament this marriage union was between Yahweh and Israel, *i.e.* with one particular chosen people. However, at various times in Israel's history, the Israelites turned away from Yahweh and worshipped other gods, so that over time Israel came to be seen as a wayward wife that repeatedly turned away from her true husband. This idea is first expressed in the book of Hosea and is subsequently used in other prophetic works.<sup>43</sup>

In Christian thinking the imagery is adapted, to signify the union between Christ and the new people of God, the universal Church, and the institution of marriage is held in greater esteem. In the gospels Jesus argued for the indissolubility of marriage and said that Moses had allowed the Israelites to divorce because of their hardness of heart, but that this had not been the case in the beginning.<sup>44</sup> In discussing marriage in his epistle to the Ephesians, Paul related earthly marriages to the union between Christ and the Church and added:

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<sup>43</sup> See Hos 2 and 4:15-16; Isaiah 1:21; 49:18; 61:9-10; 62:1-5; Jer 2-3; 5:7; 31:3-4; 33:10-11; Ezek 16 and 23; Amos 7:17; Nah 3:4-5; Mal 2:11-12. B.W. Anderson, *The Living World of the Old Testament* (Harlow 1996) 305-315; J. Dominian, *Christian Marriage: The Challenge of Change* (London 1967) 20-21; K. Grayston, 'Marriage,' in A. Richardson, ed., *A Theological Word Book of the Bible* (London 1950) 140. Claude Chavasse argued that the idea of God the husband preceded that of God the Father, *The Bride of Christ: An Inquiry into the Nuptial Element in Early Christianity* (London 1940) 29.

<sup>44</sup> Matt 19:4-9; Mark 10:6-9. See 'Matrimony' in *ODCC*, which suggests that Christian marriage differed from earlier practices because of the life-long nature of the bond and the dignity sought for the woman, and that Jesus attempted to restore marriage to its original place in God's creation, 1054. Cf. D.J. Harrington, 'The Gospel According to Mark,' in *NJBC* 41.62, 617 and B.T. Viviano, 'The Gospel According to Matthew,' in *NJBC* 42.117, 662. See also C.N.L. Brooke, *The Medieval Idea of Marriage* (Oxford 1989 repr 1994) 43-47. W. Rordorf, 'Marriage in the New Testament and in the Early Church,' *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 20 (1969) 193-210.

‘This is a great sacrament: but I speak in Christ and in the church’ (Eph 5:32).<sup>45</sup> The creation of Eve from Adam’s side (Gen 2:21-23) is referred to in both these cases as Christ, in Matthew and Mark’s gospels, recalls the creation of male and female in God’s image (Gen 1:27), quotes Genesis 2:24, ‘Wherefore a man shall leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they shall be two in one flesh’, and concludes: ‘Therefore now they are not two, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let no man put asunder’ (Matt 19:5-6). Paul, similarly, recalls the creation of Eve from Adam’s side and cites Genesis 2:24 in describing Christ’s love for the Church like a man’s love for his wife.<sup>46</sup> Just as the first woman was created from the side of the first man indicating that man and woman would be joined together as one, it was believed that the Church was formed from Christ and that Christ and the Church are similarly one. This dual understanding of marriage imagery means that, for Christians, all marriages can be an image of the relationship between Christ and the Church.<sup>47</sup>

The Christian understanding of marriage will be considered in this and the following two chapters of the thesis.<sup>48</sup> This first chapter will discuss the use of biblical marriage imagery in writings on Ecclesiology and Christology in the early Church and the patristic period and in major Christological debates in the seventh-century and early eighth-century. It will also examine Bede’s knowledge of these concepts in his exegesis. Chapter Two will discuss the royal marriage between Edwin of Northumbria and Æthelburh of Kent, which led to Edwin’s conversion, and consider the possible significance of the Christian theology of marriage in Bede’s presentation of their union. Chapter Three will consider the development of the Church in Northumbria during and after the reign of Edwin and ask if the royal marriages that are described in the *HE* for that period can be regarded as figures of the relationship between Christ and his Church.

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<sup>45</sup> Eph 5:22-33. See Grayston, ‘Marriage,’ in Richardson, ed., *Theological Word Book* 140; J. Spreadbury, ‘The Gender of the Church: the Female image of *Ecclesia* in the Middle Ages,’ in R.N. Swanson, ed., *Gender and Christian Religion, Studies in Church History* 34 (Woodbridge 1998) 93-103 at 94.

<sup>46</sup> See Matt 19:5; Mark 10:7; Eph 5:31.

<sup>47</sup> See Augustine who argues that one of the three goods of marriage is that it is a sacramental symbol of something greater, *De Bono Conjugali (Excellence of Marriage)*, c.3(3)-4(4), 7(7) and 24(32): *PL* 40, 375-376, 378-379 and 394-395; *WSA* I.9, 34-36, 38-39 and 56-57.

<sup>48</sup> Marriage imagery is also used to describe the union between every Christian soul and Christ; Chapter Four will examine Bede’s account of Æthelthryth in the light of this tradition.

## **Christ and the Church in Scripture and Patristic Exegesis**

### *(i) Marriage Imagery in the New Testament*

In Christian thinking, the Incarnation of Christ is regarded as the definitive moment in human history. Christ becomes the visible presence of God in the world and is the fulfilment of all Old Testament prophecy. He is the Word that was present at the creation (John 1:1-3) and became flesh (John 1:14) to live amongst humanity and redeem the sin of the first man through his suffering and Resurrection. The Incarnation also changed humanity's relationship with God. Jesus is recognised as the new Bridegroom for God's new chosen people who are all the members of his Church, and through the miracle of the Incarnation all peoples (even gentiles) who have received the word of God and are re-born through baptism into Christianity become God's chosen. The prevalence of marriage imagery in the Gospels, including Jesus' frequent descriptions of himself as the Bridegroom, reveals the importance of this idea from the very beginnings of Christianity.

In the New Testament marriage imagery is used on several occasions, often indicating the marriage of Christ and his spouse, the Church, at the end of time. In Matthew's gospel, after Christ's triumphant entry into Jerusalem, the evangelist included two parables linking the kingdom of heaven to the marriage theme. The first likened the kingdom of heaven to a king who prepared a marriage feast for his son but those invited refused to attend. The king told his servants to invite everyone they met to the marriage, but on seeing the guests he expelled a man who was not wearing a wedding garment (Matt 22:2-14). The second parable likened the kingdom of heaven to ten virgins who went out with lamps to meet the bridegroom and bride but only five of these had oil for their lamps and were ready to meet the bridegroom (Matt 25:1-13). This parable ends with Christ's injunction to be always watchful and ready, unlike the five foolish virgins who did not have oil for their lamps, because we do not know the day or the hour.<sup>49</sup> In Luke's gospel Christ similarly warned his hearers to be prepared, urging them to have their loins girded and lamps burning in their hands, and to

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<sup>49</sup> See Jerome who wrote that Christ is only found by the vigilant and this is why the bride in the Song of Songs says 'I was sleeping, but my heart kept vigil' (Song of Songs 5:2), *Homilia De Nativitate Domini (Homily on the Nativity of the Lord): CCSL 78, 525; FOTC 57 (Homily 88) 222.*

behave like men who wait for their Lord's return from the wedding, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door to him (Luke 12:35-36). Luke also includes a parable about a man making a great supper and inviting many (Luke 14:16-24), which is like the parable of the wedding feast prepared for the king's son in Matthew 22.<sup>50</sup> Although in Luke's gospel the great supper is not described as a wedding, shortly beforehand Luke says that Jesus spoke a *parable* in which he told his listeners not to take the first place when invited to a wedding but to take the lowest, because everyone who humbles himself will be exalted and everyone who exalts himself will be humbled (Luke 14:7-11). This parable again links heavenly rewards with behaviour appropriate for a wedding.<sup>51</sup>

In John's gospel the first miracle of Jesus' active ministry took place at the wedding feast at Cana at which he turned water into wine, and the evangelist adds that this sign revealed his glory and his disciples believed in him (John 2:1-11).<sup>52</sup> As seen already, the author of the epistle to the Ephesians regarded the complete union of husband and wife in marriage as a figure for Christ's relationship with the Church (Eph 5:22-33).<sup>53</sup> In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul used marriage imagery to remind his listeners to safeguard the faith that he has taught them:

For I am jealous of you with the jealousy of God. For I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear lest, as the serpent seduced Eve by his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted and fall from the simplicity that is in Christ (2Cor 11:2-3).

In the book of Revelations the marriage of the Lamb to the New Jerusalem at the end of time is described. The New Jerusalem is presented as a bride made ready for her husband (Rev 19:7-9; 21-22) and is adorned like the bride of the Lord in

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<sup>50</sup> Gregory the Great compares these two passages and suggests that the marriage feast in Matthew represents the Church on earth because some who enter the Church leave it, and Luke's dinner is the eternal banquet because everyone who enters this will never leave, *Hom* 38.1: *CCSL* 141, 360; Hurst (1990) 339-340.

<sup>51</sup> See Chavasse, *The Bride of Christ* 55-56.

<sup>52</sup> Wine imagery is important for the messianic wedding feast, see P. Perkins, 'The Gospel According to John,' in *NJBC* 61.40, 954.

<sup>53</sup> P.J. Kobelski suggests that in the view of the author of Ephesians this union between Christ and the Church would not take place until the end of time, 'The Letter to the Ephesians,' in *NJBC* 55.27, 890.

the Old Testament and will be united with the Lord her God in marriage for all eternity.<sup>54</sup>

Along with this marriage imagery, Jesus is clearly identified as the Bridegroom in the gospels. In response to questions from John the Baptist's disciples concerning fasting, he described himself as the Bridegroom and his apostles as the friends of the bridegroom who rejoice while the Bridegroom is with them. 'And Jesus said to them: Can the children of the bridegroom mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them: and then they shall fast' (Matt 9:15).<sup>55</sup> In John's Gospel, John the Baptist clearly stated that he was not the Christ, but sent before him as the friend of the Bridegroom, because 'He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, who standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth with joy because of the bridegroom's voice' (John 3:28-29). John the Baptist also asserted that he was not the Christ by telling the people: 'I indeed baptize you with water; but there shall come one mightier than I, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to loose. He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire' (Luke 3:16).<sup>56</sup> From a very early stage Christian exegetes related these words to Christ's role as the Bridegroom in ways which are now not commonly encountered. Cyprian wrote that it was written in the Law (Deut 25:7-9) that whoever wanted to refuse marriage should remove their shoes, but that the Bridegroom will be wearing shoes. He continues to show how this reveals that Christ is the Bridegroom, as he noted that Moses was told to remove his shoes when he was about to approach the burning bush because he was not the Bridegroom (Exod 3:2-6); Joshua was ordered to remove his shoes because he was standing on holy ground and was also not the Bridegroom (Josh 5:13-15); and John the Baptist claimed that he was not worthy to loosen the shoes of the one coming after him who was the Bridegroom.<sup>57</sup> That John the Baptist

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<sup>54</sup> See Chapter Four for discussion of this description of the bride.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Mark 2:19-20; Luke 5:34-35. The children of the bridegroom signify the bridegroom's bachelor friends who go with him to his marriage feast, see Chavasse, *The Bride of Christ* 53-55. Chavasse also notes that the importance attached to Jesus' words is seen in that it is repeated exactly in Matthew, Mark and Luke, *The Bride of Christ* 54.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Matt 3:11; Mark 1:7; John 1:27. It is significant that John's words are preserved in each of the four gospels.

<sup>57</sup> Cyprian, *Testimoniorum Libri Tres Adversus Judaeos (Three Books of Testimonies Against the Jews)*, 12, bk.2.19: *PL* 4, 713-714; *ANF* 5, *Treatise* 12, 523-524. Cyprian includes many



described Christ as the one who would be wearing shoes revealed that He was to be the Bridegroom.

Caesarius of Arles also wrote on the significance of the bridegroom's shoes in Judaic tradition in a sermon on Moses and the burning bush. He referred to a Judaic Law which commanded that if a man died without children his brother should marry his widow and their sons would be called by the name of the deceased brother.<sup>58</sup> Those who were unwilling to have their sons receive another's name and wanted to be excused<sup>59</sup> were led to the city gate, where their brother's widow removed her brother-in-law's shoes and spat in his face, and his house was called that of the unshod.<sup>60</sup> As a result the men who were not going to be married had the straps of their shoes removed, whereas those who agreed to marry their brothers' widows did not. Caesarius explains that Moses and Joshua had to remove the straps from their shoes (Exod 3:5 and Josh 5:15) because they were not lawful spouses, and adds that the lawful spouse for the Church is Christ, which is why John the Baptist was not worthy to loosen the strap of Christ's shoe.<sup>61</sup> In the same sermon Caesarius wrote that the apostles are like the brother who agrees to take his deceased brother's wife and raise children for him. After Christ's death, the apostles received his wife, *i.e.* the Church, and continued to preach Christ's gospel. Whoever is born of the Church from their teaching is not called a Petran or a Paulan, but a Christian. In this way the apostles fulfil the law concerning the wife of a dead brother, while heretics do the opposite. Their followers are called various names, such as Arians, Manichaeans, Donatists, because the leaders of heretics are not the lawful spouse of the Church and do not raise children under the name of Christ.<sup>62</sup>

While marriage imagery was often used to describe Christ's relationship with the Church, other images were also employed in the New Testament to describe that relationship, particularly in the Pauline epistles, and it is necessary

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significant verses from the Old and New Testaments to demonstrate that Jesus is the Bridegroom and the Church his bride.

<sup>58</sup> See Deut 25:5 and Ruth 3-4. On marrying a deceased brother's wife see Matt 22:24-30; Mark 12:19-25; Luke 20:28-35.

<sup>59</sup> See Deut 25:7; Gen 38:8-9; and Ruth 4:6.

<sup>60</sup> Deut 25:9-10 and cf. Ruth 4:7-8. See J. Blenkinsopp, 'Deuteronomy,' in *NJBC* 6.41, 105 and A.L. Laffey, 'Ruth,' in *NJBC* 35.4 and 23, 554 and 557.

<sup>61</sup> Caesarius of Arles, *Sermo (Sermon)* 96.4: *CCSL* 103, 394-395; *FOTC* 47, 71-72.

<sup>62</sup> Caesarius of Arles, *Sermo* 96.5: *CCSL* 103, 395-396; *FOTC* 47, 72-73.

to consider these images before examining patristic commentary on the nuptial imagery used to explain the relationship between Christ and the Church.

*(ii) Other Pauline images of Christ and the Church: the temple and the body*

As seen already, marriage imagery is used in the Pauline epistles to describe the relationship between Christ and the Church. In 2 Corinthians the newly converted Christians are reminded that they have been presented to their husband, Christ (2 Cor 11:2), and in the epistle to the Ephesians marriage imagery is used to describe the relationship between Christ and the Church making them one flesh (Eph 5:31-32). However, two other significant and influential images are also used in the Pauline epistles to stress the oneness of Christ and the Church and, both in scripture and patristic exegesis, these images underscore and extend the connotations of the nuptial metaphor. The Church was very often described metaphorically as a living building with Christ as its cornerstone. In Ephesians it is written: ‘Built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone: In whom all the building being framed together, groweth up into an holy temple in the Lord’ (Eph 2:20-21). This image had earlier been used in the first epistle to the Corinthians, where Paul wrote that his audience are God’s building and his role is that of an architect who lays a foundation in Christ upon which others can build according to their merits, and their work will be tested by the Lord (1Cor 3:9-15).<sup>63</sup> This architectural metaphor is not unique to the Pauline epistles, but is highly developed there. Peter had described Christ as the living stone and also advised all Christians to be living stones and to build up a spiritual house for God (1Pet 2:4-5). In this epistle Christ is again described as the corner stone in fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaiah (Is 28:16; 1Pet 2:6), and is the stone that the builders rejected but becomes the head of the corner (Ps 117:22; 1Pet 2:7). Jesus referred to this psalm verse in the gospels and in the Acts of the Apostles Peter tells the leaders of the Jews that this prophecy has been fulfilled in Christ and that there is

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<sup>63</sup> The architectural image is used to demonstrate the unity and equality of all Christians as members of Christ, as each have their part to play in the life of the Church, see Eph 2:19; cf. Gal 3:26-29.

no salvation in any other.<sup>64</sup> Christ is the stumbling stone and the rock of scandal for those who do not believe (Is 8:14 and Luke 20:18; 1Pet 2:8), and the rock of faith for Christians on which the edifice of the Church is built.<sup>65</sup> The architectural image of the Church is very striking as temple imagery is so often used in the New Testament to describe Christ's body or every Christian soul. For Christians the true temple is not a physical building in Jerusalem or elsewhere, but every individual Christian and the union of all Christians as one in the Church.<sup>66</sup>

The union between Christ and the Church is also described in the Pauline epistles in the image of the human body. The Church is an organic entity like a body that has many members each possessing their own gifts, and all come together to create the whole Body with Christ as its Head.<sup>67</sup> Paul told the Colossians: 'And he [*i.e.* Christ] is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things he may hold the primacy' (Col 1:18), and warned them to follow Christ by holding 'the head, from which the whole body, by joints and bands, being supplied with nourishment and compacted, groweth into the increase of God' (Col 2:19). In the epistle to the Ephesians, Christ is similarly described as the head: 'And he hath subjected all things under his feet and hath made him head over all the church, Which is his body and the fullness of him who is filled all in all' (Eph 1:22-23; cf. Eph 4:15-16). This teaching strongly emphasises the oneness of the Church and its complete union with Christ, as all the various members with their diverse gifts make up a complete organism. In Ephesians 5, the analogy of the body when describing the union between Christ and his Church is directly linked with the image of marriage:

For no man ever hated his own flesh, but nourisheth and cherisheth it, as also Christ doth the church: Because we are members of his body, of his flesh and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and

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<sup>64</sup> Matt 21:42; Luke 20:17; Acts 4:11. Cf. Heb 4:11-12.

<sup>65</sup> See Rom 9:33 and 1Cor 10:4 for Paul's spiritual interpretation of Exodus.

<sup>66</sup> See John 2:19-21; 1Cor 3:16-17; 1Cor 6:19; 2Cor 6:16. Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, Ps 126(127), st.3(2): *CCSL* 40, ll 1-2ff, 1858; *NPNF* 1<sup>st</sup> series, 8, 606, *Domus enim Dei, populus Dei* ... See J. O'Reilly, intro., S. Connolly, tr., *Bede: On the Temple* (1995) esp. xviii-xxviii for biblical and patristic background to this theme. Cyprian stressed the oneness and unity of the Church in his *De Ecclesiae Catholicae Unitate (The Unity of the Catholic Church)*, see esp. st.7 on the seamless and undivided nature of Christ's garment in John's account of the Crucifixion (John 19:23): Bévenot (1971) 68-69. See Chapter Two for discussion of the temple as the soul of every Christian.

<sup>67</sup> See Rom 12:4-6; 1Cor 6:15; 10:17; 12:12-27; Eph 5:29-30; Col 1:24.

mother: and shall cleave to his wife. And they shall be two in one flesh. This is a great sacrament: but I speak in Christ and in the church (Eph 5:29-32).

The writer here succeeds in drawing the different metaphors of marriage and the Body together to reveal that Christ and the Church are one.<sup>68</sup> In doing this he refers to the creation of Adam and Eve in Genesis and significantly relates this to the union between Christ and the Church. According to Genesis 2, God created Eve from a rib taken from Adam's side while he was asleep and because woman came from man in this way, it is right that a man should leave his parents to cleave to his wife and they shall be two in one flesh (Gen 2:21-24), effectively returning to their original state. Jesus clearly alluded to this text in making obvious his disapproval of divorce in the gospels (Matt 19:4-6; Mark 10:6-9) and it was of fundamental significance for the Christian understanding of marriage.<sup>69</sup> The letter to the Ephesians gives this idea an ecclesiological aspect and, by relating this to the Pauline concept of the Church as the Body of Christ, reveals that Christ and the Church are one. Indeed, it is notable that each of the foregoing images used to express the relationship between Christ and the Church reveals the Church's dependence on Christ for its very existence: *e.g.* He is the Head of the Body, or the cornerstone for the building. The marriage image from Ephesians is also treated in the same way in patristic commentary on the union between Christ and the Church.

In understanding the description of Christ and the Church in Ephesians 5, the account of the Crucifixion in John's gospel becomes very important. The evangelist wrote that the Jews asked that the bodies of Jesus and the two thieves crucified with him be taken away before the following day, as it was a great sabbath day. The soldiers came and broke the legs of the thieves crucified on either side of Jesus (so they would die from asphyxiation) but, as Jesus was already dead, they did not need to break his legs; however one of the soldiers 'opened' his side with a spear from which blood and water flowed out (John

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<sup>68</sup> See Y.M.-J. Congar, *L'Écclésiologie Du Haut Moyen Age: De Saint Grégoire le Grand à la désunion entre Byzance et Rome* (Paris 1968) 73ff, on the Church as Body of Christ and spouse of Christ.

<sup>69</sup> See Chapter Two for discussion of this in relation to actual marriage.

19:31-34).<sup>70</sup> The fourth gospel continues to explain that these events took place in fulfilment of scripture, as it was written ‘You shall not break a bone of him,’ and ‘They shall look on him whom they pierced’ (John 19:35-36).<sup>71</sup> The blood and water that flowed from Christ’s side were believed to signify the sacraments and thereby signalled the birth of the Church giving humanity the opportunity to be saved.<sup>72</sup> In his tractate on this passage from John’s Gospel, Augustine explained that the evangelist wrote that they opened his side (rather than pierced or wounded Him) because this caused the gate of life to be opened as the sacraments of the Church which flowed out are the only means of ensuring entrance to the true life.<sup>73</sup>

As Eve had been created from Adam’s side while he slept, it seemed significant for Christians that Christ’s bride was likewise created from his side while he was asleep on the Cross. Augustine wrote that a spouse was formed for the second Adam from what flowed from the sleeper’s side, *i.e.* the blood and water, which signified the sacraments.<sup>74</sup> Augustine explained in one of his psalm commentaries that John’s account fulfilled what had been signified in Adam:

... for when Adam was asleep, a rib was drawn from him, and Eve was created; so also while the Lord slept on the Cross, His side was transfixed with a spear, and the Sacraments flowed forth, whence the Church was born. For the Church the Lord’s Bride was created from His side, as Eve was created from the side of Adam. But as she was made from his side no otherwise than while sleeping, so the Church was created from His side no otherwise than while dying.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Cf. Ezek 47:1, in which the prophet has a vision of the temple of the Lord and sees waters issuing out from under the house on the right side. In Rev 22:1, the visionary sees a river of water of life proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb.

<sup>71</sup> The first part refers to Exod 12:46 and Num 9:12 and relates to the preparation of the paschal lamb; the second quotation to Zacharias 12:10 and is seen as proof of Christ’s divinity and linked to Rev 1:7, see J. O’Reilly, ‘Early Medieval Text and Image: The Wounded and Exalted Christ,’ *Peritia* 6-7 (1987-1988) 72-118 at 85.

<sup>72</sup> See Origen, *In Exodum homiliae (Homilies on Exodus)*, 11.2: *SC* 321, 330; *FOTC* 71, 357. Jerome, *Ep.* 3.4: Labourt 1, 14; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 6, 5. Jerome, *Ep.* 69.6: Labourt, 3, 201; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 6, 146. See also Jerome who argues that the Resurrection of the Lord on Easter Sunday signals the end of the Synagogue and the rising or birth of the Church in both of his homilies for Easter Sunday, *In Die Dominica Paschae (On Easter Sunday)*: *CCSL* 78, 545 and 550; *FOTC* 57 (*Homily* 93 and 94) 248 and 252. In later iconography the Church was often depicted as a woman at the foot of the Cross holding a chalice to collect the blood of Christ, see Spreadbury, ‘The Gender of the Church’, 95-96 and O’Reilly, ‘Early Medieval Text and Image,’ 85 and 98.

<sup>73</sup> Augustine, *In Iohannis Evangelium Tractatus (Tractates on the Gospel of John)*, 120, st.2: *CCSL* 36, 661; *NPNF* 1<sup>st</sup> series, 7, 434.

<sup>74</sup> Augustine, *In Iohannis Evangelium Tractatus*, 120, st.2: *CCSL* 36, 661; *NPNF* 1<sup>st</sup> series, 7, 435.

<sup>75</sup> Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, Ps 126(127), st.7(4): *CCSL* 40, II 9-15, 1862; *NPNF* 1<sup>st</sup> series, 8, 607, ... *quia cum dormiret Adam, costa illi detracta est, et Eua facta est; sic et Domino*

Augustine clearly articulates the orthodox Christian belief that the Church was formed from Christ, as Eve was formed from Adam, which enforces the description of Christ's relationship with the Church as a marriage. The letter to the Ephesians, which uses marriage imagery that evokes the creation of Eve to describe the union of Christ and the Church, provides significant testimony for such a belief and compliments John's Crucifixion account in patristic comment. This also reveals the Church's dependence on Christ for its existence as, although marriage suggests that two distinct entities are involved that come together to become one, scriptural exegesis (which finds its beginning in Scripture) reveals that Christ and the Church – like male and female (Gen 1:27; 2:23-24) – were originally one; just as Eve was formed from the flesh of her husband, Adam, the Church was formed from the side of her bridegroom, Christ.

*(iii) Old Testament Marriage Imagery in Christian thinking*

The prevalence of the metaphor of marriage throughout the New Testament and in exegesis, as seen above, makes this a very important image for Christians who came to identify Jesus as the promised Messiah of the Old Testament and the fulfilment of prophecy. The Song of Songs and Psalm 44(45), the great marriage psalm, came to be regarded as representing the relationship between Christ and his Church or Christ and every individual soul, whereas before they had been related to the marriage of Yahweh and Israel.<sup>76</sup> Christ is also identified as the Bridegroom from Psalm 18(19), known as the missionary psalm, which begins:

The heavens shew forth the glory of God: and the firmament declareth the work of his hands. Day to day uttereth speech: and night to night sheweth knowledge. There are no speeches nor languages, where their voices are not

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*cum dormiret in cruce, latus eius lancea percussus est, et sacramenta profluxerunt, unde facta est ecclesia. Ecclesia enim coniux Domini facta est de latere, quomodo Eua facta est de latere. Sed quomodo illa non est facta nisi de latere dormientis, sic ista non est facta nisi de latere morientis.* See also Augustine, *Two books on Genesis against the Manichees*, bk.2, c.13, st.19: *FOTC* 84, 115.

<sup>76</sup> See introduction to Origen, *The Song of Songs: Commentary and Homilies*: ACW 26, 7 and D.L. D'Avray, *Medieval Marriage: Symbolism and Society* (Oxford 2005) 8. On Song of Songs see Origen, *In Canticum Cantorum*: PG 13, 61-198 (Commentary), SC 37 (Homilies); *The Song of Songs: Commentary and Homilies*, ACW 26. Jerome, *Ep.*53.8: Labourt 3, 21; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series 6, 101. On Psalm 44(45), see Jerome, *Ep.*65: Labourt, 3, 140-167. Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos (Expositions on the Psalms)*: CCSL 38; *NPNF* 1<sup>st</sup> series, 8. Cassiodorus, *Expositio Psalmorum (Explanation of the Psalms)*: CCSL 97; ACW 51, 439-452.

heard. Their sound hath gone forth into all the earth: and their words unto the ends of the world. He hath set his tabernacle in the sun: and he, as a bridegroom coming out of his bride chamber, Hath rejoiced as a giant to run the way. His going out is from the end of heaven, And his circuit even to the end thereof: and there is no one that can hide himself from his heat (Ps 18:2-7).

This psalm is very important because, in Christian exegesis, it linked the miracle of Christ's Incarnation with his final command to the apostles to spread Christianity to the ends of the earth (see Matt 28:19-20).<sup>77</sup> The first part of the above quotation, especially verse 5(4) 'Their sound hath gone forth into all the earth ...', is related to the teaching of the apostles reaching to all peoples as early as Romans 10:18. This psalm text is also applied to the conversion of the islands of Britain and Ireland.<sup>78</sup> Pope Boniface V refers to Psalm 18:5(19:4)/Rom 10:18 in a letter to Archbishop Justus of Canterbury regarding the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons and the same image occurs in other Insular sources.<sup>79</sup> The second part of the above quotation, 'He hath set his tabernacle in the sun, ...' is related to Christ's Incarnation.<sup>80</sup> The Christological significance of this psalm was recognised by early Christian exegetes. Cyprian quoted verses 6 and 7 (5 and 6) along with many other passages from the Old and New Testaments to demonstrate that Christ is the Bridegroom and the Church His bride and that this union produces spiritual children.<sup>81</sup> Éamonn Ó Carragáin has shown that, from an early stage in the Church's development, Psalm 18(19) was used in the liturgy

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<sup>77</sup> See Augustine, *Contra Litteras Petilianus (Answer to the Letters of Petilian)*, bk.2.32 (74): PL 43, 284; NPNF 1<sup>st</sup> series, 4, 548-549. Cf. Isaiah 49, which contains similar imagery and suggests that the chosen people of the Lord will be clothed and ornamented like a bride (Is 49:18). Rordorf comments on the dual nature of Christianity, which questions all the structures of the world while sending teachers into the same world to spread a message of reconciliation, 'Marriage in the New Testament and in the Early Church,' 193-194.

<sup>78</sup> The conversion of Ireland, and later the Anglo-Saxons, was seen as the fulfilment of biblical prophecies (such as Ps 18 and Is 49 among others) concerning salvation spreading to the ends of the earth. See J. O'Reilly, 'Islands and Idols at the Ends of the Earth: Exegesis and Conversion in Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*,' in S. Lebecq, M. Perrin and O. Szerwiniack, ed., *Bède le Vénérable entre Tradition et Postérité* (Lille 2005) 119-145. See also J.(D.) A. Scully, *The Atlantic Archipelago from Antiquity to Bede: The Transformation of an Image*, unpub. D.Phil Thesis, N.U.I. Cork (2000).

<sup>79</sup> HE II.8, 160-161. See Patrick, *Confessio (Confession)*, st.9 and 40: Conneely (1993) 31 and 42-53; 64 and 71-72. Columbanus, *Ep.V.11*: Walker (1997) 48-49. Adomnán, *Vita Columbae (Life of Columba)*, bk.iii.23: Sharpe (1995).

<sup>80</sup> See e.g. Ambrose, *De Incarnationis Dominicae Sacramento (The Sacrament of the Incarnation of the Lord)*, c.5 (35-36): PL 16, 862-863; FOTC 44, 231-232. Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos (Expositions on the Psalms)*, Ps 18(19), *enarratio* 1, st.6-7: CCSL 38, 102-103; NPNF 1<sup>st</sup> series, 8, 54-55. Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, Ps 18(19), *enarratio* 2, st.2: CCSL 38; ACW 29, 183. Cassiodorus, *Expositio Psalmorum*, Ps 18(19) st.5-7: CCSL 97; ACW 51, 197-198.

<sup>81</sup> Cyprian, *Adversus Judaeos*, bk.2.19: PL 4, 713-714; ANF 5, *Treatise* 12, 523-524.

for celebrating Christ's birth at Christmas.<sup>82</sup> Augustine described this psalm as an allegory of Christ.<sup>83</sup> He also referred to it when discussing Christ's relationship with the Church, arguing that when Christ is recognised in Scripture the Church is also in the sacred text. He noted that we recognise Christ as the bridegroom of verse 6(5), and in the previous verse, 'Their sound hath gone forth into all the earth and their words to the ends of the world. He hath set his tabernacle in the sun', we can identify the Church. Although the sun in this verse is often taken for Christ,<sup>84</sup> on this occasion Augustine explains that the Church is the sun, because it is made known by its manifestation to the ends of the earth.<sup>85</sup> That Christ and the Church are so closely linked in Augustine's thought is very important.

*(iv) Union of Christ and the Church in Augustine's thought – Psalm 18:6(19:5), 'and he, as a bridegroom coming out of his bride chamber'*

Augustine often described Christ's relationship with the Church in marriage terms but he also significantly developed this image. In his commentary on Psalm 44(45), which describes the marriage of a bridegroom and his bride, Augustine (like many other Christian commentators) wrote that Christ and the Church are the bridegroom and bride in this psalm. However, he noted that certain verses sung in honour of brides and bridegrooms by balladists are sung in the bridechamber, which leads him to question whether or not there is a bridechamber for this marriage of Christ and the Church to which we are all invited. He continues to explain that there is such a place because in another psalm the bridegroom is described as emerging from his bridechamber (Ps 18:6/19:5). This bridechamber, Augustine explains, was the Virgin's womb and

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<sup>82</sup> É. Ó Carragáin, *Ritual and the Rood: Liturgical Images and the Old English Poems of the Dream of the Rood Tradition* (London 2005) 321-323. On the development of the feast of Christmas, see T.J. Talley, *The Origins of the Liturgical Year* (Collegeville, Minnesota 1986) 79-162 and S.K. Roll, *Towards the Origins of Christmas* (Kampen 1995).

<sup>83</sup> Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, Ps 18(19), *enarratio* 2, st.2: *CCSL* 38, 105; *ACW* 29, 182.

<sup>84</sup> Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, Ps 18(19), *enarratio* 1, st.6: *CCSL* 38, 102; *NPNF* 1<sup>st</sup> series, 8, 54. Augustine, *Homilies on the First Epistle of John*, 1.2: *NPNF* 1<sup>st</sup> series, 7, 461. See Ó Carragáin, *Ritual and the Rood* 322.

<sup>85</sup> Augustine, *Ep.*105 (to the Donatists), where Augustine also refers to Ps 49(50):1: *FOTC* 18, 207. Cf. Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, Ps 18(19), *enarratio* 2, st.6: *CCSL* 38, 109-110; *ACW* 29, 188-189.



the marriage union within was between the Word and flesh so that what had been two became one (Matt 19:5).<sup>86</sup>

It was necessary for the Word to take flesh in order to dwell among humanity (see John 1:14) as Christ's divinity needed to be clothed in human form so that he could be seen in the world.<sup>87</sup> The mystical union of Christ's divinity with human nature was often referred to in Christian exegesis prior to Augustine,<sup>88</sup> but the bishop of Hippo was the first to describe this union in terms of marriage. In discussing verse 6(5) from Psalm 18(19) he gives this interpretation in both of his expositions. In the first discourse, Augustine explained that Christ came 'forth out of the Virgin's womb, where God was united to man's nature as a bridegroom to a bride.'<sup>89</sup> In his second discourse, he wrote that as a bridegroom Christ found his nuptial chamber in the Virgin's womb when the Word was made flesh.<sup>90</sup> Augustine similarly expressed this belief in discussing the mystery of the Incarnation in his Christmas homilies.<sup>91</sup> In one of these he wrote that the Word of God and human creation were united in the Virgin's Womb in a marriage that is impossible to define.<sup>92</sup> In his *Confessions* Augustine returned to this theme, explaining that Christ came from heaven to the Virgin's womb where humanity was wedded to him so that our mortal flesh would not always be mortal. From there he set out like a bridegroom from his chamber and rejoiced as a great runner on the track. Not lingering on the way he ran and called us to return to him by his words and deeds, his life and death, his descent into hell and ascension into heaven.<sup>93</sup> This is the significance

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<sup>86</sup> Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, Ps 44(45), st.3: *CCSL* 38, 495; *NPNF* 1<sup>st</sup> series, 8, 146.

<sup>87</sup> See e.g. Augustine, *Sermo (Sermon)* 195 (13), st.3: *PL* 38, 1019; *ACW* 15, 128. Augustine, *Sermo* 76, st.5-6: *NPNF* 1<sup>st</sup> series, 6, 483. Augustine, *In Iohannis Evangelium Tractatus*, 2, st.8: *CCSL* 36, 15-16; *NPNF* 1<sup>st</sup> series, 7, 16. This is an immense theme in Christian thought; I am only dealing with one aspect of this as it occurs in Augustine's works here.

<sup>88</sup> See Ambrose, *De Incarnationis Dominicae Sacramento*, c.5 (35-36): *PL* 16, 862-863; *FOTC* 44, 231-232. Ambrose, *De Virginibus, ad Marcellinam Sororem Suam (Concerning Virgins, to Marcellina, his sister)*, bk.1, c.3, st.13: *PL* 16, 203; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 10, 365. See Ó Carragáin, *Ritual and the Rood* 323. See below for relevance for Christological controversies.

<sup>89</sup> Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, Ps 18(19), *enarratio* 1, st.6: *CCSL* 38, 102-103; *NPNF* 1<sup>st</sup> series, 8, 54-55.

<sup>90</sup> Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, Ps 18(19), *enarratio* 2, st.6: *CCSL* 38, 109-110; *ACW* 29, 189.

<sup>91</sup> See Augustine, *Sermo* 195 (13), st.3: *PL* 38, 1019; *ACW* 15, 128. *Sermo* 188 (6), st.2: *PL* 38, 1003-1004; *ACW* 15, 92-93. See also *Sermo* 76, st.6: *PL* 38; *NPNF* 1<sup>st</sup> series, 6, 483.

<sup>92</sup> Augustine, *Sermo* 192 (10), st.3: *PL* 38, 1013; *ACW* 15, 115.

<sup>93</sup> Augustine, *Confessionum (Confessions)*, bk.4.12: *CCSL* 27, 50; Pine-Coffin (1961) 82.

of the Incarnation – of the Word made flesh – that through Christ’s willingness to take on human flesh, all humanity has been redeemed and can return to God.

Augustine’s use of marriage imagery is a very innovative means of explaining the union of the divine and human in Christ. He states this very clearly in his first homily on John’s first epistle, writing:

that Bridegroom’s chamber was the Virgin’s womb, because in that virginal womb were joined the two, the Bridegroom and the bride, the Bridegroom the Word, and the bride the flesh; because it is written, ‘And they twain shall be one flesh’ (Gen 2:24); and the Lord saith in the Gospel, ‘Therefore they are no more twain but one flesh’ (Matt 19:6).<sup>94</sup>

This explicitly relates the Christian understanding of marriage imagery based on the creation account of Genesis and Jesus’ words on this subject, to the union of the Word and flesh in Christ. As we have seen this view of marriage had already been used to explain the union between Christ and the Church in the epistle to the Ephesians and in Christian comment on John’s account of the Crucifixion. Augustine’s theology develops this further, however. Although the Church was created from Christ’s side while he died on the Cross and Christ and the Church become one in a mystical marriage union, Augustine argued that, long before the Passion and Crucifixion, the marriage between Christ and the Church had its beginning in the Virgin’s womb. In his tractate on the wedding feast of Cana in John’s gospel Augustine wrote that it was unsurprising that Christ attended the marriage feast at Cana and performed his first miracle there, as he had come into the world for a marriage. His bride is the chaste virgin that Paul fears will be corrupted by the devil as Eve was (2 Cor 11:2-3), and Christ redeems her by his blood and gives her the Holy Spirit as a pledge.<sup>95</sup> Augustine writes that while men offer their brides earthly ornaments like gold, precious stones, houses, etc., Christ gives his own blood:

But the Lord, dying without fear, gave His own blood for her, whom rising again He was to have, whom He had already united to Himself in the Virgin’s womb. For the Word was the Bridegroom, and human flesh the bride; and both one, the Son of God, the same also being Son of man. The womb of the Virgin Mary, in which He became head of the Church (*caput*

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<sup>94</sup> Augustine, *Homily on the First Epistle of John* 1, st.2: *NPNF* 1<sup>st</sup> series, 7, 461.

<sup>95</sup> Augustine, *In Iohannis Evangelium Tractatus*, 8, st.4: *CCSL* 36, 83-84; *NPNF* 1<sup>st</sup> series, 7, 58. Cf. Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, Ps 18(19), *enarratio* 2, st.2: *CCSL* 38, 106; *ACW* 29, 182-183.

*ecclesiae*), was His bridal chamber: thence He came forth, as a bridegroom from his chamber, as the Scripture foretold, “And rejoiced as a giant to run his way” (Ps 19:5). From His chamber he came forth as a bridegroom; and being invited, came to the marriage.<sup>96</sup>

Augustine here combined the miracles of Christ’s Incarnation and Resurrection, as he recognised that both are essential for the salvation of humanity.<sup>97</sup> He noted that Christ died for the Church and gave his own blood for her knowing that they would be joined again after his Resurrection as they had already been united in the Virgin’s womb. Augustine also very significantly linked the Pauline concepts of Christ as the head of the Church with Christ’s role as spouse for the Church, as in Ephesians 5. However, Augustine developed this imagery explaining that Christ became the head of the Church when the Word was joined to flesh in the Virgin’s womb and from there left his bridechamber so that he could unite the whole Church to himself in marriage. Augustine described Christ’s union with the Church in similar terms in his exposition of Psalm 44(45). He explained that by uniting human flesh to the Word in the Virgin’s womb, it meant that Christ became the head of the Church, and all those who believed in Him through the Church become members of that Head.<sup>98</sup>

Once the mystical marriage took place in the Virgin’s womb, the Word and flesh became inseparable. Indeed for Augustine, in this marriage Christ is both bride and bridegroom. In commenting on the union of Word and flesh in his first homily on 1John (referred to above), Augustine cited Isaiah, ‘For he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation and with the robe of justice he hath covered me: as a bridegroom decked with a crown and as a bride adorned with her jewels’ (Is 61:10), and explained that the prophet is speaking in the person of Christ because he is aware that they are two. He adds: ‘One seems to speak, yet

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<sup>96</sup> Augustine, *In Iohannis Evangelium Tractatus*, 8, st.4: *CCSL* 36, ll 17-25, 84; *NPNF* 1<sup>st</sup> series, 7, 58, *Dominus autem securus moriens, dedit sanguinem suum pro ea quam resurgens haberet, quam sibi iam coniunxerat in utero uirginis. Verbum enim sponsus, et sponsa caro humana; et utrumque unus Filius Dei, et idem filius hominis; ubi factus est caput ecclesiae, ille uterus uirginis Mariae thalamus eius, inde processit tamquam sponsus de thalamo suo, sicut scriptura praedixit: Et ipse tamquam sponsus procedens de thalamo suo, exsultauit ut gigas ad currendam uiam; de thalamo processit uelut sponsus, et inuitatus uenit ad nuptias.*

<sup>97</sup> Eamonn Ó Carragáin has shown that an ancient series of liturgical chants presented Christ’s life as three royal *adventus* giving his life a sense of unity. The first *adventus* is his incarnation in the Virgin’s womb followed by his birth at Christmas, the second is his death on the Cross and descent into hell to bring light to those in darkness and under the shadow of death, and the third is his triumphant return to heaven, his course complete, *Ritual and the Rood* 321-325.

<sup>98</sup> Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, Ps 44(45), st.3: *CCSL* 38, 495; *NPNF* 1<sup>st</sup> series 8, 146. See also Augustine, *Sermo* 192 (10), st.2: *PL* 38, 1012; *ACW* 15, 114.

makes Himself at once Bridegroom and Bride; because “not two, but one flesh:” because “the Word was made flesh, and dwelt in us.” To that flesh the Church is joined, and so there is made the whole Christ, Head and body.’<sup>99</sup> The union between Christ and the Church is completed after his Passion and Resurrection but had its beginning in the mystical union in the Virgin’s womb.

Augustine elsewhere explained that as Christ is Head of the Church (Eph 5:23), even though the Head is in heaven while the body is on earth, they are still one. Following the teaching of the apostle he added that they are not only two in one flesh, but are also two in one voice. Augustine presents a sequence of biblical texts, each of which testifies for the Head and the Body, and significantly he finishes with the evidence of Psalm 18(19): ‘Hear for the Head; And “He is as a bridegroom coming forth out of His bridechamber” (Ps 18:6/19:5). And in this Psalm hear for the Body; “Their sound went out into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world” (Ps 18:5/ 19:4).’<sup>100</sup> This psalm is of central importance for Augustine in explaining the mystical relationship between Christ and the Church. As mentioned much earlier in this chapter, he referred to this to show that when Christ is recognised in Scripture then the Church is there too. His exposition of this psalm demonstrated the intimate and irreversible union between Christ and the Church and was very influential in the post-Augustinian Church.

#### *(v) Christology in the fifth-century Church*

Augustine’s work greatly influenced subsequent comment on Christ’s relationship with the Church and in particular highlighted that this union began in the Virgin’s womb through the miracle of the Incarnation. Independently of Augustine, the centrality of the Incarnation and the corresponding role of the Virgin were increasingly being stressed from the fourth-century onwards in

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<sup>99</sup> Augustine, *Homily on the First Epistle of John* 1, st.2: *NPNF* 1<sup>st</sup> series, 7, 461. See Ó Carragáin, *Ritual and the Rood* 44 and n.150. Arthur Holder has recently shown that Christ was sometimes depicted with feminine characteristics in Bede’s exegetical commentaries, see his ‘Christ as Incarnate Wisdom in Bede’s Commentary on the Song of Songs,’ in S. de Gregorio, ed., *Innovation and Tradition in the Writings of The Venerable Bede* (Morgantown 2006) 169-188, and ‘The Feminine Christ in Bede’s Biblical Commentaries,’ in S. Lebecqz, M. Perrin, and O. Szerwiniack, ed., *Bède le Vénérable – Entre Tradition et Postérité* (Lille 2005) 109-118. See further below.

<sup>100</sup> Augustine, *Sermo* 79 (129), st.4-5: *NPNF* 1<sup>st</sup> series, 6, 496-497.

response to various Christological controversies, which by turns denied Christ's full divinity or full humanity.<sup>101</sup> In the early-fourth century Arius and his supporters had denied that Christ was equal to the Father, claiming that he was lesser as he had been created. There had been similar concerns about the divinity of Christ from the beginning of Christianity and the prologue to John's gospel was reputedly written to assert that the Word who became flesh existed with God in the beginning and that all things were created through Him (John 1:1-5).<sup>102</sup> The orthodox position was asserted at the first ecumenical council held in Nicaea in 325 and the Nicene Creed was formulated to state Christian belief.<sup>103</sup> At the other extreme, various heresies asserted that Christ's humanity was incomplete. Those who held this view argued that Christ could not have had a human mind or a human soul, as these would have been fallible and led to division in Him. On one side the belief that came to be known as Nestorianism argued that there were two persons in Jesus Christ (human and divine) who were completely separate and unrelated. The principal position on the other side, which came to be known as Monophysitism and believed to be founded by Eutyches, was that there was only one nature in Christ, a divine one, in which his humanity was absorbed. The orthodox belief in contrast to both stated that Christ is one Person in two natures – divine and human.<sup>104</sup> The assembled bishops at the First Council of Constantinople (381) asserted this belief, which was upheld at the Councils of Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451).<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> This is of necessity a brief summary of a complex series of events. See R.A. Norris, ed., *The Christological Controversy* (Philadelphia 1980) for general background and translations of some of the key texts up to the Council of Chalcedon. For detailed consideration of Christology from the beginnings of Christianity to the time of Gregory the Great, see A. Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition: I, From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon (451)*, tr. J. Bowden (London 1965, rev. ed. 1975); A. Grillmeier with T. Hainthaler, *Christ in Christian Tradition: II, From the Council of Chalcedon (451) to Gregory the Great (590-604)*, Parts 1-2, tr. P. Allen and J. Cawte (London 1987 and 1995).

<sup>102</sup> Cf. Phil 2:6-8; 1Tim 2:5. See Augustine, *Tractate on the Gospel of John 1: NPNF 1<sup>st</sup> series*, 7, 7-13. Cf. Bede, *Hom I.8: CCSL 122, 52-55*; Martin and Hurst (1991) 73-77.

<sup>103</sup> See *Nicaea 1*, 'Profession of Faith': Tanner (1990) I, 5.

<sup>104</sup> See Nestorianism and Monophysitism in *ODCC*, 1138-1139 and 1104-1105; Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*. Monophysitism led to major political division in the Eastern Empire and in the seventh century Emperor Heraclius pushed a new compromise doctrine called Monothelitism, which stated that there were two natures but one will in Christ, in an attempt to resolve this dispute. This led to further division because it was unacceptable to the Western Church and many members of the Eastern Church who took refuge in Rome – Theodore of Tarsus, the future archbishop of Canterbury, was probably one such exile. See further below.

<sup>105</sup> See *Constantinople 1*, 'Letter of the bishops gathered in Constantinople': Tanner (1990) I, 28, 'And we preserve undistorted the accounts of the Lord's taking of humanity, accepting as we do that the economy of his flesh was not soulless nor mindless nor imperfect. To sum up, we know

Orthodox Christians believed that if Christ's humanity was incomplete, if he did not feel human emotions such as fear, then he could not be a perfect example for fallen humanity and his sacrifice would not be redemptive. On this subject Jerome wrote that the parts of man's nature that Christ did not assume, He could not save.<sup>106</sup> Jerome also argued that anyone who believed that Christ did not have a human soul because he might have been unable to control his human impulses was gravely mistaken. He stated that this belief suggested that John the Baptist and Peter, and all the other apostles were able to control their human feelings and emotions, while Christ would have been unable to control his. He asserted that this was ridiculous as it implies 'that the Lord fears what the apostles did not fear.'<sup>107</sup> Ambrose stated that the general faith, 'that Christ is the Son of God, and eternal from the Father, and born of the Virgin Mary', stands against all heresies.<sup>108</sup> Ambrose subsequently referred to Christ as the giant from Psalm 18:6(19:5), because 'He, one, is of double form and of twin nature, a sharer in divinity and body, who "as a bridegroom, coming out of his bride-chamber, hath rejoiced as a giant to run the way."<sup>109</sup> Ambrose continues to explain that He was a giant of earth who went through all the duties of life while remaining God eternal. There was not one part of Him from the Father and the other from the Virgin, but the same is of the Father in one way, and from the Virgin in the other.<sup>110</sup> Elsewhere Ambrose referred to the description of the Beloved as white and ruddy from Song of Songs (5:10) and related this to his divine and human natures: 'He is white fittingly, for He is the brightness of the Father; and ruddy, for He was born of a Virgin. The colour of each nature shines

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that he was before the ages fully God the Word, and that in the last days he became fully man for the sake of our salvation.' See *Ephesus*, 'Second Letter of Cyril to Nestorius,' 'Third Letter of Cyril to Nestorius,' 'Formula of Union,' and 'Letter of Cyril to John of Antioch about peace': Tanner (1990) I, 40-44, 50-61, 69-70 and 70-74. *Chalcedon*, 'Letter of Pope Leo to Flavian, bishop of Constantinople, about Eutyches (Tome),' and 'Definition of the faith': Tanner (1990) I, 77-82 and 83-87.

<sup>106</sup> Jerome, *Homilia De Nativitate Domini*: CCSL 78, 529; FOTC 57 (Homily 88) 227.

<sup>107</sup> Jerome, *Tractatus de Psalmo (Homily on Psalm)* 108(109): CCSL 78, II 394-395, 221; FOTC 48 (Homily 35) 268-269, *ut uideatur timere Dominus, quod apostoli non timuerunt*.

<sup>108</sup> Ambrose, *De Incarnationis Dominicae Sacramento*, c.5 (35): PL 16, 862; FOTC 44, 231, *quia Christus est Dei Filius, et sempiternus ex Patre, et natus ex Maria Virgine*. Cf. 'Letter of Pope Leo to Flavian (Tome),' where a very similar sentiment is expressed: Tanner (1990) I, 77.

<sup>109</sup> Ambrose, *De Incarnationis Dominicae Sacramento*, c.5(35): PL 16, 862; FOTC 44, 231-232, *eo quod biformis geminaeque naturae unus sit consors divinitatis et corporis: qui "tamquam sponsus, procedens de thalamo suo, exsultavit tanquam gigas ad currendam viam."*

<sup>110</sup> Ambrose, *De Incarnationis Dominicae Sacramento*, c.5(35): PL 16, 862; FOTC 44, 232.

and glows in him.’<sup>111</sup> In his ‘Sacrament of the Incarnation of the Lord,’ Ambrose explained that Christ’s flesh was not prejudicial to his divinity, and as the pledge for the redemption of mankind he was not prejudicial to the Father, the will was not prejudicial to the Passion, nor the Passion to the will:

For the same one suffered and did not suffer; died and did not die; was buried and was not buried; rose again and did not rise again; for the body proper took on life again; for what fell, this rose again; what did not fall; did not rise again. He rose again, therefore, according to the flesh, which, having died, rose again. He did not rise again according to the Word, which had not been destroyed on earth, but remained always with God.<sup>112</sup>

Ambrose asserts the complete union of two natures in Christ and significantly looked to Psalm 18(19) as a proof-text.<sup>113</sup> Augustine was greatly influenced by Ambrose’s teaching; however his exposition of Psalm 18:6(19:5), which stressed that the Word and flesh were joined together in marriage in the bridechamber of the Virgin’s womb, was (as noted above) a very significant development. Augustine’s use of marriage imagery, which for Christians means that two become one, was an ingenious means of describing the union of the two natures in Christ. In considering the mystery of the Incarnation this also afforded the Virgin a central role, as Christ received his humanity from her.

Mary’s importance was increasingly recognised in the Church in response to the Christological controversies. Although devotion to her as Christ’s mother had always existed, this became more organised during the fifth-century.<sup>114</sup> At

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<sup>111</sup> Ambrose, *De Virginibus Ad Marcellinam Sororem Suam*, bk.1, c.9, st.46: *PL* 16, 212; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 10, 370, *Candidus merito, quia Patris splendor: rubeus, quia partus est Virginis. Color in eo fulget et rutilat utriusque naturae*. For further discussion of this image see J. O’Reilly, ‘*Candidus et Rubicundus: An image of Martyrdom in the Lives of Thomas Becket*,’ *Analecta Bollandiana* 9, 303-314. The importance of this description of Christ is also considered in Chapter Four in relation to the virginal life.

<sup>112</sup> Ambrose, *De Incarnationis Dominicae Sacramento*, c.5(36): *PL* 16, 862-863; *FOTC* 44, 232, *Idem enim patiebatur, et non patiebatur: moriebatur, et non moriebatur: sepeliebatur, et non sepeliebatur: resurgebat, et non resurgebat; quia corpus proprium suscitabat: quia quod cecidit, hoc resurgit: quod non cecidit, non resurgit. Resurgebat igitur secundum carnem, quae mortua resurrexit: non resurgebat secundum Verbum, quod non resolutum fuerat in terram, sed apud Deum semper manebat*.

<sup>113</sup> Ambrose also believed that after Christ had united the Godhead and human flesh ‘without any confusion or mixture,’ that the practice of the heavenly life began spreading throughout the world and became implanted in human bodies, which led to the practice of the virginal life, *De Virginibus*, bk.1, c.3, st.13: *PL* 16, 203; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 10, 365. See Chapter Four for discussion of the virginal life.

<sup>114</sup> For an overview of the patristic attitude to Mary see L. Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers of the Church: The Blessed Virgin Mary in Patristic Thought*, tr. T. Buffer (San Francisco 1999), and for a general consideration of Marian devotion in this period see H. Graef, *Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion* (London 1985, 1994) 1-161.

the Council of Ephesus (431) she received the title *Theotokos* (Mother of God), which revealed the Church's belief that she was not just the mother of Jesus' humanity that he had received from her, but mother of Christ who is two natures in one person.<sup>115</sup> Both before and after the Council of Ephesus, Nestorius denied that Mary could be the mother of God and this led to his condemnation.<sup>116</sup> In the build-up to the Council of Chalcedon (451), Leo the Great had stated the orthodox view in his famous letter to Flavian of Constantinople known as the Tome, and this position was subsequently confirmed at Chalcedon.<sup>117</sup> Leo also recognised the importance of the Incarnation for our redemption. In a sermon for Christmas, he wrote that although we are celebrating the birth of Christ, we are also celebrating our own origin, because with the conception of Christ we have the origin of the Christian people and the birthday of the Head is therefore also the birthday of the body.<sup>118</sup> This devotion to Mary is also apparent in Church building at Rome during the fifth-century, as major Marian foundations were established there, including S. Maria Maggiore (built by Pope Sixtus III) and S. Maria in Trastevere.<sup>119</sup> The earliest known icons of Mary survive from this period or a little after, and in these images she is often depicted with the Christ-child, as this was an important means of demonstrating that he had become fully human.<sup>120</sup> Augustine stressed Mary's importance, writing that all Christians are concerned in her childbearing, because all Christians are members of Christ (*i.e.* the Church) and Mary has given birth to their Head.<sup>121</sup> In identifying the bridechamber of Psalm 18:6(19:5) with the Womb of the Virgin where the marriage between Christ's humanity and divinity took place in preparation for His marriage to the Church, Augustine placed an emphasis on Mary and her role in Christ's Incarnation that was very much in keeping with wider theological developments in the fifth-century.

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<sup>115</sup> See *Ephesus*, 'Third letter of Cyril to Nestorius,' and 'Formula of Union': Tanner (1990) I, 58-59 and 69-70.

<sup>116</sup> See *Ephesus*, 'Second Letter of Nestorius to Cyril': Tanner (1990) I, 46-48. Nestorius, *First Sermon Against the Theotokos*: Norris (1980) 124-125.

<sup>117</sup> See *Chalcedon*, 'Letter of Pope Leo to Flavian (Tome),' and 'Definition of the Faith': Tanner (1990) I, 77-82 and 83-87.

<sup>118</sup> Leo the Great, *Sermon 26.2: FOTC* 93, 105.

<sup>119</sup> See Ó Carragáin, *Ritual and the Rood* for discussion of the many major Marian foundations in Rome between the fifth and seventh centuries.

<sup>120</sup> See H. Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, tr. E. Jephcott (Chicago and London 1994) 58.

<sup>121</sup> Augustine, *Sermo* 192 (10), st.2: *PL* 38, 1012; *ACW* 15, 114.



(vi) *Christology and Ecclesiology post-Chalcedon*

Christological questions were continually raised and debated in the Church until the late seventh-century when these matters were finally resolved in favour of the orthodox position at the sixth ecumenical council held in Constantinople in 680-681 (Third Council of Constantinople). The Western Church had resolutely followed orthodox thinking and refused to accept compromise doctrines, such as Monothelism, enforced by the Eastern Emperor. During this period (from Chalcedon to Constantinople 3) questions concerning the union of Christ's human and divine natures continued to be an issue for many Christian commentators and the centrality of the Incarnation in humanity's redemption was increasingly stressed. In conjunction with this Augustine's influence is very apparent on many writers from this period.

Cassiodorus, in his influential explanations of the Psalms which were well known to Bede, regularly turned to the theme of two natures in Christ. He argued that various psalms speak about the two natures in Christ and used these to demonstrate the heretical nature of the beliefs of Arius, Eutyches, and Nestorius.<sup>122</sup> He is adamant that these two natures are unmingled but together make up the single Person of the Christ.<sup>123</sup> Cassiodorus also recognised the importance of the Nativity and the role of Christ's mother in asserting this doctrine and is clear that the Word of God is identical with Mary's Son.<sup>124</sup> Cassiodorus' explanations of the psalms are recognisably orthodox on this subject and he is clearly working within the patristic tradition, often referring to earlier authorities, especially Leo the Great.<sup>125</sup> Augustine's influence is also clearly evident on Cassiodorus, particularly in his explanation of Psalm 18(19). Like many commentators Cassiodorus related this psalm to the miracle of the

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<sup>122</sup> See Cassiodorus, *Expositio Psalmorum*, Ps 8, *Conclusio*: CCSL 97, 94-95; ACW 51, 115-116. For refutation of these named heretics, see Ps 20, *Conclusio*: CCSL 97, 188; ACW 51, 214-215. Ps 71, *Conclusio*: CCSL 98, 658-659; ACW 52, 195. Ps 81, *Conclusio*: CCSL 98, 760-761; ACW 52, 195-196, 305-306.

<sup>123</sup> Cassiodorus, *Expositio Psalmorum*, Ps 2, *Conclusio*: CCSL 97, 49; ACW 51, 67. Ps 8, st.1: CCSL 97, 89; ACW 51, 109. Ps 20, st.1: CCSL 97, 181; ACW 51, 208. Ps 81, *Conclusio*: CCSL 98, 760-761; ACW 52, 305-306. Ps 107, st.1: CCSL 98, 986-987; ACW 53, 96. See also Ps 18, st.7: CCSL 97, 171-172; ACW 51, 198.

<sup>124</sup> See Cassiodorus, *Expositio Psalmorum*, Ps 20, st.1: CCSL 97, 181; ACW 51, 208. See also Ps 8, *Conclusio*: CCSL 97, 95; ACW (51) 115. Ps 71, *Conclusio*: CCSL 98, 659; ACW 52, 195.

<sup>125</sup> See Cassiodorus, *Expositio Psalmorum*, Ps 2, *Conclusio*: CCSL 97, 50, ACW 51, 67. Ps 71, st.6: CCSL 98, 652; ACW 52, 188.

Incarnation and noted that ‘He hath set his tabernacle in the sun’ (Ps 18:5/19:4), because only those whose inner eye is most pure can bear and behold the brightness of this mystery, whereas those following heretical teachings are blinded by the brightness of the Lord’s incarnation, and cannot gaze on the Lord’s holy light because of their sins.<sup>126</sup> In commenting on the next verse, ‘and he, as a bridegroom coming out of his bride chamber, Hath rejoiced as a giant to run the way’, he writes that the psalmist means ‘the Lord Christ, who as Bridegroom of His Church came *out of his bride-chamber*, that is, the virginal womb.’<sup>127</sup> He continues to explain that in this ‘great simile’ the psalmist ‘unfolded the mystery of His incarnation.’<sup>128</sup> He follows Augustine in writing that Christ came from his bride-chamber to join the Church to himself in matrimony:

By this miraculous dispensation, He came forth from a virgin womb to reconcile the world to the Godhead, and with a Bridegroom’s love to join himself to the Church. So He was rightly born of a virgin, for He was to be joined to a virgin in holy wedlock.<sup>129</sup>

He continues to explain that Christ is very appropriately described as the Bridegroom, as the Latin word (*sponsus*) derives from *spondere*, which means ‘to pledge’ and Christ has been promised or pledged by the prophets on many occasions.<sup>130</sup> In his commentary on Psalm 44(45), which in the Christian tradition concerns the marriage of Christ and the Church, Cassiodorus – like Augustine earlier – returned to the evidence of Psalm 18:6(19:5).

Cassiodorus begins his commentary on Psalm 44(45) by writing: ‘The spiritual marriage of Christ is now described, and prayers to Him are celebrated with the praise of the marriage-song. ... O blessed bride, known to be joined to such great majesty not in the alliance of the flesh but in the unbreakable bond of

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<sup>126</sup> Cassiodorus, *Expositio Psalmorum*, Ps 18, st.5: CCSL 97, 171; ACW 51, 197.

<sup>127</sup> Cassiodorus, *Expositio Psalmorum*, Ps 18, st.6: CCSL 97, ll 88-90, 171; ACW 51, 197, ... *Christum Dominum dicit, qui tamquam sponsus Ecclesiae suae, processit de thalamo suo, id est de utero uirginali.*

<sup>128</sup> Cassiodorus, *Expositio Psalmorum*, Ps 18, st.6: CCSL 97, ll 90-91, 171; ACW 51, 197, *Magna similitudine sacramentum eius incarnationis exposuit.*

<sup>129</sup> Cassiodorus, *Expositio Psalmorum*, Ps 18, st.6: CCSL 97, ll 91-94, 171; ACW 51, 197, *Ob hoc enim de intacto utero processit dispositione mirabili, ut mundum deitati reconcilians, Ecclesiam sibi sponsi caritate sociaret. Quapropter merito de Virgine natus est, qui Virgini erat sancta copulatione iungendus.*

<sup>130</sup> Cassiodorus, *Expositio Psalmorum*, Ps 18, st.6: CCSL 97, 171; ACW 51, 197-198.

love!’<sup>131</sup> In considering the Bridegroom who is praised in the first part of this psalm, he returns to the mystery of the Incarnation, without which the marriage between Christ and the Church could not take place. On the verse, ‘Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O thou most mighty, With thy comeliness and thy beauty set out: proceed prosperously, and reign’ (Ps 44:4-5/45:3-4), Cassiodorus explained that the ‘sword’ is God’s word and ‘thigh’ signifies the Incarnation of the Saviour.<sup>132</sup> ‘O thou most mighty’ reveals that the power of the God-head is involved in the Incarnation and therefore is to be revered, and Cassiodorus writes that the phrase ‘With thy comeliness and thy beauty’, describes the two natures in Christ; ‘comeliness referring to His humanity, and beauty to His divinity. *Comeliness* is a good expression for His saving appearance in the world, and beauty is most appropriately used for the source of all beautiful and seemly things.’<sup>133</sup> On the next part of this verse, Cassiodorus writes that he was to proceed (or come forth) prosperously, because he was to ‘*Come forth*, as the Bridegroom from the maiden’s womb; in the words of Scripture: And he as a bridegroom coming out of his bridechamber (Ps 18:6/19:5)’, and provide the benefits of liberation to humanity.<sup>134</sup> Cassiodorus clearly regarded the miracle of the Incarnation, involving the union of humanity and divinity in the person of Christ that took place in the Womb of the Virgin, as central in leading to the marriage between Christ and the Church. In his commentary he demonstrates for a Christian audience that this salvific sequence of events is both prophesied and celebrated in this psalm.

The significance of the Incarnation for Christ’s marriage to the Church is also apparent in the preaching of Caesarius of Arles. We have already seen Caesarius’ exposition of the words of John the Baptist, which proved that Jesus was the Bridegroom for the Church. In his sermon on the wedding feast of Cana

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<sup>131</sup> Cassiodorus, *Expositio Psalmorum*, Ps 44, st.1: CCSL 97, ll 14-19, 402; ACW 51, 440, *Istius nunc spiritales nuptiae referuntur, istius uota epithalamii laude celebrantur ... O beata sponsa, quae tantae maiestati probaris esse coniuncta, non societate carnali, sed inuiolabili coniunctione caritatis!* Later he writes that the psalmist ‘celebrates a kind of heavenly epithalamium’, Ps 44, st.1: CCSL 97, ll 27-28, 403; ACW 51, 440.

<sup>132</sup> Cassiodorus, *Expositio Psalmorum*, Ps 44, st.4: CCSL 97, 405; ACW 51, 442.

<sup>133</sup> Cassiodorus, *Expositio Psalmorum*, Ps 44, st.4: CCSL 97, ll 128-132, 405; ACW 51, 443, ... *ut species pertineat ad humanitatem, pulchritudo ad deitatem. Illa enim species bene dicitur, in qua mundo salutaris apparuit: ista pulchritudo aptissime pronuntiatur, unde omnia pulchra ueniunt quaecumque decora sunt.*

<sup>134</sup> Cassiodorus, *Expositio Psalmorum*, Ps 44, st.5: CCSL 97, ll 141-143, 406; ACW 51, 443, *Procede, uelut sponsus de utero uirginali, sicut scriptum est: Et ipse tamquam sponsus procedens de thalamo suo.*

from John's gospel, Caesarius explained that the opening verse 'And the third day, there was a marriage' (John 2:1), refers to the joys of human salvation. This is on the third day because of the Trinity or because Christ rose from the dead on the third day. He then adds that Christ came down to earth as a groom comes out of his bridechamber (referring to Ps 18:6/19:5), and because of the Incarnation he was joined to the Church, which is composed of all peoples.<sup>135</sup> Caesarius links the Incarnation not only with Christ's marriage to the Church, but also to the spread of Christianity to all nations, as commanded by Christ at the end of Matthew's gospel and prophesied in the Old Testament.<sup>136</sup> He adds that he and his listeners are part of this Church to which Christ gave a pledge and a dowry: a pledge when he was promised in the Old Testament and a dowry when he was sacrificed for us, or the pledge is present grace and the dowry eternal life.<sup>137</sup> In a homily given on the Nativity, Caesarius wrote that Christ was united with his spouse the Church in a spiritual marriage in the Virgin's womb on his birthday, and 'then "the groom" came forth "from his bridal chamber" (Ps 18:6/19:5), that is, the Word of God came forth from the womb of a virgin. He came forth with His spouse; that is, He assumed human flesh.'<sup>138</sup> Caesarius, similarly to Augustine, recognises that Christ is united to the Church in the Virgin's womb and comes forth from this as both bridegroom and bride to live his life and spread salvation to all people who become members of His bride, the Church.

Marriage imagery is also significant in the writings of Gregory the Great; indeed Gregory did not merely preach the importance of the marriage vows between Christ and the Church, but played an active role in extending the Church to all peoples through the mission to the Anglo-Saxons. It is Gregory, rather than Augustine of Canterbury or his fellow missionaries, whom Bede and other early Anglo-Saxon sources recognise as the apostle of the English.<sup>139</sup> In this chapter

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<sup>135</sup> Caesarius of Arles, *Sermo* 168.2: *CCSL*; *FOTC* 47, 409-410.

<sup>136</sup> See above 10-11. Caesarius elsewhere referred to the bridechamber of Psalm 18:6(19:5) as the Virgin's womb and added that Christ's birth is 'Wonderful', again signalling the importance of the Incarnation, *Sermo* 142.6: *CCSL*; *FOTC* 47, 294.

<sup>137</sup> Caesarius of Arles, *Sermo* 168.2: *CCSL*; *FOTC* 47, 410.

<sup>138</sup> Caesarius of Arles, *Sermo* 188.2: *CCSL*; *FOTC* 66, 12.

<sup>139</sup> See Bede, *HE* II.1, 122-123. *The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great, by an anonymous monk of Whitby*, Prologue, c.3, 5-6: Colgrave (1968) 72-73, 76-77, 80-85. For discussion of Gregory and the Anglo-Saxons see A. Thacker, 'Memorializing Gregory the Great: the origin and transmission of a papal cult in the 7<sup>th</sup> and early 8<sup>th</sup> centuries,' *Early Medieval Europe* 7:1 (1998) 59-84, and 'In Gregory's Shadow? The Pre-Conquest Cult of St Augustine,' in R. Gameson, ed., *Saint Augustine and the Conversion of England* (Stroud 1999) 374-390.

Gregory's exegetical works will be considered, in particular his homily on the marriage feast arranged for the king's son in Matthew's gospel (Matt 22:2-14; see above).<sup>140</sup> Commenting on the line that a king made a marriage feast for his son, Gregory explained that God the Father made a marriage feast for God the Son when he united Him to human nature in the Virgin's womb in the miracle of the Incarnation. Gregory continues to explain that even though such a union normally takes place between two persons, Christians regard as sinful the belief that Christ is the union of two persons; he is one person in two natures.<sup>141</sup> For this reason Gregory suggests that it is safer and clearer to say that 'the Father made a marriage feast for his Son by joining the Church to him through the mystery of his incarnation.'<sup>142</sup> The Virgin's womb was his bridal chamber and He, as God incarnate, came forth from this as a bridegroom to unite the Church to himself.<sup>143</sup> As in the parable Gregory explains that Christ sent his servants to invite his friends to the wedding, firstly through the prophets and secondly through the apostles, 'because he said through the prophets that his only Son's incarnation would come about, and he proclaimed through the apostles that it had.'<sup>144</sup>

Gregory returned to the image of the marriage chamber in other exegetical works. He very often focused on the union between Christ and the individual soul, arguing that this takes place in the inner chamber of the heart. In his homilies on Ezekiel, Gregory suggests that the chamber that was one reed long and one reed broad (Ezek 40:7) represents the chamber where a bride and groom are joined in love:

So what are the chambers in Holy Church if not the hearts of those whose soul is joined through love with the Unseen Bridegroom so that it burns with yearning for Him, it desires nothing which is in the world, it counts punishment the length of this present life, it hastens to depart and to rest with a loving embrace in the vision of the Heavenly Bridegroom?<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> For brief comment on his role in the mission to the Anglo-Saxons, see Chapter Four.

<sup>141</sup> Gregory the Great, *Hom 38.3*: CCSL 141, 361; Hurst (1990) 341.

<sup>142</sup> Gregory the Great, *Hom 38.3*: CCSL 141, ll 45-46, 361; Hurst (1990) 341, *in hoc Pater regi Filio nuptias fecit, quo ei per incarnationis mysterium sanctam ecclesiam sociavit.*

<sup>143</sup> Gregory the Great, *Hom 38.3*: CCSL 141, 361; Hurst (1990) 341.

<sup>144</sup> Gregory the Great, *Hom 38.3*: CCSL 141, ll 52-56, 361-362; Hurst (1990) 341, ... *quia incarnationem Unigeniti et per prophetas dixit futuram, et per apostolos nuntiavit factam.*

<sup>145</sup> Gregory the Great, *Homilies on Ezekiel*, bk.2, *Hom 3.8*: CCSL 142, ll 162-167, 242; Gray (1990) 183, *Quid ergo sunt in sancta Ecclesia thalami, nisi eorum corda in quibus anima per amorem sponso inuisibili iungitur, ut eius desiderio ardeat, nulla iam quae in mundo sunt concupiscat, praesentis uitae longitudinem poenam deputet, exire festinet, et amoris amplexu in*

Similarly in the *Moralia*, Gregory argues that the soul is a ‘widow (*uidua*)’, because it was united to its Maker in the marriage chamber of the Virgin’s womb (as testified by Psalm 18:6/19:5), and her husband subsequently underwent death on her behalf and is now hidden from her eyes in heaven.<sup>146</sup> Gregory recognises that the marriage image of Psalm 18:6(19:5) is a means of expressing the union of the Word and flesh in the person of Christ and extends this to include Christ’s marriage with the Church, which is the reason for the first marriage in the Virgin’s womb. He is also keen to acknowledge that within this marriage there are many marriages taking place between individual souls and Christ, which are a foretaste of the heavenly life.

The application of marriage imagery in Ecclesiology and Christology was very important in Christian thinking and, as seen in this sampler of patristic evidence, was a means of combating heresies regarding the union of the divine and human natures in Christ. In what follows, this chapter will examine to what extent Bede had received this theology and consider how he applied marriage imagery in his exegetical commentaries. In the light of Bede’s understanding of this thinking it will then consider if this could have played a part in his use of marriage imagery in the *HE*.

## **Ecclesiology and Christology in Bede’s thought**

### *(i) Bede’s exegesis*

Bede’s awareness of and dependence on patristic exegesis has long been recognised; however most recently his abilities as an innovator rather than a slavish follower of tradition have become increasingly appreciated.<sup>147</sup> Some scholars now regard Bede as an inheritor of patristic tradition who succeeded in applying this in new ways to expound difficulties in Scripture or to relate it to the

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*caelestis sponsi uisione requiescere?* For discussion of the marriage between every Christian soul and Christ see Chapter Four.

<sup>146</sup> Gregory the Great, *Mor.* 17.4: *CCSL* 143A, 852; Bliss (1844-1850) II, 280.

<sup>147</sup> See esp. S. DeGregorio, ed., *Innovation and Tradition in the Writings of The Venerable Bede* (Morgantown 2006). DeGregorio’s introduction notes that Bede’s oft-quoted comment that he was following ‘in’ the footsteps of the fathers has been mis-understood by modern scholars and should be read as following the footsteps of the fathers, *i.e.* Bede is moving in the same direction as the fathers as one of their equals, ‘Introduction,’ 1-10 at 8.

needs of the Anglo-Saxon Church of his time.<sup>148</sup> It is clear from Bede's exegesis that he followed orthodox thinking in regarding Christ as the Bridegroom for His Bride, the Church. This is stated clearly in his homily on the wedding feast of Cana from John's gospel (John 2:1-11), in which he explained – as did Augustine – that Christ came to this marriage to reveal that He was the one foretold by the psalmist under the image of the sun, who would be like a bridegroom coming from his bride chamber, having exalted like a giant to run the way ... (Ps 18:6/19:5).<sup>149</sup> A little further on he adds that the Bridegroom is Christ and the bride is the Church, and later still he explains that Jesus manifested his glory by performing the first of his signs at Cana to make clear that he was the King of glory and the Church's Bridegroom.<sup>150</sup> Bede also identified Christ as the Bridegroom based on his understanding of John the Baptist's declaration of his own unworthiness to even loosen the strap of the sandal on the one that would follow him.<sup>151</sup> Bede explains that this was related to a decree of the law regarding marriage by the rule of next of kin.<sup>152</sup> John did not want people to think that he was the Bridegroom and consequently lose the Bridegroom's friendship so made clear to the people that he was the friend of the Bridegroom (John 3:29). Bede continues to explain, as did Cyprian and Caesarius of Arles earlier, that Moses and Joshua were similarly commanded to undo their sandals even though they were the leaders of the synagogue because they were similarly friends of the Bridegroom while the one who gave these mandates was the Bridegroom.<sup>153</sup>

In a homily given on the feast of Epiphany Bede described the Church as the spouse of Christ and explained that in the Song of Songs the Church sings in praise of her Beloved, Christ.<sup>154</sup> In this homily he referred to the Song of Songs' descriptions of the eyes of both the Bridegroom and the Bride being like those of doves (Song of Songs 1:14; 5:12).<sup>155</sup> In discussing the importance of the dove, Bede linked this to another Song of Songs' verse in which the figure representing

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<sup>148</sup> See DeGregorio, 'Introduction,' 8-9, and other contributors to *Innovation and Tradition*.

<sup>149</sup> Bede, *Hom I.14: CCSL 122*, 95-96; Martin and Hurst (1991) 135. See further below.

<sup>150</sup> Bede, *Hom I.14: CCSL 122*, 96 and 103; Martin and Hurst (1991) 135 and 145.

<sup>151</sup> See Matt 3:11; Mark 1:7; Luke 3:16; John 1:27, and above.

<sup>152</sup> See Deut 25:5-9; Ruth 3-4, and above.

<sup>153</sup> Bede, *Hom I.1: CCSL 122*, 5; Martin and Hurst (1991) 6. See above for Cyprian and Caesarius of Arles.

<sup>154</sup> Bede, *Hom I.12: CCSL 122*, 86; Martin and Hurst (1991) 121.

<sup>155</sup> See Bede, *Hom I.12: CCSL 122*, 85-86; Martin and Hurst (1991) 120-121.

Christ says that his dove nests in the ‘clefts of the rock, in the hollow places of the wall’ (Song of Songs 2:14). Bede explained that the rock is Christ (1Cor 10:4) and his hands were pierced by nails and his side was pierced by a lance from which blood and water immediately flowed out to reveal the mystery of our sanctification and cleansing (John 19:34).<sup>156</sup> Christ then is the cleft of the rock in which the dove can nest. He also explains that the wall is the united virtue of the saints, who through fraternal love assist the weaker souls among the faithful and allow them to figuratively nest in the hollow places of the wall. Bede adds that the small in faith should always humbly accept help from the stronger and, like the dove nesting in the cleft of rock, must take care to be always sanctified by the sacraments of the Lord’s passion.<sup>157</sup>

Bede often returned to the piercing of Christ’s side from John’s account of the Crucifixion in discussing Christ’s relationship with the Church and with the faithful. The importance of this for Augustine has been seen above. Bede followed Augustine in regarding the blood and water that flowed from Christ’s side as figures for the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist, as in seen in his homily for Epiphany.<sup>158</sup> He explains that it is through these sacraments that the Church is born and nourished in Christ and again follows Augustine in noting that the Church has been produced from the side of her Redeemer while he was dying for her sake.<sup>159</sup> In his commentary on Acts Bede also referred to the blood that flowed from Christ’s side on the Cross, and stated that the blood flowed in a vigorous stream even though he was dead, which is not normal for human bodies, as a sign of our salvation and of the life born from death.<sup>160</sup> Bede also repeatedly linked the description of the opening of Christ’s side with the account of Solomon’s temple in 1Kings. In commenting on the description of the door leading to the stairs in the south wall (1Kings 6:8) in his *On the Temple*, Bede

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<sup>156</sup> Cf. Origen, *In Exodum homiliae*, 11.2: SC 321, 330; *FOTC* 71, 357, see above n.30, in which Origen similarly relates the opening of Christ’s side in John’s Crucifixion account with Moses making water flow from a rock in Exodus 17:3 and 1Cor 10:4.

<sup>157</sup> Bede, *Hom I.12*: CCSL 122, 86; Martin and Hurst (1991) 121-122. On Bede’s view that the Church is never separated from Christ, see Spreadbury, ‘The Gender of the Church’, 94-95.

<sup>158</sup> See also Bede, *Hom II.15*: CCSL 122, 284; Martin and Hurst (1991) 140. *Hom II.1*: CCSL 122, 191; Martin and Hurst (1991) 10-11. *De Templo (On the Temple)*, bk.1, st.8.1: CCSL 119A, 166; Connolly (1995) 30. Bede also wrote that the water and blood served to cleanse the works of believers, *Hom II.5*: CCSL 122, 216; Martin and Hurst (1991) 46. See above for Augustine on this theme.

<sup>159</sup> Bede, *Hom II.15*: CCSL 122, 284; Martin and Hurst (1991) 140. *Hom II.4*: CCSL 122, 209; Martin and Hurst (1991) 36.

<sup>160</sup> Bede, *Expositio Actuum Apostolorum*, c.2.19: CCSL 121, 19; Martin (1989) 32.



explained that this door was on the eastern side of the southern wall, *i.e.* the right-hand side of the house. He writes that this refers to the Lord's body, explaining that the door is on the right because Holy Church believes that the Lord's right side was opened by the soldier's spear. He then notes, as did Augustine, that the evangelist used the word 'opened' when describing the wounding of Christ's side and explains that this is to say that a door to heavenly things was opened for us.<sup>161</sup> Bede is following Augustine's above-mentioned tractate on John's gospel, but relating Christ's wounding to the description of the door in the south wall of the temple seems to be his own interpretation. Bede also does not in this case refer to Ezekiel's vision of the temple, in which water flowed out from the right side (Ezek 47:1), even though this could be more obviously related to the opening of Christ's side. In Bede's temple commentary he explains that as the door in the temple wall opens on to stairs that lead to the middle and upper storeys of the temple it is through this door given to us by our Redeemer that those in the Church can ascend to the middle storey that is the repose of souls after death, and from there to the immortality of the body after Judgement Day.<sup>162</sup> Bede also presents this Christological interpretation of the door in the south wall of the temple, noting that it leads to eternal life and the resurrection of the body, in discussing Solomon's building on other occasions in his exegetical works.<sup>163</sup>

While Bede does see the opening of Christ's side as signalling the birth of the Church and the blood and water as figures for the saving sacraments as Augustine did, he does not refer to the creation of Eve (Gen 2:21-24) as a pre-figuring of the creation of Christ's spouse – in the works just referred to – though this interpretation would very probably have been known to him. That he sees the description of a doorway in Solomon's temple as a figure of Christ reveals much about Bede's mind-set.<sup>164</sup> In his exegesis of 1Kings 6:8 in the light of John

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<sup>161</sup> Bede, *De Templo*, bk.1, st.8.1: CCSL 119A, 165-166; Connolly (1995) 29.

<sup>162</sup> Bede, *De Templo*, bk.1, st.8.1: CCSL 119A, 165-166; Connolly (1995) 29-30.

<sup>163</sup> See Bede, *In Esram et Neemiam (On Ezra and Nehemiah)*, bk.2: CCSL 119A, 300-301; DeGregorio (2006) 97-99. *Hom II.1*: CCSL 122, 190-191; Martin and Hurst (1991) 10-11. *In Regum Librum XXX Quaestiones (Thirty Questions on the Book of Kings)*, Q.12: CCSL 119, 304; Foley (1999) 107-109. See S. DeGregorio, *Bede: On Ezra and Nehemiah* (Liverpool 2006) 98, n.1.

<sup>164</sup> The temple image plays a major part in much of Bede's exegesis, see his *De Templo, De Tabernaculo, In Esram et Neemiam, Hom II.1, II.24, and II.25*: CCSL 122, 184-192 and 358-378;

19:34, Bede focuses his attention on Christ's body, and not only his body that is the whole Church, but the body that he had assumed from the Virgin. In his commentary on Ezra he wrote that the verse from 1Kings 'specifically presented a figure of the Lord's body about which it is written, But one of the soldiers opened his side with a spear, and immediately there flowed out blood and water (John 19:34).'<sup>165</sup> In *On the Temple*, he wrote:

This place [*i.e.* 1Kings 6:8], of course, properly refers to the Lord's body which he received from the virgin. For the door to the middle section was on the right of the house because when the Lord died on the cross one of the soldiers opened his side with a spear. And aptly <does it say> on the right hand of the house because the holy Church believes his right side was opened by the soldier.<sup>166</sup>

In commenting on this passage in his *Thirty Questions on Kings* he wrote that this denotes the body that Christ assumed from the Virgin so that he could be the Church's head.<sup>167</sup> In each of these cases his emphasis is on the Virgin's role in the Word becoming flesh. Elsewhere in a homily for the dedication of a church, Bede discussed the forty-six years that it took to build the temple for the second time. He wrote that it is claimed that the human body is articulated into its separate members on the forty-sixth day after the start of its conception and suggests that it was divinely arranged that the temple, which pre-figured the Lord's body, was built during the same number of years as the days required for the Lord's body to be developed in the Virgin's womb.<sup>168</sup> Bede emphasizes that Christ received his physical body from the Virgin and this is in keeping with orthodox thinking as it developed in response to the controversies concerning the

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Martin and Hurst (1991) 1-12 and 241-268. See O'Reilly, intro., *Bede: On the Temple*, xxviii-li, for discussion of Bede's use of temple imagery in his exegesis and in the *HE*.

<sup>165</sup> Bede, *In Esram et Neemiam*, bk.2: *CCSL* 119A, ll 510-512, 300; DeGregorio (2006) 98, ... *specialiter dominici corporis figuram praetulit de quo scriptum est, Sed unus militum lancea latus eius aperuit, et continuo exiuit sanguis et aqua.*

<sup>166</sup> Bede, *De Templo*, bk.1, st.8.1: *CCSL* 119A, ll 759-764, 166; Connolly (1995) 29, *Qui nimirum locus proprie ad corpus dominicum quod de uirgine sumpsit respicit, Ostium namque lateris medii in parte erat domus dextrae quia defuncto in cruce domino unus militum lancea latus eius aperuit. Et bene in parte domus dextrae quia dextrum eius latus a milite apertum sancta credit ecclesia.*

<sup>167</sup> Bede, *In Regum Librum XXX Quaestiones*, Q.12: *CCSL* 119, 304; Foley (1999) 108.

<sup>168</sup> Bede, *Hom II.24*: *CCSL* 122, 365; Martin and Hurst (1991) 250-251. On the significance of 46, see J. O'Reilly, 'The Library of Scripture: Views from Vivarium and Wearmouth-Jarrow,' in P. Binski and W. Noel, ed., *New Offerings, Ancient Treasures* (Sutton 2001) 3-39 at 33, and W. Berschin, 'Opus deliberatum ac perfectum: Why did the Venerable Bede write a second Prose Life of St Cuthbert?', in G. Bonner, D. Rollason, and C. Stancliffe, ed., *St Cuthbert, his Cult and his Community to AD 1200* (Woodbridge 1989) 95-102 at 99-101.

two natures in Christ. Bede also follows Augustine in noting that Christ received his body from the Virgin so that he could become the head of the Church, which traces the union between Christ and the Church to the Virgin's womb.<sup>169</sup> Bede succeeds in combining the Christian view of Christ as the temple (see John 2:19-21) with Christ's role as head of the Church as described in the Pauline epistles and links these with the miracle of the Incarnation. For Bede then, Christ's marriage to the Church does not begin with the opening of His side at the Passion, but much earlier in the Virgin's womb.

Bede's view of the significance of the Incarnation is most clearly evident in his *Homilies on the Gospels*.<sup>170</sup> In his homily on the Annunciation, Bede describes the miracle by which the Word became incarnate in the Virgin's womb. He explains that the Holy Spirit created the body of the Redeemer in the Virgin's womb having formed Christ's flesh from her inviolate flesh.<sup>171</sup> Bede then describes Christ's divinity as like the sun and says that it was his rays that Mary received when she conceived the Lord, but adds that this sun cloaked itself with the covering of human nature as with a shade so that a virgin's womb could bear him. In this way Mary was over-shadowed by the power of the Most High and able to conceive a son though still a virgin (Luke 1:35).<sup>172</sup> In accepting God's will as she did (Luke 1:38) Bede draws attention to Mary's great humility in describing herself as the handmaid of the Lord at the time when she was chosen to be his mother.<sup>173</sup> He notes that in allowing this to take place Mary was in effect saying:

Let it be done that the Holy Spirit's coming to me may render me worthy of heavenly mysteries; let it be done that in my womb the Son of God may put on the condition of human substance, and may proceed like a bridegroom from his chamber (Ps 18:6/19:5) for the redemption of the world.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> Bede, *In Regum Librum XXX Quaestiones*, Q.12: CCSL 119, 304; Foley (1999) 108. See Augustine above.

<sup>170</sup> In discussing Bede's difference in emphasis in his various works, Arthur Holder has recently described his *Homilies on the Gospels* as 'a close-up of the years of Christ's Incarnation,' see 'Christ as Incarnate Wisdom,' 179.

<sup>171</sup> Bede, *Hom I.3*: CCSL 122, 18; Martin and Hurst (1991) 24.

<sup>172</sup> Bede, *Hom I.3*: CCSL 122, 19; Martin and Hurst (1991) 25. Christ's human nature is often regarded as a shield or cloud to enable him to be seen with eyes of the flesh in the world.

<sup>173</sup> Bede, *Hom I.3*: CCSL 122, 20; Martin and Hurst (1991) 27.

<sup>174</sup> Bede, *Hom I.3*: CCSL 122, ll 227-231, 20; Martin and Hurst (1991) 27, *fiat ut spiritus sanctus adueniens me caelestibus dignam mysteriis reddat; fiat ut in meo utero filius Dei humanae substantiae habitum induat atque ad redemptionem mundi tamquam sponsus suo procedat de thalamo.*

Bede believed that Mary had been instructed in the hidden mysteries of humanity's redemption before other mortals. Bede's description of her acceptance of the Lord's will demonstrates that Bede regarded her womb as the Lord's bridechamber where His divinity would be joined to humanity and from there He would set forth to redeem the world, and is in keeping with the views of patristic commentators already considered.

While Bede on this occasion looks to the evidence of Psalm 18(19), he expands on this image to demonstrate the centrality of the Incarnation in his (already-mentioned) homily on the wedding feast of Cana. As noted above, he explains that Christ came to this marriage to reveal that he was the Bridegroom prophesied by the psalmist under the image of the sun.<sup>175</sup> Bede continues in this homily to explain:

Therefore the bridegroom is Christ, the bride is the Church, and the friends of the bridegroom (Matt 9:15; Luke 5:34), or of the marriage (Mark 2:19) are each and every one of his faithful. The time of the marriage is that time when, through the mystery of the incarnation, he joined holy Church to himself.<sup>176</sup>

Bede clearly reveals his view that the marriage between Christ and the Church took place at the time of the Incarnation, and on this occasion he sees all faithful Christians as not solely members of the Church but also friends of the Bridegroom or of the marriage between Christ and the Church. Bede writes that the nuptial chamber for this marriage was the Virgin's womb, where God was joined to human nature so that on leaving the womb he could join the Church to himself.<sup>177</sup> He came to an earthly marriage at Cana for a mystical meaning because he had descended to earth from heaven for his marriage to the Church in spiritual love.<sup>178</sup> Bede sees the Incarnation in Judea, 'where the Son of God deigned to become a human being and to consecrate the Church by a sharing in his body,' as the 'first marriage-place'. It was at that time that the Church

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<sup>175</sup> Bede, *Hom* I.14, referring to Ps 18:6(19:5): *CCSL* 122, 95-96; Martin and Hurst (1991) 135. See above.

<sup>176</sup> Bede, *Hom* I.14: *CCSL* 122, ll 31-35, 96; Martin and Hurst (1991) 135, *Sponsus ergo Christus sponsa eius est ecclesia filii sponsi uel nuptiarum singuli quique fidelium eius sunt; tempus nuptiarum tempus est illud quando per incarnationis mysterium sanctam sibi ecclesiam sociavit.*

<sup>177</sup> Bede also comments on the union between the human and divine natures in Christ in this homily, noting that Jesus' response to his mother's concern that the wine had run short revealed that even though he had received flesh from her, his divinity was separate and the two natures had nothing in common, *Hom* I.14: *CCSL* 122, 97; Martin and Hurst (1991) 137.

<sup>178</sup> Bede, *Hom* I.14: *CCSL* 122, 96; Martin and Hurst (1991) 135.

became one with Christ. Bede then adds that the same ‘joyful marriage vows’ that were celebrated in Judea at that time have since spread to the ends of the earth with the calling of the gentiles to the faith.<sup>179</sup>

(ii) *Bede’s HE*

Bede’s exegesis reveals that he followed orthodox thinking in recognising the centrality of the Incarnation for the redemption of the world and regarding Christ as the Church’s Bridegroom, tracing their marriage to this event.<sup>180</sup> After Christ’s Passion, Resurrection and Ascension, the Church is fortified by the Holy Spirit and at work in the world having replaced the Synagogue under the new dispensation,<sup>181</sup> but it was first united to Christ when he received human flesh from the Virgin in her womb. At this point He became the Head of the Church and left the womb to join the Church completely to Himself. It is clear from Bede’s homily on the wedding feast of Cana that he believed that this marriage between Christ and the Church extends throughout the world to include all peoples, even gentiles. This is very significant for a reading of the *HE*, which concerns the spreading of Christianity to the Anglo-Saxons who are gentiles at the ends of the earth.

Earlier in this chapter the belief that Psalm 18(19), regarded as the missionary psalm, prophesied the spread of Christianity to the ends of the earth was considered and in this context it was noted that various people, including a pope, invoked this psalm when referring to the conversion of these islands.<sup>182</sup> The next part of this psalm (as noted) refers to the Incarnation, which is the message being spread by the voices throughout the world. It has been persuasively argued that Old Testament, patristic and classical ideas of the ends of the earth inform Bede’s account of the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons in the

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<sup>179</sup> Bede, *Hom* I.14: *CCSL* 122, ll 41-45, 96; Martin and Hurst (1991) 135-136, *Primus nuptiarum locus in Iudaea exstitit in qua filius Dei homo fieri et ecclesiam sui corporis participatione consecrare sui spiritus pignore in fide confirmare dignatus est; sed uocatis ad fidem gentibus usque ad fines orbis terrae earundem nuptiarum uotiuua gaudia peruenerunt.*

<sup>180</sup> See Holder, ‘Christ as Incarnate Wisdom,’ 180, who writes that the Incarnation was the centre-point in time for Bede.

<sup>181</sup> See Bede’s homily for the Easter Vigil, *Hom* II.7: *CCSL* 122, 225-232; Martin and Hurst (1991) 58-68.

<sup>182</sup> See above n.37. See Patrick, *Confessio (Confession)*, st.9 and 40: Conneely (1993) 31 and 42-53; 64 and 71-72. Columbanus, *Ep*.V.11: Walker (1997) 48-49. Adomnán, *Vita Columbae (Life of Columba)*, bk.iii.23: Sharpe (1995). Pope Boniface to Justus, *HE* II.8, 160-161.

*HE*.<sup>183</sup> In conjunction with this it seems appropriate to suggest that the Christological and ecclesiological concepts of marriage as expressed in patristic commentaries and in Bede's exegesis may play a similarly important role in Bede's account of Anglo-Saxon conversion. The centrality of the Incarnation is demonstrated every time that Bede uses the *A.D.* system of dating. To synchronise various systems of dating based on the reigns of various Anglo-Saxon kings from different kingdoms, bishops spread across the country, and Roman Emperors was an onerous task and required remarkable skill if it were to be accomplished effectively, as it is in this case. Bede had previously used the *annus mundi* method of dating in his *Greater Chronicle*, which concerned the history of the world from the creation to the end of time.<sup>184</sup> His decision to use *A.D.* dates in the *HE* was revolutionary at the time and taken for theological reasons. Unfortunately the significance of Bede's choice is difficult for a modern audience to appreciate.

The conversion of the Anglo-Saxons as described in the *HE* is contemporary with the Monothelite controversy in the Eastern Empire, which had significant repercussions throughout the Church. The Synod of Hatfield (679) was called as part of the Western Church's response and John the arch-cantor of St Peter's, who had brought over the *Acta* of the 649 Lateran Council, was to return to Rome with a copy of the Hatfield synod's proceedings.<sup>185</sup> Bede's *Greater Chronicle* and his use of the *Liber Pontificalis* reveals that he was very aware of the intricacies of this controversy but he pays little attention to this in the *HE*.<sup>186</sup> We also know that Bede's abbot, Benedict Biscop, was in Rome at various significant times during the seventh-century. Indeed, his first visit was in c.652/653, shortly after the 649 Lateran Council and around the time that Pope Martin was arrested by the Emperor Constans, and brought to Constantinople, where he was tried, and found guilty, of treason and sentenced to exile in the

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<sup>183</sup> See above, O'Reilly, 'Islands and Idols at the Ends of the Earth,' 119-145, and Scully, *The Atlantic Archipelago from Antiquity to Bede*.

<sup>184</sup> See Holder, 'Christ as Incarnate Wisdom,' 179-180 on Bede's dating systems for the *HE* and *Greater Chronicle*.

<sup>185</sup> *HE* IV.17(15)-18(16), 385-391. Bede's modern editors in the Oxford World's Classics' edition erroneously suggest in their notes that he 'was unaware of the wider purposes of the synod [of Hatfield] and mistaken as to its significance', J. McClure and R. Collins, ed., *Bede: The Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Oxford 1999) 405.

<sup>186</sup> See Bede, *De Temporum Ratione (On the Reckoning of Time)*, c.66 (*Chronica Maiora*): CCSL 123B, 525-528; Wallis (1999) 229-232.

Crimea. Martin died there in 655, after the Roman Church had taken the unprecedented action of electing a new pope, Eugene, while the previous incumbent was still alive. Benedict could not have been unaware of these happenings during his first visit to Rome.<sup>187</sup> Wilfrid was also in Rome at this period, having left Kent with Benedict Biscop, though they parted company on the way as Wilfrid delayed in Gaul.<sup>188</sup> Through these contacts, many Northumbrians in the monastic life would have been very aware of events in Rome during the second half of the seventh-century.

In Bede's writings his theology is firmly orthodox. His exegesis stresses the union of the two natures in Christ at the time of the Incarnation in the Virgin's womb and he repeatedly refers to the role of the Virgin, from whom the Word received flesh. He has clearly been influenced by patristic commentaries on the union of Christ's human and divine natures and his exegesis, even when applying his own interpretation, is in accord with orthodox thinking. While this wider background is not greatly in evidence in the *HE*, Bede's knowledge of the dispute and his awareness of orthodox views underlie what he does write. That he dates the whole book from the Incarnation of the Lord reveals his belief in the centrality of that event, the significance of which was disputed by the opponents of orthodoxy. If Christ was not both fully God and fully man united in one person but not inter-mingled, then the orthodox believed that his sacrifice was not redemptive for humanity. The Incarnation was therefore of paramount importance, as this union of the two natures in him took place in the Virgin's womb, which came to be regarded as Christ's nuptial chamber. As seen, Bede

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<sup>187</sup> See *Historia Abbatum (Lives of the Abbots)*, c.2: Plummer (1969); Farmer (1998) 188. Benedict also visited Rome in the mid 660s, c.671, c.678/679, and c.683/684, see *Historia Abbatum*, c.3-4, 6 and 9: Plummer (1969); Farmer (1998) 189-191, 192-193 and 196. Cf. *HE* IV.18(16), 388-391. Ceolfrith accompanied Benedict on his pilgrimage to Rome in c.678/679 and hoped to return in 716 but died on the way, *Historia Abbatum* 7 and 16-21: Plummer (1969); Farmer (1998) 193 and 204-209. Cf. *Vita Ceolfridi anonymo (The Anonymous History of Abbot Ceolfrith)* 10 and 21-31: Plummer (1969); Farmer (1998) 216 and 220-225. Ceolfrith also sent a delegation to Rome during the papacy of Sergius (687-701) and his successor as abbot, Hwætberht, had also visited the city during the reign of Sergius, perhaps as a member of Ceolfrith's delegation, *Historia Abbatum* 15 and 18: Plummer (1969); Farmer (1998) 203 and 206. Cf. *Vita Ceolfridi anonymo* 20: Plummer (1969); Farmer (1998) 220. After Ceolfrith's death en route to Rome a number of his monks continued the pilgrimage and presented Ceolfrith's Bible (the *Codex Amiatinus*) to the pope, *Vita Ceolfridi anonymo* 37: Plummer (1969); Farmer (1998) 227.

<sup>188</sup> *Life of Wilfrid*, c.3-4: Colgrave (1985) 8-11. Wilfrid returned to the city in c.679, and attended the Roman Church's synod (680) in preparation for the Sixth Ecumenical Council to be held in Constantinople, and went to Rome again in c.704, *Life of Wilfrid*, c.29-32 and 50-55: Colgrave (1985) 56-67 and 102-121. Cf. *HE* V.19, 522-527.

shared this belief, and it seems probable then that all the dates throughout the book repeatedly remind the reader of Christ's Incarnation to reveal the Christ-centred view of salvation history, which in the *HE* is being worked out among the Anglo-Saxon peoples on the island of Britain during the seventh-century.

As a result of the spread of Christianity to the Anglo-Saxons they too come to share in the marriage union between Christ and His Church, which had its beginning in the Virgin's womb at the Incarnation. The extension of the Church is often expressed through marriage imagery in the book. The image is used in various ways to describe the conversion of kings, followed by their subjects, or conversion to the monastic life, where one dedicates oneself wholly to the heavenly Bridegroom, Christ. The cases that follow reveal the gradual extension of Christianity throughout Anglo-Saxon England to different peoples at different times and in different ways. In every case the Anglo-Saxons individually and in a corporate sense are becoming members of the Church, the bride of Christ, and consequently – following the Christological and Ecclesiological understanding of marriage imagery – the Anglo-Saxons are becoming members of Christ.



## C.2 – Edwin and Æthelburh: Royal Marriage and the King’s Conversion

Bede’s *Historia Ecclesiastica* is concerned with the spreading of faith to all peoples and their subsequent inclusion within the Church, the body of Christ. In this context it is significant that in the *HE* several royal marriages between a Christian and an un-believer lead to the spreading of Christianity. Through an earthly marriage the converted spouse (usually a king) and subsequently his people come to share in the divine and everlasting marriage between Christ and his Church. This is most pertinent in the case of King Edwin of Northumbria, whose marriage to Æthelburh of Kent leads to his own conversion and subsequently to that of all of his followers.<sup>189</sup> There are also other similar cases in the *HE*: Æthelberht of Kent’s marriage to the Frankish princess, Bertha; and Paeda of Mercia and Alhflæd of Northumbria’s marriage, preceded by that of Alhflæd’s brother, Alhfrith of Northumbria and Cyneburg of Mercia, Paeda’s sister.<sup>190</sup> Marriages between Christians and unbelievers were for a long time a recognised means of conversion in barbarian societies. The most famous account was Gregory of Tours’ on the conversion of King Clovis, in which Clotild, Clovis’ Christian wife, plays an important part through both her words to him and her prayers for him.<sup>191</sup> Popes Gregory the Great and Boniface V were aware that Christian spouses could bring their unbelieving partners to conversion, and both sent letters to queens encouraging them to convert their pagan husbands: Gregory to Bertha in Kent, and Boniface to Bertha’s daughter, Æthelburh in Northumbria.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> *HE* II.9, 162-163.

<sup>190</sup> See *HE* I.25, 72-77, although Æthelberht was converted by Augustine’s mission from Rome the fact that he had a Christian wife prepared the ground for the Roman missionaries; III.21, 278-279.

<sup>191</sup> Gregory of Tours, *Historia Francorum (History of the Franks)*, bk.II.28-31: *MGH SRM* 1:1, 89-93; Thorpe (1985) 141-145. See R. Fletcher, *The Conversion of Europe: From Paganism to Christianity, 371-1386 AD* (London 1998) 104; C.M. Cusack, *The Rise of Christianity in Northern Europe, 300-1000* (London 1998) 68-71.

<sup>192</sup> *Gregorius Bertae Reginae Anglorum (Gregory to Bertha, queen of the English)*, bk.11.35: *CCSL* 140A, 923-924; Martyn (2004) 778-779. *Dominae gloriosa filiae Aedilbergae reginae Bonifatius episcopus seruus seruorum Dei (To his daughter the most illustrious lady, Queen Æthelburh, Bishop Boniface, servant of the servants of God)*, *HE* II.11, 172-173 (*PL* 80, 438-440). See M.A. Meyer, ‘Queens, Convents and Conversion in Early Anglo-Saxon England,’ *Revue Bénédictine* 109:1-2 (1999) 90-116, at 93; Stephanie Hollis suggests that both pontiffs were influenced by Clotild’s role in Clovis’ conversion, *Anglo-Saxon Women and the Church: sharing a common fate* (Woodbridge 1992) 222.

Following his own conversion, Edwin encouraged another king, Eorpwold of the East Angles (Rædwald's son and successor as king) to accept Christianity,<sup>193</sup> and he introduced the faith to the kingdom of Lindsey.<sup>194</sup> As well as spreading Christianity throughout their own kingdoms, a dominant king encouraging subordinate kings to convert, and supplying preachers as bishops, became a very useful means of spreading the faith.<sup>195</sup> Æthelberht of Kent succeeded in converting the East Saxons who were ruled by his nephew, Sæberht, and Rædwald of East Anglia became a Christian while at the court of Kent, but reverted to idol worship after returning home.<sup>196</sup> The East Saxons also returned to pagan practices during the reigns of Sæberht's sons, but were later re-converted by Oswiu of Northumbria, who is presented preaching to their king, Sigeberht, about the limitations of man-made idols.<sup>197</sup> Many Christian kings also stand as godfather at the baptism of a newly converted king. Although their role in the actual conversion is often not stated in Bede's text, their attendance at these kings' baptisms suggests they may have had a part to play in their final decision to convert. Oswald of Northumbria was godfather for Cynegisl of the West Saxons, even though Birinus who had been sent by Pope Honorius converted them; Æthelwold of the East Angles was sponsor to Swithelm of the East Saxons' sponsor; and Wulfhere of Mercia persuaded Æthelwealh of the South Saxons to convert and accepted him as a son after his baptism.<sup>198</sup> These personal contacts introduced an important form of spiritual kinship to the Anglo-Saxons.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> *HE* II.15, 188-189. For Rædwald's assistance to Edwin, *HE* II.12, 180-181.

<sup>194</sup> *HE* II.16, 190-193.

<sup>195</sup> After Peada's baptism at the Northumbrian court he brought Cedd, Adda, Betti, and Diuma back to his kingdom (of the Middle Angles), *HE* III.21, 278-279. Oswiu persuaded Sigeberht, the king of the East Saxons, to convert and summoned Cedd from the kingdom of the Middle Angles to send him to the East Saxons instead, *HE* III.22, 282-283.

<sup>196</sup> *HE* II.3, 142-143; II.15, 188-191.

<sup>197</sup> *HE* II.5, 152-155; III.22, 280-283. See A. Angenendt on the phenomenon of royal sons of Anglo-Saxon kings often remaining pagan after their father's conversion, 'The Conversion of the Anglo-Saxons considered against the background of the Early Medieval Mission,' in *Angli e Sassoni al di qua e al di là del mare, Settimane di studio del centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo* 32 (Spoleto 1986) 747-781, at 750-754.

<sup>198</sup> *HE* III.7, 232-233, see Fletcher, *Conversion of Europe* 161 on Birinus' background; III.22, 284-285; IV.13, 372-373. See Angenendt, 'The Conversion of the Anglo-Saxons,' 757-769.

<sup>199</sup> See J. Campbell, 'Observations on the Conversion of England,' repr. in J. Campbell, *Essays in Anglo-Saxon History* (London 1986) 69-84 at 74-75; J.H. Lynch, *Godparents and Kinship in Early Medieval Europe* (Princeton 1986) 242-249; J.H. Lynch, 'Spiritale Vinculum: The Vocabulary of Spiritual Kinship in Early Medieval Europe,' in T.F.X. Noble and J.J. Contremi,

The importance of securing active support and the baptism of kings cannot be over-estimated in considering the mission to the Anglo-Saxons. Bede's presentation of Edwin's conversion emphasizes the importance of his marriage to Æthelburh in bringing this about. This royal marriage is the focus of the present chapter and subsequent events (including the marriage of their daughter Eanflæd to Oswiu of Northumbria) will be considered in the following one.

### **Bede's account of Edwin's conversion**

Bede moves his narrative to Northumbria in chapter nine of book two of the *Historia*. In the previous chapter Bede included Pope Boniface V's letter to Archbishop Justus, which congratulated him on the success of his efforts among the Anglo-Saxons thus far and hoped that Justus' ministry would lead to the complete conversion of all the peoples subject to Eadbald of Kent and also their neighbours.<sup>200</sup> Bede then begins chapter nine by writing 'At this time (*Quo tempore*) the Northumbrian race,' along with their king Edwin accepted the preaching of Bishop Paulinus and were converted to Christianity.<sup>201</sup> He proceeds to relate the details of Edwin's progression to Christianity, explaining that the king's earthly power had greatly increased before his conversion 'as an augury that he was to become a believer and have a share in the heavenly kingdom.'<sup>202</sup> Bede then moves to the reason for the Northumbrians' conversion, writing that this took place because of Edwin's alliance with the kings of Kent through his marriage to Æthelburh (also called Tate), the daughter of Æthelberht. He outlines the marriage arrangement including the decision to send Paulinus – after his consecration as bishop (21 July 625) – in Æthelburh's company to safeguard her Christianity and acknowledges Paulinus' desire to convert the Northumbrian

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ed., *Religion, Culture and Society in the Early Middle Ages* (Kalamazoo 1987) 181-204; and J.H. Lynch, *Christianizing Kinship: Ritual Sponsorship in Anglo-Saxon England* (Ithaca 1998).

<sup>200</sup> *HE* II.8, 160-161.

<sup>201</sup> *HE* II.9, 162-163. Bede's language – *Quo tempore* – is necessarily quite general here. Edwin was not baptised until 627, two years after the death of Pope Boniface V, and Paulinus' mission among the Northumbrians began in 625 after he was consecrated bishop by Archbishop Justus, which would have taken place after Justus received licence to consecrate bishops from the pope (c.624). Edwin and his people did not convert to Christianity at the time that Boniface wrote to Justus but around that time and during the archbishopric of Justus. This letter allows Bede to fluidly move his narrative from Kent to Northumbria.

<sup>202</sup> *HE* II.9, 162-163. According to Bede, Edwin held under his sway more peoples than any English king before him.

people and his early but failed attempts to do so.<sup>203</sup> He includes a dramatic tale of a West Saxon attempt to assassinate the Northumbrian king that ends with Edwin wounded, his loyal thegn Lilla and the assassin dead, and Æthelburh giving birth to the couple's first child – their daughter Eanflæd – all on Easter Sunday (626). Edwin allows Paulinus to baptise his daughter, and promises to convert to Christianity if he is successful against the king who sent the assassin to his court. Eanflæd is baptised on Pentecost along with eleven others from the king's household and Bede clearly states that she is the first of the Northumbrians to be baptised. After defeating the West Saxons however, Edwin is still unwilling to accept baptism but he renounces idol worship.<sup>204</sup>

At this point in the book, Bede interrupts his narrative to include two letters sent from Pope Boniface V to the king and queen of Northumbria, exhorting Edwin to convert to Christianity and encouraging Æthelburh to do everything she can to influence her husband. These letters are deeply theological containing concise creedal statements and explicitly presenting the Christian view of marriage for the benefit of the royal couple and subsequently the reader of the *HE*.<sup>205</sup> In the next chapter Bede returns to his account of Edwin's conversion and again stresses its providential nature. Bede surmises that Paulinus became aware of a miraculous experience of Edwin's when he was in exile in East Anglia during his predecessor's reign. While spending a sleepless night in fear for his life, Edwin was approached by a strange man (or spirit according to Bede later in the chapter) who prophesied a change in fortune for the king to be followed by much future success and received Edwin's assurances that if this took place he would gladly listen to anyone who gave him better advice concerning his salvation than his ancestors had heard, if that person also used the same sign as his nocturnal messenger. Edwin's fortunes subsequently improved and he became king of Northumbria with assistance from Rædwald of East Anglia. When Paulinus became aware of Edwin's earlier experience he approached the king and placing his hand on Edwin's head, as the stranger had done years earlier, asked him if he recognised the sign and reminded Edwin of

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<sup>203</sup> *HE* II.9, 162-163.

<sup>204</sup> *HE* II.9, 164-167.

<sup>205</sup> *HE* II.10, 166-171 and II.11, 172-175.

his promise.<sup>206</sup> Edwin agreed to accept Christianity and after conferring with his chief men and counsellors they all agreed to be baptised with their king, which took place on Easter Sunday (12 April) 627.<sup>207</sup> Edwin and the chief of his pagan priests, Coifi, also destroyed their pagan idols and the idols' former enclosures.<sup>208</sup> Bede then relates Paulinus' work in preaching and baptizing throughout Northumbria and in neighbouring kingdoms, and Edwin's success in persuading Eorpwold of the East Angles to become a Christian.<sup>209</sup> Bede follows this by including another papal letter sent to Edwin, this time from Pope Honorius (Boniface's successor), which commends Edwin for his efforts in spreading Christianity.<sup>210</sup> Bede ends his account of Edwin with the king's death in battle in 633 against Penda's Mercians supported by a British Christian king named Cædwalla. All of Northumbria was plundered after his death and Paulinus escorted Æthelburh and other members of Edwin's family to Kent, leaving James the Deacon in the church at York where he continued to teach and baptize.<sup>211</sup>

There are many notable factors in Bede's account of Edwin's conversion but the importance attached by Bede to the king's marriage in bringing this about is one of the most significant. It is worth briefly comparing Bede's account with our other source for Edwin's life, the earlier anonymous *Life of Gregory the Great* written at the monastery of Whitby. Like Bede, this source stresses the providential nature of Edwin's conversion and acknowledges Paulinus' whole-hearted labours in Northumbria, but the anonymous author never refers to Edwin's marriage alliance with Kent or Paulinus' reasons for being in Northumbria. The writer simply explains that Paulinus was one of those that 'Gregory sent us.'<sup>212</sup> While both sources include Edwin's nocturnal encounter

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<sup>206</sup> *HE* II.12, 174-183.

<sup>207</sup> *HE* II.13-14, 182-187. See Angenendt, 'The Conversion of the Anglo-Saxons,' 747-749. On the phenomenon of mass conversions following the baptism of a king see Cusack, *Rise of Christianity* 19, 37, 100-107; on the similarities between accounts of the conversion of pagan kings see Fletcher, *Conversion of Europe* 104.

<sup>208</sup> *HE* II.13, 184-187.

<sup>209</sup> *HE* II.14-16, 186-193.

<sup>210</sup> *HE* II.17, 194-197.

<sup>211</sup> *HE* II.20, 202-207. One of Edwin's retainers named Bass also accompanied this party back to Kent. Hollis has argued that the involvement of Paulinus and Bass in this endeavour is an example of cultural coalition between what she calls 'clerical chivalry' and Germanic sympathy for women as particular sufferers in war, *Anglo-Saxon Women* 90. James the Deacon was still in Northumbria and following the Roman Easter practice at the time of the Synod of Whitby in 664, *HE* III.25, 296-297.

<sup>212</sup> *The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great: By an anonymous monk of Whitby*, c.15: Colgrave (1968) 96-97.

during his exile in East Anglia, they present different versions of Edwin's journey to Christianity.<sup>213</sup> However, the sources do not actively contradict each other and Christianity's introduction to Northumbria during the reign of Edwin by Bishop Paulinus is affirmed in both. Bede's *Greater Chronicle* gives the following bare essentials in his description of Edwin's conversion. He writes that the king and his people in the north of Britain received Christian teaching from Bishop Paulinus who had been sent from Kent by Archbishop Justus; that Paulinus set up his episcopal see at York; and that Edwin's kingdom had greatly increased before his conversion as an indicator of Christianity's impending arrival.<sup>214</sup> In the *HE* Bede presents the reader with the longest and most complete narrative of these events and his emphasis on Edwin's marriage is unique to this work, indeed it is a central component of it.<sup>215</sup>

### **Edwin and Æthelburh's marriage**

Bede's description of the contacts between Northumbria and Kent as Edwin attempted to secure an alliance with the Kentish royal family through marriage has attracted much attention from Anglo-Saxon historians. His account suggests that an embassy was sent from Northumbria to the Kentish court. The request was initially rebuffed by Æthelburh's brother, Eadbald, by then king of Kent, because it was deemed unlawful for a Christian to marry a heathen for fear that

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<sup>213</sup> *Whitby Life*, c.16: Colgrave (1968) 98-101; the anonymous author identifies the mysterious stranger at Rædwald's court as Paulinus. This source does not include the West Saxon attempt on Edwin's life or the birth of his daughter Eanflæd (who Bede described as the first of the Northumbrians to be baptised), or Edwin's council with his senior men before agreeing to be baptised. Instead the Whitby writer includes a story in which Paulinus instructs one of his youths to shoot a crow whose croaking had interrupted his attempts to teach the assembled royal company, to warn them against the dangers of idolatry, c.15: Colgrave (1968) 96-99. Walter Goffart is very dismissive of the *Whitby Life*, describing its account of Edwin's conversion as 'pitifully inadequate', see *The Narrators of Barbarian History (A.D. 550-800): Jordanes, Gregory of Tours, Bede, and Paul the Deacon* (Princeton 1988) 264-267 and 304-306; however, for a valuable re-appraisal of this work see B. Butler, *The Whitby Life of Gregory the Great: Exegesis and hagiography*, unpub. Ph.D. Thesis, N.U.I. Cork (2005).

<sup>214</sup> Bede, *De Temporum Ratione (On the Reckoning of Time)*, c.66 (*Chronica Maiora*): CCSL 123B, 525; Wallis (1999) 228.

<sup>215</sup> Bede had accumulated many more sources for the history of Anglo-Saxon England by the time he wrote his *HE* as acknowledged in his preface to the text. He may not have been aware of the intricacies of the relationship between Kent and Northumbria until then. Even without the benefit of these sources, however, it is unlikely that the author of the *Whitby Life* would have been unaware of Edwin's marriage to Æthelburh as their first daughter, Eanflæd lived at Whitby as joint-abbess after Oswiu's death and the author seems to have known her. The work was also written during the abbacy of Ælflæd, Eanflæd and Oswiu's daughter, see c.18: Colgrave (1968) 102-103.

her relationship with the heavenly King might be profaned by such a union. Following this reply Kent received a guarantee that Edwin would not obstruct Æthelburh and all those in her company in practising their faith. It was also suggested that the king might accept the same religion at some future date if his wise men approved of it.<sup>216</sup> On receiving this assurance the marriage was arranged and Æthelburh was sent to Edwin with Paulinus in her company, whose role was to ensure that the group from Kent were not polluted by their contact with the heathen in Northumbria.<sup>217</sup> This short account has led to much discussion and debate among scholars. It has been seen as a good example of the way in which marriage was used to create diplomatic alliances between families in Anglo-Saxon society, a type of arrangement that can be confirmed by comparison with other Anglo-Saxon sources such as epic poems like *Beowulf*.<sup>218</sup> That Edwin sought this marriage and that Eadbald initially refused to allow it suggests that Kent held the dominant position in this arrangement and is in keeping with what is known about marriage arrangements in this society. To have Æthelburh's interests and independence protected by a figure like Paulinus seems to have been acceptable under these arrangements.<sup>219</sup> Stephanie Hollis suggests that he would have filled the role of the queen's protector in a variation of the part played by the protective retinue of warrior kinsmen who accompanied queens given as peace-weavers.<sup>220</sup>

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<sup>216</sup> It is possible that two separate embassies went to Kent from Northumbria to arrange this marriage, or that only one was sent, which had the authority to make concessions on Edwin's behalf. Bede writes that Edwin promised to respect Æthelburh's Christianity after he heard the messengers' initial reply (*HE* II.9, 162-163), but the detail is unclear.

<sup>217</sup> *HE* II.9, 162-163.

<sup>218</sup> For discussion of marriage in Anglo-Saxon society see R. Hill, 'Marriage in Seventh-Century England,' in M.H. King and W.M. Stevens, ed., *Saints, Scholars and Heroes* I (Collegeville, Minnesota 1979) 67-75; J.A. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (London 1987) 128-135; J.T. Rosenthal, 'Marriage and the blood feud in "heroic" Europe,' *The British Journal of Sociology* 17, no.1 (1966) 133-144; J. Hines, 'Society, Community, and identity,' in T.M. Charles-Edwards, ed., *After Rome* (Oxford 2003) 61-101 at 89,91.

<sup>219</sup> This can be seen in other marriages that Bede mentions: Bertha had her own Gaulish bishop (Liudhard) in Kent, *HE* I.25, 74-75; and Eanflæd brought her own priest (Romanus) to Northumbria when she married Oswiu, which allowed Eanflæd to continue following the Roman Easter, *HE* III.25, 296-297.

<sup>220</sup> Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women* 224. Hollis later in the same work argues that a tradition of contracts existed guaranteeing freedom for a bride and her retinue to practice their own customs at her husband's court, which was not a response to the exclusive demands of Christianity, see 234-238. See also Rosenthal, 'Marriage and the blood feud,' 140; D. Whitelock, *The Beginnings of English Society* (Harmondsworth repr 1974) 45. Paulinus' flight from Northumbria with Æthelburh and members of Edwin's family after the king's death should be understood in this light, *HE* II.20, 204-205. See Chapter Three for more discussion of the role of queens as peace-weavers in this society.

From what can be understood about pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon society, marriage was regarded as a contract between the two families involved and various social, economic and political factors would be taken into account when these unions were being arranged.<sup>221</sup> This is quite unlike the Christian view, in which the relationship between the two individuals is of paramount importance. As it is generally accepted that it took the Church a considerable length of time to establish its influence on aspects of everyday life such as marriage, the Christian character of Eadbald's objection to Edwin's request (as it is transmitted to us), with its clear concern for Æthelburh, has caused some concern among scholars, primarily because it takes place at such an early stage in the conversion period.<sup>222</sup> This is a particularly problematic response for those who have argued that Eadbald was still an unbeliever at the time, entirely discounting Bede's claim that he converted to Christianity during the archbishopric of Laurence.<sup>223</sup> Hollis surmounts these difficulties by suggesting that the guiding hand in these arrangements is ecclesiastical. She argues that such an objection could have been raised by the church leaders in Canterbury, who hoped to secure Edwin's conversion as a condition of the alliance. She adds that Canterbury's attempt to 'negotiate a politically-motivated conversion would, however, make less edifying reading than the high-minded preoccupation with theological absolutes that Bede's report offers.'<sup>224</sup> Adding to the modern reservations, Richard Fletcher has described Bede's account of Edwin's conversion as less than satisfactory.<sup>225</sup> Many scholars have had difficulties with Bede's chronology of all the events concerned with Edwin's conversion.<sup>226</sup> However their alternative chronologies

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<sup>221</sup> On early Anglo-Saxon laws relating to marriage, see *Laws of Æthelberht* 31 and 76-77 and 82-84, in A.W. Haddan and W. Stubbs, ed., *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents relating to Great Britain and Ireland III* (Oxford 1871 repr. 1964) 42-50 at 45 and 49-50; *Laws of Ine* 31, in D. Whitelock, ed., *English Historical Documents, c.500-1042* (London 1979) 398-407 at 402.

<sup>222</sup> J.M. Wallace-Hadrill wrote that in dealing with matrimonial law the Church was 'slow and uncertain in its advance', *Early Germanic Kingship in England and on the Continent* (Oxford 1980) 39. E.J. Sharpe discusses the gradual process by which the societies of Northern Europe became Christianised in his 'Salvation, Germanic and Christian,' in E.J. Sharpe and J.R. Hinnells, ed., *Man and his salvation* (Manchester 1973) 243-262.

<sup>223</sup> *HE* II.6, 154-157. See D.P. Kirby, *The Earliest English Kings* (London 1991) 39-41 and 77-78.

<sup>224</sup> Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women* 223.

<sup>225</sup> Fletcher, *Conversion of Europe* 5.

<sup>226</sup> Wallace-Hadrill wrote that *HE* II.9 'bristles with chronological difficulties', *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People: A Historical Commentary* (Oxford 1988 repr 1991) 65. Kirby has been particularly critical of Bede's chronology, arguing that Edwin and Æthelburh's marriage happened prior to 625, see his 'Bede and Northumbrian Chronology,' *English Historical Review* 78 (1963) 514-527 at 522 and his *Earliest English Kings* 39-41 and 78



tend to lead to further problems and more recent scholarship has upheld Bede's dates and his overall presentation of this marriage.<sup>227</sup> There is certainly no reason to dispute Bede's presentation of the main events involved in Edwin and Æthelburh's marriage. It seems most likely that Edwin did seek this marriage; Kent would have been in a position to impose conditions; Æthelburh's rights would have been protected; and the question of her Christianity probably arose (as it did during the arrangement of her parents' marriage) as Paulinus was sent in her company. It is in moving beyond these essentials of the story that we may determine Bede's larger aims.

The theology behind the description of the marriage arrangement in Bede's text is very closely connected to the content of Boniface's letters to the royal couple and this has also raised questions. Hollis suggests that this can be explained as the later influence of Paulinus on the official history of Canterbury as he would have had access to the pope's letters in Northumbria and later returned to Kent.<sup>228</sup> She therefore claims that Bede's allusions to marital theology in his account of this royal marriage derive from his 'Canterbury source'.<sup>229</sup> It seems far more probable though, that the emphasis on marriage theology throughout Bede's work is Bede's own. We know that he was definitely in possession of Boniface's letters and was well versed in the theology of marriage.<sup>230</sup> Bede is concerned with the proper practice of marriage throughout the *HE*.<sup>231</sup> In the midst of his account of Edwin, Rædwald's marriage is twice

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for a further variation. Kirby's major difficulty, however, is that he has 'corrected' many of Bede's dates, unnecessarily. See also J. Campbell, 'Bede I,' repr. in J. Campbell, *Essays in Anglo-Saxon History* (London 1986) 1-27 at 8; H. Mayr-Harting, *The Coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England*, (Pennsylvania 1994) 66; P. Hunter Blair, 'The Letters of Pope Boniface V and the mission of Paulinus to Northumbria,' in P. Clemoes and K. Hughes, ed., *England Before the Conquest: Studies in Primary Sources presented to Dorothy Whitelock* (Cambridge 1971) 5-13 at 11-12.

<sup>227</sup> See S. Wood, 'Bede's Northumbrian dates again,' *English Historical Review* 98 (1983) 280-296; N.J. Higham, *The Convert Kings: Power and religious affiliation in early Anglo-Saxon England* (Manchester 1997) 158-163; P. Wormald and T.M. Charles-Edwards, 'Addenda,' in Wallace-Hadrill, *Historical Commentary* (Oxford repr 1991) 222; K. Harrison, *The Framework of Anglo-Saxon History: to A.D. 900* (Cambridge 1976) 86.

<sup>228</sup> Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women* 223, see n.90.

<sup>229</sup> Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women* 219-220 and 224.

<sup>230</sup> Hollis acknowledges that he had written a commentary on the Song of Songs, but believes that this did not affect his understanding of the queen's role in the development of the Church, *Anglo-Saxon Women* 220.

<sup>231</sup> He includes Augustine's questions to Gregory the Great on marriage practices, *Questions* 4 and 5, *HE* I.27, 82-87; draws attention to Eadbald's grievous sin in taking his step-mother as his wife, *HE* II.5, 150-151; in describing the death of King Sigeberht of the East Saxons, Bede explains that two of his *gesiths* killed the king because they believed he was too willing to forgive

referred to; the first instance is during Edwin's exile in East Anglia while Rædwald is preparing to hand Edwin over to his enemy, Æthelfrith, but is dissuaded by his wife.<sup>232</sup> The second occasion concerns Rædwald's conversion to Christianity in Kent but on his return home his wife and 'evil teachers' successfully encourage him to continue serving his old gods also.<sup>233</sup> The role of Rædwald's wife has been seen as an example of a normal pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon royal marriage but, taken in the overall context of Bede's work, it is possible that there is something far more instructive going on in these stories.<sup>234</sup> Rædwald's marriage or his wife are not referred to at any stage in the *Whitby Life*, so like Edwin's marriage the references to Rædwald's are also unique to Bede. There is also nothing to suggest that such evidence came to Bede from his Canterbury source through Paulinus as intermediary. For Rædwald's polytheism, Bede refers to the eyewitness evidence of a later king of East Anglia who ruled up to Bede's own time.<sup>235</sup> Marriage imagery is also employed to describe Paulinus' wider mission among the Northumbrians:

Paulinus was consecrated bishop by Archbishop Justus, on 21 July in the year of our Lord 625, and so in the princess's train he came to Edwin's court, outwardly bringing her to her marriage according to the flesh. But more truly his whole heart was set on calling the people to whom he was coming to the knowledge of the truth; his desire was to present it, in the words of the apostle, as a pure virgin espoused to one husband, even Christ (2 Cor 11:2).<sup>236</sup>

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his enemies, but adds that one of these *gesiths* was unlawfully married and, as Bishop Cedd could not prevent or correct this marriage, he excommunicated him and ordered that no one should enter his house or eat with him; however, Sigeberht disregarded this command and for this reason Cedd prophesied that the king would meet his death in this house, *HE* III.22, 284-285.

<sup>232</sup> *HE* II.12, 180-181.

<sup>233</sup> *HE* II.15, 190-191.

<sup>234</sup> Stephanie Hollis extrapolates that Rædwald's wife was a serious devotee of the old religion and that powerful queens like her had many reasons to feel that their positions were threatened by this new religion. She also suggests that in Bede's version of Edwin's nocturnal encounter there is a very close connection between the 'spirit guide' and Rædwald's wife, and that this connection was a problem because it meant that Edwin's later unwillingness to convert came from his belief that he had been saved by the pagan gods enlisted on his behalf by Rædwald's wife, *Anglo-Saxon Women* 233. I am inclined to disagree with her reading of the text; see below for more on this subject.

<sup>235</sup> *HE* II.15, 190-191.

<sup>236</sup> *HE* II.9, 164-165, *Ordinatus est autem Paulinus episcopus a Iusto archiepiscopo sub die XII kalendarum Augustarum anno ab incarnatione Domini DCXXV, et sic cum praefata uirgine ad regem Eduinum quasi comes copulae carnalis aduenit, sed ipse potius toto animo intendens ut gentem, quam adibat, ad agnitionem ueritatis aduocans iuxta uocem apostoli uni uero sponso uirginem castam exhiberet Christo.*

Indeed, the true importance of Christian marital imagery in Bede's presentation of Edwin's conversion has not been recognised.

In writing his account there were many examples of political marriages leading to conversion that Bede could have followed if he wished. As previously mentioned, Gregory of Tours' account of Clovis' conversion was very influential and there are other such cases in the *HE*.<sup>237</sup> However, Bede's narrative is based very deliberately on the Christian concept of marriage, ably supported by his incorporation of Boniface's letters strategically placed in his account. Indeed, the Christian theology of marriage is expressed in the *HE* most clearly in Boniface's letters, particularly the one to Æthelburh. These letters then serve to illuminate the surrounding narrative, located as they are in the centre of Bede's account of Edwin's conversion: in between the two longest chapters concerning Edwin, *HE* II.9, which introduces Edwin and his marriage, and *HE* II.12, which contains the story of his nocturnal encounter and ends with him having to fulfil his earlier vow to accept better teaching about salvation.

The importance of the papal letters as the chief means whereby teaching is provided in the *HE* has recently been demonstrated.<sup>238</sup> Bede's own narrative gives very little explicit teaching. The oft-described 'gallery of good examples'<sup>239</sup> presents the reader with models of good (and on rare occasions bad) behaviour, but when the work is considered in the light of the papal letters, Bede's theological orthodoxy and his intentions become clearer as the popes' teaching is enacted in the narrative of events. Considering the role of the papacy in the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons and the subsequent development of their Church as demonstrated in the *HE*, it is quite appropriate that this important didactic work is allowed to them – the Anglo-Saxons' teachers in faith. The papacy's role for the developing Anglo-Saxon Church was recognised in Rome

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<sup>237</sup> See above. Bede very probably knew Gregory of Tours' *History* but Bede's work is very different in style and in content, see J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, 'Gregory of Tours and Bede: their views on the personal qualities of kings,' in J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, *Early Medieval History* (Oxford 1975) 96-114; Goffart, *Narrators of Barbarian History* 304-305.

<sup>238</sup> J. O'Reilly, 'Islands and Idols at the Ends of the Earth: Exegesis and Conversion in Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*,' in S. Lebecq, M. Perrin and O. Szerwiniack, ed., *Bède le Vénérable entre Tradition et Postérité* (Lille 2005) 119-145 at 135-137 and 124-128 for the specific example of papal exegesis on islands and idols.

<sup>239</sup> James Campbell, 'Bede I,' 24, coined the phrase. Cf. A.T. Thacker, 'Bede's Ideal of Reform,' in P. Wormald, D. Bullough, and R. Collins, ed., *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford 1983) 130-153 at 142. Fletcher, *Conversion of Europe* 5. N.J. Higham, (*Re-Reading Bede: The Ecclesiastical History in Context* (London 2006) 72.

with various popes adopting a patriarchal attitude to the Anglo-Saxons and Bede's text, through different means, acknowledges the pope's fatherly role for the English Church.<sup>240</sup> The papal letters also demonstrate the importance of Rome in preserving the faith of the apostles and disseminating this throughout the world.<sup>241</sup> However, even though Bede had a great regard for the papacy he was very careful about the sources he included in his text; he did not use all the papal letters that he had in his possession and he was prepared to edit these letters to include what was relevant to his message.<sup>242</sup>

This is worth mentioning as it is often suggested that Bede set out to diminish or suppress Æthelburh's role in her husband's conversion to give the sole credit to Paulinus; however, had Bede wanted to do this, it seems unlikely that he would include Boniface's letter to her in his text. A notable omission in the book is the letter sent by Gregory the Great to Bertha in Kent. Like Boniface V afterwards, Gregory had sent a pair of letters to the royal couple in Kent in which he encouraged Æthelberht to convert to Christianity and urged Bertha to bring this about. Bede included the letter to Æthelberht in the *HE* but not the one sent to Bertha.<sup>243</sup> He may not have had this in his possession, but as he had obtained so many of the letters sent by Gregory concerning the Anglo-Saxons, its omission from the *HE* may have been his decision. There are various reasons suggested for not including the letter to Bertha, but its omission does not support the argument that Bede deliberately undermined the role of women in his book.<sup>244</sup> If this were the case, then one might expect the letter to Æthelburh

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<sup>240</sup> Pope Gregory the Great uses parental imagery twice in his letter to Æthelberht, *HE* I.32, 112-115; Pope Boniface V uses such imagery once of the Anglo-Saxons in his letter to Archbishop Justus, II.8, 160-161, once in his letter to Edwin, II.10, 168-169, and five times in his letter to Æthelburh, II.11, 172-175; Pope Honorius does so three times in his letter to Edwin, II.17, 194-195 and once in his letter to Archbishop Honorius, II.18, 198-199; Pope Vitalian does so four times in his letter to Oswiu, III.29, 318-323. Bede's attitude to Gregory the Great is particularly important, II.1, 122-135.

<sup>241</sup> O'Reilly, 'Islands and Idols,' 125. See also D. Scully, 'Bede, Orosius and Gildas on the early History of Britain,' in S. Lebecq, M. Perrin and O. Szerwiniack, ed., *Bède le Vénérable entre Tradition et Postérité* (Lille 2005) 31-42, at 40-41.

<sup>242</sup> See *HE* I.31, 108-111, where Bede uses only part of a letter from Gregory the Great to Augustine on miracle-working; II.19, 198-199, Bede briefly summarises a letter sent from Pope Honorius to the Irish and also in II.19, 200-203, he includes parts of a letter from Pope-elect John to the Irish; III.29, 318-323, he includes most of Pope Vitalian's letter to Oswiu. Cf. *HE* II.4, 146-147, where Bede quotes the beginning of a letter from Archbishop Laurence to the Irish bishops.

<sup>243</sup> *HE* I.32, 110-115. *Gregorius Bertae*, bk.11.35: *CCSL* 140A, 923-924; Martyn (2004) 778-779.

<sup>244</sup> See Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women* 214, 218 and 225-227; C. Karkov, 'The Body of St Æthelthryth: Desire, Conversion and Reform in Anglo-Saxon England,' in M. Carver, ed., *The*

would have been similarly omitted. The importance of Boniface's letters (particularly, therefore, the one to Æthelburh) in the unfolding of Bede's account cannot be overstated.

While marriages like Æthelburh and Edwin's, between Christians and unbelievers, were not actively encouraged by the Church, neither were they expressly forbidden. Paul raised the question of whether or not Christians should marry believers and recognised the negative and positive consequences of these unions; later exegetes were unable to develop a definitive answer on this question.<sup>245</sup> There was a belief that the Christian spouse was placed in danger through such a union but this was often out-weighed by the realisation that these marriages could lead to conversion. In what follows therefore, Bede's account of Edwin and Æthelburh will be examined in two sections. Firstly, the danger facing Æthelburh through her marriage to a pagan will be considered. Important Christian beliefs underlie the work of Bede and Pope Boniface V on this, but of most significance is the Christian view that through marriage two persons become one. In conjunction with this the Christian understanding of the sin of fornication will be considered and, as every baptised Christian's soul is regarded as a temple of the Holy Spirit, the threat that Æthelburh's soul will be profaned by her union with not only a pagan but also an idolater will be assessed. The second section will look at how Æthelburh's situation can be remedied and the positive consequences of these marriages. This will be followed by a consideration of the unique role that Æthelburh, as a true Christian wife, can play in bringing her husband to Christianity.

### **Threat to Æthelburh**

#### *(i) Profanation of the Temple*

In Bede's narrative and in Boniface's letter to Æthelburh, it is clearly stated that marriage to a heathen places her in danger. Kent's initial response explained that

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*Cross Goes North* (Woodbridge 2003) 397-411 at 398. Bede may have wanted to credit this conversion entirely to the Roman missionaries and Gregory the Great and downplay the Gaulish influence, as Æthelberht was married before Augustine and his companions' arrival and his wife seems not to have succeeded in converting her husband before then – however, we know about Bertha's Christianity from Bede, *HE* I.25-26, 72-77; he may also have wanted to vary his presentation of conversion and not tell the same story twice; see further below.

<sup>245</sup> *E.g.* 1 Cor 6:15-19; 7:14: see further below.

‘it was not lawful for a Christian maiden [virgin] to be given in marriage to a heathen for fear that the faith and mysteries of the heavenly King might be profaned by a union with a king who was an utter stranger to the worship of the true God.’<sup>246</sup> This difficulty is surmounted in the narrative (as it would have been in reality), but Boniface’s letter to Æthelburh makes clear that her soul remains in danger while Edwin continues in his paganism. He urges Æthelburh to labour to convert her husband so that they can ‘enjoy the rights of marriage in undefiled union.’<sup>247</sup> The pope then explains that there cannot be full unity between Edwin and Æthelburh while Edwin is a stranger to Æthelburh’s ‘shining faith (*fidei splendore*)’ and the ‘darkness of detestable error (*detestabilis erroris tenebris*)’ remains between them.<sup>248</sup> There are a number of key Christian beliefs underlying these objections, in particular the Christian concept of marriage. This was based on the belief that the couple become one in body and soul through marriage and for this reason divorce was impermissible. When the Pharisees questioned Jesus on this issue he answered them, with a deliberate reference to Genesis 2:24 and the creation of Adam and Eve,

Have ye not read that he who made man from the beginning made them male and female: And he said: For this cause shall a man leave father and mother and shall cleave to his wife: and they two shall be in one flesh. Therefore now they are not two, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let no man put asunder.<sup>249</sup>

Jesus continued to explain that Moses had allowed the Israelites to divorce because of their hardness of heart but that in the beginning this was not so.<sup>250</sup> This belief in complete union through marriage is also found in Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians and in his epistle to the Ephesians.<sup>251</sup> Paul also highlights the dangerous side to this belief in the letter to the Corinthians. He reminded his

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<sup>246</sup> HE II.9, 162-163, *est non esse licitum Christianam uirginem pagano in coniugem dari, ne fides et sacramenta caelestis regis consortio profanarentur regis qui ueri Dei cultus esset prorsus ignarus.*

<sup>247</sup> HE II.11, 172-173, *ut perinde intemerato societatis foedere iura teneas maritalis consortii.*

<sup>248</sup> HE II.11, 172-175.

<sup>249</sup> Matt 19:4-6; cf. Mark 10:6-9. See Chapter One.

<sup>250</sup> Matt 19:8. The ODCC, in its entry on ‘Matrimony’, writes that Jesus’ teaching was concerned to restore marriage to its original place in God’s Creation, 1054. On marriage in the New Testament see W. Rordorf, ‘Marriage in the New Testament and in the Early Church,’ *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 20 (1969) 193-210, at 193-196 and 205; Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society* 57-61; C.N.L. Brooke, *The Medieval Idea of Marriage* (Oxford repr 1994) 43-50.

<sup>251</sup> 1 Cor 6:16; Eph 5:31. In Eph 5:32, Paul writes that this ‘is a great sacrament: but I speak in Christ and in the church.’ See Chapter One.

recipients that their bodies were the members of Christ and warned them that they should not join themselves to a harlot, explaining that they will then become the same as the harlot sharing the same sins: ‘Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid! Or know you not that he who is joined to a harlot is made one body? For they shall be, saith he, two in one flesh’ (1 Cor 6:15-16). The dangers of fornication exercise Paul’s mind in this letter – in the previous chapter, cited earlier in the *HE* by Bede, Paul is concerned that a man who has taken his father’s wife has not been punished by the community and his sinful activity is a danger to those around him.<sup>252</sup> He writes that fornication is the only sin that is committed against one’s own body (1 Cor 6:18) and warns that fornicators cannot possess the kingdom of heaven (1 Cor 6:9).<sup>253</sup> This means that if a Christian through fornication with a harlot becomes one with the harlot they become like the harlot and also lose their heavenly rewards. This Christian concept of marriage is in Pope Boniface’s mind when he describes the married couple as being ‘one flesh’ in his letters to both Edwin and Æthelburh.<sup>254</sup>

A further fundamental tenet of Christian teaching is also relevant here, which is the belief that through baptism all Christians become temples of the Holy Spirit and dwelling places for the Lord. In John’s account of the Last Supper, Jesus tells the disciples that if anyone loves him and keeps his word, that the Father will love that person, ‘and we will come to him and will make our abode with him’ (John 14:23). This belief was also very influentially expressed in Paul’s letters to the Corinthians:

Know you not that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? But if any man violate the temple of God, him shall God destroy. For the temple of God is holy, which you are (1 Cor 3:16-17).

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<sup>252</sup> 1 Cor 5. Bede claims that Eadbald is guilty of the same sin before he repents, puts aside this wife, accepts Christian teaching and is baptised (*HE* II.6, 154-155); in a reference to 1 Cor 5:1, Bede writes that he is ‘polluted with such fornication as the apostle declares to have been not so much as named among the Gentiles,’ *HE* II.5, 150-151.

<sup>253</sup> See Acts 15:20 and 29, following the dispute in the early Church over the circumcision of Gentile converts. Those at the council in Jerusalem agreed that it was sufficient for those Gentiles to refrain from the pollutions of idols, from things strangled, from blood, and from fornication.

<sup>254</sup> *HE* II.10, 168-169 and II.11, 172-173. Hollis has stated that Edwin and Æthelburh were already one flesh as they had produced a daughter (*Anglo-Saxon Women* 221), but this misunderstands the nature of Boniface’s concern. It is also quite likely that Boniface wrote these letters at a very early stage in their marriage as he died in October 625 before Eanflæd was born.

Or know you not that your members are the temple of the Holy Ghost, who is in you, whom you have from God: and you are not your own? (1 Cor 6:19)

For you are the temple of the living God: as God saith: I will dwell in them, and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people (2 Cor 6:16).

Through becoming one with a fornicator, a Christian therefore not only takes on the sins of fornication, but also profanes their internal temple in the presence of the Lord. This concern with preserving each individual as a temple of the Lord free from all sins is regularly expressed in patristic thinking. Cyprian writes that nothing impure or profane should be brought into the temple of God, as the Lord may be offended and leave that temple.<sup>255</sup> John Chrysostom, in his homilies on Paul's epistles to the Corinthians, is adamant that through impure behaviour the individual does not just insult their own body, but also Christ as every Christian is the member of Christ; and they also turn the dwelling place of the Spirit into a robbers' den.<sup>256</sup> Jerome is in agreement with this thinking, writing that fornication defiles both conscience and body, by making one's own body, which is the temple of Christ the body of a harlot.<sup>257</sup> Prudentius' *Psychomachia* is concerned with the internal warfare between the virtues and vices within the soul and after the virtues are victorious the soul is described as a gilded temple.<sup>258</sup>

The danger that any Christian's internal temple could be profaned through immoral behaviour underlies Boniface's (and Bede's) concern for Æthelburh. However, unlike the apostate Eadbald, Edwin is not anywhere described as a fornicator; he is a pagan and is clearly presented as an idolater in the *HE*.<sup>259</sup> In Boniface's letter to Edwin, the pope makes the Christian case against idolatry describing it as 'pernicious superstitions'.<sup>260</sup> In his letter to Æthelburh, Boniface is concerned that Edwin is 'still serving abominable idols

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<sup>255</sup> Cyprian, *De Habitu Virginis (On the Dress of Virgins)*, st.2: *PL* 4, 442; *ANF* 5, 430.

<sup>256</sup> John Chrysostom, *Homiliae 44 in Epistolam primam ad Corinthios (Homilies on First Corinthians)*, Hom 18, st.3: *PG* 61, 148-149; *NPNF* 1<sup>st</sup> series, 12, 102.

<sup>257</sup> Jerome, *Ep.* 55,2: *Labourt* 3, 44; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 6, 110.

<sup>258</sup> Prudentius, *Psychomachia*, esp. ll 910-915: Burton, *BMLC* (2004) 34; Thomson (1969) 343. See Chapter Four for more on this.

<sup>259</sup> See *HE* II.9, 166-167 and II.13, 184-187, for Edwin and his high priest, Coifi's attitude to idolatry and subsequent destruction of idols. See *HE* II.6, 154-155, for Eadbald.

<sup>260</sup> *HE* II.10, 168-171. The full sentence is worth quoting: 'The great guilt of those who cling to the pernicious superstitions of idolatrous worship is seen in the damnable form of their gods (*Quanta autem reatitudinis culpa teneantur obstricti hi, qui idolatriarum perniciosissimam superstitionem colentes amplectuntur, eorum quos colunt exempla perditionis insinuant*)'. See O'Reilly, 'Islands and Idols,' 126 and 137, on the Old Testament tradition within which the pope was working for his descriptions of paganism.



(*abominandis idolis seruiens*)'.<sup>261</sup> In the first letter to the Corinthians, Paul also warned the community to avoid idolaters, as they are like fornicators and cannot possess the kingdom of God:

I wrote to you in an epistle not to keep company with fornicators. I mean not with the fornicators of this world or with the covetous or the extortioners or the servers of idols: otherwise you must needs go out of this world. But now I have written to you, not to keep company, if any man that is named a brother be a fornicator or covetous or a server of idols or a railer or a drunkard or an extortioner: with such a one, not so much as to eat (1 Cor 5:9-11).

Know you not that the unjust shall not possess the kingdom of God? Do not err: Neither fornicators nor idolaters nor adulterers (1 Cor 6:9).

In patristic thinking fornication and idolatry are very closely linked. Augustine described idolatry as fornication of the Spirit, which is an even more serious sin than fornication in the body.<sup>262</sup> Augustine made the connection between these two sins because in Matthew's Gospel Jesus permitted that a husband or wife could be put away only for the sin of fornication and in the first epistle to the Corinthians Paul said that marriages between Christians and unbelievers could be terminated, but suggested that when possible they should not be.<sup>263</sup> In his commentary on the *Sermon on the Mount*, Augustine wrote that, as Paul allowed marriages to be dissolved because of unbelief and the commandment of the Lord was that a wife could only be put away for the cause of fornication, then unbelief is also fornication.<sup>264</sup> A little later in the same commentary he added that the idolatry followed by unbelievers is also fornication.<sup>265</sup>

Cassian similarly linked the prohibition against adultery, as given in the Law (Exod 20:14), with spiritual fornications such as idolatry. He writes that those who have moved beyond the literal meaning of this text must observe this law in the Spirit. They must 'forsake not only the worship of idols but also all

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<sup>261</sup> *HE* II.11, 172-173.

<sup>262</sup> Augustine, *De Coniugiis Adulterinis (Adulterous Marriages)*, bk.1, c.17(19)-c.18(20): *PL* 40, 462-463; *WSA* I.9, 154-155.

<sup>263</sup> See Matt 5:32; 19:9; 1 Cor 7:12-13. It should be noted that Matthew's gospel does not clearly state whether or not the innocent party in the marriage can re-marry in this situation. Paul urged the innocent partner to remain unmarried if they put their spouse away, 1 Cor 7:10-11. Augustine believed that neither spouse should be allowed to re-marry, on this subject see Augustine, *De Coniugiis Adulterinis*, bk.1, c.2(2)-c.12(13): *PL* 40, 452-459; *WSA* I.9, 143-151. For views of marriage in the New Testament see n.62 above.

<sup>264</sup> Augustine, *De Sermone Domini in Monte (Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount)*, c.16,44 and 46: *CCSL* 35, 49-51 and 52; *NPNF* 1<sup>st</sup> series, 6, 19-20.

<sup>265</sup> Augustine, *De Sermone Domini in Monte*, c.16,45: *CCSL* 35, 51-52; *NPNF* 1<sup>st</sup> series, 6, 20.

heathen superstitions and the observance of auguries and omens and all signs and days and times,<sup>266</sup> as these things destroy the simplicity of faith, and he adds that it was through fornication of this kind that Jerusalem was defiled.<sup>267</sup> Cyprian, in the third century, had used similar arguments to assert that Christians should not marry gentiles. He associated unbelief with fornication, referring to Paul's warning (as discussed above) that if a Christian is joined to a harlot they become one flesh, and added Paul's words that there cannot be any communication between righteousness and unrighteousness, or between light and darkness.<sup>268</sup> He also cited Old Testament examples in which the chosen people of God were forbidden to marry foreigners and specifically mentioned Solomon, who loved many 'strange' women, and these turned his heart away and he followed strange gods.<sup>269</sup> Tertullian wrote that Christians contracting marriages with gentiles (i.e. unbelievers) are guilty of fornication and should be excluded from all contact with the Christian community.<sup>270</sup>

The association of idolatry and unbelief with the grievous sin of fornication in patristic commentaries would have heightened concerns in theologically aware observers about the threat to Æthelburh through her marriage to a 'gentile'. Pope Boniface, in his own words, was greatly grieved by her situation.<sup>271</sup> As Æthelburh's soul is a temple for the Lord then her internal purity must be preserved, in particular against the depravity of idol worship. The danger for Æthelburh is that as union with a harlot makes the other partner a harlot, then union with an idolater makes her also an idolater, which leads to the corruption of the purity of her soul as a temple for the Lord. Of real relevance to Æthelburh's situation are Paul's admonitions in his second letter to the Corinthians:

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<sup>266</sup> Cassian, *Conlatione (Confererence)* 14, c.11: *SC* 54, 197; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 11, 440, *ut scilicet non solum a caerimoniis idolorum, sed etiam ab omni superstitione gentilium et auguriorum atque ominum omniumque signorum et dierum ac temporum obseruatione discedat.*

<sup>267</sup> Cassian, *Conlatione* 14, c.11, referring to Jer 3:6; Is 47:13; Hos 4:12: *SC* 54, 197-198; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 11, 440-441. Cassian also included Judaism, heresy and wandering thoughts as types of fornication. See C. Stewart, *Cassian the Monk* (New York 1998) 94.

<sup>268</sup> Cyprian, *Testimoniorum Libri Tres Adversus Judaeos (Three Books of Testimonies Against the Jews)*, bk.3, c.62, referring to 1 Cor 6:15-17; 2 Cor 6:14: *PL* 4, 767-768; *ANF* 5, 550-551.

<sup>269</sup> Cyprian, *Adversus Judaeos*, bk.3, c.62, referring to Gen 24; Ezra 9; Tob 4:12; 1Kings 11:4: *PL* 4, 767-768; *ANF* 5, 550-551. See 1Kings 11:1-5. Cf. Augustine, *De Coniugiis Adulterinis*, bk.1, c.18(20): *PL* 40, 462-463; *WSA* I.9, 154-155.

<sup>270</sup> Tertullian, *Ad Uxorem (To his Wife)*, bk.2,3: *CCSL* 1, 387-388; *ANF* 4, 45-46. See also Tertullian, *Ad Uxorem*, bk.2,8: *CCSL* 1, 392-394; *ANF* 4, 48.

<sup>271</sup> *HE* II.11, 172-173.

Bear not the yoke with unbelievers. For what participation hath justice with injustice? Or what fellowship hath light with darkness? Or what concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what part hath the faithful with the unbeliever? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God: as God saith: I will dwell in them, and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore, Go out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing. And I will receive you: and I will be a Father to you: and you shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord almighty (2 Cor 6:14-18).

This passage makes clear that Christians should not associate with unbelievers; as temples of the Lord they should not be involved with idol worshippers; and they should of necessity avoid the ‘unclean thing’, in Æthelburh’s case her husband. Paul’s words in the second letter to the Corinthians are echoed in Boniface’s expressed concerns in his letter to Æthelburh. The pope has already reminded, indeed warned, Æthelburh that she is ‘imbued with the Holy Spirit (*diuinae inspirationis imbuta subsidiis*)’,<sup>272</sup> and he wrote that Æthelburh could not be in full union with her husband while he was a stranger to her ‘shining faith’ as there was darkness between them.<sup>273</sup> This is reminiscent of Paul’s rhetorical question (quoted above), ‘what fellowship hath light with darkness?’ From Boniface’s viewpoint, Æthelburh as a Christian is light while her husband is in the darkness of paganism and idolatry and these two cannot co-exist in Christian thinking.<sup>274</sup>

(ii) *Idolatry in Bede*

Bede was very aware of the theology underlying Boniface’s letters to Edwin and Æthelburh. His exegetical works regularly drew attention to the role of each Christian as a temple of God. In a homily on John’s Gospel he writes that ‘We should rejoice that we have become the temple of God by our baptism, according to the testimony of the Apostle, For the temple of God, which you are, is

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<sup>272</sup> *HE* II.11, 172-173.

<sup>273</sup> *HE* II.11, 172-175.

<sup>274</sup> Christianity itself and saintly Christians are associated with Light on numerous occasions in the *HE*; see Chapter Five for a discussion of this imagery as it relates to Holy Women in Bede’s text.

holy.<sup>275</sup> He also wrote that the apostles knew that Christ was in them through their love for him and because of their observance of his commandments.<sup>276</sup> In another gospel homily he reminded his audience that as Christians' bodies have been consecrated to Christ and are his members then (in a direct reference to Paul's teaching) they must ensure that they are not made the members of a harlot.<sup>277</sup> Bede was also aware of the patristic view (in particular from Augustine) that unbelief and idolatry are equal to unchastity, providing this interpretation in his selection of excerpts from Augustine on Paul's permission for spouses to divorce because of unbelief.<sup>278</sup> Throughout his works, Bede is very concerned about the dangers of idolatry and unbelief. In his commentary *On Ezra and Nehemiah*, Bede refers to 2 Cor 6:14-16 a number of times to demonstrate that Christians and non-believers have nothing in common. He writes that even those who do not understand Christianity know that light and darkness, wickedness and righteousness, Christ and Belial cannot co-exist in the same mind.<sup>279</sup> Earlier in the commentary he explained that those who have not renounced idols can only make unclean sacrifices to God, and again rhetorically asks what do righteousness and wickedness, light and darkness, or Christ and Belial have in common? He continues to say that people still worshipping idols share the doomed lot of the Gentiles, as they do not abandon the Gentiles' sins.<sup>280</sup>

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<sup>275</sup> Bede, *Hom II.1*, referring to 1 Cor 3:17: *CCSL* 122, 186, ll 70-72; Martin and Hurst (1991) 4, *Et quidem gaudendum est quia ipsi sumus in baptismo templum Dei facti teste apostolo qui ait: Templum enim Dei sanctum est quod estis uos*. See *Hom II.1*: *CCSL* 122, 189-190; Martin and Hurst (1991) 8-9, on the various meanings of temple for Christians. See also his homilies for the dedication of a Church, *Hom II.24* and *25*: *CCSL* 122, 358-378; Martin and Hurst (1991) 241-268. *Hom I.19*: *CCSL* 122, 137; Martin and Hurst (1991) 190-191. *Hom I.23*: *CCSL* 122, 165; Martin and Hurst (1991) 227. *De Templo (On the Temple)*, bk.1, st.1,1: *CCSL* 119A, 147; Connolly (1995) 5-6. In *Ezram et Neemiam (On Ezra and Nehemiah)*, bk.1 and 2: *CCSL* 119A, 241 and 305; DeGregorio (2006) 6, 105-106. See *De Tabernaculo (On the Tabernacle)*, bk.2: *CCSL* 119A, 43; Holder (1994) 46-47, where Bede suggests that tabernacle and temple can be inter-changed when referring to the soul. See J. O'Reilly, intro., S. Connolly, tr., *Bede: On the Temple* (Liverpool 1995) xvii-lv, and O'Reilly, 'Islands and Idols,' 128-129.

<sup>276</sup> Bede, *Hom II.17*, referring to John 14:20-23: *CCSL* 122, 304; Martin and Hurst (1991) 168.

<sup>277</sup> Bede, *Hom II.23*, referring to 1 Cor 6:15: *CCSL* 122, 352; Martin and Hurst (1991) 232. See also Bede, *Excerpts from the Works of Saint Augustine on the Letters of the Blessed Apostle Paul*, st.165 on 1 Cor 6:16, from Augustine, *On the Trinity* 6.2: Hurst (1999) 128-129.

<sup>278</sup> Bede, *Excerpts from the Works of Saint Augustine on the Letters of the Blessed Apostle Paul*, st.172 on 1 Cor 7:12-13, from Augustine, *On the Lord's Sermon on the Mount* 1: Hurst (1999) 134.

<sup>279</sup> Bede, *De Ezra et Neemiam*, bk.1: *CCSL* 119A, 286; DeGregorio (2006) 76. See also *De Ezra et Neemiam*, bk.3: *CCSL* 119A, 388; DeGregorio (2006) 221.

<sup>280</sup> Bede, *De Ezra et Neemiam*, bk.1 referring to 1 Cor 6:14-15: *CCSL* 119A, 282; DeGregorio (2006) 69.

In his commentary *On Tobias*, Bede wrote that the devil is busy trying to destroy the people of God with spiritual death through idolatry.<sup>281</sup>

In the *HE* Bede allowed Pope Boniface's letters to present this theology but his familiarity with these concepts enabled him to incorporate them into his presentation of Edwin and Æthelburh's marriage. Considering his account in this light allows us to understand it at another level. Bede was clearly very concerned about the threat facing Æthelburh from Edwin's idolatry. If we look again at Kent's objection to Edwin's proposal (quoted in full above), the meaning becomes clearer. Bede writes that the marriage was refused because 'the faith and mysteries of the heavenly King might be profaned by a union with a king who was an utter stranger to the worship of the true God.'<sup>282</sup> The faith and mysteries of God could be profaned because Edwin was not only a stranger to the true God, but also an idolater and through union with him Æthelburh was in danger of becoming an idolater too, thereby corrupting the purity of her soul as a temple for the Lord. In Bede's commentary *On Ezra and Nehemiah*, he writes that the people of God were polluted through their unions with foreign peoples (*i.e.* non-believers).<sup>283</sup>

Bede's account also describes Æthelburh as a virgin, explaining that it would not be lawful to place a Christian virgin in this situation.<sup>284</sup> Bede's language is important because he also includes a second virgin in this story, describing Paulinus' desire to present the Northumbrian people to Christ as a pure virgin, espoused to one husband.<sup>285</sup> This description of the Northumbrians is very significant and will be considered in the next chapter, but we must remember that Paulinus' primary concern was to ensure that the first virgin in the story was kept free from corruption. After Edwin's death Paulinus leaves Northumbria and the fledgling church to escort Æthelburh and her family back to Kent, thereby demonstrating his priorities.<sup>286</sup> The verse from Paul's second letter

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<sup>281</sup> Bede, *In Tobiam (On Tobias)* [1:22-23]: *CCSL* 119B, 4; Foley (1999) 59-60.

<sup>282</sup> *HE* II.9, 162-163. See above, and n.58 for the Latin.

<sup>283</sup> See Bede, *De Ezra et Neemiam*, bk.2, on Ezra 9:1-2, and bk.3, on Nehemiah 13:23-25 and 30-31: *CCSL* 119A, 326-327 and 391-392; DeGregorio (2006) 136-139 and 225-226.

<sup>284</sup> *HE* II.9, 162-163, the Latin is *Christianam uirginem*.

<sup>285</sup> *HE* II.9, referring to 2 Cor 11:2, 164-165.

<sup>286</sup> *HE* II.20, 204-205. See Mayr-Harting on the Roman missionaries 'habit' of fleeing at the first sign of trouble, *Coming of Christianity* 75-76. However, this seems to misrepresent Paulinus' role in Northumbria. See above.

to the Corinthians, ‘For I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ’ (2 Cor 11:2), used by Bede for the Northumbrians, is often related to the Church. However, it can also mean individual Christians or individual women, especially when the next verse is considered, ‘But I fear lest, as the serpent seduced Eve by his subtilty (Gen 3:4), so your minds should be corrupted and fall from the simplicity that is in Christ’ (2 Cor 11:3). In comment on 2 Cor 11:2-3 Augustine wrote that, while some women in the Church have bodily virginity, all the faithful have virginity of the heart; however, he explained that Paul feared that the virginity of the heart would be lost through the temptations of the devil and if this were to happen then bodily virginity is worthless.<sup>287</sup> Augustine therefore continues to say that a married woman who preserves the Catholic faith is better than a virgin who is a heretic. Even though the first is not a virgin in her body, the second has become married to the devil in her heart.<sup>288</sup> In a sermon delivered at Christmas, Augustine told the married faithful who live chastely to be virgins in matters of the faith just as the universal Church is.<sup>289</sup> Interior virginity is far more important than bodily virginity. Jerome had similarly noted that without chastity of the mind, bodily chastity would not save anyone.<sup>290</sup>

Bede knew this interpretation of Augustine’s, using this precise passage in his collection of extracts from Augustine on Paul’s epistles for 2 Cor 11:3.<sup>291</sup> Understood in this light the threat to Æthelburh, described as a virgin by Bede, becomes even clearer. Although she is not going to preserve her bodily virginity after marriage, her more important spiritual virginity must be maintained. This can be protected as long as she is not seduced by the devil and does not fall from her simplicity in Christ. As already mentioned, however, according to Bede one

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<sup>287</sup> Cf. Cassian who associated 2 Cor 11:2-3 with a form of spiritual fornication, writing that those who too keenly observe the days, months, times and years (Gal 4:10) and focus on the strictures of the law have ‘certainly gone a whoring from Christ (*dubio moechatus a Christo*)’ and are in danger of being told by Paul that the serpent has deceived them, their minds have been corrupted and they have fallen from the simplicity in Christ (2 Cor 11:3), *Conlatione* 14, c.11: *SC* 54, 198; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 11, 441. See also n.79.

<sup>288</sup> Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos (Expositions on the Psalms)*, Ps 90(91): *CCSL* 39, *sermo* 2, st.9, 1276; *NPNF* 1<sup>st</sup> series, 8, st.17, 451-452. See also Augustine, *De Bono Conjugali (Excellence of Marriage)*, c.11(13): *PL* 40, 382; *WSA* I.9, 43, where he writes that married people who are faithful to each other are holy in body.

<sup>289</sup> Augustine, *Sermo (Sermon)*, 192 (10), st.2: *PL* 38; *ACW* 15, 114.

<sup>290</sup> Jerome, *Ep.*125.20: *Labour* 7, 132-133; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 6, 251.

<sup>291</sup> Bede, *Extracts from the Works of Saint Augustine on the Letters of the Blessed Apostle Paul*, st.256: Hurst (1999) 194.

of the devil's ways of destroying the purity of the people of God is through idol-worship, and as Æthelburh is marrying an idolater she is in grave danger of being corrupted by this as she will become one with him. For this reason Bede (and Pope Boniface) were aware that Æthelburh needed to bring her husband to Christianity to ensure that her own spiritual integrity, her virginity of the heart, would not be compromised by her relations with him. In this Bede and Boniface were of one mind, and Bede ensures that there is remarkable synchronisation between his narrative and the pope's instruction.

In this context it is worth briefly considering again Gregory the Great's letter to Bertha, as its omission from the *HE* has concerned some readers.<sup>292</sup> There are many similarities between the letters sent by Gregory and Boniface and it is very probable that Boniface had access to Gregory's earlier letter. However, while both letters urge the queens to convert their husbands and use quite similar imagery, it is noticeable that Gregory does not mention idolatry in his letter to Bertha. It is likely that Gregory knew that Æthelberht had already given up such practices, as he was aware of happenings in Kent through the recent return of Laurence and Peter to Rome.<sup>293</sup> Gregory was also aware that he was writing to a Frankish princess, who probably knew about the conversion of Clovis through his Christian wife, and as she had been married for a number of years before Augustine and his companions arrived might not have appreciated being told that her soul was in danger of being defiled through her marriage to Æthelberht. The letter to Bertha is very diplomatic, likens her to Helena, and stresses that her renown had spread to Constantinople and that even the angels would rejoice when her great work in converting her husband and subsequently the people of Kent was completed.<sup>294</sup> Bertha's situation was in many ways quite different to that facing Æthelburh, particularly because she had been in Kent long before the arrival of the Roman missionaries, whereas Æthelburh was going to Northumbria in the care of one such missionary.

Considering Bede's emphasis on the danger to Æthelburh from the very beginning of his account of her marriage, and his concern with the proper practice of marriage and the dangers of idolatry throughout the *HE*, it would very

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<sup>292</sup> As mentioned above, there are many reasons why Bede may not have included this.

<sup>293</sup> *Gregorius Bertae*, bk.11.35: *CCSL* 140A, 923; Martyn (2004) 778.

<sup>294</sup> *Gregorius Bertae*, bk.11.35: *CCSL* 140A, 923-924; Martyn (2004) 778-779.

much have undermined his work if he had included a letter from a pope to a Christian queen married to a pagan that was not concerned with the threat to her soul through her marriage to an unbeliever. Bede could not have presented Book Two as he did, as the immediacy of the threat to Æthelburh would have been lessened. He does include Gregory's letter to Æthelberht, but this is similar to other such letters to kings in the book, and encourages the king to suppress idol-worship and destroy the buildings and shrines dedicated to pagan deities.<sup>295</sup> Bede may well have had Gregory's letter to Bertha in his possession, but his decision not to include it is unlikely to have been an attempt on his part to undermine the role of queens in the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons. He chose not to use it because the contents of the letter were not appropriate to his purposes in the work or, more correctly, Gregory's pragmatic lack of concern for the effect on Bertha of becoming one with an unbeliever would have undermined Bede's attempt to teach his readers about the sanctity of marriage throughout the *HE*. As mentioned, Bede was prepared to edit papal letters to keep their contents relevant to his text. His omission of the letter to Bertha does not tell us about his slighting attitude to women, but about his sustained teaching objectives.

Bede may have been greatly concerned about the dangers of idol worship because these Anglo-Saxon pre-Christian beliefs survived into his own lifetime. He mentions widespread apostasy and returns to pagan practices at various times in the *HE*.<sup>296</sup> Resistance to Christian practices is also evident in his *Life of Cuthbert*, when he describes the jeering of monks who were swept out to sea on rafts by watching peasants who believed that the monks deserved their fate for rejecting ordinary life and introducing new unknown rules of conduct. When Cuthbert remonstrates with these people, they reply that nobody should pray for the monks as they have got rid of all the old ways of worship and nobody knows what to do. After Cuthbert prays for the monks and they are brought safely to land, the onlookers are ashamed of their impiety.<sup>297</sup> However, Christians were also in danger of falling into idolatry. An excessive concern with external observances without the corresponding internal motivations could be regarded as a form of idolatry. Bede was very concerned about this threat in his letter to

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<sup>295</sup> *HE* I.32, 112-113.

<sup>296</sup> See *HE* III.1, 212-215; III.30, 322-323; cf. *HE* II.5, 150-155.

<sup>297</sup> Bede, *Vita Cuthberti (Life of Cuthbert)*, c.3: Colgrave (1940) 162-165; Webb (1998) 48-49.



Egbert.<sup>298</sup> He especially disliked the growth of false monasteries in the early eighth century where the inhabitants were not leading a truly Christian life. He urged Egbert to ensure that the monasteries in his diocese, which had been consecrated to God, did not allow the devil to set up his kingdom in them and described those who followed Christ in name but not in their behaviour as the slaves of idols.<sup>299</sup>

Bede's worries about the dangers from various kinds of idolatry were not peculiar to him. The writer of the *Whitby Life of Gregory the Great* also warned his (or her) readers about the dangers of the old beliefs. This work contains a short story about Paulinus' teaching work among the Northumbrians in which recent converts are warned about the dangers of idolatry. A crow croaking from a quarter of the sky that was believed to be unpropitious led many of the royal company to believe that it was a sign that the new song being sung in the church was false and useless. Becoming aware of this, Paulinus instructed one of his companions to shoot the bird with an arrow and produced the dead bird while teaching, thereby demonstrating to the catechumens that if the bird was unable to even avoid its own death it could not foretell the future to people who had been reborn and baptised in the image of God and hold dominion over all living things (Gen 1:28). From this they should realize the futility of idolatry, dismissed by the writer as ancient evil that God allows to deceive the foolish.<sup>300</sup> Brian Butler has recently presented an enlightening study of the imagery in this short chapter and suggests that the writer is stressing that Christians continually require religious instruction.<sup>301</sup> It is worth noting that the Whitby writer similarly felt the need to demonstrate the dangers of idolatry and his dismissal of it is similar to that of Pope Boniface who described such pagan beliefs as 'pernicious superstitions', and Edwin's high priest, Coifi, who recognised that there was no benefit in

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<sup>298</sup> Benedicta Ward described such beliefs as comfortable 'half-baked Christianity', *High King of Heaven* (Kalamazoo 1999) 97. Bill Friesen writes that the whole treatment of Augustine's mission to Kent in the *HE* suggests an anxiety about the vulnerable state of the newly converted, especially with regard to orthodoxy, 'Answers and echoes: the *Libellus responsionum* and the hagiography of north-western European mission,' *Early Medieval Europe* 14:2 (2006) 153-172 at 160-161.

<sup>299</sup> Bede, *Epistola Bede Ad Ecgbertum Episcopum (Bede's Letter to Egbert)*, st.14-16: Plummer (1969) 417-421; McClure and Collins (1999) 353-355.

<sup>300</sup> *Whitby Life*, c.15: Colgrave (1968) 96-99.

<sup>301</sup> See Butler, *Whitby Life of Gregory the Great* (2005) 126-146.

worshipping idols.<sup>302</sup> In his description of the assembled company who took notice of the crow's croaking, the Whitby writer said that they were 'bound not only to heathenism but also to unlawful wives.'<sup>303</sup> His association of pagan practices and unlawful marriages that the Church disapproves of also follows patristic thinking, which linked the sins of idolatry and fornication and recognises (as did the early Church) that heathens are often guilty of both. Although Edwin's marriage is never referred to in this work, the Whitby writer has clearly many similar concerns to Bede; however, the two writers adopt different means for expressing these.

*(iii) Rædwald's apostasy*

Bede's awareness of Christian theology is also evident in his description of Rædwald's apostasy in *HE* II.15, contained in the middle of his account of Edwin and Æthelburh immediately after Edwin and many of the Northumbrians are baptised. Bede is here presenting a narrative illustration of the theological instruction given by Pope Boniface. We are told that Rædwald was converted to Christianity in Kent, most probably during Æthelberht's reign.<sup>304</sup> After his return home his wife and certain 'evil teachers (*peruersis doctoribus*)' succeeded in persuading the king that he could continue to worship his old gods while also worshipping Christ.<sup>305</sup> This is wholly unacceptable for Christians who believe exclusively in one God denying the existence of any others. While modern scholars can see the pragmatism in Rædwald's behaviour and strict monotheism was unknown to the Anglo-Saxons at the time, Bede is wholly appalled by

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<sup>302</sup> *HE* II.10, 168-171 (see above) and *HE* II.13, 182-183.

<sup>303</sup> *Whitby Life*, c.15: Colgrave (1968) 96-97. In Bede's account of Eadbald's unlawful marriage (see above, n.64), he wrote that on accepting Christianity Eadbald both gave up his step-mother as wife and banned all idolatrous worship, *HE* II.6, 154-155.

<sup>304</sup> According to Bede's famous list of over-kings in *HE* II.5, 148-151, Æthelberht was the third such king but Rædwald gained the leadership for his own race during Æthelberht's lifetime. On Bede's concept of over-kingship see P. Wormald, 'Bede, the *Bretwaldas* and the Origins of the *Gens Anglorum*,' in Wormald, Bullough, and Collins, ed., *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford 1983) 99-129; and S. Fanning, 'Bede, *Imperium*, and the *Bretwaldas*,' *Speculum* 66 (1991) 1-26.

<sup>305</sup> *HE* II.15, 190-191. Rædwald's apostasy is often given a political dimension in modern scholarship, particularly because he succeeded Æthelberht as over-king during the former's lifetime, see N.J. Higham, *An English Empire: Bede and the early Anglo-Saxon kings*, (Manchester 1995) 205; B. Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms of Early Anglo-Saxon England* (London 2002) 62 and 160.

Rædwald's actions and writes that his last state was worse than his first.<sup>306</sup> Before he converted to Christianity Rædwald could use ignorance as an excuse for his sins but after becoming a Christian he knowingly went back to his old ways. The role of Rædwald's wife in this is important, particularly as she is not a negative character in Bede's book.<sup>307</sup> It is her involvement that stopped Rædwald from handing Edwin over to his enemy, Æthelfrith, thereby saving Edwin's life. On this occasion she wisely counselled the king that his honour was worth more than any amount of gold or ornaments that he might receive in exchange for his friend.<sup>308</sup> However, when it comes to Rædwald's Christianity her advice is less acceptable.

Of particular relevance, however, is Bede's description of Rædwald's apostasy. He writes that in the same temple Rædwald had one altar for Christian sacrifice and another (smaller?) altar for his pagan offerings.<sup>309</sup> Although Bede attests that Ealdwulf – who was king of East Anglia up to Bede's own time – remembered seeing the temple when he was a boy, and Rædwald was undoubtedly engaged in religious syncretism, a temple with multiple altars seems more suited to Old Testament descriptions of religious practices or Imperial Roman behaviour than Anglo-Saxon England. Bede's descriptions of Anglo-Saxon idol-worship are closely linked to the papal letters in which descriptions of paganism come from Old Testament texts and patristic teaching.<sup>310</sup> It is also worth remembering that, although information may be gleaned from Bede's text, it was not Bede's concern to provide accurate representations of Anglo-Saxon paganism. In his *Greater Chronicle*, Bede relates the behaviour of the Syrian king, Antiochus in Jerusalem, describing his location of idols and erection of a statue of Jupiter within the temple of God and adds that Antiochus also built a shrine to Jupiter in Samaria at the request of the Samaritans.<sup>311</sup> Bede likened Rædwald to the ancient Samaritans and his actions are reminiscent of the Syrian

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<sup>306</sup> *HE* II.9, 190-191. See O'Reilly, 'Islands and Idols,' 137-138.

<sup>307</sup> The acknowledged influence of Rædwald's wife in Bede's text is problematic for those who wish to base their arguments for Bede's perceived mistreatment of queens in his book on his misogyny.

<sup>308</sup> *HE* II.12, 180-181.

<sup>309</sup> *HE* II.15, 190-191. There is no suggestion that Rædwald brought a priest back to East Anglia so one wonders what form his Christian sacrifices would have taken.

<sup>310</sup> See O'Reilly, 'Islands and Idols,' 135-136 and 126.

<sup>311</sup> Bede, *De Temporum Ratione*, c.66 (*Chronica Maiora*): *CCSL* 123B, 491; Wallis (1999) 190. See 1Macc 1-2.

king. Both kings profane areas dedicated to the worship of God by placing shrines to pagan deities in close proximity. Any disrespect to the place of God is strongly censured by Bede. In his commentary *On Ezra and Nehemiah*, on the evil deed of the priest who allowed Tobiah to have a storeroom in the vestibule of the temple (Neh 13:7), Bede writes that vessels and articles for the service of God's house were cast out so that these profane ones could be stored there. He then quotes Paul's warning to the Corinthians, rhetorically asking them what righteousness and wickedness have in common, or Christ and Belial, or the temple of God and idols. Bede then adds 'What fellowship do heretics and schismatics have with the orthodox and peace-loving children of God?'<sup>312</sup>

All this helps to explain Bede's antipathy to Rædwald's behaviour. However, if we relate Rædwald's temple to the Christian instruction given already in book two it further illuminates this account. We have already seen that Paul's warning to the Corinthians that light and darkness have nothing in common is echoed in Boniface's letter to Æthelburh. Rædwald was trying to serve both Christ and Belial and his Christianity was compromised by his continuing idolatry. This is expressed by the description of his temple containing altars to both Christ and pagan deities. As already seen though, in Christian thinking (and in Bede's works) the true temple of the Lord is every Christian's soul. Therefore Rædwald's outward actions – in whatever form they may have taken – lead to the corruption of his soul, the profaning of his more important inner temple. If he is worshipping Christ and idols externally, then he is also worshipping them internally. Rædwald is brought to this state by the influence of (among others) his wife, who is an idolater, and who succeeds in making the member of Christ (i.e. Rædwald) an idolater also through her relationship with him. This brief story in the *HE* further illustrates the threat that Æthelburh faced in her marriage to an idolater. Indeed Rædwald and his wife are the opposite of Edwin and Æthelburh, as Rædwald's Christianity is defiled through his wife's influence and his internal temple is profaned, whereas, Æthelburh's husband gives up his idol-worship and converts to Christianity thereby ensuring that Æthelburh's soul will be unstained through her marriage and only sacrifices to

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<sup>312</sup> Bede, *De Ezra et Neemiam*, bk.3, *quae communicatio hereticis et scismaticis cum orthodoxis et pacificis Dei filiis*: CSSL 119A, 388, ll 1961-1962; DeGregorio (2006) 221.

Christ will be offered in her internal temple. Unlike the pernicious influence of Rædwald's wife on her husband's spirituality, Edwin's soul is saved through his marriage. Although Æthelburh's influence on her husband is not as explicit as Rædwald's wife's in Bede's narrative, Pope Boniface's letter outlines for her (and therefore the reader of the *HE*) the part that she must play in her husband's conversion:

Therefore, my illustrious daughter, persevere with all your might to soften his hard heart as soon as possible, by piously teaching him God's commandments. Pour into his mind a knowledge of the greatness of the mystery in which you have believed and the wonder of the reward which, by the new birth, you have been accounted worthy to receive. In flame his cold heart by teaching him about the Holy Spirit, so that he may lose that numbness which an evil religion produces and so that the warmth of divine faith may, through your frequent exhortations, kindle his understanding. Then the testimony of holy scripture will be clearly and abundantly fulfilled in you: 'The unbelieving husband shall be saved by the believing wife' (1 Cor 7:14).<sup>313</sup>

### **Æthelburh's role in Edwin's salvation**

Pope Boniface makes very clear to Æthelburh that she is in grave danger through her marriage to an unbeliever, but having expressed his concerns he then presents her with the solution. He encourages the queen to pray continually and to labour unceasingly to convert her husband. If she does this then the bonds of marriage that unite them on earth, will ensure that they are united in the bonds of faith forever.<sup>314</sup> Æthelburh is urged to pour knowledge of Christianity into her

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<sup>313</sup> *HE* II.11, 174-175, *Insiste ergo, gloriosa filia, et summis conatibus duritiam cordis ipsius religiosa diuinorum praeceptorum insinuatione mollire summopere dematura, infundens sensibus eius quantum sit praeclarum quod credendo suscepisti mysterium, quantumue sit admirabile quod renata praemium consequi meruisti. Frigiditatem cordis ipsius Sancti Spiritus adnuntiatione succende, quatinus amoto torpore perniciosissimi cultus diuinae fidei calor eius intellegentiam tuorum adhortationum frequentatione succendat, ut profecto sacrae scripturae testimonium per te expletum indubitanter perclareat: 'Saluabitur uir infidelis per mulierem fidelem.'*

<sup>314</sup> *HE* II.11, 174-175. Stephanie Hollis is quite dismissive of this promise of Boniface's, suggesting that this goes against Christ's words to the Pharisees that there will not be marrying or giving in marriage in heaven referring to Matt 12:25, *Anglo-Saxon Women* 221. This need not be read as a refutation or misrepresentation of the words of Christ. If Edwin were to convert to Christianity he will share along with his wife in the heavenly rewards offered to all Christians for all eternity, if he is not baptised then he will not. See Adomnán, *Vita Columbae (Life of Columba)*, iii.10: Anderson and Anderson (1991) 196-197; Sharpe (1995) 213. This concerns a vision of Columba's in which the saint sees the soul of a devout woman come from heaven a year after her death to meet her husband's soul in the air and assist the angels in fighting for him

husband's mind and to inflame his cold heart with teachings about the Holy Spirit.<sup>315</sup> Boniface then adds that if she can bring him to the faith, that 'the testimony of holy scripture will be clearly and abundantly fulfilled in you: "The unbelieving husband shall be saved by the believing wife"' (1 Cor 7:14).<sup>316</sup> Æthelburh is expected to do this, according to the pope, as he claims that she has obtained the Lord's mercy for this reason and is expected to return a harvest of faith to the Lord (i.e. convert her husband) to repay the Lord for the benefits that she has received.<sup>317</sup> The pope then asks her to comfort him as soon as possible with the news that Edwin and all the Northumbrians have been converted through her according to the will of God.<sup>318</sup>

Following Boniface's many concerns in the first part of his letter to Æthelburh, the second half suggests that the danger to which she is exposed need only be a temporary problem as long as her husband converts to Christianity. Boniface's exhortations to Æthelburh are quite similar to those of Gregory the Great to Bertha. Both begin their letters by writing that God has reserved for these queens the honour of converting their subject peoples.<sup>319</sup> They also urge their recipients to do everything in their power to turn their husbands' minds towards Christianity. They are told to inflame their thoughts and that through their husbands' conversion they will save their respective peoples.<sup>320</sup> Gregory tells Bertha that her good deeds are already known in Rome and that their renown has subsequently spread to Constantinople but if she is successful in converting Æthelberht, then even the angels in Heaven will rejoice. Boniface tells Æthelburh that he has heard about her pious life and her support for those

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against the powers of the devil. With their help and because the man was righteous, his soul is rescued and he is brought to heaven.

<sup>315</sup> *HE* II.11, 174-175. Boniface used similar imagery in his letter to Edwin, see *HE* II.10, 168-169.

<sup>316</sup> *HE* II.11, 174-175, *ut profecto sacrae scripturae testimonium per te expletum indubitanter perclareat: "Saluabitur uir infidelis per mulierem fidelem"*.

<sup>317</sup> *HE* II.11, 174-175. See Chapter Three for discussion of this imagery.

<sup>318</sup> *HE* II.11, 174-175. Pope Boniface probably died shortly after these letters were written: following Bede's chronology, Æthelburh went to Northumbria with Paulinus after his consecration on 21 July 625. Pope Boniface died 25 October 625.

<sup>319</sup> *Gregorius Bertae*, bk.11.35: *CCSL* 140A, 923; Martyn (2004) 778. Boniface to Æthelburh, *HE* II.11, 172-173.

<sup>320</sup> *Gregorius Bertae*, bk.11.35: *CCSL* 140A, 923-924; Martyn (2004) 778-779. Boniface to Æthelburh, *HE* II.11, 174-175. Gregory also, famously, likened Bertha's role among the English to Constantine's mother's (Helena) effect on the Romans: *CCSL* 140A, 923; Martyn (2004) 778. Jennifer O'Reilly has suggested in personal conversation that this along with comparing her husband, Æthelberht, to Constantine (Helena's son) may also have discouraged Bede from using this letter.

who spread the Christian faith.<sup>321</sup> Boniface's letter to Æthelburh is the longer of the two and was possibly influenced by Gregory's, but has important differences. As discussed already, Boniface outlines his concerns about the threat to a Christian wife through marriage to an unbeliever (especially an idolater), whereas Gregory does not express similar concerns, probably from prudence. Boniface also relates Paul's words about Christian wives leading to the salvation of their pagan husbands to Æthelburh's situation, directly quoting part of this verse in his letter. Gregory does not apply this well-known verse to Bertha's situation, but it is more in keeping with the overall tenor of Boniface's letter than Gregory's. It is also very much in keeping with Bede's account of Edwin's conversion. Indeed if one were looking for a dominant *exemplum* underlying Bede's work on Edwin's journey to Christianity, then 1 Corinthians 7:14 is it.

(i) *1 Corinthians 7:14 – 'the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the believing wife'*

Despite the many arguments put forward against unions between Christians and unbelievers (as discussed above), it is clear that the Church was not wholly opposed to such marriages and was aware that these could lead to conversion. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians is the earliest example of this pragmatism, he wrote:

For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the believing wife: and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the believing husband. Otherwise your children should be unclean: but now they are holy (1 Cor 7:14).

In the preceding verses, Paul had elaborated on the Lord's prohibition against divorce and explained to the Corinthians that if a Christian was married to an unbeliever and the unbeliever was content to remain in the marriage then the

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<sup>321</sup> *Gregorius Bertae*, bk.11.35: *CCSL* 140A, 924; Martyn (2004) 779. Boniface to Æthelburh, *HE* II.11, 172-173. For Gregory's attitude to the Eastern Empire and Constantinople see R.A. Markus, *Gregory the Great and his World* (Cambridge 1997) 83-87; see also M.E. Hoenicke Moore, 'Bede's devotion to Rome: the periphery defining the centre,' in S. Lebecq, M. Perrin and O. Szerwiniack, ed., *Bède le Vénérable entre Tradition et Postérité* (Lille 2005) 199-208 at 201.

Christian should also be happy to stay (1 Cor 7:12-13).<sup>322</sup> If the unbelieving partner dissolved the marriage then the Christian member was not at fault, but if they remained in the marriage they could ultimately lead to the salvation of their partner. Paul urged them to stay, stating ‘For how knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? Or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife?’ (1 Cor 7:16) Peter’s first epistle similarly allowed marriages between unbelievers and Christians suggesting that if Christian wives were subject to their husbands even if these men were without the word, they might be won over not by preaching but by the ‘conversation of the wives’ (1 Pet 3:1). The outlined concerns relating to such marriages remained, however. Tertullian wrote that 1 Cor 7:14 was intended for specific situations and did not give all Christians the right to marry pagans. He explained that Paul was referring to Christians who were married prior to baptism, as it would be quite extreme to expect new converts to dissolve their existing marriages if their spouse was unwilling to convert also. Paul is not allowing unmarried Christians to marry whomever they will, as Christians are expected to marry ‘in the Lord’ (1 Cor 7:39), which means they are to marry other believers. Tertullian also explains that Christians are clean and ‘what is unclean has no part with the holy, unless to defile and slay it by its own (nature).’<sup>323</sup> Cyprian similarly believed that Christians should not marry unbelievers as they could be corrupted by these marriages.<sup>324</sup> *Canon 72* of the *Quinisext Council* also insists that marriages between unbelievers and Christians are only allowable if both parties did not believe at the time of the marriage and one partner came to the faith afterwards. Anyone who goes against this teaching is to be cut off from the Church.<sup>325</sup>

Many commentators were prepared to allow these marriages, however, interpreting Paul’s text more generously than other authorities. Such marriages became a very useful means of spreading Christianity. Augustine wrote that he was unaware of any unambiguous statement from the Lord in the gospels or any of the apostle’s letters forbidding the faithful to marry unbelievers; although he

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<sup>322</sup> As discussed above, in comments from Augustine on this and Christ’s words on divorce from Matthew’s gospel, he discerned that unbelief was equal to fornication and therefore marriage could be dissolved for this reason also.

<sup>323</sup> Tertullian, *Ad Uxorem*, bk.2,2: *CCSL* 1, 384-387; *ANF* 4, 44-45. See also Tertullian, *Ad Uxorem*, bk.2,7: *CCSL* 1, 391-392; *ANF* 4, 47.

<sup>324</sup> Cyprian, *Adversus Judaeos*, bk.3, c.62: *PL* 4, 767-768; *ANF* 5, 550-551. See above.

<sup>325</sup> *Canons of the Quinisext Council*, 72: *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 14, 397.



acknowledges that Cyprian thought that this was a sin.<sup>326</sup> On Paul's words to the Corinthians, Augustine wrote that it must already have been occurring that women were converting to Christianity because of their believing husbands, and men because of their believing wives.<sup>327</sup> In his work *On the Excellence of Marriage*, Augustine asserts that the bodies of married people who are faithful to each other are holy, like those committed to the virginal life, and equally deserve to be told that their bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit.<sup>328</sup> A partner who is an unbeliever does not affect the holiness of people like that. Augustine adds that the opposite is the case, as the holiness of the Christian partner benefits the other as testified by Paul in 1 Cor 7:14.<sup>329</sup> Augustine associated unbelief with fornication and believed that a spouse could be put away for these sins. However as Paul encouraged Christians to stay with unbelieving partners, regarding this as an opportunity to convert them, Augustine believed that it was not good to dissolve these marriages. This was not to preserve the marriage bond, but to win unbelieving spouses for Christ.<sup>330</sup> Augustine also believed that if Christians divorced their spouses because of their unbelief, then people might take offence and come to detest the doctrine of salvation; for this reason it was good to maintain these marriages but this should be done from charity.<sup>331</sup>

In the *Libellus Responsum*, Gregory the Great outlined a positive view of marriage and female sexuality. He reassured Augustine that there was no reason not to baptise pregnant women as the fruitfulness of their bodies is not a sin.<sup>332</sup> Gregory also interpreted the Hebrew Law regarding ritual purification, which stated that a women was impure for thirty-three days after the birth of a

<sup>326</sup> Augustine, *De Coniugiis Adulterinis*, bk.1, c.25(31): PL 40, 468-469; WSA I.9, 162.

<sup>327</sup> Augustine, *De Sermone Domini in Monte*, ch.16.45: CCSL 35, 51; NPNF 1<sup>st</sup> series, 6, 20. See also Augustine, *De Peccatorum Meritis et Remissione, et de Baptismo Parvulorum (On the Merits and Forgiveness of Sins and on the Baptism of Infants)*, bk.3.21: PL 44, 198-199; NPNF 1<sup>st</sup> series, 5, 77-78.

<sup>328</sup> Augustine, *De Bono Coniugali*, c.11(13): PL 40, 382; WSA I.9, 43. It is generally believed that Augustine wrote this work to defend the institution of marriage after Jerome's polemic, written against Jovinian, presented marriage as very inferior to the celibate life, see e.g. *Adversus Jovinianum*, bk.1, st.7: PL 23, 218-219; NPNF 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 6, 350. See D.G. Hunter, intro, Augustine, *On the Excellence of Marriage*: WSA I.9, 29; Brooke, *Medieval Idea of Marriage* 61-63.

<sup>329</sup> Augustine, *De Bono Coniugali*, c.11(13): PL 40, 382; WSA I.9, 43. See also Augustine, *De Moribus Ecclesiae Catholicae (On the morals of the Catholic Church)*, c.35.79: PL 32, 1344; NPNF 1<sup>st</sup> series, 4, 63.

<sup>330</sup> Augustine, *De Coniugiis Adulterinis*, bk.1, c.13(14): PL 40, 459; WSA I.9, 151.

<sup>331</sup> Augustine, *De Coniugiis Adulterinis*, bk.1, c.18(19) and c.18(22): PL 40, 462 and 463; WSA I.9, 154 and 156.

<sup>332</sup> HE I.27, Q.8, 88-91.

boy and sixty-six days after the birth of a girl (Lev 12:4-5), in a Christian manner and explained that if a woman entered a Church immediately after giving birth in order to praise and thank God, then she was not sinning in the eyes of God. He also urged Augustine to baptise an infant immediately after birth if there was a danger that the baby would not survive.<sup>333</sup> He also reinterpreted the sacred law that regarded menstruating women as unclean (Lev 20:18), stating that women should not be forbidden from entering a church or from receiving the Eucharist at that time because they should not be further punished for what happens naturally. Gregory cites the example of the woman with the issue of blood in Matthew's gospel, who was praised for touching the Lord's garment and notes that what was permitted to this woman, is permissible for all women. He recognised that all these natural happenings are the result of the sin of Adam and Eve and are part of humanity's punishment but should not be confused with individuals' sins.<sup>334</sup>

Gregory's reply to Augustine's fifth question is also concerned with the proper practice of marriage but this recognises the gradual nature of conversion, as he notes that newly-converted Anglo-Saxons should not be punished for unlawful marriages contracted before conversion but should be warned about abstaining from these marriages after conversion.<sup>335</sup> As Christians are urged not to marry unbelievers but the benefits of such marriages are often recognised, especially when dealing with recent converts, Gregory similarly realises that other practices relating to marriage, that Christians would regard as improper, need to be tolerated when evangelising new peoples.<sup>336</sup> It is worth noting that Canon 10 of the Synod of Hertford, convened by Theodore in 673 and based on the canons of Chalcedon, states the Christian view of marriage and notes that these marriages can only be dissolved if one partner is guilty of fornication.<sup>337</sup> A concern with the proper practice of marriage is apparent at various stages in the life of the young Anglo-Saxon Church.

While the possibility of bringing unbelieving spouses to Christianity was an important reason for preserving marriages between Christians and unbelievers, of even greater significance was the chance to save the children of

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<sup>333</sup> *HE* I.27, Q.8, 90-91.

<sup>334</sup> *HE* I.27, Q.8, 92-93, referring to Matt 9:20.

<sup>335</sup> *HE* I.27, Q.5, 84-85.

<sup>336</sup> *HE* I.27, Q.5, 84-87.

<sup>337</sup> *HE* IV.5, 352-353.

these marriages: as Paul had told the Corinthians, ‘Otherwise your children should be unclean: but now they are holy.’ Augustine believed that Paul encouraged people to remain in these marriages in the hope that they would win their partners and children for Christ.<sup>338</sup> If one of the parents was Christian then the children of the marriage had the chance to be baptised. Augustine wrote that this would not happen unless there was a difference of belief in the marriage and the unbelief of one spouse had to be endured in the hope that they might come to the faith; this then leads to their children’s salvation.<sup>339</sup> It was also the case that if the Christian spouse succeeded in having the children of the marriage baptised their partner was often more likely to convert. Augustine believed that if the Christian life was lived in the home then the close ties of married life and children could lead to a ‘sprinkling of holiness’ falling on the unbelieving spouse. However he adds that, although the unbeliever is sanctified by these family contacts and their intimate union with a holy spouse, they still require baptism to be cleansed of original sin and be able to return to God.<sup>340</sup>

Marriages of mixed faith did lead to many children being baptised that otherwise would not have been Christian. Jerome cites the example of an influential Roman family known to him. In writing to Laeta on the upbringing of her daughter Paula, who had been consecrated to Christ, Jerome refers to 1 Cor 7:14 and adds that if anyone thought that Paul was being indulgent or relaxing the laws of discipline they need look no further than Laeta’s family. She was the product of a mixed marriage and yet was a Christian and her daughter was dedicated to a life of virginity. Jerome then presents the beautiful image of the small child’s heathen grandfather (Albinus) delightedly hearing Christ’s Alleluia from her faltering lips, and adds that the ‘one unbeliever is sanctified by his holy and believing family.’ He suggests that anyone who is surrounded by Christian children and grandchildren is a candidate for the faith and only regrets that Albinus was not surrounded by Christian family members in his youth as he

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<sup>338</sup> Augustine, *De Conjugiis Adulterinis*, bk.1, c.13(14): *PL* 40, 459; *WSA* I.9, 151.

<sup>339</sup> Augustine, *De Sermone Domini in Monte*, c.16.45: *CCSL* 35, 52; *NPNF* 1<sup>st</sup> series, 6, 20. See also Augustine, *De Peccatorum Meritis et Remissione*, bk.3.21: *PL* 44, 198-199; *NPNF* 1<sup>st</sup> series, 5, 77-78 and *De Moribus Ecclesiae Catholicae*, c.35.79: *PL* 32, 1344; *NPNF* 1<sup>st</sup> series, 4, 63.

<sup>340</sup> Augustine, *De Peccatorum Meritis Et Remissione*, bk.3.21: *PL* 44, 199; *NPNF* 1<sup>st</sup> series, 5, 77-78.

might then have been prepared to accept Christianity. Yet Jerome remains hopeful that he will be saved.<sup>341</sup>

As Christianity spread northwards diplomatic marriages between Christians and unbelievers became an increasingly useful means of conversion. Clovis' conversion is the most famous example, and in this case his wife succeeded in having the children of the marriage baptised while her husband was still actively an unbeliever.<sup>342</sup> The tone of Gregory the Great's letter to Bertha suggests that he recognised the potential in these marriages. Pope Boniface V was similarly aware of the possibilities, but he stressed the danger in these marriages very forcefully before suggesting to Æthelburh that she could remedy the unfortunate situation. He urged her to do everything she could to convert her husband and very significantly quoted the first part of 1 Cor 7:14, telling her that he hoped she would fulfil this during her own life.

*(ii) Bede and Æthelburh*

The danger facing Æthelburh is very apparent in Bede's text, but before this is raised the reader is already informed that Edwin converted to Christianity after becoming allied through marriage to the royal family in Kent.<sup>343</sup> If one then considers Bede's text in the light of Boniface's letters in particular, and the Christian view of marriage in general, it is apparent that Paul's words to the Corinthians are fulfilled in Æthelburh's life. The unbelieving husband is sanctified and subsequently accepts baptism through having a believing wife, thereby fulfilling Paul's pronouncement as Pope Boniface hoped. Not only is this the case however, but even before Edwin's own conversion the first child from this mixed marriage is baptised, which means the second part of 1 Cor 7:14 is also fulfilled: 'Otherwise your children should be unclean: but now they are holy.' Eanflæd who, as Bede points out, is the first Northumbrian to be baptised, becomes a Christian because she is the child of a marriage between a Christian and an unbeliever.<sup>344</sup> She is like Laeta, Jerome's correspondent, as they are both

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<sup>341</sup> Jerome, *Ep.* 107.1: Labourt 5, 144-145; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 6, 189-190.

<sup>342</sup> Gregory of Tours, *Historia Francorum*, bk.II.29: *MGH SRM* 1:1, 90-91; Thorpe (1985) 141-142.

<sup>343</sup> *HE* II.9, 162-163.

<sup>344</sup> *HE* II.9, 166-167. See Augustine above on this.

the children of mixed marriages and both of them dedicate their daughters to lives of virginity.<sup>345</sup> Although Bede does not explicitly show Æthelburh teaching her husband about Christianity, his presentation of Edwin's conversion, particularly when considered in the light of Boniface's letters and comment on 1 Cor 7:14, implies her important role in this.

Æthelburh is not shown teaching Edwin at any stage in the text and there is nothing in the *HE* that is like the discussions between Clovis and Clotild in Gregory of Tours' *History of the Franks*.<sup>346</sup> Bede may not have drawn attention to Æthelburh's role for various reasons. If he had shown that Edwin converted to Christianity because of his wife's urgings, then following the Anglo-Saxon concept of marriage it would have seemed that Northumbria was politically subordinate to Kent, as the king of Northumbria had accepted the religion of his wife and the royal family of Kent.<sup>347</sup> Instead Bede's narrative stresses the providential nature of Edwin's conversion and draws attention to the role of Paulinus in this. However even Paulinus' work was unsuccessful until he received divine help and was made aware of Edwin's encounter with a mysterious stranger while in exile.<sup>348</sup> Despite Æthelburh's invisibility in the narrative, it seems probable that she had an influence on her husband. Meyer observed that women were often able to shape events by exercising informal power and influencing those around them.<sup>349</sup> Pope Boniface acknowledged Æthelburh's pious works, her devotion for the Redeemer and her unceasing aid

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<sup>345</sup> See above for Jerome, and *HE* III.24, 290-293, for Eanflæd's daughter, Ælflæd.

<sup>346</sup> Gregory of Tours, *Historia Francorum*, bk.II.29-30: *MGH SRM* 1:1, 90-92; Thorpe (1985) 141-143. However Clotild's objections to idolatry are similar to those presented in the *HE* in Pope Boniface's letters and in Coifi's words to Edwin's assembly, *HE* II.10, 168-171; II.11, 172-175; II.13, 182-183. Cf. Oswiu's discussions with Sigeberht of the East Saxons, III.22, 280-283. In each of these cases the impotence of man-made idols is stressed and in many cases compared to the omnipotence of God who created the world and everything in it.

<sup>347</sup> Many Anglo-Saxon scholars have suggested that Edwin's conversion was motivated by political considerations. Mayr-Harting and Yorke both suggest that Edwin delayed his baptism until after Rædwald's death because of the East Anglian king's dominance, Mayr-Harting, *Coming of Christianity* 66 and Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms* 78. Higham argues that he converted in an attempt to compete with supporters of the sons of Æthelfrith (Oswald and Oswiu) who had converted to Christianity while in exile, *Convert Kings* 164-169. Edwin's defeat of the West Saxons proved his competence in military matters (and demonstrated the power of the Christian God to him), *HE* II.9, 166-167. This may have established him as a strong king and his political dominance might have been widely recognised before his conversion. Edwin is fifth in Bede's list of over-kings, *HE* II.5, 148-149.

<sup>348</sup> See *HE* II.9, 164-165 and II.12, 176-177.

<sup>349</sup> Meyer, 'Queens, Convents and Conversion,' 91.

to those spreading the Christian faith.<sup>350</sup> As previously mentioned, Bede had a tendency to edit letters when their content was not suitable to his purposes; that he included Boniface's praises suggests that he agreed with them.

While Bede does not give practical details of how Æthelburh accomplished the role Bede and Boniface's letter eloquently describe, Bede did expect all Christians to act as teachers for those around them. When discussing the role of the shepherds in spreading the word about the birth of Christ in a homily on Luke's account of the Nativity, Bede wrote that the shepherds did not keep silent about the mysteries they had received but told everyone that they could. He then added:

It is not only bishops, presbyters, deacons, and even those who govern monasteries, who are to be understood to be pastors, but also all the faithful, who keep watch over the little ones of their house, are properly called "pastors," insofar as they preside with solicitous watchfulness over their own house.<sup>351</sup>

In his commentary on Ezra and Nehemiah, when discussing the two hundred male and female singers of Ezra 2:65, Bede wrote:

It is proper also that, along with the male singers, female singers should be included on account of their female sex, in which there are many people found who not only by the way they live but also by preaching enkindle the hearts of their neighbours to the praise of their Creator and, as though with the sweetness of a holy voice, assist the labour of those who build the Lord's temple.<sup>352</sup>

Bede seems not to have had a problem with women teaching;<sup>353</sup> for him, the fundamental requirement for any teacher was that they act out of love. All Christians are required to love God and love their neighbour and, for Bede, the clearest way of demonstrating one's love for God and neighbour was to labour

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<sup>350</sup> *HE* II.11, 172-173.

<sup>351</sup> Bede, *Hom* I.7: *CCSL* 122, 49, ll 104-108; Martin and Hurst (1991) 69, *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.*

<sup>352</sup> Bede, *De Ezra et Neemiam*, bk.1: *CCSL* 119A, 257, ll 650-655; DeGregorio (2006) 32, *Bene autem cantoribus etiam cantrices iunguntur propter sexum uidelicet femineum in quo plurimae reperiuntur personae quae non solum uiuendo uerum etiam praedicando corda proximorum ad laudem sui creatoris accendant et quasi suauitate sanctae uocis aedificantium templum domini adiuuent laborem.*

<sup>353</sup> See Thacker, 'Bede's Ideal of Reform,' 131. A.T. Thacker, 'Bede and the Ordering of Understanding,' in S. DeGregorio, ed., *Innovation and Tradition in the Writings of The Venerable Bede* (Morgantown 2006) 37-63 at 43.

solicitously on behalf of one's neighbour. This is why, in Bede's view, Christ commanded Peter to 'Feed his sheep' each time after asking Peter if he loved him (John 21:15-17).<sup>354</sup> This means that all teachers should instruct their hearers out of love.<sup>355</sup> Taking on the office of teaching for reasons other than love (such as vainglory) is unacceptable, as teachers are expected to have moved beyond vices and the cares of the world so that they can concentrate all their efforts on loving God and their neighbour.<sup>356</sup> Bede wrote that teachers should be of 'settled character and unalterable mind.'<sup>357</sup> He also explained that the Lord sent the apostles out in twos to preach the good news (Luke 10:1) because he wanted to make clear that before anyone tries to teach the word of faith they must first possess the virtue of love.<sup>358</sup> This belief that loving God and neighbour could be demonstrated by teaching one's neighbour is most apparent in the *HE* in Bede's account of Cuthbert. Cuthbert was fired with divine love in all things and 'held that to give the weak brethren help and advice was a fit substitute for prayer, for he knew that He who said, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God", also said, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour"' (Matt 22:37,39).<sup>359</sup>

A husband or wife can therefore become a teacher for their spouse as long as they are doing so out of love. Christian spouses are expected to love their partner as themselves because their spouse is their neighbour, but also love each other as they love their own bodies and husbands are told to love their wives as Christ loved the Church, and wives are to love and obey their husbands as Christ.<sup>360</sup> Tertullian applied Christ's promise to the apostles that wherever 'there are two or three gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them'

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<sup>354</sup> Bede, *Hom II.22: CCSL 122*, 342; Martin and Hurst (1991) 220. Cf. Bede, *Hom II.25: CCSL 122*, 374; Martin and Hurst (1991) 263. For the twofold commandment of love, see Matt 22:37-39; Mark 12:29-31; Luke 10:27. Exegetes often couple the authority Peter received from Christ in Matt 16 with his responsibility to Christ's flock as outlined in John 21, see Bede *Hom II.22: CCSL 122*, 342ff; Martin and Hurst (1991) 220-228.

<sup>355</sup> See Bede, *In Tobiam* [8:22]: *CCSL 119B*, 12, ll 49-50; Foley (1999) 70; where he writes that 'teachers are filled with the grace of heavenly love.' See also Bede, *Hom I.7: CCSL 122*, 47; Martin and Hurst (1991) 66.

<sup>356</sup> See Bede, *In Epistolas Septem Catholicas (On the Seven Catholic Epistles)*, James 5.19-20: *CCSL 121*, 223; Hurst (1985) 64-65. Bede, *Hom II.1: CCSL 122*, 186-187; Martin and Hurst (1991) 4-5. Bede, *Hom II.25: CCSL 122*, 371; Martin and Hurst (1991) 259. Bede, *De Tabernaculo*, bk.2: *CCSL 119A*, 60-61; Holder (1994) 67-68.

<sup>357</sup> Bede, *Hom II.25: CCSL 122*, 374; Martin and Hurst (1991) 263.

<sup>358</sup> Bede, *De Templo*, bk.1, st.13.3: *CCSL 119A*, 180; Connolly (1995) 48.

<sup>359</sup> *HE IV.28(26)*, 438-439, *hoc ipsum quoque orationis loco ducens, si infirmis fratribus opem suae exhortationis tribueret, sciens quia, qui dixit 'Diliges Dominum Deum tuum', dixit et 'Diliges proximum'*.

<sup>360</sup> See Eph 5:24-33; 1 Cor 7:3-4. See Rordorf, 'Marriage in the New Testament,' 195-196.

(Matt 18:20), to married couples; adding that where Christ is, there the evil one is not.<sup>361</sup> Bede wrote that love could not exist between fewer than two.<sup>362</sup> If a husband or wife endeavours to teach their spouse then, it is to be assumed that their motivation is one of love. As all Christians are allowed to teach if they do so out of love, then Æthelburh could have done this for Edwin. Augustine of Hippo believed that if the Christian life was led in the home, then this could help to bring an unbeliever to the faith.<sup>363</sup> Bede also subscribed to this view. In his commentary on 1 Peter 3:1, which states that wives should be subject to their husbands, even if they are unbelievers, Bede explained that Peter was not suggesting that obedient wives should do evil at their husbands' commands, but hoping that they could be examples of chastity and faith to even those men.<sup>364</sup> It is most likely that Æthelburh's efforts to convert her husband took place in the home and in private. Bede does not draw attention to this, but considering his use of Boniface's letter and his belief that all Christians could be teachers for those around them he probably believed that Æthelburh should play a part in bringing her husband to Christianity. That Bede's account of Æthelburh's life, particularly the baptism of her first child, so closely fulfilled the words of 1 Cor 7:14 suggests that Bede assumed that in this case the believing wife did lead to the sanctification of her unbelieving husband.

### **Conclusion – Bede's narrative and Pope Boniface V's letters**

In returning again to Bede's account of Edwin the remarkable congruence between his narrative and the pope's letters is increasingly apparent. Bede's location of the papal letters in the midst of his narrative is also very important. He begins this account by warning about the dangers to a Christian virgin from this marriage. Read in the light of Boniface's instruction, Bede's presentation of Kent's objection to the marriage reveals a genuine concern for Æthelburh's safety rather than an attempt to gain leverage, and serves to instruct his readers about the Christian concept of marriage. Bede ends chapter nine by relating

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<sup>361</sup> Tertullian, *Ad Uxorem*, bk.2,8(9): *CCSL* 1, 394; *ANF* 4, 48. See also Rordorf, 'Marriage in the New Testament,' 207, for Clement of Alexandria on this idea.

<sup>362</sup> Bede, *De Templo*, bk.1, st.13.3: *CCSL* 119A, 180; Connolly (1995) 48.

<sup>363</sup> Augustine, *De Peccatorum Meritis Et Remissione*, bk.3.21: *PL* 44, 199; *NPNF* 1<sup>st</sup> series, 5, 78. See above.

<sup>364</sup> Bede, *In Epistolas Septem Catholicas*, 1 Pet 3.1: *CCSL* 121, 243; Hurst (1985) 95.



Edwin's victory over the West Saxon king who had sent an assassin to kill him and, while acknowledging that Edwin was unwilling to accept Christianity immediately afterwards, he had by this time renounced idol worship and allowed Paulinus to baptise his daughter, Eanflæd. The following two chapters contain Boniface's letters to the royal couple, although these were undoubtedly written at an earlier stage in the marriage. In both letters the pope is very concerned about Edwin's idolatry but, unlike Boniface at the time of writing, the reader of the *HE* is aware, when reading these letters in the order of Bede's narrative, that Edwin has already turned his back on idolatry and, thanks to the pope's teaching, realises that the threat to Æthelburh is greatly reduced. Her husband is still a stranger to Christianity, a situation that remains undesirable, but he is no longer (to paraphrase the pope) guilty of clinging to pernicious superstitions and worshipping damnable gods.<sup>365</sup> The reader of the *HE* is also aware that the baptism of Eanflæd means that the second part of 1 Cor 7:14 has been fulfilled: the child that would otherwise have been unclean is made holy, and the first part as subsequently quoted by the pope will surely soon follow. The providential nature of conversion, which Bede refers to on a couple of occasions in chapter nine, also runs through Boniface's letters. Immediately after the pope's intervention the true extent of divine providence in Edwin's life is revealed in Bede's account of the king's experience in East Anglia. Paulinus is made aware of this and, when he confronts the king, even Edwin accepts the role of God in his life and is prepared to follow the teachings of Paulinus. In conference with his chief men and counsellors, Edwin's high priest acknowledged the impotence of idols, which again the reader is aware of following Boniface's presentation of the Christian view of these superstitions in his letter to Edwin. This realisation has now come to the Northumbrian people in the person of their high priest, Coifi. Following the baptism of the king, Paulinus undertakes mass baptisms throughout the kingdom and even in neighbouring districts that bring many Anglo-Saxons to the faith. This again ties in with Boniface's letter to Æthelburh as the pope had promised her that if she laboured to convert her husband, then God would not only bring him but all the peoples subject to them to Christianity.

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<sup>365</sup> *HE* II.10, 168-169.

Book two ends with the death of Edwin in battle and the flight of Paulinus, Æthelburh and her surviving family members back to Kent following the devastation of Northumbria. Although Æthelburh and Paulinus' good work is seemingly undone, Bede ends on a note of hope describing the work of James the Deacon who remained behind and continued to teach when possible. He, along with Eanflæd – the child of a marriage between an unbeliever and a Christian and the first of the Northumbrians to be baptised – and others ensured that the marriage between the Northumbrian people and Christ begun during the reign of Edwin following his marriage to Æthelburh would endure.

### **C.3 – From Æthelburh to Eanflæd: Christianity and the Northumbrian People**

Chapter One suggested that biblical images of marriage and the bride of Christ form an important element in Bede's many-layered account of the process by which Christianity was brought to the Anglo-Saxons.<sup>366</sup> Chapter Two discussed the particular example of the role that Edwin of Northumbria's marriage played in his conversion. This leads to the mass evangelisation of the Northumbrian people, and Bede uses the Pauline image of the Church as the bride of Christ in his account of their conversion.<sup>367</sup> As Edwin's marriage to Æthelburh was instrumental in bringing the faith to the king and his people, so their daughter Eanflæd's marriage to Oswiu was to be an important factor in the further 'conversion' of the Northumbrians to the Roman dating of Easter. Bede's account is unique in acknowledging the role of Eanflæd in bringing this controversy to a head through her own observance of the Roman Easter at Oswiu's court. Like her mother at Edwin's court, Eanflæd's presence in Northumbria leads to the conversion of her husband and subsequently his people to the true faith. These kings represent their people literally and figuratively (as the Church needs the kings' support if it is to be successful and when the kings convert their peoples usually follow them); the queens symbolically represent the Church coming to them and living among them. This chapter will examine Bede's account of the conversion of Northumbria from the mission of Paulinus to the reign of Eanflæd and consider the extent to which the ecclesiological understanding of marriage imagery may be relevant to understanding Bede's account.

#### **Paulinus and the Northumbrians**

##### *(i) Paulinus' mission*

The conversion of Northumbria began during the reign of Edwin, following his marriage to the Christian Æthelburh of Kent. As part of this marriage

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<sup>366</sup> The extension of Christianity to the Anglo-Saxons and other peoples at the ends of the earth has been examined in great detail by Jennifer O'Reilly, see Chapter One.

<sup>367</sup> *HE* II.9, 164-165.

arrangement Edwin guaranteed that the faith of Æthelburh and those in her company would be respected. Archbishop Justus consecrated Paulinus as bishop on 21 July 625 and he went to Northumbria in Æthelburh's train to ensure that the queen and all those in her company would not be corrupted through their contacts with the indigenous pagan population.<sup>368</sup> However, Bede wrote that 'more truly his whole heart was set on calling the people to whom he was coming to the knowledge of the truth; his desire was to present it [*i.e.* them – the Northumbrian people], in the words of the apostle, as a pure virgin to be espoused to one husband, even Christ.'<sup>369</sup> Although Paulinus is in many ways Æthelburh's protector and leaves Northumbria with her after Edwin's death in 633, his consecration as bishop before leaving for Northumbria ties in with his missionary intentions.<sup>370</sup> In medieval Europe bishops were occasionally consecrated for missionary areas before they had established a see. Angenendt notes that this was the case in sixth century Gaul and suggests that Bertha had Bishop Liudhard in her company at Æthelberht's court because the Franks hoped to bring the then unbelieving kingdom of Kent into the Gaulish Church.<sup>371</sup> Birinus was similarly consecrated as bishop in Genoa at the command of Pope Honorius after he had promised the pope that he would spread Christianity to the remote Anglo-Saxons. He did not have a see or even a definite destination, but

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<sup>368</sup> *HE* II.9, 162-163.

<sup>369</sup> *HE* II.9, referring to 2 Cor 11:2, 164-165, *ipse potius toto animo intendens ut gentem, quam adibat, ad agnitionem ueritatis aduocans iuxta uocem apostolic uni uero sponso uirginem castam exhiberet Christo.*

<sup>370</sup> Many scholars have questioned Bede's chronology of Edwin's marriage and suggested that Æthelburh and Paulinus were in Northumbria many years before Paulinus' consecration (see Chapter Two, n.38). They argue that Paulinus returned to Kent to be consecrated after some success among the Northumbrians, as was the case for Augustine of Canterbury who went to Arles to be consecrated after his mission to Kent was proving successful (*HE* I.27, 78-79). R.A. Markus, 'The Chronology of the Gregorian Mission to England: Bede's Narrative and Gregory's Correspondence,' *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 14 (1963) 16-30, repr. in Markus, *From Augustine to Gregory the Great* (London 1983) X, suggests a different interpretation of Augustine's movements. Cedd similarly began his mission among the East Saxons before he became their bishop and returned to Northumbria to consult with Bishop Finan following the success of this mission before Finan consecrated him (*HE* III.22, 282-283). However, as Edwin's baptism took place after 625 and Bede is clear that Eanflæd was the first Northumbrian to be baptised in 626, it is unlikely that Paulinus could have had sufficient success among the Northumbrians by 625 to warrant being consecrated as bishop. It is most likely that Paulinus' consecration took place in Kent before he brought Æthelburh to Northumbria for her marriage; see Chapter Two, n.39 on the now general acceptance of Bede's dates for Edwin's reign.

<sup>371</sup> A. Angenendt, 'The Conversion of the Anglo-Saxons considered against the background of the Early Medieval Mission,' in *Angli e Sassoni al di qua e al di là del mare, Settimane di studio del centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo* 32 (Spoleto 1986) 747-781 at 779-780. He also suggests that Æthelberht may have become aware of this intention and this may explain why Liudhard and Bertha played such a negligible role in his conversion.

the first people he met were the West Saxons who were still heathen so he remained there.<sup>372</sup> Aidan was also consecrated as bishop on Iona before he began his mission to the Northumbrians.<sup>373</sup>

Paulinus' consecration suggests that the Church at Kent hoped that Edwin and Æthelburh's marriage would lead to the evangelisation of the Northumbrian people and Bede also makes clear that it was Paulinus' intention to bring this about.<sup>374</sup> Immediately in Bede's text, Edwin and Æthelburh's marriage is linked with Paulinus' desire to bring the Northumbrians into the Church. Through this earthly marriage, the Northumbrians would be able to partake in the heavenly marriage between Christ and his virgin bride, the Church. In the text Bede clearly alludes to 2 Cor 11:2: 'For I am jealous of you with the jealousy of God. For I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.' This verse and the following one were discussed in Chapter Two in relation to Æthelburh, who is described as a virgin in *HE* II.9 in a reference to her spiritual virginity. While every baptised soul is the bride of Christ, the Church incorporating the whole body of the faithful is the true bride, to be united in holy matrimony with Christ at the end of time.<sup>375</sup> By using this verse Bede has acknowledged that if the Northumbrian people accept the Christian faith they will be fit to be presented as a pure virgin to their husband, Christ. In comment on this verse Origen wrote that Paul wanted all the Corinthians to present themselves as a pure virgin, which was possible even though they were corrupted by diverse sins. On coming to the faith of Christ in baptism, they were all at once re-born as members of the pure virgin and were worthy to be joined in marriage with Christ.<sup>376</sup> Augustine also wrote that the whole Church is the spouse of Christ and through the integrity of the faith of all her members – whether literally virgins, married or widowed – she is a virgin.<sup>377</sup> Through baptism as Christians,

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<sup>372</sup> *HE* III.7, 232-233. See R. Fletcher, *The Conversion of Europe: From Paganism to Christianity, 371-1386 AD* (London 1998) 161.

<sup>373</sup> *HE* III.3, 218-219; III.5, 228-229.

<sup>374</sup> Gregory the Great's plan for the Anglo-Saxon Church was that there would be two archbishops, one at London and the other at York; see Gregory to Augustine, *HE* I.29, 104-107.

<sup>375</sup> See Chapter One.

<sup>376</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Leviticus*, 12.5: *SC* 287, 184-185; *FOTC* 83, 226-227.

<sup>377</sup> Augustine, *De Bono Viduitatis (The Excellence of Widowhood)*, c.10(13): *PL* 40; *WSA* I.9, 121. Cf. Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos (Expositions on the Psalms)*, Ps 90(91): *CCSL* 39, *sermo* 2, st.9, 1276; *NPNF* 1<sup>st</sup> series, 8, st.17, 451-452. Augustine, *Sermo (Sermon)* 192 (10), st.2: *PL* 38; *ACW* 15, 114.

the Northumbrians would be renewed in Christ and become his bride, and would remain in this state as long as they maintained the integrity of their faith.

On arriving in Northumbria Paulinus tried, initially without success, to bring about the conversion of the population. Throughout his account of Paulinus' work among the Anglo-Saxons, Bede described him as a labourer. In introducing him to the reader in *HE* I.29, Bede suggested that Paulinus and his companions were sent to assist Augustine's work in England because the harvest was great and the labourers were few – a deliberate allusion to the gospel accounts of Jesus sending out the twelve disciples in Matthew (9:37ff) and the seventy-two others in Luke (10:2).<sup>378</sup> In Christian commentary this commission is not just related to the twelve apostles but to all teachers who follow them. In his exegesis Bede wrote that the 'twelve' reveals the beginning of the episcopal rank, whereas the 'seventy-two' signify the lesser rank of the priesthood.<sup>379</sup> Bede frequently returned to the labouring image in his account of Paulinus. He wrote on different occasions that Paulinus laboured among the Northumbrians and, in the description of his death, said that Paulinus ascended to heaven 'bearing with him the fruits of his glorious labours.'<sup>380</sup> Labouring for the Lord and returning a harvest to him, which results in the labourer receiving his reward, is an important evangelical image and is expressed in the gospel parables of the labourers in the vineyard (Matt 20:1-16) and the talents given by the master to his servants (Matt 25:14-30; cf. Luke 19:12-27). This became a very important exegetical theme and was often applied to the work of teachers, as their labours return a harvest of believers to the Lord.<sup>381</sup> This imagery was very familiar to Bede and occurs in his scriptural commentaries where it is often related to the work of teachers.<sup>382</sup> Bede saw all Christian teachers as the successors of the apostles whom Christ

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<sup>378</sup> *HE* I.29, 104-105.

<sup>379</sup> Bede, *De Tabernaculo (On the Tabernacle)*, bk.3: *CCSL* 119A, 112; Holder (1994) 128-129.

<sup>380</sup> *HE* II.20, 204-205, ... *cum gloriosi fructu laboris ascendit*. See also *HE* II.9, 164-165; II.12, 176-177.

<sup>381</sup> See e.g. Ambrose, *De Fide (Of the Christian Faith)*, bk.5, prologue, st.14-15: *PL* 16, 677-678; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 10, 285. Augustine, *Sermo* 37, st.6: *NPNF* 1<sup>st</sup> series, 6, 375. Gregory the Great, *Mor.* 30:47: Bliss (1844-1850) III, 396.

<sup>382</sup> See Bede, *De Tabernaculo*, bk.2: *CCSL* 119A, 52, 61 and 85-87 ; Holder (1994) 57, 67-68 and 97-99. Bede, *De Templo (On the Temple)*, bk.2, st.22.3: *CCSL* 119A, 227; Connolly (1995) 109. Bede, *Expositio Actuum Apostolorum (Commentary on Acts of the Apostles)*, c.2.1: *CCSL* 121, 15-16; Martin (1989) 27-28. Bede, *In Regum Librum XXX Quaestiones (Thirty Questions on the Book of Kings)*, Q.30: *CCSL* 119, 322; Trent Foley (1999) 138. See also Bede, *Epistola Bede Ad Ecgbertum Episcopum (Bede's Letter to Egbert)*, st.2: Plummer (1969) 405-406; McClure and Collins (1999) 343.

had commissioned to spread the faith to all peoples (Matt 28:19-20).<sup>383</sup> In using the harvesting image of Matthew and Luke (above) in describing the arrival of Paulinus and other missionaries to the Anglo-Saxons, Bede clearly linked their evangelising with the apostolic mission. While he does not specifically refer to particular biblical verses in his account of Paulinus among the Northumbrians, labouring imagery is contained in the papal letters included in this book.<sup>384</sup> As in Bede's account of Æthelburh's role in her husband's conversion, the papal letters are again a central component in the unfolding of Bede's narrative presenting the biblical and theological background to Paulinus' endeavours in Northumbria.<sup>385</sup> Bede's presentation of Paulinus demonstrates his role in spreading Christianity and building up the Church for Christ among non-believers. However, in this case, Bede uses marriage imagery to illuminate Paulinus' work.

It becomes apparent that without the support of the king Paulinus' efforts were destined to be unsuccessful.<sup>386</sup> It was not until Pentecost in 626, almost a year after his consecration as bishop for the Northumbrians, that the first Northumbrian was baptised. This was Edwin and Æthelburh's first child, Eanflæd, and as argued in Chapter Two this is presented as a fulfilment of 1Cor 7:14 – that the child of a mixed faith couple can be saved through the faith of one of their parents. Eanflæd's birth had taken place at Easter Sunday (626) in the most traumatic circumstances following a failed attempt on her father's life. After Edwin recovered from this attack, Paulinus assured him that it was through Christ's intercession that he had survived and that his child had been safely delivered without much suffering to her mother.<sup>387</sup> Following Paulinus' words

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<sup>383</sup> See e.g. Bede, *De Templo*, bk.2, st.19.5: *CCSL* 119A, 209-210; Connolly (1995) 87-88. See also J. O'Reilly, intro., S. Connolly, tr., *Bede: On the Temple* (1995) xxxiv-xxxv.

<sup>384</sup> Boniface to Justus, *HE* II.8, 158-161; Boniface to Æthelburh, II.11, 174-175; Honorius to Edwin, II.17, 194-197; and Honorius to Archbishop Honorius, II.18, 196-199. See Boniface to Justus, *HE* II.8, 158-161 and Honorius to Archbishop Honorius, II.18, 196-197, who both directly quote from the parable of the talents. The labouring image appears again in Vitalian's letter to Oswiu and, in relation to 'conversion' to the Roman Easter, he also uses the image of rooting out tares (cf. Matt 13:24-30), *HE* III.29, 318-321. Bede returns to the image of harvesting in describing Egbert's mission to the Columban monks, describing them as 'cutting a crooked furrow' in relation to their Easter practice, *HE* V.9, 478-479. Cf. Wihthberht who spent two years preaching the word in Frisia but 'reaped no fruit for all this labour', *HE* V.478-481.

<sup>385</sup> See Chapter Two on the important didactic role of the papal letters in the *HE*.

<sup>386</sup> See *HE* II.9, 164-165, which again suggests the providential nature of the Northumbrians' conversion.

<sup>387</sup> In personal conversation Jennifer O'Reilly has suggested that Eanflæd's birth is miraculously painless for her mother because the curse of Eve, who will bring forth her children in pain and suffering (Gen 3:16), has been negated. This is associated with Edwin's miraculous escape from the assassin's attack, and ultimately leads to Eanflæd's baptism, which is subsequently followed

and as part of a pledge that he might later convert if successful in battle against the West Saxon king who sent the assassin to his court, Edwin agreed to let Paulinus baptise his new daughter and eleven others from his household were baptised with her on the feast of Pentecost.<sup>388</sup>

(ii) *Birth of the Northumbrian Church*

There are many note-worthy elements in Bede's short account of the baptism of Eanflæd and eleven other Northumbrians. It is undoubtedly significant that twelve Northumbrians were baptised on this occasion. In his *De Doctrina Christiana*, Augustine wrote that being unfamiliar with numbers makes many things that are said figuratively or mystically in scripture unintelligible and argued for the significance of various numbers, including twelve, which is a very important number in the Judaeo-Christian tradition.<sup>389</sup> The twelve sons of Jacob (whose other name was Israel, *i.e.* seeing God) were the eponymous ancestors of the twelve tribes of Israel. There were twelve fountains of water in Elim (Exod 15:27), twelve loaves of proposition presented to the Lord (Lev 24:5-6), twelve men – one from each of the tribes – carried twelve stones from the bed of the Jordan to mark the Israelites' camp-site on the opposite bank and twelve stones were set up in the midst of the channel to mark the passing of the ark of the covenant (Joshua 4:1-9) in a miracle that mirrors the crossing of the Red Sea in Exodus. The twelve tribes of Israel pre-figure the twelve apostles of the Church. The Old and New Testament are drawn together in the vision of the heavenly city/temple (Rev 21). The wall of the city has twelve gates with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel inscribed on them (Rev 21:12), and the wall of the city has twelve foundations with the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb on them (Rev 21:14).<sup>390</sup> On the twelve stones brought from the bed of the River Jordan,

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by the baptism of Edwin and many of his most important advisors. Bede describes Edwin's literal near-death experience, followed by a real birth, which are all directly related to Easter, which celebrates Christ's victory over death and Resurrection from the tomb, commemorated in baptism, which is a ritual death and re-birth into new life as a Christian (see Rom 6).

<sup>388</sup> *HE* II.9, 164-167.

<sup>389</sup> Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana (On Christian Teaching)*, bk.2 (62-65): *CCSL* 32; Green (1997) 45-46.

<sup>390</sup> See J. O'Reilly, 'The Library of Scripture: Views from Vivarium and Wearmouth-Jarrow,' in P. Binski and W. Noel, ed., *New Offerings, Ancient Treasures: Studies in Medieval Art for George Henderson* (Sutton 2001) 3-39 at 31.



Jerome wrote that those stones are symbols of the twelve foundations on which are written the names of the twelve apostles (Rev 21:14), on which the heavenly city is built.<sup>391</sup> Elsewhere he wrote that Joshua, who prefigured the Lord, marked out the spiritual boundary of the heavenly Jerusalem, which is the Church.<sup>392</sup> In Christian exegesis twelve evokes the Church.<sup>393</sup>

The number twelve is also important in Insular tradition. As seen already, twelve Northumbrians were baptised together in 626. It was also recorded that Columba left Ireland with twelve companions or, perhaps more correctly, disciples, and this fact was included in Adomnán's *Life* of the saint.<sup>394</sup> Adomnán also claimed that Oswald had been baptised with twelve men while he was in exile among the Irish.<sup>395</sup> Indeed in Adomnán's account of the victory that brought Oswald to the throne of Northumbria, he likens Oswald to Joshua. On the day before the battle against Cædwalla, Oswald had a vision of Columba who encouraged him as the Lord encouraged Joshua before the crossing of the Jordan, urging him to 'Be strong and act manfully. Behold I will be with thee' (Josh 1:9).<sup>396</sup> Later in Northumbrian history, Bede records that after Oswiu's defeat of Penda of Mercia, he founded twelve monasteries throughout his kingdom in thanksgiving to God – six in Deira and six in Bernicia.<sup>397</sup> Bede often commented on the significance of the number twelve in his exegesis, which affects our understanding of this image in his *HE*. In commenting on the twelve stones in the High Priest's Rational, which literally represent the twelve tribes of Israel (Exod 28:17-21), he suggests that twelve refers to a Christian's need to hold their faith in the Holy Trinity by exercising the four principal virtues (prudence, fortitude, justice and temperance), and later adds that all teachers should possess this in

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<sup>391</sup> Jerome, *Ep.*108 (on the camp at Gilgal, Josh 4:3,20): Labourt; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 6.

<sup>392</sup> Jerome, *Ep.*53: Labourt; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 6.

<sup>393</sup> The numbers three and four are also often combined to make the number twelve, indeed in Revelations' description of the heavenly Jerusalem the four walls each contain three gates (Rev 21:12-13). The number 144 is also significant being twelve by twelve, e.g. the visionary recording Revelations saw 144,000 virgins who follow the Lamb wherever he goes (Rev 14:1-4), see Chapter Four for discussion of this verse in relation to the virginal life.

<sup>394</sup> Adomnán, *Vita Columbae (Life of Columba)*, bk.iii.3: Sharpe (1995) 208. See R. Sharpe, intro., *Adomnán of Iona: Life of Saint Columba* (London 1995) 19, who argues that Columba may have deliberately chosen this number because of its apostolic significance.

<sup>395</sup> Adomnán, *Vita Columbae*, bk.i.1: Sharpe (1995) 111.

<sup>396</sup> Adomnán, *Vita Columbae*, bk.i.1: Sharpe (1995) 110-111. In his *De Locis Sanctis (On the Holy Places)*, Adomnán described Arculf's visit to the site of Gilgal, where Joshua had placed twelve stones to mark the site of the Israelites' encampment around the tabernacle, which by then were within a Church, bk.II.15: Meehan (1983).

<sup>397</sup> *HE* III.24, 290-291. See further below.

themselves and urge their disciples to do the same.<sup>398</sup> In the same passage he also explains that twelve signifies that faith in the Holy Trinity would one day be preached in all four parts of the world.<sup>399</sup> The number twelve also suggests completeness. In discussing the structure of Solomon's temple, Bede wrote that 'twelve cubits is the norm of apostolic teaching' and went on to explain that anyone who tries to teach beyond what the Church has received and learnt through the apostles is not fit to be a pillar in God's temple and is out of accord with the line of twelve cubits (3Kings 6:15).<sup>400</sup> Elsewhere Bede wrote that in the scriptures the number twelve often designates totality.<sup>401</sup> That the Church in Northumbria begins with twelve people can be read as an attempt to stress its orthodox beginnings and its place in God's plan that Christianity would spread throughout the world reaching all peoples. Oswiu's later foundation of twelve monasteries follows on from this and demonstrates the increasing Christianisation of one kingdom, through these twelve foundations.<sup>402</sup>

It is also important that the Northumbrian Church had its beginning at Pentecost. In Jewish tradition Pentecost, also called the day of firstfruits (Num 28:26) or more usually the feast of Weeks, was one of the three great feasts of pilgrimage and was celebrated seven weeks after Passover (the Greek word for Pentecost means fiftieth). It involved a formal offering of the firstfruits from the new crops to Yahweh marking the end of the grain-harvesting season.<sup>403</sup> Later in Judaism it became associated with the giving of the Law to Moses on Mount Sinai fifty days after the exodus (Exod 19-24).<sup>404</sup> For Christians this feast marked the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles and the beginning of the Church's active mission after Christ's Resurrection and Ascension (Acts 2).<sup>405</sup> The

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<sup>398</sup> Bede, *De Tabernaculo*, bk.3: *CCSL* 119A, 104 and 112-113; Holder (1994) 120 and 129-130.

<sup>399</sup> Bede, *De Tabernaculo*, bk.3: *CCSL* 119A, 112; Holder (1994) 129. Cf. Bede, *De Templo*, bk.2, st.19.5: *CCSL* 119A, 209-210; Connolly (1995) 87-88.

<sup>400</sup> Bede, *De Templo*, bk.2, st.18.7: *CCSL* 119A, 200; Connolly (1995) 75-76.

<sup>401</sup> Bede, *Hom* I.13: *CCSL* 122, 89; Martin and Hurst (1991) 126.

<sup>402</sup> On these monasteries see further below.

<sup>403</sup> See R.J. Clifford, 'Exodus,' in *NJBC* 3.43, 55. R.J. Faley, 'Leviticus,' in *NJBC* 4.45, 76. C.E. L'Heureux, 'Numbers,' in *NJBC* 5.57, 91. J. Blenkinsopp, 'Deuteronomy,' in *NJBC* 6.36, 102. J.J. Castelot and A. Cody, 'Religious Institutions of Israel,' in *NJBC* 76.113-116, 1275-1276; 76.128, 1278; and 76.130-132, 1278-1279.

<sup>404</sup> Clifford, 'Exodus,' in *NJBC* 3.32, 51. Castelot and Cody, 'Religious Institutions of Israel,' in *NJBC* 76.132, 1278.

<sup>405</sup> R.E. Brown argues that early Christian self-understanding was keen to reflect continuity with Israel, and that this could be seen as God renewing the covenant made on Sinai for Israel though now based on Jesus, 'Early Church,' in *NJBC* 80.10, 1340. Cf. Castelot and Cody, 'Religious Institutions of Israel,' in *NJBC* 76.132, 1278-1279. R.J. Dillon suggests that as this was an

apostles began to speak in diverse tongues and people from every nation under heaven heard their teaching in their own language (Acts 2:4-6), which led to the baptism of three thousand souls (Acts 2:41). This event took place fifty days after the Lord's Resurrection and ten days after his Ascension in Christian thinking. For these reasons Pentecost is also significant in terms of number symbolism: fifty being the sum of seven by seven plus one, or forty plus ten.<sup>406</sup> Forty is often seen as a figure for the life of the Church and when added to the heavenly denarius (the number ten), this equals the eternal reward of the Church.<sup>407</sup>

In the early Church catechumens spent the forty days of Lent in preparation for baptism, which was then received at Easter,<sup>408</sup> and Pentecost was another time in the liturgical year when baptisms often took place. In a homily given on the feast of Pentecost, Bede explained that to preserve the memory of the first Pentecost it has become the Church's custom to celebrate the mysteries of baptism on that day. He added:

as a result a venerable temple is made ready for the coming of the Holy Spirit upon those who believe and are cleansed at the salvation-bearing baptismal font. In this way we celebrate not only the recollection of a former happening, but also a new coming in [the font] of the Holy Spirit upon new children by adoption.<sup>409</sup>

Later in the same homily Bede wrote that the Church offers a new sacrifice to the Lord, when to mark the beginning of Pentecost a new people is consecrated to the Lord through baptism. The Church not only renews the memory of an ancient happening but also celebrates a new sending of the Holy Spirit to a new people who have been reborn, and Bede continued to describe those baptised at the first Pentecost as 'living first-fruits of the New Testament'.<sup>410</sup> This is an appropriate

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important Jewish pilgrimage, it is historically quite plausible that Jesus' disciples were in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, 'Acts of the Apostles,' in *NJBC* 44.20, 731.

<sup>406</sup> See Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, bk.2(62-65): *CCSL* 32; Green (1997) 45-46. Augustine, *In Iohannis Evangelium Tractatus (Tractates on the Gospel of John)* 122, st.8: *CCSL* 36, 673-674; *NPNF* 1<sup>st</sup> series, 7, 443.

<sup>407</sup> See Augustine, *Sermo (Sermon) 75*, st.9: *NPNF* 1<sup>st</sup> series, 6, 480. Cf. Bede, *De Tabernaculo*, bk.2: *CCSL* 119A, 86-87; Holder (1994) 98-99. Bede, *Expositio Actuum Apostolorum*, c.2.1: *CCSL* 121,15-16; Martin (1989) 27-28.

<sup>408</sup> Cf. Bede's account of Edwin's baptism, *HE* II.14, 186-187.

<sup>409</sup> Bede, *Hom* II.17: *CCSL* 122, ll 195-199, 306; Martin and Hurst (1991) 170-171, ... *ablutisque fonte salutari credentibus superuenienti spiritui sancto templum uenerabile paretur. Ac per hoc non solum ueteris facti recordation uerum etiam in nouos adoptionis filios nouus in ea spiritus sancti celebratur aduentus.*

<sup>410</sup> Bede, *Hom* II.17: *CCSL* 122, 308; Martin and Hurst (1991) 173. Cf. Bede, *Expositio Actuum Apostolorum*, c.2.41: *CCSL* 121, 22-23; Martin (1989) 37.

metaphor and reveals Bede's knowledge of the significance of this festival in Judaic tradition. The three thousand baptised at the first Pentecost are the first fruits of the apostles' work in spreading Christianity. This also resonates with the first baptisms in Northumbria. As noted already Bede used harvesting and labouring images when describing Paulinus' work among the Northumbrians, and the baptism of Eanflæd and the eleven other Northumbrians are the first fruits of Paulinus' labours. Their baptism consecrated a new people to the Lord and is a recent historical example of Bede's exegesis.

Without the king's baptism, however, it remained very difficult for Paulinus to encourage other Northumbrians to convert.<sup>411</sup> It was only after Edwin finally agreed to be baptised, through the unfolding of providence and the efforts of Æthelburh and Paulinus and with the support of his chief men and counsellors, that the Northumbrians became enthusiastic about Christianity and Paulinus' labours finally came to fruition.<sup>412</sup> Paulinus is famously related to have baptised the local populace in rivers throughout Deira and Bernicia and on one occasion spent thirty-six days teaching in the vicinity of the royal palace at Yeavinger and baptising people in the nearby River Glen.<sup>413</sup> Paulinus was also able to teach and baptise in neighbouring kingdoms and Edwin encouraged Eorpwold of the East Angles to convert, demonstrating that the Northumbrian king's power stretched beyond his own kingdom.<sup>414</sup> Indeed Edwin actively supported his bishop and

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<sup>411</sup> See C.M. Cusack, *The Rise of Christianity in Northern Europe, 300-1000* (London 1998) on the prevalence of top-down as opposed to individual conversions in medieval society. See also J. Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford 2005) 49, who notes that conversion proceeded from the top downwards but suggests that Bede may have over-stressed 'the reception of specific missionaries by specific great kings'.

<sup>412</sup> *HE* II.13-14, 182-187. See Chapter Two. Many other barbarian kings similarly receive support from their chief men before being baptised *en mass*, see the examples of Æthelberht of Kent, Peada of the Middle Angles, and Sigeberht of the East Saxons, *HE* I.26, 76-77; III.21, 278-279; III.22, 282-283. Cf. also Clovis in Gregory of Tours' *Historia Francorum* (*History of the Franks*), bk.II.31: *MGH SRM* 1:1, 92-93; Thorpe (1985) 143-144.

<sup>413</sup> *HE* II.14, 188-189; Paulinus also conducted baptisms in the River Swale, II.14, 188-189, and in the River Trent, II.16, 192-193. On the royal site at Yeavinger and its continued importance from Roman times, see B. Hope-Taylor, *Yeavinger: An Anglo-British centre of early Northumbria* (London 1977) 276-277; C. Neuman de Vegvar, 'The Iconography of Kingship in Anglo-Saxon archaeological finds,' in J.T. Rosenthal, ed., *Kings and Kingship, Acta* 11 (New York 1986) 1-15; B. Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms of Early Anglo-Saxon England* (London 1990 repr 2002) 8-9, 19 and 86.

<sup>414</sup> *HE* II.16, 190-193; II.15, 188-189. See also *HE* II.5, 148-151, where Edwin is fifth in Bede's famous list of dominant kings. On the concept of over-kingship among the Anglo-Saxons, see P. Wormald, 'Bede, the *Bretwaldas* and the Origins of the *Gens Anglorum*,' in P. Wormald, D. Bullough, and R. Collins, ed., *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford 1983) 99-129, repr. in P. Wormald, *The Times of Bede* (Oxford 2006) 106-134; S. Fanning, 'Bede, *Imperium*, and the *Bretwaldas*,' *Speculum* 66 (1991) 1-26; B.A.E. Yorke, 'The

according to an eyewitness account was in attendance at Paulinus' mass baptisms in the River Trent.<sup>415</sup> The role of kings in supporting the spreading of Christianity is also apparent in other kingdoms in the *HE*. On the mission in Kent, Bede wrote that Æthelberht did not force others to accept Christianity, but showed more affection to those who converted because they were all fellow citizens in the kingdom of heaven.<sup>416</sup> Oswiu encouraged both Peada and Sigebert to convert and gave them both teachers to bring back to their own kingdoms to spread the faith among their peoples.<sup>417</sup>

Following his account of the widespread Christianisation of Northumbria, Bede described Edwin's kingdom in idyllic terms. He wrote: 'It is related that there was so great a peace in Britain, wherever the dominion of King Edwin reached, that, as the proverb still runs, a woman with a new-born child could walk throughout the island from sea to sea and take no harm.'<sup>418</sup> Bede added that the king was so concerned about the well-being of his people that he placed bronze drinking cups at clear springs near main roads so that travellers could refresh themselves and also explained that no one dared to misuse these cups because they loved the king dearly and feared him greatly.<sup>419</sup> A standard bearer also preceded Edwin wherever he went throughout his kingdom, likening him to a Roman emperor.<sup>420</sup> Nicholas Higham suggests that Bede's description of the peace during Edwin's Christian reign evokes the universal peace of the Emperor Augustine at the coming of Christ and the reign of Constantine, the first Christian Emperor.<sup>421</sup> Many other Church Fathers, however, unlike Eusebius, stressed the temporal nature of the Roman Empire through which the Church had

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Vocabulary of Anglo-Saxon Overlordship,' in D. Brown, J. Campbell, and S. Chadwick Hawkes, ed., *Anglo-Saxons Studies in Archaeology and History* (Oxford 1981) 171-200; H.R. Loyn, 'Bede's Kings: A Comment on the Attitude of Bede to the Nature of Secular Kingship,' in N. Crossley-Holland, ed., *Eternal Values in Medieval Life, Trivium* 26 (1991) 54-64 at 60-61.

<sup>415</sup> *HE* II.16, 192-193.

<sup>416</sup> *HE* I.26, 76-79.

<sup>417</sup> *HE* III.21, 278-281; III.22, 282-285.

<sup>418</sup> *HE* II.16, 192-193, *Tanta autem eo tempore pax in Britannia, quaquaversum imperium regis Eduini peruenerat, fuisse perhibetur ut, sicut usque hodie in prouerbio dicitur, etiam si mulier una cum recens nato paruulo uellet totam perambulare insulam a mari ad mare, nullo se ledente ualeret.*

<sup>419</sup> *HE* II.16, 192-193. Bede was very aware that kings needed to be strong if they were to be good kings, it is as important that Edwin was feared as that he was loved; see R.M.T. Hill, 'Holy Kings – The Bane of Seventh Century Society,' in D. Baker, ed., *Church Society and Politics, Studies in Church History* 12 (Oxford 1975) 39-43.

<sup>420</sup> *HE* II.16, 192-193.

<sup>421</sup> N.J. Higham, *The Convert Kings: Power and Religious affiliation in early Anglo-Saxon England* (Manchester 1997) 171; see also Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms* 19.

providentially spread. For them, the Church alone is truly universal.<sup>422</sup> Bede qualifies the Constantinian model in Edwin's case, as the king dies violently after only six years of Christian rule.<sup>423</sup> Edwin was killed in battle in 633 against the pagan Penda of Mercia and the British Christian king, Cædwalla. The kingdom was thrown into turmoil and Paulinus' successful work was very quickly undone. Bede described Penda and Cædwalla's devastation of the kingdom, and added that although Cædwalla was a Christian he did not respect the Anglo-Saxons' recent conversion to Christianity. The situation was so desperate that Paulinus fled with Æthelburh and her family back to Kent by boat, leaving James the Deacon in the church at York to cater for the remaining Christian population.<sup>424</sup> The kingdom of Northumbria split into its constituent parts of Deira and Bernicia and Edwin's first cousin, Osric, became king of Deira, while Eanfrith, the eldest son of Edwin's predecessor Æthelfrith, gained the throne of Bernicia. Although both these kings were baptised Christians, on receiving their thrones they apostatised and reverted to their former idolatry, leading to widespread apostasy across the kingdom and revealing just how dependent Christian missionaries were on the reigning king's support.<sup>425</sup>

The overall impression given is that Northumbria during Edwin's reign was a truly Christian society and as a member of the Church was the pure virgin ready to be presented to her one husband, Christ. In Christian thinking the marriage image is applicable to both sexes and to individuals or groups. As this marriage and every marriage is a figure of the union between Christ and his Church (Eph 5:31-32), Edwin can represent the Northumbrians who, post-baptism, are members of Christ's bride and in this sense Æthelburh may be read as a figure of Christ. While this may seem surprising to a modern reader, particularly in the light of much that has been written on Bede's attitude to

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<sup>422</sup> See e.g. Augustine, *De Civitate Dei (The City of God)*: Bettenson (1984). Leo the Great, *Sermon 82: FOTC 93*.

<sup>423</sup> See J. O'Reilly, 'Islands and Idols at the Ends of the Earth: Exegesis and Conversion in Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*,' in S. Lebecq, M. Perrin and O. Szerwiniack, ed., *Bède le Vénérable entre Tradition et Postérité* (Lille 2005) 119-145 at 139-140.

<sup>424</sup> *HE* II.20, 202-207. See Chapter Two on Paulinus' flight from Northumbria.

<sup>425</sup> *HE* III.1, 212-213. Cf. the similar situations in Kent and in the kingdom of the East Saxons following the deaths of Æthelberht and Sæberht when their sons returned to the idolatry they had ostensibly given up during their fathers' lifetimes and their bishops similarly fled, *HE* II.5, 150-155. However in the case of Kent, Archbishop Laurence was 'encouraged' to remain following a nocturnal encounter with Saint Peter and the mission subsequently survived this early scare, *HE* II.6, 154-155.

women,<sup>426</sup> in two enlightening studies Arthur Holder has shown that in Bede's exegetical commentaries Christ is frequently depicted with feminine characteristics and David D'Avray has also recently argued that in medieval views of marriage either partner could represent Christ or the Church.<sup>427</sup> Chapter One also argued that in Christian thinking on the marriage between Christ's inseparably bound human and divine natures in the Virgin's womb, Christ himself is both bride and bridegroom. As noted above though, this period in Northumbrian history was very short-lived. Following the widespread apostasy after Edwin's death the Northumbrians compromised the integrity of their faith, and become like the Israelites in the Old Testament in turning away from God in times of crisis.<sup>428</sup> Patristic commentators like Augustine and Cassian warned about the dangers of defiling one's faith and in Chapter Two their concerns were related to Bede's account of Æthelburh, who as a Christian was in danger from Edwin's idolatry.<sup>429</sup> The danger of falling into idolatry that faced Æthelburh was just as grave for the second virgin in *HE* II.9, the newly Christian Northumbrian people. Through the apostasy following Edwin's death and led by his successors, the Northumbrian Church lost its spiritual integrity and could no longer be regarded as a pure virgin espoused to her one husband, Christ.

### **Ionan mission to Northumbria**

After Edwin's death the kingdom of Northumbria was split between the two royal houses of Deira and Bernicia.<sup>430</sup> Both of these kings were Christian as

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<sup>426</sup> See Introduction and Chapter Four.

<sup>427</sup> A.G. Holder, 'Christ as Incarnate Wisdom in Bede's Commentary on the Song of Songs,' in S. de Gregorio, ed., *Innovation and Tradition in the Writings of The Venerable Bede* (Morgantown 2006) 169-188; and A.G. Holder, 'The Feminine Christ in Bede's Biblical Commentaries,' in S. Lebecq, M. Perrin, and O. Szerwiniack, ed., *Bède le Vénérable – Entre Tradition et Postérité* (Lille 2005) 109-118; D.L. D'Avray, *Medieval Marriage: Symbolism and Society* (Oxford 2005) 201.

<sup>428</sup> Israel's behaviour was described as a series of adulterous relationships with strange men and an offence to her husband, God. See esp. Hos 2; Isaiah; Jer 2 and 3; Ezek 16 and 23; Mal 2:11-12. See Chapter One.

<sup>429</sup> Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos (Expositions on the Psalms)*, Ps 90(91): *CCSL* 39, *sermo* 2, st.9, 1275-1276; *NPNF* 1<sup>st</sup> series, 8, st.17, 451-452. Cassian, *Conlatio* 14, c.11: *SC* 54, 197-198; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 11, 440-441.

<sup>430</sup> The unity of the kingdom of Northumbria in this period is difficult to determine and it is sometimes suggested that Bede over-states this. See e.g. C. Stancliffe, 'Oswald "Most Holy and Most Victorious King of the Northumbrians",' in C. Stancliffe and E. Cambridge, ed., *Oswald: Northumbrian King to European Saint* (Stamford 1995) 33-83. See also B. Butler, *The Whitby Life of Gregory the Great: Exegesis and hagiography*, unpub. Ph.D. Thesis, N.U.I. Cork (2005)

Osric of Deira received the faith from Paulinus, and Eanfrith of Bernicia had been instructed and baptised by the Irish while living in exile during Edwin's reign.<sup>431</sup> However, as noted above, on becoming kings of their respective houses they both apostatised and returned to their former idolatry, and they were both killed in battle very early in their reigns, leading to Cædwalla's devastation of both kingdoms for a year before Oswald of Bernicia defeated him.<sup>432</sup> In the beginning of Book Three it is evident that the kingdom of Northumbria is divided. Bede wrote that the year preceding Oswald's reign was regarded as unfortunate and hateful to all good people because of the apostasy of the two English kings and the tyranny of Cædwalla and, for this reason, those who computed regnal dates decided to abolish the memory of those kings and assigned that year to Oswald.<sup>433</sup> During this perfidious year, it is clear that the kingdom of Northumbria is firstly divided between two kings, and then conquered and ravaged by the British king. Bede's presentation of these events may be an allusion to the Gospel image of the divided kingdom or house that will invariably fall.<sup>434</sup> In his *Lives of the Abbots*, Bede wrote that Benedict Biscop believed that it was best that one abbot should always rule both houses of Wearmouth and Jarrow to keep them together in harmony, unity and peace, and for that reason never ceased to warn his monks to keep in mind the gospel precept, 'Every kingdom divided against itself will be brought to desolation.'<sup>435</sup> Oswald became king of both provinces of Northumbria, and Bede makes clear that he had a legitimate claim to the throne of Deira through his mother, Acha, who was Edwin's sister.<sup>436</sup> Oswald was Christian on coming to power as he had been baptised with some of his thegns while in exile on Iona during Edwin's reign but unlike his brother, Eanfrith, he continued to follow Christianity after he

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164-166, who argues that Northumbrian political success depended on the unity of Bernicia and Deira.

<sup>431</sup> *HE* III.1, 212-213.

<sup>432</sup> *HE* III.1, 212-215. See *HE* III.2, 214-215 for Bede on this battle, and cf. Adomnán, *Vita Columbae (Life of Columba)*, i.1: Anderson and Anderson (1991); Sharpe (1995) 110-111.

<sup>433</sup> *HE* III.1, 214-215.

<sup>434</sup> See Matt 12:25; Mark 3:24-25; Luke 11:17. See further below.

<sup>435</sup> Bede, *Historia Abbatum (Lives of the Abbots)*, c.13: Plummer (1969) 377; Farmer (1998) 200. Cf. *Vita Ceolfridi anonymo (The Anonymous History of Abbot Ceolfrith)*, c.25, which similarly stresses the need for unity and concord between Wearmouth and Jarrow: Plummer (1969) 397; Farmer (1998) 222.

<sup>436</sup> *HE* III.6, 230-231. Marriages between rival royal families were often arranged to try and end hostilities between them or indeed, as in this case, give one family legitimate claims to the other's kingdom, see Chapter Two on Anglo-Saxon marriage.



came to power.<sup>437</sup> Both Bede and Adomnán's accounts of the battle of Heavenfield (in which Oswald's army defeated Cædwalla's numerically superior force) stress Oswald's strong faith as a factor in his success.<sup>438</sup> Before the battle of Heavenfield, Bede wrote that Oswald's men made a wooden cross and the king set it standing upright on the battlefield. Bede added that, as far as he knew, this cross was the first symbol of the Christian faith to be erected in Bernicia.<sup>439</sup>

Although Northumbria was largely pagan at the beginning of Oswald's reign, if Bede is correct that Oswald's cross at Heavenfield was the first Christian symbol in Bernicia, then this region must have been largely unaffected by Christianity even during Edwin's reign.<sup>440</sup> On becoming king Oswald was eager to introduce Christianity to his subjects and asked the monastery of Iona for a bishop to minister to his people, to which the community duly obliged. Immediately on introducing the monastery of Iona into his narrative Bede makes clear to the reader that the monks there followed a different method for calculating Easter to the Roman practice.<sup>441</sup> Bede does not do this to denigrate the work of the Columban monks in Northumbria as at this point in the narrative he excuses their error by explaining that they were so far away from the centre of the Church that they were unaware of decrees from synods about Easter, and he eagerly praises their work and manner of life.<sup>442</sup> He also emphasised that Aidan always kept Easter on Sunday – so he could not be accused of being a Quartodeciman – and revered and taught the same doctrine as the universal Church.<sup>443</sup> This is in contrast to the charges made in the *Life of Wilfrid*, which was very willing to criticise the Irish mission, claiming that Wilfrid had to root out the poisonous weeds that they had planted in the Northumbrian Church.<sup>444</sup>

Bede's account of the Ionan mission illustrates the size of the task facing these teachers. The first candidate sent in answer to Oswald's request lost

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<sup>437</sup> *HE* III.2, 218-219.

<sup>438</sup> *HE* III.1-2, 214-215. *Vita Columbae*, i.1: Anderson and Anderson (1991); Sharpe 1995) 111.

<sup>439</sup> *HE* III.2, 214-217.

<sup>440</sup> Bede described Paulinus' activities in this region but he may not have built any permanent structures; it is also probable that his efforts were focused in Deira. Higham suggests that Bede is mistaken on this point and argues that Yeavering had been developed into a site of Christian worship during Edwin's reign, but this might have been destroyed before Oswald's reign, *Convert Kings* 209.

<sup>441</sup> *HE* III.3, 218-219; cf. III.17, 266-267.

<sup>442</sup> *HE* III.4, 224-225; III.26 (the chapter following the account of the Synod of Whitby), 310-311.

<sup>443</sup> *HE* III.17, 266-267.

<sup>444</sup> Stephan, *Life of Wilfrid*, c.47: Colgrave (1985) 98-99; Webb (1998) 158.

patience with the Anglo-Saxons who were unwilling to listen to him and returned to Iona. At a conference held by the community to discuss the problem, Aidan's suitability was recognised and he was sent instead.<sup>445</sup> Aidan's many virtues are praised throughout the book, although Bede qualifies his praise by reminding the reader that his Easter practice was erroneous.<sup>446</sup> In every other respect Aidan is presented as an ideal teacher who was not concerned with the earthly status of his hearers and taught always by his deeds as well as by his words.<sup>447</sup> His personal merits were such that he commanded the respect of all who knew him, including Archbishop Honorius in Canterbury and Bishop Felix of the East Angles.<sup>448</sup> Aidan's discretion – which Bede described as the mother of all virtues<sup>449</sup> – was apparent to all at the conference held on Iona to discuss the Anglo-Saxons' needs after the first missionary's return to the island. Aidan pointed out this teacher's error, explaining:

It seems to me, brother, that you have been unreasonably harsh upon your ignorant hearers: you did not first offer them the milk of simpler teaching, as the apostle recommends (1Cor 3:2), until little by little, as they grew strong on the food of God's word, they were capable of receiving more elaborate instruction and of carrying out the more transcendent commandments of God.<sup>450</sup>

Aidan here refers to a very important teaching precept, which indicates that the uninitiated and newcomers to Christianity cannot immediately receive the deeper mysteries of the Christian faith, as they would not understand these and could consequently be damaged by this or (like the Anglo-Saxons on this occasion)

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<sup>445</sup> *HE* III.3, 218-221; III.5, 228-229.

<sup>446</sup> *HE* III.3, 218-219; III.17, 266-267.

<sup>447</sup> *HE* III.3, 218-219; III.5, 226-229; III.15, 260-261; III.17, 264-267; III.25, 296-297. On word and deed see Bede, *Hom* I.7: *CCSL* 122, 47 and 50-51; Martin and Hurst (1991) 66 and 70-71. Bede, *Hom* II.14: *CCSL* 122, 274; Martin and Hurst (1991) 126-127. Bede, *De Tabernaculo*, bk.2: *CCSL* 119A, 69-70; Holder (1994) 77-78. Bede, *Expositio Actuum Apostolorum*, c.1.1: *CCSL* 121, 6; Martin (1989) 9. Bede, *In Epistolas Septem Catholicas (On the Seven Catholic Epistles)*, James 3.13 and 3.17: *CCSL* 121, 208 and 210; Hurst (1985) 43-44 and 46.

<sup>448</sup> *HE* III.25, 296-297.

<sup>449</sup> *HE* III.5, 228-229. Cf. *The Rule of Benedict*, which similarly describes discretion as the mother of virtues and suggests that this quality is required in an abbot, c.64: *SC* 181-182; Fry (1982) 88. This is personified in Aidan and leads to his appointment.

<sup>450</sup> *HE* III.5, 228-229, *Videtur mihi, frater, quia durior iusto indoctis auditoribus fuisti, et non eis iuxta apostolicam disciplinam primo lac doctrinae mollioris porrexisti, donec paulatim enutriti uerbo Dei, ad capienda perfectiora et ad facienda sublimiora Dei praecepta sufficerent.*

reject Christian teaching because of the experience.<sup>451</sup> He acknowledges that this is the advice of Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians, which states:

And I, brethren, could not speak to you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal. As unto little ones in Christ. I gave you milk to drink not meat: for you were not able as yet. But neither indeed are you now able: for you are yet carnal. For, whereas there is among you envying and contention, are you not carnal and walk you not according to man? (1Cor 3:1-3)

The epistle to the Hebrews similarly refers to milk and meat imagery:

For whereas for the time you ought to be masters, you have need to be taught again what are the first elements of the words of God: and you are become such as have need of milk and not of strong meat. For every one that is a partaker of milk is unskilful in the word of justice: for he is a little child. But strong meat is for the perfect: for them who by custom have their senses exercised to the discerning of good and evil (Heb 5:12-14).

Peter's first epistle also includes the image of milk, as he urges his listeners to lay aside malice and guile and 'As newborn babes, desire the rational milk without guile, that thereby you may grow unto salvation: If so be you have tasted that the Lord is sweet' (1Pet 2:1-3). On 1Pet 2:1-2, Bede wrote that the newly baptised are like children just issued from the womb. Just as children desire their mother's milk, these seek the basic elements of faith from the breasts of their mother, the Church, that is from their teachers. As they grow up through the sacraments they come to the nourishment of the living bread that came down from heaven and, in time, attain the contemplation of the divine majesty.<sup>452</sup> In his commentary on Solomon's temple, Bede wrote that the carnal are those who the apostle regards as still on milk and these are the majority in the Church.

Although they share in the reward of the elect, they are not numbered among the perfect and have not progressed to solid food.<sup>453</sup> Elsewhere Bede wrote that it is for teachers to discern the capacity of their hearers and to provide the rational milk without guile (1Pet 2:2) to those who require elementary teaching, and provide the solid food of more sublime doctrine to those who are at

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<sup>451</sup> There are various expressions of this idea. See Origen, *Homilies on Exodus* 12: SC 321; *FOTC* 71, 373. Gregory the Great, *Regula Pastoralis*, part III.39: SC 382, 528,530; Davis (1978) 231-232. The milk and meat theme is also found in other Insular works. Cf. *Life of Wilfrid*, c.41: Colgrave (1985) 82-83; Webb (1998) 157. *The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great: By an anonymous monk of Whitby*, c.23: Colgrave (1968).

<sup>452</sup> Bede, *In Epistolas Septem Catholicas*, 1 Peter 2.1-2: CCSL 121, 232-233; Hurst (1985) 80-81.

<sup>453</sup> Bede, *De Templo*, bk.2, st.17.5: CCSL 119A, 194; Connolly (1995) 68-69.

a higher level in their faith.<sup>454</sup> This image implies that the Anglo-Saxons encountered by the Ionan missionary were beginners in the faith and numbered among the carnal and reveal that the teacher lacked the discretion to recognise what his hearers needed. Aidan, on the other hand, is aware of what is required and this is the reason that he is chosen. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians recognised that his hearers were at an early stage in their faith and had to be treated as 'little ones in Christ' (1Cor 3:1-2). In the previous chapter Paul wrote that when he came to them he did not use lofty speech or wisdom: 'For I judged not myself to know anything among you, but Jesus Christ: and him crucified' (1Cor 2:2). Most of the Northumbrians were similarly in need of very basic instruction in the Christian faith and Bede's account of Aidan's teaching says that Aidan focused on teaching them about the Passion, Resurrection and Ascension into Heaven of Christ, the mediator between God and men.<sup>455</sup>

Oswald gave Aidan the island of Lindisfarne for his episcopal see and actively supported his work in the kingdom. Bede explained that the king and bishop worked together with Oswald acting as interpreter for Aidan while the bishop preached the gospel, as the king had become fluent in Irish during his exile.<sup>456</sup> Bede described their collaboration as a beautiful sight and wrote that Oswald listened to Aidan's admonitions and advice on all matters as he endeavoured to build up and extend the Church of Christ in his kingdom.<sup>457</sup> Indeed Oswald's collaboration with his bishop is reminiscent of the Gregorian model of kingship, as expressed in a letter Gregory the Great sent to Æthelberht of Kent, which Bede included in *HE* I.32.<sup>458</sup> The image of the Church as a spiritual building was introduced in Chapter One, where it was noted that this was one of the metaphors used to describe the relationship between Christ and his Church.<sup>459</sup> In Peter's first epistle he refers to Christians desiring rational milk without guile so they can grow to salvation (1Pet 2:1-3) and follows this by urging all Christians to come to Christ, the living stone, and to become

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<sup>454</sup> Bede, *De Tabernaculo*, bk.2: *CCSL* 119A, 80-81; Holder (1994) 90-91.

<sup>455</sup> See *HE* III.17, 266-267, Bede refers to 1Tim 2:5.

<sup>456</sup> *HE* III.3, 218-221.

<sup>457</sup> *HE* III.3, 220-221.

<sup>458</sup> Gregory urged Æthelberht to strive to convert his people and to lead them by his own Christian example. He also encouraged the king to listen to Augustine of Canterbury's counsel and to follow it earnestly, *HE* I.32, 112-113.

<sup>459</sup> See Chapter One.

themselves living stones in God's spiritual building (1Pet 2:4-10). Bede was very familiar with the architectural image of the Church, providing a spiritual interpretation of the Old Testament tabernacle and temple buildings in three of his biblical commentaries.<sup>460</sup> However, he used this image very rarely in describing the development of the Anglo-Saxon Church in the *HE* and never likened a particular church building to Solomon's temple, as the church at Ripon is described in the *Life of Wilfrid*.<sup>461</sup> In his homily for Pentecost, which has already been referred to in relation to Paulinus' mission, Bede also described the Church as being built up in the fear of the Lord and filled with the consolation of the Holy Spirit who restores the hearts of believers and helps them to rise above the adversities of the age.<sup>462</sup>

While Bede was concerned about Aidan's Easter practice, the imagery he used to describe Aidan's mission suggests that the Northumbrian Church had a secure and orthodox foundation. Once Oswald had succeeded in restoring peace to the kingdom, James (Paulinus' deacon) continued his mission in the vicinity of Catterick alongside the work of the Ionan missionaries and as the number of Christians steadily increased, he was able to instruct many in the Roman and Kentish manner of singing and also in the Roman Easter practice.<sup>463</sup> It is important to note that James' work was not in opposition to the Ionan missionaries as both sides were endeavouring to increase the Church in Northumbria. This situation in Northumbria is paralleled by the contemporary situation in East Anglia, where both Irish and continental missionaries also operated simultaneously in the kingdom. Felix of Burgundy came as a consecrated bishop to Archbishop Honorius who sent him to preach the word to the East Angles (c.631),<sup>464</sup> and Fursa arrived in the kingdom after leaving Ireland

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<sup>460</sup> See *De Tabernaculo*: CCSL 119A, 3-139; Holder (1994). *De Templo*: CCSL 119A, 143-234; Connolly (1995). *In Esram et Neemiam (On Ezra and Nehemiah)*: CCSL 119A, 235-392; DeGregorio (2006).

<sup>461</sup> See *HE* II.1, 128-129; II.4, 144-145; III.22, 282-285; IV.3, 336-339. *Life of Wilfrid*, c.17: Colgrave (1985) 34-37; Webb (1998) 125, this church is also described as the virgin bride of Christ in this text, which again is an image never used for actual church buildings in Bede's writings. See O'Reilly, intro. Jennifer O'Reilly has recently argued that the image of Islands and Idols is one of Bede's preferred means of expressing the growth of the Anglo-Saxon Church, seminar paper delivered as part of U.C.C.'s *Insular Studies' Seminar Series* on 8/11/07, see also O'Reilly, 'Islands and Idols at the ends of the earth'.

<sup>462</sup> Bede, *Hom* II.17, referring to Acts 9:31: CCSL 122, 301; Martin and Hurst (1991) 164.

<sup>463</sup> *HE* II.20, 206-207; III.25, 296-297.

<sup>464</sup> *HE* II.15, 190-191; III.18, 268-269. Felix was bishop of East Anglia for seventeen years and a contemporary of Aidan's, *HE* III.25, 296-297. Indeed Bede notes that Aidan was respected by

to be a pilgrim for Christ's sake.<sup>465</sup> Indeed it is worth briefly considering the evangelisation of this kingdom as Bede introduced the conversion of East Anglia in the midst of his account of Paulinus' work in Northumbria after Edwin had accepted Christianity, and then returned to this kingdom during his account of Oswiu's reign, after describing Aidan's successful mission and before the Synod of Whitby.

In Chapter Two it was argued that Bede's passages concerning Rædwald and his wife (*HE* II.12 and 15) are very relevant for the wider purposes of Book Two, most notably helping to demonstrate the influence of royal wives and the dangers facing a Christian spouse in a mixed faith marriage. It seems fair to argue that events in East Anglia inserted into the narrative are similarly important in understanding the conversion of Northumbria. In describing Felix's mission in *HE* II.15, Bede employed very similar imagery to that used for Paulinus in Book Two. He wrote that Felix was a devoted husbandman, that he reaped a harvest of believers in the spiritual field, and bestowed the gift of everlasting happiness on the kingdom.<sup>466</sup> When returning to East Anglia in Book Three Bede reminds the reader that Felix was bishop there and then introduced Fursa, an Irish pilgrim who was welcomed to East Anglia by King Sigeberht. Fursa founded a monastery in the kingdom and engaged in preaching the gospel, converting many by the example of his life as well as by his words, as did the Irish in Northumbria. Bede then includes an account of a vision of Fursa's that served to reveal his sanctity, as he had already demonstrated Aidan's.<sup>467</sup> In both kingdoms Irish teachers' efforts supported the work of continental missionaries, and Bede presents these respective missions in similar terms. Through his brief account of East Anglian Christianity Bede succeeded in showing that the combined efforts of Irish and continental missionaries could be successful in the same kingdom and need not be placed in opposition to each other.

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both Honorius of Kent and Felix of East Anglia, *HE* III.25, 296-297. Cf. reference to Anicetus and Polycarp in Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica (The History of the Church)*, bk.5.24: PG 20, 507; Williamson (1989) 173. See Higham, *Convert Kings* 183-184, for a proposed political dimension to Felix's mission.

<sup>465</sup> *HE* III.19, 268-277. It is unclear whether Felix or Fursa was in East Anglia first, but the *HE* suggests that Fursa came to Sigeberht at a later stage in his reign.

<sup>466</sup> *HE* II.15, 190-191. See above for Paulinus. As with Paulinus' labours among the Northumbrians, the papal letters in Book Two also help the reader to understand Felix's work in East Anglia.

<sup>467</sup> *HE* III.18-19, 268-277. For Bede's proof of Aidan's sanctity see *HE* III.15-17, 260-267.

This positive account of the mission from Iona in *HE* III is an interesting development from earlier practices. The Irish are portrayed negatively in the *Life of Wilfrid* and are invisible in the *Whitby Life of Gregory the Great*, which focuses on the Gregorian mission of Paulinus and never mentions the Columban influence on Northumbrian Christianity, or kings Oswald or Oswiu, or even Hild the founder of Whitby.<sup>468</sup> The same can be said of Bede's *Greater Chronicle*, which similarly refers to Paulinus and Edwin but never mentions Aidan, Oswald, Iona, or the Synod of Whitby. Indeed the *Chronicle* suggests that the Northumbrian Church was founded by Paulinus and continued uninterrupted to the age of Theodore – in contrast to the *Life of Wilfrid*, which suggests that Wilfrid had to undo the damaging work of the Columban monks.<sup>469</sup> Bede's view of Northumbrian history clearly changed considerably before he wrote the *HE*. The preface to the *HE* acknowledges that he received information from various people in many kingdoms, and notes that many of the papal letters were discovered by Nothhelm who went to Rome to search through the Roman Church's archives.<sup>470</sup> These letters certainly changed his understanding of Augustine's mission, as the *Chronicle* suggests that he was unaware that two groups were sent from Rome – Paulinus, Mellitus and Justus being members of the second party.<sup>471</sup> Bede's attitude to the Ionan mission and Oswald is also transformed in the *HE*, as they are both highly praised and play a pivotal role in what is a much more detailed account of differing stages and facets of the growth of the Northumbrian Church.<sup>472</sup> Bede's Oswald is presented very differently to

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<sup>468</sup> *Life of Wilfrid*, c.47: Colgrave (1985) 98-99; Webb (1998) 158. *The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great: By an anonymous monk of Whitby*: Colgrave (1968). Considering the *Life* was written at Whitby during the abbacy of Ælflæd (Oswiu's daughter) and mentions Eanflæd (Oswiu's wife), and Oswiu was buried there, his omission is surprising and certainly deliberate.

<sup>469</sup> Bede, *De Temporum Ratione (On the Reckoning of Time)*, c.66 (*Chronica Maiora*): CCSL 123B, 525 and 527; Wallis (1999) 228, 230. Stephen, *Life of Wilfrid*, c.47: Colgrave (1985) 98-99; Webb (1998) 158. See above.

<sup>470</sup> *HE* 'Praefatio (Preface)', 2-7.

<sup>471</sup> See *HE* I.29, 104-105. Cf. *Chronica Maiora*, which notes that Gregory sent Augustine, Mellitus and John and many others to convert the English, *De Temporum Ratione*, c.66: CCSL 123B; Wallis (1999) 226. This follows the evidence of the *Liber Pontificalis (The Book of Pontiffs)*, which mentions the same three names and indicates that only one mission was sent, st.66.3 (Gregory I): Davis (2000) 63.

<sup>472</sup> On the differences between the *Chronicle* and the *HE*, see D. Scully in M. Ryan and J. Graham-Campbell, ed. *Proceedings of British Academy Conference*, October 2005 (British Academy forthcoming). On Bede's attitude to the Irish, see A.T. Thacker, 'Bede and the Irish,' in L.A.J.R. Houwen and A.A. MacDonald, ed., *Beda Venerabilis: Historian, Monk and Northumbrian* (Groningen 1996) 31-59. Bede's Cuthbert (in both the *HE* and his *Prose Life*) is a unifying figure with the best attributes from both the Irish and Roman traditions. Many of the

his account of Edwin. Whereas Edwin is imagined as a barbarian king surrounded by his court, Bede's account of Oswald is more concerned with the king's posthumous miracles and always states the king's holiness.<sup>473</sup> Indeed five chapters of Book Three relate miracles that demonstrate Oswald's sanctity and reveal that his fame spread far beyond Britain.<sup>474</sup> While the Easter Controversy, which will be discussed in the next section, caused problems in Northumbria and led to criticism of the Columban monks, it is clear from Bede's account of Aidan's mission in the *HE* that he believed that the Northumbrian Church rested on solidly orthodox foundations.

### **Oswiu and Eanflæd**

#### *(i) Synod of Whitby*

Oswald died in battle against Penda of Mercia in 642 and was succeeded by his brother Oswiu in Bernicia, and by Oswine, the son of Osric – Edwin's cousin and successor in Deira – in Deira.<sup>475</sup> Both kings were baptised Christians and unlike the situation after Edwin's death, they both remained Christian on becoming king, so for the first time in Northumbria the succession was Christian (demonstrating the extent to which that religion had taken root in the kingdom) and peaceful. Oswiu was very pragmatic and remarkably long lasting, ruling from 642 until he (quite unusually) died of illness in 670, by which time he was

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contributors to G. Bonner, D. Rollason and C. Stancliffe, ed., *St Cuthbert, his Cult and his Community to AD 1200* (Woodbrige 1989) recognise Cuthbert's importance in bringing both traditions together. See also O'Reilly, intro., xxxviii and C. Stancliffe, *Bede, Wilfrid, and the Irish*, Jarrow Lecture 2003.

<sup>473</sup> *HE* III.2, 214-219, relates Oswald's prayers and raising of a cross before his battle against Cædwalla and the subsequent healing miracles that took place at that spot; III.3, 218-219, demonstrates his personal assistance to Aidan during his mission; III.6, 230-231, his Christian humility, charity and generosity; III.7, 232-233, he is described as 'the saintly and victorious king of the Northumbrians (*sanctissimum ac uictoriosissimum regem Nordanhymbrorum*)'.

<sup>474</sup> See *HE* III.9-13, 240-255. In *HE* III.13, 252-253, Bede wrote: 'Not only did the fame of this renowned king spread through all parts of Britain but the beams of his healing light also spread across the ocean and reached the realms of Germany and Ireland.' See Stancliffe, 'Oswald "Most Holy and Most Victorious King of the Northumbrians"', 41-46. Walter Goffart argues that the cults of these royal saints were very politically significant and suggests that the Whitby-sponsored cult of Edwin was intended to over-shadow the Wilfrid-sponsored cult of Oswald, as Wilfrid hoped that by magnifying Oswald he would over-shadow the memory of Aidan and his companions, *The Narrators of Barbarian History (A.D. 550-800): Jordanes, Gregory of Tours, Bede, and Paul the Deacon*, (Princeton, New Jersey 1988) 261-262 and n.128.

<sup>475</sup> *HE* III.9, 240-243; *HE* III.14, 254-257.



contemplating retirement in Rome.<sup>476</sup> However, he has often been regarded as something of a lukewarm Christian, as Bede's description of him is very different to his account of Oswald and nowhere is Oswiu's sanctity praised or even suggested. His co-king, Oswine, on the other hand, was a very devout Christian and has been described as Oswald's moral heir.<sup>477</sup> He was very popular and attracted noblemen from various kingdoms to serve as his retainers, but was so humble and virtuous that Aidan prophesied his early death, commenting that he never before saw a humble king.<sup>478</sup> Aidan's prophecy was fulfilled when Oswiu had his co-king murdered in the first part of his reign to become sole ruler of Northumbria.<sup>479</sup> While Bede was very impressed by Oswine's personal sanctity, he recognised that kings needed to be more like Oswiu if they were to successfully defend the interests of their subjects.<sup>480</sup> Oswiu did just that a few years later at the Battle of the Winwæd (655) when he defeated Penda of Mercia who had previously ended the reigns (and lives) of Oswald and Edwin. Oswiu extended his kingdom to rule over the Mercians for some years afterwards, which was the culmination of his expansion pre-Synod of Whitby.

Although Oswiu's Christianity is often questioned, his reign oversaw major developments in the Anglo-Saxon Church including the Synod of Whitby and the beginning of Theodore's (equally long-lasting) reign as archbishop of Canterbury.<sup>481</sup> The Synod of Whitby, along with the Battle of the Winwæd, was one of the most defining moments of his kingship. Although most of the

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<sup>476</sup> *HE* IV.5, 348-349. Æthelberht of Kent also had a very long reign, particularly by the standards of Anglo-Saxon society. It is difficult to date his coming to power, Bede claims that he ruled for 56 years (*HE* II.5, 148-149), but D.P. Kirby, *The Earliest English Kings* (London 1991) 33, suggests that he may have been born in 560 not come to power then. Æthelberht indisputably ruled from before the arrival of Augustine in 597 until 616, making his reign of twenty years plus duration. It has been argued that the very long reigns of these kings who were Christian encouraged the adoption of Christianity, as it suggested the power of the Christian God and the impotence of the pagan deities, see Higham, *Convert Kings*.

<sup>477</sup> See Higham, *Convert Kings* 227.

<sup>478</sup> *HE* III.14, 256-261. Cf. Sigebert of the East Saxons, who was killed by two of his own *gesiths* because the king was so willing to pardon and forgive former enemies, *HE* III.22, 284-285. However, Bede praised Oswald for being 'wonderfully humble', *HE* III.6, 230-231. See Stancliffe, 'Oswald "Most Holy and Most Victorious King of the Northumbrians"', 65-66, who suggests that Aidan may not have agreed.

<sup>479</sup> *HE* III.14, 256-257; Oswine was killed in 651 and Aidan died twelve days later, *HE* III.14, 260-261.

<sup>480</sup> See Hill, 'Holy Kings,' 41-42, who believes that although Bede praised the virtues of men like Oswine and Sigebert of the East Saxons, he did not regard them as good kings. See also H.R. Loyn, 'Bede's Kings: A Comment on the Attitude of Bede to the Nature of Secular Kingship,' in N. Crossley-Holland, ed., *Eternal Values in Medieval Life, Trivium* 26 (1991) 54-64 at 56.

<sup>481</sup> *HE* III.24, 288-293; III.25, 294-309; IV.2, 332-337.

kingdom had been evangelised by monks from Iona, individuals like James the Deacon had continued teaching in the kingdom and taught the Roman as opposed to the Ionan practice for calculating Easter.<sup>482</sup> Another prominent follower of the Roman Easter was Eanflæd, Oswiu's queen, who was able to practice this at her husband's court having brought her own priest, the aptly named Romanus, from Kent to Northumbria. Bede wrote that it was said that in those days Easter was sometimes celebrated twice in the same year at the royal court; the king would be finished his fast and celebrating Easter Sunday while the queen and her retinue were still keeping their Lenten fast and observing Palm Sunday.<sup>483</sup> As the Lenten fast was seriously observed in Kent at this time, this would have led to difficulties and revealed a very clear division in the royal household.<sup>484</sup> There are other examples in the Insular Church of people who disagreed about Easter refusing to eat together. Aldhelm expressed his concerns about the behaviour of British bishops who refused to eat with those who followed a different Easter in a letter to their king, Geraint.<sup>485</sup> The Roman missionaries in Kent, almost a century before Aldhelm, were also concerned by the behaviour of a certain Bishop Dagan, who refused to eat with them, and would not even eat in the same house where they took their meals.<sup>486</sup>

Bede's description of the Northumbrian royal household is reminiscent of Eusebius' *Life of Constantine* however. Eusebius wrote that Easter had been a problem in the Church for a very long time as some argued that the Jewish custom should be followed, *i.e.* what comes to be known as Quartodecimanism. He notes that people were divided and the observance of religion was affected, as 'the time for celebrating one and the same feast caused the greatest disagreement between those who kept it, some afflicting themselves with fastings and austerities, while others devoted their time to festive relaxation'.<sup>487</sup> Eusebius

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<sup>482</sup> Bede mentions that Ronan, who was Irish but had been in Gaul or Italy, and Agilbert from Gaul and bishop of the West Saxons were both in Northumbria in the build-up to the Synod of Whitby, *HE* III.25, 294-299.

<sup>483</sup> *HE* III.25, 296-297. On background to the Easter question see C.W. Jones, ed., *Bedae Opera De Temporibus* (Cambridge, Mass. 1943) 6-104.

<sup>484</sup> King Eorcenberht of Kent (Eanflæd's first cousin) had decreed that the forty-day Lenten fast was to be practised with harsh penalties for offenders; the Kentish contingent at the Northumbrian court would have been aware of this, *HE* III.8, 236-237.

<sup>485</sup> Aldhelm, *Letter IV, to Geraint*: Lapidge and Herren (1979) 158.

<sup>486</sup> *HE* II.4, 146-147.

<sup>487</sup> Eusebius, *Vita Constantini (Life of Constantine)*, bk.3.5: *PG* 20, 1058-1059; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 1, 521.

continued to claim that only Constantine could resolve this issue, which led to his calling of the Synod of Nicaea.<sup>488</sup>

Eusebius' evidence relates very closely to Bede's account of the Northumbrian situation, which is similarly resolved through a Council, in this case called by the king.<sup>489</sup> The contrast between feasting and fasting also takes place within the Northumbrian royal household, which it can be argued represents the Church.<sup>490</sup> The lack of unity at the royal court also reflected the greater disunity in the kingdom because of this dispute. Bede's account suggests that as time went on those who came from Kent and Gaul drew attention to the erroneous nature of the Irish Easter calculation and a serious controversy developed that disturbed many across the kingdom.<sup>491</sup> Even Alhfrith, Oswiu's son and sub-king, followed the Roman Easter, being a close associate of Wilfrid's, who had recently returned to Northumbria from a pilgrimage to Rome and a lengthy stay in Gaul.<sup>492</sup> Stephanie Hollis suggests that according to Bede's account, Oswiu was not concerned about not being in full union with his wife but with rumours of a widespread disenchantment with Christianity in his kingdom; in her view this division in the kingdom is represented by the absence of unity between the king and his sub-king.<sup>493</sup>

The possible political background aside, the two surviving accounts of the Synod of Whitby give different readings of its significance. In the *Life of Wilfrid* it marked the end of Columban influence and the official beginning of Wilfrid's ascent in the Northumbrian Church, whereas in the *HE* it is presented as a defining moment in the development of the Northumbrian Church.<sup>494</sup> Bede's

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<sup>488</sup> Eusebius, *Vita Constantini*, bk.3.5-6: *PG* 20, 1058-1059; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 1, 521.

<sup>489</sup> James Campbell has recognised Eusebius' influence on Bede's writing of the *HE*, see 'Bede I,' repr. in J. Campbell, *Essays in Anglo-Saxon History* (London 1986) 1-27 at 4-5 and 25; 'Bede II,' repr. in Campbell, *Essays in Anglo-Saxon History*, 29-48 at 33-36.

<sup>490</sup> In Bede's account of Augustine's earlier dispute with the British bishops (which concerned three main points, one being the celebration of Easter), Augustine attempts to resolve the situation by praying for unity and refers to Psalm 67:7(68:7), that God makes men to be of one mind in his Father's house, *HE* II.2, 136-137.

<sup>491</sup> *HE* III.25, 294-297.

<sup>492</sup> *HE* III.25, 296-299; V.19, 520-523; cf. *Life of Wilfrid*, c.7-8: Colgrave (1985) 14-19; Webb (1998) 114-115. Alhfrith's acceptance of the Roman Easter, while his father still followed the Irish practice, has often been given a political dimension, see R. Abels, 'The Council of Whitby: A Study in Early Anglo-Saxon politics,' *Journal of British Studies* 23:1 (1983) 1-25 at 8-9; Higham, *Convert Kings* 254-255.

<sup>493</sup> Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women* 240. Modern scholars have often regarded this division between Oswiu and his sub-king, Alhfrith as the reason for calling the Synod of Whitby, see Higham, *Convert Kings* 254-256.

<sup>494</sup> See *Life of Wilfrid*, c.10: Colgrave (1985) 20-23; Webb (1998) 116-118.

account of the Synod of Whitby is linked with his understanding of the development of the early Church particularly as outlined in the Acts of the Apostles.<sup>495</sup> Glenn Olsen has convincingly demonstrated Bede's historical awareness of the early Church's development,<sup>496</sup> and it is clear that he realised that the Northumbrian Church went through its own process of development. As the early Church progressed it was decided that circumcision would no longer be imposed on gentile converts, although in the beginning the opposite had been the case.<sup>497</sup> As seen in Eusebius' *Life of Constantine*, there were also questions concerning the date of Easter in the Early Church, which became more problematic as the Church developed.<sup>498</sup> In the Northumbrian Church there was a similar process of development and the Ionan Easter, which had once been acceptable particularly during Aidan's bishopric, became unacceptable. It is notable that in the *HE* Aidan and his associates followed the apostolic way of life of the early church.<sup>499</sup> Bede praised their faith and way of life and even excused their Easter practice explaining that it was due to their ignorance about the decrees of Church councils concerning this matter.<sup>500</sup> However, when faced with the Roman practice of other teachers in Northumbria and ultimately at the Synod of Whitby the Ionan monks continued to prefer their own local traditions, which is where the problem arises. In continuing to persist with their own practice they were in violation of Church unity and guilty of obduracy.<sup>501</sup>

The Northumbrian Church accepted the practice of Rome and the universal Church at the Synod of Whitby following the decision of Oswiu. The Columbanus, including Bishop Colman, who wished to continue following their own customs, were asked to leave the kingdom.<sup>502</sup> Though Irish influence

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<sup>495</sup> See Plummer (1896 repr 1969) 2, 190-191; R. Ray, 'The Triumph of Greco-Roman Rhetorical Assumptions in Pre-Carolingian Historiography,' in C. Holdsworth and T.P. Wiseman, ed., *The Inheritance of Historiography 350-900* (Exeter 1986) 80; O'Reilly, intro., xxxvii.

<sup>496</sup> G. 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) 519-530.

<sup>497</sup> See Acts 15; 16:3 and Gal 2. Bede, *Expositio Actuum Apostolorum*, c.16.3: CCSL 121, 68; Martin (1989) 135.

<sup>498</sup> Eusebius, *Vita Constantini*, bk.3.5-6: PG 20, 1058-1059; NPNF 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 1, 521. See above.

<sup>499</sup> See O'Reilly, intro., xxxv-xxxvi. Augustine and the other Roman missionaries at Canterbury also lived like the first apostles, *HE* I.26, 76-77.

<sup>500</sup> *HE* III.4, 224-225.

<sup>501</sup> See O'Reilly, intro., xxxvi-xxxvii. Bede's account of Whitby stressed the importance of one faith; 'King Oswiu began by declaring that it was fitting that those who served one God should observe one rule of life and not differ in the celebration of the heavenly sacraments, seeing that they all hoped for one kingdom in heaven', *HE* III.25, 298-299.

<sup>502</sup> *HE* III.26, 308-309. *Life of Wilfrid*, c.10: Colgrave (1985) 22-23; Webb (1998) 118.

continued, the Northumbrian Church turned increasingly towards Rome.<sup>503</sup> Bede's account appreciates the process of development that this Church underwent from its origins during Paulinus' bishopric, through the Ionan mission to the Synod of Whitby and after. This is at variance with the *Life of Wilfrid*, which was eager to stress the disruption in the Northumbrian Church from the time of Paulinus to the return of Wilfrid. At the Council of Austerfield Wilfrid justified his life's work, claiming: 'After the death of those elders whom Pope Gregory sent to us, was I not the first to root out from the Church the foul weeds planted by the Scots?'<sup>504</sup> Bede, on the other hand, recognised the legitimacy of Aidan's mission and acknowledged the piety of his life and his efforts in building up the Church for Christ. He also succeeded in showing clear continuity between the missions of Aidan and Paulinus through the lives of James the Deacon, Hild and Eanflæd.

James the Deacon, as already mentioned, continued his pastoral work alongside the Ionan mission and his attendance at the Synod of Whitby demonstrated a clear link between Paulinus' time and the Northumbrian Church during Oswiu's reign.<sup>505</sup> Hild received her Christian faith in company with Edwin (who was her father's uncle) through the teaching of Paulinus and she was also a close associate of Aidan's. Hild intended to join her sister in Chelles in Gaul, but returned to Northumbria to pursue the monastic life there at Aidan's request. After becoming abbess of Hartlepool she established a Rule that was based on what Aidan and other learned men had taught her and was abbess of Whitby at the time of the Synod to which it gave its name.<sup>506</sup> Though on the Columban side, Hild accepted the Synod's decision and continued her work in Northumbria, producing five bishops for the Northumbrian Church.<sup>507</sup> Bede wrote that from the time of receiving baptism from Paulinus, 'she preserved that

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<sup>503</sup> On discovering that the archbishop of Canterbury had died and not been replaced, Oswiu consulted with Egbert of Kent and they sent an approved candidate (Wigheard) to Rome to be consecrated as their new archbishop. Wigheard died in Rome and Pope Vitalian sent Theodore back to the Anglo-Saxons in his place, see *HE* III.29, 318-323; IV.1, 328-333.

<sup>504</sup> *Life of Wilfrid*, c.47: Colgrave (1985) 98-99; Webb (1998) 158.

<sup>505</sup> *HE* III.25, 296-297; II.20, 206-207.

<sup>506</sup> There is some dispute about the location of Whitby although most scholars follow the traditional identification of it with *Streanæshalch* in Bede's text, *HE* III.25, 298-299; *HE* IV.23(21), 408-409. See P. Hunter Blair, 'Whitby as a centre of learning in the seventh century,' in M. Lapidge and H. Gneuss, ed., *Learning and Literature in Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge 1985) 3-32 at 9-12; J. Blair, 'Whitby,' in M. Lapidge *et al.*, ed., *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford 1999) 472-473.

<sup>507</sup> *HE* IV.23(21), 406-409. See Chapter Five for discussion of Hild.

faith inviolate until she was counted worthy to behold Him.<sup>508</sup> Her close association with Aidan and observance of the Ionan Easter was not a matter of faith and did not adversely affect the integrity of her faith. Eanflæd's role in Northumbrian affairs through her practice of the Roman Easter at Oswiu's court has already been referred to; however her influence does not end there and as the first Northumbrian Christian, she is the most significant link between Paulinus' mission and the reign of Oswiu.

*(ii) Eanflæd's role*

Eanflæd was born on Easter Sunday 626, the first child of Edwin and Æthelburh and the first Northumbrian to be baptised; the significance of her birth and baptism have been discussed above. She and Oswiu were married sometime in the early part of his reign, but the precise date is unknown.<sup>509</sup> This marriage linked Oswiu to the Kentish royal family and strengthened his claims to the throne of Deira, still held by Oswine at the time.<sup>510</sup> Indeed Oswiu may have had an existing claim to Deira if Acha (Edwin's sister and Oswald's mother) was also his mother; if this were the case, however, Oswiu and Eanflæd were first cousins and the Church disapproved of such unions.<sup>511</sup> As Bede is silent on the identity of Oswiu's mother, this suggests she was Acha.<sup>512</sup> Their marriage brought the houses of Bernicia and Deira together in one family. Eanflæd as was customary brought a retinue to Oswiu's court including her own priest, Romanus, which allowed her and all those in her company to continue following Roman practices as they had done in Kent.<sup>513</sup> Eanflæd's behaviour is reminiscent of her mother's

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<sup>508</sup> *HE* IV.23(21), 406-407, ... *haec, usquedum ad eius uisionem peruenire meruit, intemerata seruauit.*

<sup>509</sup> When Oswiu came to power in 642 Eanflæd was sixteen and of marriageable age and Aidan (who died in 651) was still living at the time this marriage was arranged.

<sup>510</sup> *HE* III.15, 260-261.

<sup>511</sup> See *HE* I.27, Gregory's fifth reply, 84-87, which forbids these unions; the inclusion of this reply suggests that these alliances were common practice among the Anglo-Saxons.

<sup>512</sup> It is probable that had Oswiu's mother been someone other than Acha, Bede would have stated so clearly. Higham suggests that Aidan disapproved of this marriage and withdrew his support from Oswiu after he went through with it, 'Dynasty and Cult: the Utility of Christian Mission to Northumbrian Kings between 642 and 654,' in J. Hawkes and S. Mills, ed., *Northumbria's Golden Age* (Stroud 1999) 95-104 at 98-99. Aidan may have disapproved, but there is no evidence that the king lost his support, *HE* III.14, 260-261.

<sup>513</sup> *HE* III.25, 296-297. Stephanie Hollis suggests that Eanflæd may have been particularly strong-willed at Oswiu's court as she did not have the benefit of a marriage agreement, but all political marriages would almost certainly have had contracts to protect the interests of both sides; Hollis

at Edwin's court, who had brought her own bishop to ensure that the faith of those in her company would be uncorrupted.<sup>514</sup> However, in Eanflæd's case, this leads to division in the royal household because the royal couple are not eating together. Bede writes:

Hence it is said that in these days it sometimes happened that Easter was celebrated twice in the same year, so that the king had finished the fast and was keeping Easter Sunday, while the queen and her people were still in Lent and observing Palm Sunday.<sup>515</sup>

This division reflects the division in the kingdom of Northumbria, as noted above, but also reveals the disunity between the Northumbrian royal houses of Bernicia and Deira. In the beginning of Book Three it is clear that Northumbria under Edwin's successors has split into its constituent parts and this leads to their separate defeats by Cædwalla early in their reigns and the pillaging of the kingdom for a year. The division over Easter is a further instance of the threat to the unity of Northumbria in this period, and according to Bede troubled many people in the kingdom.<sup>516</sup> It was also very problematic for the Church, as all Christians are in one Church, which should not be divided.<sup>517</sup> To be unable or unwilling to eat the Eucharistic meal together at the most important feast in the Church's calendar was very problematic for Christians, particularly as there is only one eternal heavenly banquet in which all the Just will partake.<sup>518</sup> The British Christians also followed a different Easter practice to the Roman missionaries and this was one of the matters that Augustine of Canterbury attempted to resolve in dealing with them. In Bede's account of their first council, Augustine urged that they should unite in prayer to God who 'makes men to be of one mind in his father's house', in the hope that he would show

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does recognise that it was important for the bride's family that her independence, and by extension her family's independence, be recognised at her husband's court, *Anglo-Saxon Women* 237.

<sup>514</sup> *HE* II.9, 162-163. See above and Chapter Two.

<sup>515</sup> *HE* III.25, 296-297, *Vnde nonnumquam contigisse fertur illis temporibus, ut bis in anno uno pascha celebraretur, et cum rex pascha dominicum solutis ieiuniis faceret, tum regina cum suis persistens adhuc in ieiunio diem palmarum celebraret.* See above for Eusebius, *Vita Constantini*, on similar problems in the early Church.

<sup>516</sup> *HE* III.25, 296-297. See above for Bede's reference to Benedict Biscop's warnings to his monks to avoid disunity between the two houses of Wearmouth and Jarrow, *Lives of the Abbots*, c.13: Farmer (1998) 200.

<sup>517</sup> See Cyprian who stressed the oneness and unity of the Church in his *De Ecclesiae Catholicae Unitate (The Unity of the Catholic Church)*, esp. st.7, on the seamless and undivided nature of Christ's garment in John's account of the Crucifixion (John 19:23): Bévenot (1971) 68-69.

<sup>518</sup> See Chapter One on New Testament images of heaven as a banquet or wedding feast.

them by what paths they should hasten to enter his kingdom.<sup>519</sup> This is clearly not happening in the Northumbrian royal household prior to the Synod of Whitby, and Bede is aware that such behaviour leads to destruction. The destruction of the British Christians at the hands of Æthelfrith of Northumbria and the later devastation of Northumbria after the defeats of Osric and Eanfrith reveal the need for unity among Christians, and hence the need to resolve the controversy over the dating of Easter before further problems arise.<sup>520</sup> Indeed Eanflæd plays a very important role in keeping the royal houses of Deira and Bernicia together and simultaneously brings her husband to a deeper understanding of Christianity.

We are given very little information about Eanflæd's reign as queen, but the details that Bede does choose to include are important. Eanflæd returned to Northumbria to marry Oswiu in auspicious circumstances. Having had to flee by sea under the care of Paulinus after her father's death, Eanflæd returned to Northumbria, also by sea, and in the company of a priest named Utta under the protection of Bishop Aidan. Utta had received Aidan's blessing for his journey and also some holy oil that Aidan prophesied would calm the storms that would threaten their ship on the return journey. This all took place as Aidan had said: just as the company believed the ship was about to sink, Utta remembered Aidan's words and poured the oil into the sea, which immediately calmed. Bede explained that Aidan was able to calm the storm despite not being bodily present on the ship.<sup>521</sup> This is the first of three miracles that Bede included at the end of his account of Aidan's life to conclusively demonstrate Aidan's sanctity, but it is notable that Aidan had an important part in bringing Eanflæd safely back to Northumbria.

The next time that we meet Eanflæd, her Christian influence on the king is apparent. As mentioned above, to become king of all Northumbria Oswiu had his sub-king Oswine (who was Eanflæd's second cousin) murdered, which would have led to Eanflæd being divided between her husband and her family and caused division between the royal houses of Deira and Bernicia. The location of this story is significant in the context of the *HE*, however. In *HE* III.14, Bede

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<sup>519</sup> *HE* II.2, 136-137, referring to Ps 67:7(68:7).

<sup>520</sup> *HE* II.2, 140-141; *HE* III.1, 212-215.

<sup>521</sup> *HE* III.15, 260-261.



describes Oswine's murder and records that a monastery was founded at the place called Gilling so that Oswiu could atone for the murder, and Bede then describes Oswine's relationship with Aidan.<sup>522</sup> He mentions the monastery of Gilling again in *HE* III.24 after describing Oswiu's success at the Battle of the Winwæd and, on this occasion, refers to Eanflæd's role in its foundation.<sup>523</sup> It is only in the chapter before the Synod of Whitby that we discover Eanflæd's involvement in this dispute. In Anglo-Saxon society diplomatic marriages were often arranged to create alliances between different kingdoms.<sup>524</sup> In these marriages, the queen was often expected to play the role of peace-weaver, becoming a bridge between her own people and her husband's to ensure good relations between them.<sup>525</sup> Indeed one of the 'periphrases for "woman" in Old English is *freothuwebbe*, "weaver of peace".'<sup>526</sup> On these marriages Joel Rosenthal wrote that the bride was supposed to be 'accepted without rancour into the house of the groom if she came to resolve a feud, or with high hopes and affection if she came in order to prevent one.'<sup>527</sup> As a consequence these women were often placed in unenviable situations. In *Beowulf*, the hero warns about the inherent dangers in such a marriage alliance between the Danes and the Heathobards: 'But the deadly spear rarely sleeps for long after a prince lies dead in the dust, however exceptional the bride may be!'<sup>528</sup> In *HE* III.24, the reader is also presented with an example of such a diplomatic marriage going badly.

Northumbria and Mercia had been at war for generations and Oswiu finally defeated Penda at the Battle of the Winwæd in 655. Prior to this the royal houses had attempted to improve relations through marriage. Oswiu's son,

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<sup>522</sup> *HE* III.14, 256-261.

<sup>523</sup> *HE* III.24, 292-293.

<sup>524</sup> On marriage in Anglo-Saxon society, see Chapter Two, n.30.

<sup>525</sup> Women invariably move to their husband's kingdom, see Bertha to Kent, *HE* I.25, 72-75; Æthelburh to Northumbria, *HE* II.9, 162-163; Seaxburh to Kent *HE* III.8, 236-239; Cyneburh to Northumbria, *HE* III.21, 278-279; Alhflæd to Mercia, *HE* III.21, 278-279; Eafe to the kingdom of the South Saxons, *HE* IV.13, 372-373; Æthelthryth to Northumbria, *HE* IV.19(17), 390-391; Osthryth to Mercia, *HE* IV.21(19), 400-401. See T.M. Charles-Edwards, 'Nations and kingdoms: a view from above,' in T.M. Charles-Edwards, ed., *After Rome* (Oxford 2003) 23-58 at 52, and J. Goody, *The development of the family and marriage in Europe* (Cambridge 1984) 19. Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women* 161.

<sup>526</sup> R.I. Page, *Life in Anglo-Saxon England* (London 1972) 69.

<sup>527</sup> J.T. Rosenthal, 'Marriage and the blood feud in "heroic" Europe,' *The British Journal of Sociology* 17:2 (1966) 133-144 at 135.

<sup>528</sup> *Beowulf*, tr. K. Crossley-Holland in *The Anglo-Saxon World: An Anthology* (Oxford 1982, 1984) 74-154 at 125. Rosenthal suggests that in the literature of the time when these marriages failed the 'women became almost sacrificial victims', 'Marriage and the blood feud,' 133.

Alhfrith, married Penda's daughter, Cyneburh, and Penda's son, Peada, married Oswiu's daughter Alhflæd and accepted Christianity in the process.<sup>529</sup> This did not succeed in preventing further hostilities between the two kingdoms. After Oswiu defeated Penda he ruled Mercia for a number of years and gave the kingdom of Southern Mercia to Peada, because he was his kinsman. However, Bede relates that the following spring, during the celebrations for Easter, Peada was betrayed by his wife and murdered.<sup>530</sup> This comes immediately before Bede's account of the Synod of Whitby and straight after he described Eanflæd's role after the murder of her cousin, Oswine, at her husband's instigation, which placed her in a very difficult position as his cousin. In Bede's account of these events Eanflæd successfully plays her role as peace-weaver and persuades Oswiu to atone for Oswine's murder by building a monastery at the location of the crime and she also ensures that a close relative of Oswine's, Trumhere, is appointed as abbot of this new foundation.<sup>531</sup> In this monastery at Gilling prayers were to be continually said for the eternal welfare of the two kings, the victim and the one who ordered his murder.<sup>532</sup>

Eanflæd is the opposite of Alhflæd and lives up to her society's expectations of a queen, and does so again in the following chapter of the book. After these events we are unaware of any further hostilities between the two Northumbrian provinces, so it is probable that Eanflæd's actions prevented her side from retaliating and preserved peace in the kingdom. Later in the *HE*, Archbishop Theodore similarly successfully intervened in a dispute between Northumbria and Mercia following the death of Ecgfrith of Northumbria's brother, Ælfwine, in battle between Northumbria and Mercia.<sup>533</sup> Bede writes that although there could have been prolonged hostilities between these two kingdoms, Theodore was able to persuade Ecgfrith to accept the money compensation due to him for the death of his brother, thereby preserving peace

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<sup>529</sup> *HE* III.21, 278-279.

<sup>530</sup> *HE* III.24, 294-295.

<sup>531</sup> *HE* III.24, 292-293. Presumably Trumhere was also related to Eanflæd but this is not stated in the text.

<sup>532</sup> *HE* III.24, 292-293; cf. III.14, 256-257.

<sup>533</sup> *HE* IV.21(19), 400-401. Æthelred of Mercia was married to Ecgfrith and Ælfwine's sister, Osthryth, who seems to have been unsuccessful in bringing about peace between these two kingdoms. Indeed Bede reveals in his short recapitulation at the end of the *HE* that her own Mercian nobles murdered her in 697, *HE* V.24, 564-565.

for a long period between these kingdoms.<sup>534</sup> In both of these cases the influence of Christianity is apparent on the highest levels of society. Theodore persuaded the Northumbrian king to accept compensation from Æthelred of Mercia, whereas in persuading Oswiu to found a monastery Eanflæd ensured that the compensation for Oswine's murder was paid to God in the foundation of a new monastery; and in this monastery both kings would be commemorated together.

In the same chapter of the *HE* that we learn about Eanflæd's role in the foundation of Gilling, Oswiu's pledge to dedicate his infant daughter Ælfflæd to the monastic life and give twelve small estates for building monasteries if he is successful in battle against the heathen Penda of the Mercians is also outlined.<sup>535</sup> This vow is reminiscent of Edwin's promise to serve Christ if victorious against the West Saxons and as a pledge that he would keep his word, Edwin allowed his daughter, Eanflæd to be baptised.<sup>536</sup> It has been argued in Chapter Two that Æthelburh played an important role in bringing her husband to Christianity and that Eanflæd's baptism was a very important stage in that process. In this case, a generation later, it is possible that Eanflæd (who later in the same chapter is credited with encouraging her husband to build a monastery at Gilling) may have helped Oswiu to come to this decision. As she retired to Whitby after Oswiu's death and ruled the monastery jointly with Ælfflæd, it is very probable that she was in favour of dedicating their daughter to the ascetic life.<sup>537</sup> Oswiu's smaller army defeated Penda's force at the Battle of the Winwæd and he fulfilled his vow, giving twelve estates of ten hides each for monasteries (six in Deira and six in Bernicia) and Ælfflæd, then about a year old, was consecrated to a life of perpetual virginity and entered the monastery of Hartlepool under the abbacy of Hild. Two years later Hild became abbess of Whitby and Ælfflæd became a pupil there.<sup>538</sup> As well as demonstrating that the royal family was openly and actively supportive of the monastic life, twelve new monasteries in both Deira and

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<sup>534</sup> *HE* IV.21(19), 400-401.

<sup>535</sup> *HE* III.24, 290-291. Much comment on marriage in Germanic society focuses on the importance of producing children, which was the most effective means of ensuring peaceful relations between peoples. Often these alliances could fail through the childlessness of the wife. J.A. Brundage suggests that the first year of marriage was often regarded as a trial period and the marriage was seen as permanent if the wife became pregnant, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (London 1987) 131. See also J. Chance, *Woman as Hero in Old English Literature* (Syracuse 1986) 1-3, and Rosenthal, 'Marriage and the blood feud,' 139.

<sup>536</sup> *HE* II.9, 166-167. See above.

<sup>537</sup> See *HE* IV.26(24), 428-431.

<sup>538</sup> *HE* III.24, 290-291; on founding of Whitby, see IV.23(21), 408-409.

Bernicia would have significantly increased the number of monasteries in the kingdom and given the Church a greater influence on Northumbrian society.<sup>539</sup>

Eanflæd's role in the developments leading to the Synod of Whitby (as outlined above) is understated in Bede's text, as it undoubtedly would have been in reality, otherwise Oswiu's decision to change to his wife's practice could have affected his political power, implying that he was subordinate to his wife and her family under the Anglo-Saxon concept of marriage. As already described, she continued to observe the Roman Easter practice at Oswiu's court, which literally brought the problem home to the king.<sup>540</sup> Pope Vitalian's letter to Oswiu on choosing a new archbishop for Canterbury recognises that the queen was a pious Christian. The pope acknowledged the king's recent conversion to the 'true and apostolic faith'<sup>541</sup> and sent a gift of a cross with a golden key to Eanflæd, writing: 'for, hearing of her pious zeal, the whole apostolic see rejoices with us, just as her works of piety smell sweet and blossom in the presence of God.'<sup>542</sup> Without Bede's evidence that Eanflæd was an open supporter of the Roman Easter at the royal court, we could be left wondering what she was so piously zealous about. In the context of the letter the papal testimony suggests that Eanflæd may have played a part in Oswiu's acceptance of the Roman Easter, which was perhaps related to the pope by the Anglo-Saxon delegation on reaching Rome. In Bede's earlier account of Æthelburh and Edwin, the evidence from the papal letters included in Book Two are very important for demonstrating the role of the Christian wife in bringing her husband, and subsequently his people to conversion.<sup>543</sup> Vitalian's letter may be similarly important for understanding Bede's view of Eanflæd's role. It is notable that Bede only included excerpts from this letter in his text, but chose to reproduce the pope's praise for Eanflæd.<sup>544</sup>

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<sup>539</sup> See above on the significance of the number twelve.

<sup>540</sup> See Augustine, *De Peccatorum Meritis Et Remissione (On the Merits and Forgiveness of Sins)*, bk.3.21: *PL* 44, 199; *NPNF* 1<sup>st</sup> series, 5, 77-78, who believed that the Christian life lived in the home by a believing spouse could bring the unbeliever to conversion. Although Oswiu is not an unbeliever, Eanflæd's behaviour helps in bringing him to the true faith. See Chapter Two.

<sup>541</sup> Vitalian to Oswiu, *HE* III.29, 318-319, ... *ad ueram et apostolicam fidem* ... See T.M. Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* (Cambridge 2000) 433-434.

<sup>542</sup> Vitalian to Oswiu, *HE* III.29, 320-321, *de cuius pio studio cognoscentes, tantum cuncta sedes apostolica una nobiscum laetatur, quantum eius pia opera coram Deo flagrant et uernant.*

<sup>543</sup> See Chapter Two.

<sup>544</sup> As argued in Chapter Two, Bede was willing to edit his sources and only included what was relevant to his work.

In another parallel between the lives of Æthelburh and Eanflæd, Bede is the only Anglo-Saxon witness to their influence. The *Life of Wilfrid*, which contains a different account of the Synod of Whitby, never acknowledged that Eanflæd practiced the Roman Easter at Oswiu's court. To do so would have undermined the writer's belief that Wilfrid was the sole exponent of Roman practices in Northumbria in the early 660s.<sup>545</sup> Both sources recognise Eanflæd's support for Wilfrid at the beginning of his monastic career, as she encouraged Wilfrid to enter Lindisfarne and assisted his first pilgrimage to Rome, enlisting the help of her cousin Eorcenberht the king of Kent.<sup>546</sup> Eanflæd's wider influence in Northumbrian affairs is not mentioned in Stephen's *Life* however. Modern scholars have similarly often paid scant attention to Eanflæd's role in Northumbrian history, particularly in the Synod of Whitby. Stephanie Hollis suggests that in the *HE*, Eanflæd 'is merely a pious queen with a limited amount of influence in the monasteries.'<sup>547</sup> She claims that Eanflæd is presented as a powerful and independent ruler in the *Life of Wilfrid* but not in the *HE*. Hollis unfavourably compares the *HE* to the *Life of Wilfrid* and argues that Bede suppressed information about her and other women because of his hostility to female influence, particularly in ecclesiastical matters. She writes that Eanflæd's following of the Roman Easter at Oswiu's court reveals her independence and notes that this important role in preparing the way for Oswiu's endorsement of the Roman cause at Whitby was 'inherently likely to have been invisible to chroniclers.'<sup>548</sup> She does not recognise that Eanflæd's role would also be invisible to us without Bede's work. While we cannot determine the precise nature of Eanflæd's role, Bede's account emphasises her continued support for the Roman Easter after her marriage and includes Pope Vitalian's praise of her.

Eanflæd's significance in the unfolding of Northumbrian history goes beyond her role in the Easter Controversy, however. While her mother introduced Christianity to Northumbria during the reign of her father, Edwin, and

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<sup>545</sup> See *Life of Wilfrid*, c.10: Colgrave (1985) 20-23; Webb (1998) 116-118.

<sup>546</sup> *HE* V.19, 518-519. *Life of Wilfrid*, c.2-3: Colgrave (1985) 6-9; Webb (1998) 109-110. Hollis argues that Bede diminishes Eanflæd's role in Wilfrid's career, suggesting that in the *Life of Wilfrid* Eanflæd converts Wilfrid to the monastic life, whereas Bede suppressed her part in his decision, *Anglo-Saxon Women* 169, 226 and 237-238. A close reading of both texts does not easily support her argument.

<sup>547</sup> Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women* 226.

<sup>548</sup> Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women* 226-227.

witnessed the beginning of the Northumbrian Church with Eanflæd's baptism, Eanflæd as queen exerted her influence to bring her husband and his kingdom to a deeper understanding of Christianity. The Church by Eanflæd's reign was securely established through the work of Roman and Irish missionaries, and Christian kings were succeeding Christian kings. During her time as queen, Eanflæd helped to bring it to the next stage of development by encouraging Oswiu to found monasteries and Anglo-Saxons (like Wilfrid) to enter the monastic life. She brought her husband to a more complete understanding of his faith and the growth in monasticism assisted the Christianisation of Northumbrian society, which is related in Book Four of the *HE*. This development brought about the Easter controversy that led to the Northumbrian Church's conversion to the Roman method of calculating Easter, acceptance of the Petrine tonsure, and ultimately to taking its place in the universal Church.<sup>549</sup>

Edwin and Æthelburh's marriage has already been seen as a symbol of the marriage between Christ and the Northumbrian Church, but this is no less true for the marriage of Oswiu and Eanflæd. The disunity in their marriage over Easter reflected the disunity in the kingdom and in the Northumbrian royal family and threatened to split the newly united Deira and Bernicia and split the Church in Northumbria. However, Eanflæd's efforts to convert her husband brought him and the Northumbrians closer to Christ. Indeed, Eanflæd in many ways represents the Northumbrian Church. While this formally begins at her baptism (as discussed above) her birth on Easter Sunday is also of significance. Chapter One discussed the union between Christ and the Church, which first took place in the Virgin's womb, but Jerome wrote that the Church rose on Easter Sunday, as it was on this day that the Synagogue came to an end and the Church was born.<sup>550</sup> It was also on this day in 626 that the Northumbrian Church was born with the birth of Eanflæd and her later influence ensured that it became a full member of Christ's virgin bride.

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<sup>549</sup> See above for Vitalian's letter to Oswiu, *HE* III.29, 318-319 and Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* 433-434. The Synod of Hatfield reveals the highly developed nature of Anglo-Saxon Christianity just over a decade after the Synod of Whitby, *HE* IV.17(15), 384-387.

<sup>550</sup> See Jerome's two homilies for Easter Sunday, *In Die Dominica Paschae (On Easter Sunday)*: *CCSL* 78, 545 and 550; *FOTC* 57 (*Homily* 93 and 94) 248 and 252. See also Chapter One.

## The Northumbrian Church

It is significant that Bede's account of the first stage in the development of the Northumbrian Church (from the consecration of Paulinus in 625 to the Synod of Whitby in 664) is framed by two important royal marriages. For Bede, as Mayr-Harting briefly observed, the bride is very often an allegory of the Church,<sup>551</sup> and in this instance both brides serve as figures for the Church and do their part to bring their husbands and subjects into complete union with this.<sup>552</sup> Bede even begins his description of Northumbrian conversion by using marriage imagery, describing Paulinus' desire to present the populace as a spotless virgin to her one husband, Christ, making the link between earthly marriage and the ecclesiological understanding of marriage quite apparent. While Paulinus' mission is set back by the death of Edwin, and Aidan and his fellow Ionan missionaries ostensibly begin again during Oswald's reign, this evaluation of Northumbrian history has sought to demonstrate that the union between Christ and the Northumbrian people was sometimes precarious but never dissolved. Although Bede never refers to the Columban monks in his *Greater Chronicle*, that work similarly suggests that the Northumbrian Church was founded by Paulinus and continued uninterrupted to the age of Theodore.<sup>553</sup> In the *HE*, the imagery used by Bede to describe the activities of the Columban monks in building up the Church, reveals that they behaved in a suitably apostolic manner. The book also demonstrates that there was notable continuity with the earlier mission, especially through the work of important individuals like James the Deacon and Hild. While there were teething problems, Bede's historical awareness allowed him to recognise that this was not unusual as similar problems had arisen in the early Church. Bede's *HE* suggests that the developmental stage of the Northumbrian Church is begun during the reign of Æthelburh and brought to completion during the reign of her first daughter, Eanflæd.

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<sup>551</sup> H. Mayr-Harting, 'Bede's Patristic Thinking as an Historian,' in A. Scharer and G. Scheibelreiter, ed., *Historiographie im frühen Mittelalter* (Munich 1994) 367-374 at 373-374.

<sup>552</sup> See above for further development of this image.

<sup>553</sup> Bede, *De Temporum Ratione*, c.66 (*Chronica Maiora*): CCSL 123B; Wallis (1999) 228, 230.

#### C.4 – Æthelthryth: Royal Bride to Heavenly Queen

Æthelthryth was the daughter of Anna of the East Angles and the wife of Ecgfrith of Northumbria, after the death of her first husband, Tondberht. She ruled Northumbria with Ecgfrith for twelve years and then received her husband's permission to leave their marriage and dedicate herself to a life of virginity. She entered the community of Coldingham and subsequently became abbess of her own foundation at Ely. She is the third named queen of Northumbria in the *HE* after Æthelburh and Eanflæd and these three queens represent three successive generations of Northumbrian rulers: Æthelthryth married Ecgfrith, who was Eanflæd and Oswiu's son, and Eanflæd was the first daughter of Æthelburh and Edwin. Each of these three queens played a significant part in the Christianisation of the Northumbrian royal court and, by extension, the kingdom. We have seen that Æthelburh's influence on Edwin played a part in his conversion, and Eanflæd's continued practice of the Roman Easter at Oswiu's court was a factor in bringing about the Synod of Whitby.<sup>554</sup> Æthelthryth's preservation of her virginity during her marriage to Ecgfrith followed by her abdication to enter a monastic community would have also had an effect on the Northumbrian court.<sup>555</sup> Pauline Thompson has argued that Æthelthryth's choices were an attempt to change the nature of political marriage for Christian women in a way that no one else from her generation had done,<sup>556</sup> and Susan Ridyard has described her as a 'pioneer'.<sup>557</sup> Bede's presentation of Æthelthryth in the *HE*, which is the source for all subsequent accounts of Æthelthryth,<sup>558</sup> has received much attention from modern scholars. However the

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<sup>554</sup> See Chapters Two and Three.

<sup>555</sup> Eanflæd had previously retired to Whitby after Oswiu's death and jointly ruled there with their daughter Ælflæd, *HE* IV.26(24), 428-431. Æthelburh is traditionally believed to have founded and entered her own monastery on returning to Kent following Edwin's death, see J. Luecke, 'The Unique Experience of Anglo-Saxon Nuns,' in L.T. Shanks and J.A. Nichols, ed., *Medieval Religious Women, II, PeaceWeavers* (Kalamazoo 1987) 55-65 at 55-56, who suggests that as Lyminge was believed to be Æthelburh's foundation this was probably the first Anglo-Saxon house for women.

<sup>556</sup> P.A. Thompson, 'St Æthelthryth: the making of history from hagiography,' in M.J. Toswell and E.M. Tyler, ed., *Studies in English Language and Literature: 'Doubt Wisely', Papers in honour of E.G. Stanley* (London 1996) 475-492.

<sup>557</sup> S.J. Ridyard, *The Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England: A Study of West Saxon and East Anglian Cults* (Cambridge 1988) 177-178, Ridyard also says that Æthelthryth had done 'something rather different'; see also 83.

<sup>558</sup> See Ridyard, *Royal Saints* 53-54; Thompson, 'St. Æthelthryth,' 485; C.E. Fell, 'Saint Æðelþryð: A Historical-Hagiographical Dichotomy Revisited,' *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 38



most important facet of Bede's account – that Æthelthryth was a Bride of Christ – is often over-looked in these studies. This chapter will firstly consider modern commentators' reactions to Æthelthryth in the *HE* and then examine Bede's presentation of Æthelthryth in the light of patristic exegesis on the virgin bride of Christ.

### **Æthelthryth, Bede and recent scholarship**

#### *(i) Æthelthryth in the HE*

The particulars of Bede's account of Æthelthryth are well known. She was the wife of Ecgrith of Northumbria and the daughter of Anna of the East Angles – a king noted in the *HE* for his religious devotion, which was passed on to his family.<sup>559</sup> She had previously been married to an ealdorman of the South Gyrwe named Tondberht who died shortly afterwards and was then given in marriage to Ecgrith, with whom she lived for twelve years. Æthelthryth preserved her virginity through both marriages and after a long time finally received Ecgrith's permission to enter a monastery and serve Christ, 'the only true King'.<sup>560</sup> Bede suggests that certain people doubted that Æthelthryth had been a virgin through twelve years of marriage but he personally testifies that Wilfrid confirmed that this was true, as Ecgrith had offered him money and estates to persuade the queen to consummate their marriage.<sup>561</sup> Bede also emphatically adds that people need not doubt that this could happen in their time through divine assistance (in a reference to Matt 28:20), as according to trustworthy accounts it often happened in earlier times.<sup>562</sup> Æthelthryth initially entered the monastery of Coldingham

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(1994) 18-34 at 29. Virginia Blanton writes that 'Bede's authority was so persuasive that his account was the basis for all subsequent renditions of Æthelthryth's vita', *Signs of Devotion: The Cult of St. Æthelthryth in Medieval England, 695-1615* (Pennsylvania 2007) 53.

<sup>559</sup> *HE* IV.19(17), 390-391; III.18, 268-269. Stephanie Hollis caustically comments that 'Anna's fame for holiness appears, indeed, to rest chiefly on the numerousness of his monastic daughters', *Anglo-Saxon Women and the Church: sharing a common fate* (Woodbridge 1992) 68.

<sup>560</sup> *HE* IV.19(17), 392-393, ... *tantum uero regi* ...

<sup>561</sup> *HE* IV.19(17), 390-393. Hollis suggests that doubting this story is 'to be as vulgar minded as Bede', *Anglo-Saxon Women* 68, although she later wonders whether Æthelthryth failed to consummate her marriage for all twelve years or only towards the end, 70. Many scholars have doubted Bede's story. It has been suggested that Æthelthryth was sterile and Ecgrith used her virginity as an excuse for separating from her, see P. Stafford, *Queens, Concubines, and Dowagers: The King's Wife in the Early Middle Ages* (Athens, Georgia 1983) 74 and 81.

Thompson acknowledges this possibility but argues persuasively against it, see 'St Æthelthryth,' esp. 475-476. See further below.

<sup>562</sup> *HE* IV.19(17), 392-393.

under Abbess Æbbe, Ecgfrith's aunt, and received the veil and habit of a nun from Wilfrid. A year later she founded and became abbess of the monastery of Ely in the kingdom of the East Angles and ruled this for seven years until her death. She lived a very austere lifestyle, which demonstrated her humility: she wore only woollen garments, never linen; she only had hot baths before the greater Church feasts and then only after the other members of the community had washed themselves with the assistance of Æthelthryth and her attendants; she rarely ate more than once a day; and she always remained in prayer in the church from the office of matins until dawn. Æthelthryth also foresaw the plague that caused her own death and knew the number that would die from this. She was buried in a wooden coffin, in the ranks of the other members of her community as her turn came, following her prior command.<sup>563</sup>

Æthelthryth's sister, Seaxburh (the former wife of Eorcenberht of Kent) succeeded her as abbess of Ely. Sixteen years after Æthelthryth's death, Seaxburh decided to translate her sister's bones to a new coffin in the church. Some of the brothers from the monastery – when sent to find blocks of stone, from which a coffin could be made – found a beautifully made coffin and close-fitting lid of white marble in a small deserted fortress. When Æthelthryth's remains were uncovered, Wilfrid and many others, including her doctor Cynefrith, testified that they were as incorrupt as the day she had died. Cynefrith had ministered to Æthelthryth during her last illness and recalled that she had a tumour beneath her jaw, which he had lanced to drain out the poisonous matter within. On the third day after this procedure, Æthelthryth's former pains returned and she died shortly afterwards. When her body was exhumed under a tent in the presence of the abbess and some others Cynefrith was called. He described her body as being like one asleep and he was shown her face and the open wound made by his incision, which had miraculously healed with only the faintest traces of a scar remaining, and the linen cloths wrapped around her body were also fresh and clean.<sup>564</sup> Bede follows the doctor's testimony by providing an interpretation for Æthelthryth's tumour in her own words, explaining that she had welcomed the pain in her neck and jaw from the tumour, as she believed that she had worn too many necklaces as a young girl and that she had to endure the pain

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<sup>563</sup> *HE* IV.19(17), 390-393, 396-397.

<sup>564</sup> *HE* IV.19(17), 392-395.

in her neck to absolve the guilt of her youthful vanity. Æthelthryth was re-interred in the marble sarcophagus that the monks had found, which fitted her body perfectly as though intended for her. The linen cloths and the wooden coffin that she was first buried in provided miraculous cures for different illnesses.<sup>565</sup> Bede ended his account of Æthelthryth with a brief description of the location of Ely, and in the next chapter presented his poem in praise of Æthelthryth.<sup>566</sup> The poem contains the basic particulars of her life, noting that she preserved her virginity during twelve years of marriage and her body was found incorrupt after sixteen years in the tomb.<sup>567</sup>

Æthelthryth is one of the few Anglo-Saxons mentioned in Bede's *Greater Chronicle*, in which he briefly summarised her life. He wrote that she preserved her virginity during two marriages including twelve years with Ecgrith, and became a consecrated virgin; he records her foundation of Ely, where she became a 'mother of virgins'; and explained that her body was uncorrupted after sixteen years in the grave, which proved her 'enduring merits.'<sup>568</sup> The only other contemporary source for Æthelthryth's life is Stephan's *Life of Wilfrid*. This work is independent of the *HE*, but affirms that her body did not corrupt after her death and Stephen (like Bede) believed that this showed that she had been unstained during her life.<sup>569</sup>

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<sup>565</sup> *HE* IV.19(17), 396-397. See D. Rollason on these as secondary relics in line with the practice of the Roman Church, *Saints and Relics in Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford 1989) 27.

<sup>566</sup> *HE* IV.19(17), 396-397; IV.20(18), 396-401.

<sup>567</sup> *HE* IV.20(18), 396-401. See below for discussion of this.

<sup>568</sup> Bede, *De Temporum Ratione (On the Reckoning of Time)*, c.66 (*Chronica Maiora*), ... *Nec mora etiam uirginum mater et nutrix pia sanctarum ... Cuius merita uiuacia testatur etiam mortua caro, quae post XVI annos sepulturae cum ueste, qua inuoluta est, incorrupta repperitur*: CCSL 123B, ll 1920-1928, 528-529; Wallis (1999) 232. Those in the *Chronicle* associated with the Anglo-Saxons are sequentially: Augustine, Mellitus, John, Æthelberht, Ælle and Æthelfrith; Edwin, Paulinus and Justus; Theodore and Hadrian; Æthelthryth and Ecgrith; Willibrord; Cuthbert; Egbert; Ceolfrith.

<sup>569</sup> *Life of Wilfrid*, c.19: Colgrave (1985) 40-41. This text also confirms that she was close to Wilfrid, adding the detail that she gave him an estate at Hexham, *Life of Wilfrid*, c. 22: Colgrave (1985) 44-45. It is from this source that we learn about Ecgrith's second wife, Iurminburg, who is never mentioned in the *HE*; see *Life of Wilfrid*, c.24: Colgrave (1985) 48-49 for the first mention of her.

(ii) *Recent interpretations of Bede's Æthelthryth*

As noted already, Bede's description of Æthelthryth's life was the source for all further accounts of Æthelthryth and greatly influenced her depiction in art.<sup>570</sup> It is also the main source for Æthelthryth available to modern scholars and has been much discussed and variously interpreted in recent times.<sup>571</sup> The major studies on Æthelthryth tend to focus on determining the historical reality behind Bede's account and (or) attempt to discern Bede's true intentions towards Æthelthryth. Christine Fell, in her article 'Saint Æðelþryð: A Historical-Hagiographical Dichotomy Revisited,' writes that Bede's account of Æthelthryth is hagiography compared to his account of Hild, which is set against a historical background, but argues that even his hagiography has to be presented in a historical context.<sup>572</sup> Fell says that we learn very little about the 'shadowy' community of Ely compared to the accounts of Whitby and Barking in the *HE*: for these two communities we are seeing Bede the historian but in his descriptions of Ely, Bede the hagiographer.<sup>573</sup> She suggests that when Æthelthryth is mentioned in secular circumstances outside *HE* IV.19(17)-20(18) that we again see Bede the historian.<sup>574</sup> However, one cannot simply divide the *HE* into history and hagiography. This pays little heed to the remarkable cohesiveness of the work as a whole and ignores Bede's own view of the role of history.<sup>575</sup> When attempting to discern the historical Æthelthryth, Fell uses details from Bede's account to claim that Ely was run like a princess' private household describing it as a 'claustrophobic environment', and argues that there is no evidence that the

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<sup>570</sup> See R. Deshman, *The Benedictional of Æthelwold* (Princeton 1995), who argues that Bede's presentation of Æthelthryth in the *HE* helps to understand the depiction of Æthelthryth in the benedictional, 122; Blanton, *Signs of Devotion* 53-56; C.E. Karkov, 'The Body of St Æthelthryth: Desire, Conversion and Reform in Anglo-Saxon England,' in M. Carver, ed., *The Cross Goes North* (Woodbridge 2003) 397-411 at 401-411. Above n.6.

<sup>571</sup> The *Life of Wilfrid* is often considered in conjunction with Bede.

<sup>572</sup> Fell, 'Saint Æðelþryð,' 19 and 25.

<sup>573</sup> Fell, 'Saint Æðelþryð,' 26-27 and 34. Cf. N. Bauer, 'Abbess Hilda of Whitby: All Britain was lit by her splendour,' in M. Schmitt and L. Kulzer, ed., *Medieval Women Monastics: Wisdom's Wellsprings* (Collegeville, MN 1996) 13-31 at 15.

<sup>574</sup> Fell, 'Saint Æðelþryð,' 28-29. She suggests that in the stories relating to Imma, *HE* IV.22(20), and Owine, *HE* IV.3, we see Æthelthryth purely as a historical character, and that Bede distinguished between Æthelthryth as queen and Æthelthryth as virgin saint, in contrast to the *Life of Wilfrid* where she is always saintly.

<sup>575</sup> On Bede's view of history, see R. Ray, 'Bede's Vera Lex Historica,' *Speculum* 55 (1980) 1-21; R. Ray, 'Who Did Bede Think He Was?', in S. DeGregorio, ed., *Innovation and Tradition in the Writings of The Venerable Bede* (Morgantown 2006) 11-35 at 29-32.

foundation played any role in the Christian development of Anglo-Saxon society in the seventh century.<sup>576</sup> She suggests that Æthelthryth was not remembered with affection or veneration in Northumbria by anyone other than Bede,<sup>577</sup> that she made nothing of her foundation at Ely ‘except a home for and monument to her own personal and particular asceticism’, and that the community faded into oblivion after Seaxburh’s death until it was re-founded in the tenth century.<sup>578</sup> Fell writes that Æthelthryth retained such a hold on the Anglo-Saxon imagination after Bede because she was the closest that they had to the virgin martyrs of the early Church and examines Bede’s poem in praise of her, *HE IV.20(18)*, in the light of these traditions.<sup>579</sup>

Pauline Stafford refers to Æthelthryth a number of times in her book, *Queens, Concubines, and Dowagers: The King’s Wife in the Early Middle Ages*, but she is primarily concerned with the bare facts of her life: that Æthelthryth and Ecgrith were divorced, Ecgrith married Iurminburg, and that Æthelthryth entered firstly Coldingham before founding Ely. Stafford states repeatedly that Ecgrith divorced Æthelthryth to marry Iurminburg because Æthelthryth was sterile, arguing that he claimed that she had failed to consummate the marriage and had a religious vocation so that he could secure the divorce.<sup>580</sup> She also suggests that Wilfrid’s evidence for Æthelthryth’s virginity is not independent corroboration, as he disliked Iurminburg and his praise for Æthelthryth’s virginity came from the general approval of female celibacy in Christian

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<sup>576</sup> Fell, ‘Saint Ædelþryð,’ 28 and 34; Fell draws attention to Æthelthryth’s attendants who helped her assist the other sisters when washing and notes that she was attended by a male physician during her final illness – neither Hild nor the community at Barking received the attentions of a doctor according to the surviving record.

<sup>577</sup> Fell, ‘Saint Ædelþryð,’ 33. She says that Æthelthryth is not mentioned in the Durham *Liber Vitae* though Iurminburg, Eanflæd and Ælflæd are and her feast is not in the Calendar of St. Willibrord, which has Hild and Ecgrith. However, it seems that both Wilfrid and the author of his *Life* were kindly disposed towards her.

<sup>578</sup> Fell, ‘Saint Ædelþryð,’ 34. She also notes that apart from Bede there is a ‘rich range of data’ (including the correspondence of Aldhelm and Boniface along with archaeological evidence) but says that there is no other independent evidence for the early Ely community, 31.

<sup>579</sup> Fell, ‘Saint Ædelþryð,’ 21-24. She acknowledges the influence of Venantius Fortunatus’ *De Virginitate* on Bede’s poem, noting that they include the same Roman virgins and, as Fortunatus moves forward in time to include Rade Gund in his poem, Bede does the same to include Æthelthryth in his, 26.

<sup>580</sup> Stafford, *Queens, Concubines, and Dowagers* 74, 81, 177. She says that after the divorce Æthelthryth was ‘sent to a family nunnery’ but returned to found Ely in East Anglia because she preferred the security of her native East Anglia to a Northumbrian monastery ruled by Ecgrith’s aunt, 81 and 177.

thinking.<sup>581</sup> Stafford does not consider that Æthelthryth might have remained a virgin during her marriage to Ecgfrith, even though both Bede and Stephen independently agree that Æthelthryth had done so. Pauline Thompson, in her ‘St Æthelthryth: the making of history from hagiography,’ has argued persuasively against Stafford’s contention that Æthelthryth must have been sterile so Ecgfrith sought to divorce her. She suggests that there is a historical realism to Æthelthryth’s life, as her upbringing in East Anglia at the time that it was being converted by Felix and Fursa and during the reign of the saintly King Sigeberht could have had a profound effect on her.<sup>582</sup> She also notes that two of her sisters went to monasteries in Gaul and her uncle’s wife, Hereswith (Hild’s sister), did the same. She also suggests that Æthelthryth may have come into contact with Hild, who spent a year in East Anglia before returning to Northumbria at Aidan’s request.<sup>583</sup> Thompson also argues that if Æthelthryth received an education, she would have been exposed to the scriptures, patristic works (perhaps including those on virginity), and may have been aware of the lives of the earliest Roman female virgin martyrs. Through contacts with Gaul, she also might have known about the lives of saints such as Radegund.<sup>584</sup> While Thompson successfully sketches the historical background to Æthelthryth’s life, she does not engage with Bede’s account, suggesting that Bede includes ‘recognisable, yet still believable, hagiographical *topoi*’ so that Æthelthryth’s journey from hagiography to history is completed by a return to hagiography.<sup>585</sup>

Stephanie Hollis similarly attempts to discern the historical reality behind Bede’s account, and reveal something of Bede’s attitude to Æthelthryth in the process. In her *Anglo-Saxon Women and the Church: sharing a common fate*, Hollis suggests that Æthelthryth is the sole abbess in the *HE* who commands Bede’s enthusiasm and as a reigning queen who entered the monastic life she

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<sup>581</sup> Stafford, *Queens, Concubines, and Dowagers* 81-82.

<sup>582</sup> Thompson, ‘St Æthelthryth: the making of history from hagiography,’ 475-492.

<sup>583</sup> Thompson, ‘St Æthelthryth,’ 480-481. See *HE* III.8, 238-241, for Anna’s step-daughter Sæthryth and daughter Æthelburh; IV.23(21), 406-407, for Hereswith and Hild. Bede wrote that c.640 many people from Britain entered monasteries in Gaul and sent their daughters there also because there were not many monasteries founded in Britain at the time, *HE* III.8, 236-239.

Ridyard suggests that Ely may have been one of the first (if not the first) foundations to make provision for women in eastern England between the Thames and the Humber, *Royal Saints* 178.

<sup>584</sup> Thompson, ‘St Æthelthryth,’ 481-483. Thompson argues for Gaulish influence through Bishop Felix and Bertha of Kent, whose grandson Eorcenberht was married to Seaxburh, Æthelthryth’s sister (*HE* III.8, 238-239).

<sup>585</sup> Thompson, ‘St Æthelthryth,’ 485.

‘represented a polemical opportunity too good to miss.’<sup>586</sup> She acknowledges that Æthelthryth fits the model of female sanctity defined by the Roman saints’ *Lives*, as like them she preserved her virginity against heavy odds,<sup>587</sup> but is unimpressed by Bede’s delight that the Anglo-Saxons have produced a saint like Æthelthryth. She says that all Æthelthryth had to contend with was a regretful husband who attempted to bribe a bishop to act as go-between, yet she is ‘worthy to be compared with martyrs who braved unflinchingly the torments of wild beasts and tyrannical persecutors.’<sup>588</sup> She argues that Wilfrid played an important role in the development of her cult and suggests that Ely’s familiarity with the conventions of Roman hagiography may have been important for her claims to sanctity, which Bede subsequently boosted.<sup>589</sup> In discussing Bede’s presentation of Æthelthryth, Hollis describes Æthelthryth’s acceptance of her tumour (which is presented in her own words in the text) as ‘moralizing’;<sup>590</sup> she notes that Seaxburh’s testimony regarding the incorrupt state of Æthelthryth’s body is overlooked in favour of the (male) physician who attended her in her last illness;<sup>591</sup> she suggests that Bede does not mention the land that Æthelthryth gave to Wilfrid, because Bede wanted to downplay the part played by queens in the development of the Anglo-Saxon Church;<sup>592</sup> she argues that in his account of Æthelthryth, Bede promotes physiological virginity as a higher value, whereas Aldhelm in his *De Virginitate* is concerned with the moral and psychological conception of purity;<sup>593</sup> and she claims that Æthelthryth was not a fully orthodox

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<sup>586</sup> Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women* 67; see also 248. She suggests that Bede’s construction of Æthelthryth is typical for the overwhelming majority of female saints, 282.

<sup>587</sup> See Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women* 67, 247 and 264.

<sup>588</sup> Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women* 71.

<sup>589</sup> Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women* 67 and 247. She suggests that Wilfrid’s and Æthelthryth’s stances in Bede’s account were at odds with the views of Theodore’s penitential, that wives were in the power of their husbands, and argues that this may reveal the different views that could be held by bishops on these matters, especially when dealing with royal individuals. Wilfrid’s presence also means that in opposing Ecgrith’s wish to consummate their marriage, Æthelthryth is acting under ecclesiastical headship, 69 and 71.

<sup>590</sup> Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women* 259.

<sup>591</sup> Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women* 259.

<sup>592</sup> Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women* 214; see *Life of Wilfrid*, c.22: Colgrave (1985) 44-45 for Æthelthryth’s donation to Wilfrid. It is vaguely suggested by some commentators that Wilfrid received the gift of land from Æthelthryth because he supported her and not Ecgrith in their marriage, see Fell, ‘Saint Ædelþryð,’ 20, Thompson, ‘St Æthelthryth,’ 480. It should be noted that our information for Æthelthryth’s foundation of Ely comes only from the *HE*.

<sup>593</sup> Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women* 81.

bride of Christ, but had valiantly preserved her virginity during her two marriages.<sup>594</sup>

Catherine Karkov, in ‘The Body of St Æthelthryth: Desire, Conversion and Reform in Anglo-Saxon England,’ interprets Bede’s presentation of Æthelthryth differently to the others just discussed. She writes that ‘Nowhere is desire for and denial of the female body and voice more evident than in Bede’s account of the virgin queen and abbess Æthelthryth’.<sup>595</sup> She suggests that Æthelthryth was for Bede – and later writers – an emblem of the newly Christianised Anglo-Saxons.<sup>596</sup> She notes that Æthelthryth held every conceivable position of power possible for a woman in early Anglo-Saxon England, and Bede greatly admired her, but she disappears beneath the layers of text and translation that cover her.<sup>597</sup> Karkov argues that throughout Bede’s account, Æthelthryth’s body is the focus of our attention but never revealed to us, and therefore remains an unfulfilled desire. From the beginning of the story, possession of Æthelthryth’s body is the desired but unobtainable goal.<sup>598</sup> The account opens with references to her father and two husbands, defining her as the object of exchange within a secular, male economy of marriage, and she subsequently entered Coldingham after receiving her husband’s permission with guidance from Wilfrid.<sup>599</sup> Æthelthryth’s behaviour draws attention to her body. Her refusal to consummate her marriage is a reminder of the role her royal body should have fulfilled in this society, and her ascetic practices (including fasting, refusal to bathe, and rejoicing in the pain from her tumour) draw attention to this body that they were designed to deny.<sup>600</sup>

In Bede’s account of her translation, Æthelthryth’s body is ‘simultaneously covered and exposed, concealed and never quite revealed.’<sup>601</sup> Karkov describes Bede’s presentation of Æthelthryth’s translation and notes that most of the community are outside the tent that contains her body, and only hear of its miraculous preservation. She writes that the surgeon’s account of the body,

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<sup>594</sup> Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women* 247.

<sup>595</sup> Karkov, ‘The Body of St Æthelthryth,’ 398.

<sup>596</sup> Karkov, ‘The Body of St Æthelthryth,’ 398.

<sup>597</sup> Karkov, ‘The Body of St Æthelthryth,’ 398-399.

<sup>598</sup> Karkov, ‘The Body of St Æthelthryth,’ 399.

<sup>599</sup> Karkov, ‘The Body of St Æthelthryth,’ 399.

<sup>600</sup> Karkov, ‘The Body of St Æthelthryth,’ 399-400.

<sup>601</sup> Karkov, ‘The Body of St Æthelthryth,’ 400.



which is intact and fresh and ‘healed of the one physical intrusion made into it’ (the neck wound), adds to the tension between the body and its coverings. The body is wrapped, but partially exposed, and the wound on her neck has become a necklace marked on the body. The body is washed and re clothed out of sight within a circle of nuns, and placed in a marble sarcophagus that fits it perfectly. The sarcophagus is like Æthelthryth’s body: both are shining, white and intact. Karkov continues to write that there is an element of spectacle in this, which generates our desire to witness these events, and frustrates this desire because we cannot see but only read about them.<sup>602</sup> She continues to claim that the cover of the sarcophagus (like the original coffin or the burial shroud) invites exposure, and ‘bears the potential of striptease’, inviting us to imagine the body underneath; ‘an invitation was realised throughout the Middle Ages in the viewer’s desire to see, touch and interact with the bones of the saints.’ She adds that there was something miraculous about the survival of the saint or relics, and ‘its existence as both a person and a thing.’<sup>603</sup> Karkov also compares the collection, translation and displaying of saints and relics to the ‘collection, stripping and display of Egyptian mummies’. She suggests that apart from ‘avowed religious intent’, there is very little separating these two practices, and ‘both can be understood as objects of desire, if not fetish.’<sup>604</sup> She continues to discuss the cult of Æthelthryth in the later reform period, arguing that Æthelthryth becomes a fetish and that images increasingly replaced the real person.<sup>605</sup> Karkov concludes that the ‘story of Æthelthryth, like Bede’s story of the conversion, is all about sex, desire and the absent woman.’<sup>606</sup>

The most recent study of Æthelthryth is Virginia Blanton’s ambitious full-length work, *Signs of Devotion: The Cult of St. Æthelthryth in Medieval England, 695-1615*, the first chapter of which is concerned with the presentation of Æthelthryth in the *HE*. Blanton notes that by writing the *HE* Bede has shaped our understanding of Anglo-Saxon history and made a major contribution to the formation of discourse regarding sanctity in Anglo-Saxon England. Indeed

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<sup>602</sup> Karkov, *The Body of St Æthelthryth*,’ 400. Karkov also writes that Æthelthryth’s body symbolically re-enacts the conversion; the marble sarcophagus is believed to be Roman, and Æthelthryth’s body therefore converts a pagan monument into a site of Christian worship, 400.

<sup>603</sup> Karkov, *The Body of St Æthelthryth*,’ 400.

<sup>604</sup> Karkov, *The Body of St Æthelthryth*,’ 400-401.

<sup>605</sup> Karkov, *The Body of St Æthelthryth*,’ 401-411.

<sup>606</sup> Karkov, *The Body of St Æthelthryth*,’ 411.

throughout the chapter, she claims that Bede was very deliberately setting himself at the origins of Anglo-Saxon literacy.<sup>607</sup> She compares Bede's accounts of Hild and Æthelthryth, suggesting that they both demonstrate acceptable religious behaviour for aristocratic women and writes that they were both important in developing the Church, but are remembered in the text for their positions as spiritual leaders, not for their patronage of monastic houses.<sup>608</sup> She claims that Bede selectively represented the lives of his female saints without considering the roles royal women played in the conversion of England or the development of the Church. She suggests that, in this, Bede is conforming to traditional hagiographic discourse, which demonstrated women's sanctity through the purity of their bodies or their associations with male saints.<sup>609</sup> She briefly discusses the importance of virginity in the oft described 'hierarchy of female chastity: virginity, widowhood, and marriage', and considers Aldhelm's version adapted for Anglo-Saxon society of virginity, chastity, and conjugality.<sup>610</sup>

In commenting specifically on Bede's (in her words) *Life of Æthelthryth*, Blanton writes that Bede has culturally inscribed the body of Æthelthryth as virginal and discounts her other political and social activities.<sup>611</sup> She writes that Bede situated Æthelthryth by the male contacts that she had – including her father, husbands, Wilfrid (her bishop), Cynefrith (her doctor), and God – and notes that he used male witnesses, ignoring the possible testimony of those who knew Æthelthryth like her sister, Seaxburh, who succeeded her as abbess. She suggests that he used these means to establish his authority as her biographer.<sup>612</sup>

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<sup>607</sup> Blanton, *Signs of Devotion* 22, 24-27, 31, 60-63. Blanton argues that Bede did not include his hymn to Æthelthryth in the *HE* solely for her benefit; she suggests that he gave a Latin summary of Cædmon's poem (which was inspired by God), but included his hymn to Æthelthryth to show that his hymn supersedes Cædmon's, 27, 61-63.

<sup>608</sup> Blanton, *Signs of Devotion* 23.

<sup>609</sup> Blanton, *Signs of Devotion* 26.

<sup>610</sup> Blanton, *Signs of Devotion* 28-31. It must be noted that Blanton's comments on the patristic view of virginity (in which she names Jerome, Ambrose and Augustine) are based entirely on Lapidge and Herren's edition of Aldhelm's prose works.

<sup>611</sup> Blanton, *Signs of Devotion* 27.

<sup>612</sup> Blanton, *Signs of Devotion* 34-37, 40-43, 48-49, 59; 'Bede, therefore, completely frames the story of Æthelthryth using male authority, effectively constraining her story and reproducing it as part of his historical program', 59. Susan Ridyard has noted that hagiographies of royal women often started with a genealogy to locate the saint in a recognisable historical context and to enhance her prestige by reference to the deeds of her ancestors. Ridyard adds that in Bede's account of Æthelthryth, this also served to develop his theme that sanctity did not necessarily come from being part of a royal dynasty, *Royal Saints* 83.

On Æthelthryth's ascetic activity, she comments that these are the only deeds in Bede's account that Æthelthryth alone is responsible for and notes that they take place in the cloister where the body is 'spatially confined.'<sup>613</sup> Blanton then turns her attention to Æthelthryth's translation and has much to say about the scar on her neck.<sup>614</sup> She writes that this scar is the visible means of identifying Æthelthryth's body; she likens it to Macrina's scar in Gregory of Nyssa's *Life* of his sister; and she says that it is a sign of the miraculous preservation of her body, a sign of her purity and becomes a sign of her continued virginity.<sup>615</sup> Æthelthryth accepted the tumour on her neck, regarding this as punishment for her vanity in wearing necklaces in her youth.<sup>616</sup> Bede allows Æthelthryth to explain this in reported speech in the text and Blanton suggests that from this hagiographical voice it is clear that 'the punishment for women's vanity is disease, for which women should be grateful.'<sup>617</sup>

The scar marking the place of the tumour on Æthelthryth's body serves to recall her sin of pride.<sup>618</sup> Blanton explains that Æthelthryth's body is made perfect in death, but this one imperfection reflects the corporeality of her body and reveals a gendered understanding of sanctity because, even though she is holy, Æthelthryth is also a woman. She suggests that in patristic thinking, a woman's natural impurity needs to be exorcised to achieve spiritual perfection.<sup>619</sup> In Æthelthryth's case her physical body is exorcised by the lancing of her tumour, 'which eliminated the noxious fluids,' and prepared the body for its transformation into spiritual perfection. She writes: 'The body, *post mortem*, is healed so that the symbolic vaginal opening remains forever closed, though a slight scar continues to mark the transformation performed (by a male physician

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<sup>613</sup> Blanton, *Signs of Devotion* 37-39. She suggests that every action Bede relates concerns control of the body, and focuses on her corporeal purity. Cf. Karkov, above.

<sup>614</sup> She notes that Cynefrith's testimony is so effective that the manner of Æthelthryth's death has never been questioned, *Signs of Devotion* 41. She also writes that the doctor received permission to touch the virginal flesh and 'in cutting the body of a virgin, he penetrates virginal flesh and figuratively writes on the body', 43.

<sup>615</sup> Blanton, *Signs of Devotion* 42-45: 'Metaphorically, as a sign of purity, the scar also operates as an indication that Æthelthryth's body is sealed, that the vaginal opening is forever closed', 45.

<sup>616</sup> Blanton, *Signs of Devotion* 46-47.

<sup>617</sup> Blanton, *Signs of Devotion* 49. Blanton is at pains to state that Æthelthryth's statement on vanity and punishment can only be read in the terms that Bede presents, 49-50.

<sup>618</sup> Blanton, *Signs of Devotion* 51.

<sup>619</sup> Blanton, *Signs of Devotion* 51; it is again worth noting that Blanton bases this argument entirely on the work of modern scholars and does not independently refer to patristic sources.

and by the male God) on the female body.’<sup>620</sup> Blanton also argues that, although the scar on Æthelthryth’s neck is the reason for her speech, the lancing of her throat symbolically silences her.<sup>621</sup> After her translation the sealed virginal body is signified by its enclosure in a stone sarcophagus.<sup>622</sup> She writes that the sarcophagus fitting Æthelthryth perfectly is a further sign that she has been shaped by death to a perfection that would have been unattainable in life.<sup>623</sup> Blanton follows this by considering Bede’s poem in honour of Æthelthryth.<sup>624</sup> She suggests that Bede’s narrative (including his poem) suggests that women’s struggle with sin is forever present, and the only way to overcome this is to follow Æthelthryth’s virginal example and become a bride of Christ.<sup>625</sup>

As seen in this summary of recent scholarship, various attempts have been made to discover the historical Æthelthryth beneath Bede’s account or reveal Bede’s true intentions towards her. What follows will consider Bede’s account of Æthelthryth in Bede’s own cultural context, set against the background of the biblical and patristic traditions within which he was operating.

### **Virginité and the Bride of Christ in Scripture and Patristic Exegesis**

Bede’s specific presentation of Æthelthryth as a ‘bride of Christ’ (*sponsa Christi*) over both chapters of the *HE* is the most significant aspect of his account, and the one most over-looked or under-appreciated by modern commentators.<sup>626</sup>

Æthelthryth is not the only figure in the *HE* to receive this title. Bede described Eorcengota of Kent (Æthelthryth’s niece) as a ‘virgin and bride of Christ’.<sup>627</sup> He tells us that many families sent their daughters to monasteries in Gaul – before there were communities founded for women in England – so that they could be

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<sup>620</sup> Blanton, *Signs of Devotion* 52. Blanton also writes that the ‘concept of the female body as a site of rupture is not limited to Bede.’

<sup>621</sup> Blanton, *Signs of Devotion* 52. It is worth noting that Æthelthryth’s reported speech, which is the most didactic in the whole chapter, comes *after* Bede’s account of the physician’s activity, see below.

<sup>622</sup> Blanton, *Signs of Devotion* 52.

<sup>623</sup> Blanton, *Signs of Devotion* 53.

<sup>624</sup> Blanton, *Signs of Devotion* 56-60.

<sup>625</sup> Blanton, *Signs of Devotion* 59.

<sup>626</sup> E.g. as noted above 140-141, Hollis suggests that Æthelthryth is not an orthodox bride of Christ, presumably because she married, *Anglo-Saxon Women* 247.

<sup>627</sup> *HE* III.8, 238-239, ... *corpus uenerabile uirginis et sponsae Christi* ...

taught in them and be ‘wedded to the heavenly bridegroom.’<sup>628</sup> In his account of Ælflæd Bede wrote that she departed this life, when aged about sixty, to be united with her heavenly bridegroom.<sup>629</sup> There are many others in the book who do not receive this title but could similarly be described as brides of Christ. Indeed the image of bride of Christ is of long-standing antiquity and, while most commonly associated with women who have dedicated themselves to lives of virginity, represents the relationship between all Christians and Christ, as every baptised Christian is both part of the Bride of Christ through being a member of the Church and is also individually Christ’s bride through the union of every Christian soul with Christ. Æthelthryth and others like her realise this doctrine in their active lives by spurning earthly marriage to focus all their attention on their heavenly bridegroom in preparation for their celestial marriage.

In the Old Testament, marriage imagery was initially used to depict the relationship between Yahweh and his chosen people, Israel. This begins in the covenant struck between God and his people in the book of Exodus.<sup>630</sup> Throughout the Old Testament this covenant is repeatedly broken and restored as the Jewish people veer from pure, unsullied devotion to God to outright rejection of him.<sup>631</sup> The prophets, beginning with Hosea, recognise this relationship as a marriage and regularly describe Israel as a wayward wife.<sup>632</sup> The pertinent factor in this marriage covenant between God and the Jewish people, however, is that once Israel is contrite and repents of her behaviour, God repeatedly forgives her transgressions and he is always willing to re-instate her as his wife.<sup>633</sup> The Incarnation of Christ, which transformed everything and was presented as a fulfilment of earlier scriptural prophecies, changed the nature of this relationship with God. Jesus is recognised as the new Bridegroom for God’s new chosen

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<sup>628</sup> *HE* III.8, 238-239, *sed et filias suas eisdem erudiendas ac sponsa caelesti copulandas mittebant ...*

<sup>629</sup> *HE* III.24, 292-293, *ad complexum et nuptias sponsi caelestis uirgo beata intraret.*

<sup>630</sup> See C. Chavasse, *The Bride of Christ: An Inquiry into the Nuptial Element in Early Christianity* (London 1940) 23.

<sup>631</sup> See e.g. Israel’s following of false gods, such as the golden calf while in the desert, or those of the indigenous peoples in Canaan, or the Babylonians during the period of the Babylonian Captivity.

<sup>632</sup> See esp. Hos 2; Isaiah; Jer 2 and 3; Ezek 16 and 23; Mal 2:11-12. See B.W. Anderson, *The Living World of the Old Testament* (Harlow 1996) 305-315; J. Dominian, *Christian Marriage: The Challenge of Change* (London 1967) 20-21; K. Grayston, ‘Marriage,’ in A. Richardson, ed., *A Theological Word Book of the Bible* (London 1950) 140; Chavasse, *Bride of Christ* 29-33.

<sup>633</sup> See Grayston, ‘Marriage,’ in Richardson, ed., *Theological Word Book*, 140. See also Chavasse, *Bride of Christ* 33-35.

people, and through the miracle of the Incarnation all peoples (including gentiles) who have received the word of God and are re-born through baptism into Christianity are the new chosen people.<sup>634</sup> For Christians, then, the bride of the Old Testament takes on a new meaning, as she comes to represent the whole Church of Christ or every Christian soul.

The earliest Christian thinkers interpreted both the Song of Songs and Psalm 44(45) – the great marriage psalm – as a description of the relationship between Christ and his Church or Christ and the soul.<sup>635</sup> Origen's *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, a fraction of which survives in Rufinus' Latin translation, and his *Homilies on the Song of Songs*, which survived through Jerome's translation, stress this dual interpretation of the work.<sup>636</sup> In the prologue to his commentary Origen describes this work as an 'epithalamium, that is to say, a marriage-song' and that the bride in this case can be taken as the soul or as the Church.<sup>637</sup> In Origen's work, even when the marriage of Christ and the Church is being related this still includes every individual soul, as the Church comes from the union of every soul with Christ brought together as one.<sup>638</sup> Over time both the Song of Songs and Psalm 44(45) became increasingly related to the virginal life. Peter Brown notes that this took place during the fourth century and that the language of the Song of Songs, which Origen had applied to the union of every Christian soul (male or female) with Christ, increasingly came to focus almost exclusively on the body of the virgin woman.<sup>639</sup> Jerome, in his work *Adversus Jovinianum*, explains that the Song of Songs contains the mysteries of virginity

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<sup>634</sup> These marriage vows between Jesus and the new chosen people begin in Judea and extend from there to the ends of the earth reaching all peoples, even to Anglo-Saxon England, see Chapter One.

<sup>635</sup> The bride in the Song of Songs had been identified as the Jewish people before the advent of Christianity, see introduction to Origen, *The Song of Songs: Commentary and Homilies: ACW 26*, 7. See also D.L. D'Avray, *Medieval Marriage: Symbolism and Society* (Oxford 2005) 8.

<sup>636</sup> Origen, *In Canticum Cantorum: PG 13*, 61-198 (Commentary), *SC 37* (Homilies); *The Song of Songs: Commentary and Homilies, ACW 26*.

<sup>637</sup> Origen, *Commentary*, prol.1: *PG 13*, 61; *ACW 26*, 21, 'Epithalamium libellus hic, id est nuptiale carmen'.

<sup>638</sup> 'Let it be the Church who longs for union with Christ; but the Church, you must observe, is the whole assembly of the saints. So it must be the Church as a corporate personality who speaks ... (*Ecclesia sit desiderans Christo conjungi. Ecclesiam autem coetum omnium adverte sanctorum. Haec ergo Ecclesia sit quasi omnium una persona, quae loquatur ...*)', *Commentary*, bk.1.1: *PG 13*, 84; *ACW 26*, 59.

<sup>639</sup> P. Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York 1988) 274. See also B. Brennan, 'Deathless Marriage and Spiritual Fecundity in Venantius Fortunatus' *De Virginitate*, *Traditio 51* (1996) 73-97 at 80, who agrees with Brown and suggests that this development was due primarily to the works of Jerome and Ambrose.

and shows that this is concerned with those who have turned their back on earthly marriage to enter into complete union with their Bridegroom, Christ.<sup>640</sup> His famous letter to Eustochium on the ascetic life begins with verse 11 from Psalm 44; ‘Hearken, O daughter, and see, and incline thine ear, and forget thy people and thy father’s house, and the king shall desire thy beauty.’ Jerome explains that in this psalm the Lord speaks to the human soul, and in that verse he is telling the soul (like he told Abraham) to get away from all temporal distractions and to cling to the bridegroom in a close embrace.<sup>641</sup> Jerome also refers to Psalm 44(45) when describing the ceremony at which Demetrias received her bridal veil from the bishop and became a professed virgin,<sup>642</sup> and he sent a commentary on this psalm to the virgin, Principia.<sup>643</sup> John Chrysostom and Ambrose both also relate this psalm directly to the life of the virgin dedicated to God in their works concerned with the practice of virginity.<sup>644</sup> In his work on *Holy Virginity*, Augustine linked the virginal Church with the virginal soul, both of whom are brides of the Lord and he urged virgins to try and emulate the virginity of the Church in their own lives.<sup>645</sup>

Although attitudes towards virginity did develop over time,<sup>646</sup> many of the most important ideas relating to this are in evidence at the beginnings of Christian thinking. From the time of the early Church, the virginal life was regarded as superior to all others. In the book of Revelations the 144,000 virgins follow the Lamb wherever he goes and stand before the throne of God without spot (Rev 14:3-5). Paul famously compared the life of the married woman to the

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<sup>640</sup> Jerome, *Adversus Jovinianum*, bk.1.30 and 31: *PL* 23, 251-254; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series 6, 368-370. In his *Epistle* 53 to Paulinus of Nola in which he briefly summarised every book of the Bible, Jerome wrote that in the Song of Songs Solomon sings a sweet marriage song to celebrate the holy bridal uniting Christ and his Church, *Ep.*53.8: *Labourt* 3, 21; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series 6, 101.

<sup>641</sup> Jerome, *Ep.*22.1 (for Abraham reference see Gen 11:31 and 12:1): *Labourt*, 1, 110-111; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 6, 22. Cf. *Ep.*54.3: *Labourt* 3, 26-27; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series 6, 103. This verse is equally relevant for men with a monastic vocation, see Jerome, *Tractatus in Marci Evangelium*, 1:13-31: *CCSL* 78, 463; *FOTC* 57, 137, and Cassian, *Conl.* 3, c.6: *SC* 42, 145-146; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 11, 321-322.

<sup>642</sup> Jerome, *Ep.*130.2: *Labourt*, 7, 167; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 6, 261.

<sup>643</sup> Jerome, *Ep.*65: *Labourt*, 3, 140-167. Jerome begins this letter by defending his practice of writing to women, especially virgins who he describes as the flowers of Christ, st.1-2: 140-143.

<sup>644</sup> See John Chrysostom, *Quod Regulares Feminae Viris Cohabitare non Debeant* (*On the Necessity of Guarding Virginity*), st.12: *PG* 47, st.9, 531; Clark (1979) 245. Ambrose, *De Virginitate Ad Marcellinam Sororem Suam* (*Concerning Virgins, to Marcellina, his sister*), bk.1, c.7, st.36: *PL* 16, 209-210; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 10, 369.

<sup>645</sup> Augustine, *De Sancta Virginitate* (*Holy Virginity*), st.2: *PL* 40, 397; *WSA* I.9, 68.

<sup>646</sup> See W. Rordorf, ‘Marriage in the New Testament and in the Early Church,’ *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 20 (1969) 193-210 at 201-203.

virgin. Although he did not disparage marriage and said that, concerning virgins, he did not have a commandment of the Lord (1Cor 7:25), Paul significantly wrote that ‘the unmarried woman and the virgin thinketh on the things of the Lord: that she may be holy both in body and in spirit. But she that is married thinketh on the things of the world: how she may please her husband’ (1Cor 7:34). The virgin was free to focus all her attention on God and as her spouse was in heaven, she was expected to lead the heavenly life on earth and not be distracted by temporal matters.<sup>647</sup> Gregory of Nyssa in his work *On Virginity*, wrote that virgins must make every effort to make sure that they are not brought down by pleasures of the flesh and blood and must be aware of the dangers that come from living for the stomach and organs alone or they will become alienated from God.<sup>648</sup>

As virgins were expected to lead the heavenly life on earth, from a very early stage the life of virginity was equated with living the life of angels. It is described as such in a very early epistle concerning virginity.<sup>649</sup> Cyprian told virgins that they already possessed the glory of the Resurrection.<sup>650</sup> Thecla in her panegyric in Methodius’ *Symposium* suggests that the virgin’s life is close to the angels.<sup>651</sup> Ambrose wrote that it was appropriate that virgins live the life of the angels in heaven as the virgin has found her spouse in heaven.<sup>652</sup> Later on in this text he wrote that all who preserve virginity are angels and all who lose it are devils, and that she ‘is a virgin who is the bride of God, a harlot who makes gods for herself.’ He continued to say that these virgins already hold the rewards of the Resurrection as, although they are in the world, they are not of the world and

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<sup>647</sup> While most of these ideas can be applied to either male or female virgins, for the purpose of simplicity and because this chapter is specifically considering the case of Æthelthryth, the female pronouns will be used throughout.

<sup>648</sup> See Gregory of Nyssa, *De Virginitate (On Virginity)*, c.5 and c.4: PG 46, 347,349 and 342-343; FOTC 58, 28 and 24-25.

<sup>649</sup> ‘For he who covets for himself these things so great and excellent, withdraws and severs himself on this account from all the world, that he may go *and* live a life divine and heavenly, like the holy angels, ... On this account he severs himself from all the appetites of the body. ...’ *First Epistle concerning Virginity*, c.4: ANF 8, 56. This epistle had been ascribed to Clement but is now thought to be later in date, at the latest third century.

<sup>650</sup> Cyprian, *De Habitu Virginis (On the Dress of Virgins)*, st.22: PL 4, 461-462; ANF 5, 436.

<sup>651</sup> Methodius, *Convivium Decem Virginum (Symposium)*, 8.2: PG 18, 142; ACW 27, 107. See Peter Brown, who writes that Methodius felt the need to deny what he thought to be Origen’s suggestion that human flesh could evaporate into that of an angelic being; humans were never entirely like angelic beings, as they always had the solid flesh and bone of Adam and Eve, *Body and Society* 186.

<sup>652</sup> Ambrose, *De Virginibus*, bk.1, c.3, st.11: PL 16, 202: NPNF 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 10, 365.



it cannot retain them.<sup>653</sup> Ambrose also claimed that as some angels fell from heaven because of incontinence, virgins are able to pass from the world into heaven because of chastity.<sup>654</sup> Jerome wrote that all God's holy men and virgins represent the angelic life in this world;<sup>655</sup> Augustine held a similar opinion, writing that the virtuous virgin displays the life of angels to all, and is living a heavenly life on earth;<sup>656</sup> and this belief is also found in Gregory of Nyssa's tract *On Virginité*, where he wrote that virgins already share in some of the beauties that are promised in the angelic life.<sup>657</sup>

The life of virginité was also seen as a return to humanity's pre-lapsarian state.<sup>658</sup> Peter Brown suggests that Methodius played an important part in the development of this idea using the ideas of Origen and Irenaeus of Lyons.<sup>659</sup> After tasting the forbidden fruit man became mortal and corruptible, but after the Incarnation he once more became immortal and incorrupt.<sup>660</sup> Brown writes that in Methodius' view, Christ brought back to earth the original virginal flesh of Adam and had shown that human beings could become again what Adam had once been.<sup>661</sup> Methodius believed civilization gradually progressed from incest to marriage to virginité with the Incarnation of Christ.<sup>662</sup> Gregory of Nyssa believed that the gift of virginité allows humanity to retrace its steps and restore what was lost at the Fall.<sup>663</sup> Jerome similarly equated virginité with a return to life in paradise, writing that as death had come into the world through Eve, life came through Mary, and the gift of virginité was bestowed most richly upon women,

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<sup>653</sup> Ambrose, *De Virginibus*, bk. 1, c.9, st.52: *PL* 16, 214; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 10, 371. He also wrote that virgins should no longer be compared with men but with the heavenly beings whose life they share in, *De Virginibus*, bk. 1, c.9, st.48: *PL* 16, 212-213; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 10, 370-371.

<sup>654</sup> Ambrose, *De Virginibus*, bk.1, c.9, st.53: *PL* 16, 214; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 10, 371.

<sup>655</sup> Jerome, *Ep.*108.23: *Labourt*, 5, 192; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 6, 208.

<sup>656</sup> Augustine, *De Sancta Virginitate*, st.53(54): *PL* 40, 427; *WSA* I.9, 103-104.

<sup>657</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *De Virginitate*, c.14: *PG* 46, 382-383; *FOTC* 58, 50-51. See also Gregory of Nyssa, *Vita S. Macrinae Virginis (The Life of St. Macrina)*: *PG* 46, 982-983; *FOTC* 58, 179.

<sup>658</sup> See Sinéad O'Sullivan, 'Aldhelm's *De Virginitate* – Patristic Pastiche or Innovative Exposition?' *Peritia* 12 (1998) 271-295 at 273; Brennan, 'Deathless Marriage,' 90.

<sup>659</sup> Brown, *Body and Society* 184. See also O'Sullivan, 'Aldhelm's *De Virginitate*,' 273.

<sup>660</sup> Methodius, *Convivium Decem Virginum*, 3.7: *PG* 18, 71; *ACW* 27, 64.

<sup>661</sup> Brown, *Body and Society* 184-185.

<sup>662</sup> See Methodius, *Convivium Decem Virginum*, 1.2-4: *PG* 18, 39-46; *ACW* 27, 43-47. See Brown, *Body and Society* 185 and O'Sullivan, 'Aldhelm's *De Virginitate*,' 273.

<sup>663</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *De Virginitate*, c.12: *PG* 46, 375; *FOTC* 58, 45-46.

as it had its beginning from a woman.<sup>664</sup> Augustine similarly believed that the gift of virginity began with the Virgin Mary.<sup>665</sup>

Virginity was so highly praised that marriage came to be seen in the eyes of many as a very inferior state. In treatises on virginity, the superiority of this way of life was presented in comparison to the ills of marriage, which were often set out for the reader.<sup>666</sup> Gregory of Nyssa described the bodily procreation of mortal children as embarking upon death rather than upon life, whereas those who refrain from procreation because of virginity cancel out death by preventing it from advancing any further.<sup>667</sup> Indeed virginity was the opposite of marriage as it was regarded as a deadening of the body.<sup>668</sup> Ambrose wrote that he did not intend to discourage marriage, but was presenting the case for virginity.<sup>669</sup> He adds that virginity is the gift of the few only, but that he is comparing good things with good things (*i.e.* marriage with virginity) so that it would be clear which is the more excellent.<sup>670</sup> Venantius Fortunatus' *De Virginitate* stresses Christ's preference for virgins.<sup>671</sup> The most devastating comments on marriage came from Jerome in his tract *Against Jovinian*. Jerome was enraged by Jovinian's contention that virginity would not be more highly rewarded than marriage. In his work, Jerome acknowledged the continued existence of marriage but reduced it to a very poor state, suggesting that it is a hindrance to prayer.<sup>672</sup> It is generally believed that Augustine's *Excellence of Marriage* was written partly

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<sup>664</sup> Jerome, *Ep.22.21*: Labourt 1, 132; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 6, 30. The virgin through her inner purity could attain the purity of life that Adam and Eve had in paradise before the Fall, see Brown, *Body and Society*, 399-401.

<sup>665</sup> See Augustine, *Sermo (Sermon)* 51 (1), st.26: *PL* 38; *ACW* 15, 57.

<sup>666</sup> See Cyprian, *De Habitu Virginis*, st.22: *PL* 4, 461-462; *ANF* 5, 436. Gregory of Nyssa, *De Virginitate*, c.3 and 4: *PG* 46, 326-348; *FOTC* 58, 12-27. Ambrose, *De Virginibus*, bk.1, c.6, st.25: *PL* 16, 206-207; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 10, 367. Ambrose, *De Virginitate (On Virginity)*, VI.31-33: *PL* 16, 287-288; Callam (1996) 17-18. Augustine, *De Sancta Virginitate*, st.16(16): *PL* 40, 403-404; *WSA* I.9, 76. Brown, *Body and Society* 25. See also Brennan, 'Deathless Marriage,' 88 on Venantius Fortunatus' graphic description of the difficulties of pregnancy and childbirth, and also 78 and 90.

<sup>667</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *De Virginitate*, c.14: *PG* 46, 382; *FOTC* 58, 48.

<sup>668</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *De Virginitate*, c.19: *PG* 46, 395; *FOTC* 58, 61.

<sup>669</sup> Ambrose, *De Virginibus*, bk.1, c.6, st.24: *PL* 16, 206; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series 10, 367. See also Ambrose, *De Virginitate*, VI.29 and 31: *PL* 16, 287; Callam (1996) 17.

<sup>670</sup> Ambrose, *De Virginibus*, bk. 1, c.7, st.35: *PL* 16, 209; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 10, 369.

<sup>671</sup> Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmen* 8.3, ll 113-116: Reydellet (2003) 134. Brennan, 'Deathless Marriage,' 78.

<sup>672</sup> Jerome, *Adversus Jovinianum*, bk.1.7: *PL* 23, 220; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series 6, 351.

in response to Jerome's attack.<sup>673</sup> In this work, Augustine defined the three goods of marriage: the procreation of children, mutual fidelity between husband and wife, and marriage as a sacramental symbol of something greater.<sup>674</sup> In his work, *Holy Virginité*, he warned virgins not to fall victim to pride because they hold a better position than the married, explaining that those who are the more exalted are always in greater danger from the sin of pride.<sup>675</sup>

Many patristic writers, in particular Jerome, believed that virgins would receive a greater heavenly reward than the married, as those who had dedicated their lives to Christ would be united with their heavenly bridegroom for all eternity revealing the true superiority of the virginal life. While the nature of this reward is unknowable, the parable of the sower whose seed, where it fell on good ground, 'brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, and some thirtyfold' (Matt 13:8; Mark 4:8) was often applied to the rewards of the heavenly life. Jerome explained that this division related to the different states of virginity, widowhood and marriage, where virginity is hundredfold, widowhood sixtyfold, and marriage thirtyfold.<sup>676</sup> Augustine introduced this view into his *Holy Virginité*, but considers it with a great deal of subtlety in his discussion of the respective merits of martyrdom and virginity. He proposes Jerome's division of these gifts but then argues that perhaps martyrdom is the hundredfold, virginity sixtyfold, and marriage thirtyfold.<sup>677</sup> He continues to say that as there are so many gifts we cannot decide on the equality or inequality between them,

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<sup>673</sup> See D.G. Hunter, intro. to *Excellence of Marriage: WSA* I.9, 29-30; C.N.L. Brooke, *The Medieval Idea of Marriage* (Oxford 1989 repr 1994) 55-56; O'Sullivan, 'Aldhelm's *De Virginitate*,' 285.

<sup>674</sup> See Augustine, *De Bono Conjugali (Excellence of Marriage)*, c.3(3)-4(4), 7(7) and 24(32): *PL* 40, 375-376, 378-379 and 394-395; *WSA* I.9, 34-36, 38-39 and 56-57. See Rordorf, 'Marriage in the New Testament and in the Early Church,' 210, and also A. Scola, *The Nuptial Mystery*, tr. M.K. Borras (Cambridge 2005) 195. Sinéad O'Sullivan argues that the word *bono* had acquired almost negative connotations and existed merely as a comparative term. She suggests then that for Augustine, the good of marriage diminished next to the excellence of continence, 'Aldhelm's *De Virginitate*,' 286. In a personal communication, Dr. Jason Harris has suggested that the most appropriate translation of *bono* in this context and for that time is 'virtue', and suggests that the title of the work translates most accurately as 'On the virtue of Marriage'. Similarly he suggests that Augustine's *De Bono Viduitatis (The Excellence of Widowhood* in the recent *WSA* edition) should be translated, 'On the virtue of Widowhood'.

<sup>675</sup> See Augustine, *De Sancta Virginitate*, st.31(31)-56(57): *PL* 40, 412-428; *WSA* I.9, 87-105.

<sup>676</sup> Jerome, *Adversus Jovinianum*, bk.1.3: *PL* 23, 213-214; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series 6, 347. See also Jerome, *Ep.22.15*: *Labourt*, 1, 124; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 6, 27. *Ep.48.2-3*: *Labourt (Ep.49.2-3)*, 2, 121-122; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 6, 67. *Ep.66.2*: *Labourt*, 3, 168; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 6, 135. *Ep.123.9*: *Labourt (Ep.123.8)*, 7, 83; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 6, 233.

<sup>677</sup> Augustine, *De Sancta Virginitate*, st.45(46): *PL* 40, 423; *WSA* I.9, 98. Cyprian suggests the same, see *De Habitu virginum*, st.21: *PL* 4, 460; *ANF* 5, 436. See O'Sullivan, 'Aldhelm's *De Virginitate*,' 280.

but that nobody could suggest that virginity is superior to martyrdom.<sup>678</sup> On the question of heavenly rewards Augustine elsewhere explained that through the diversity of their virtues some saints may shine more than others, but all will share in the one eternal life:

After one sort in that life will be wedded chastity, after another virgin purity; in one sort there will be the fruit of good works, in another sort the crown of martyrdom. One in one sort, and another in another; yet in respect to the living for ever, this man will not live more than that, nor that than this. For alike without end will they live, though each shall live in his own brightness: and the denarius in the parable is that life eternal.<sup>679</sup>

Although the virgin's reward compared to the other orders of society cannot be discerned in this life, many writers agree that her sacrifice in this life for her heavenly bridegroom will be rewarded with the virgin's crown.<sup>680</sup>

It was widely believed (and is supported by the surviving evidence) that those embarking on the virginal life, which is unlike any other, would need guidance from learned teachers.<sup>681</sup> In his work *On Virginity*, Gregory of Nyssa stressed the need for virgins to be taught through both word and deed by those who have succeeded in the lifestyle that they are about to undertake. He argues that if someone wishes to learn the language of a certain people, they must be taught by those who know the language and in that way will learn to speak a foreign tongue. In the same way one cannot naturally make progress in the life of virginity without help and to try this without advice is to incur great risk.<sup>682</sup> One

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<sup>678</sup> Augustine, *De Sancta Virginitate*, st.46(46-47): *PL* 40, 423-424; *WSA* I.9, 99. Augustine's recognition of the complexity of this issue is often over-looked by modern commentators who focus exclusively on the threefold division of society into married, widows, and virgins in patristic thinking; however, Augustine does liken marriage to the thirtyfold harvest in *De Bono Viduitatis (The Excellence of Widowhood)*, st.23(28): *PL* 40, 450; *WSA* I.9, 134. While this is not to deny the influence of this theory on Christian thought, the matter is not as clear-cut as is often suggested, see e.g. Virginia Blanton above, M. Lapidge, intro. *The Prose De Virginitate*, in *Aldhelm: The Prose Works* (1979) 55, n.18.

<sup>679</sup> Augustine, *Sermo* 87 (37), st.6, referring to Matt 20:1-16: *PL* 38, c.4, st.6, 533; *NPNF* 1<sup>st</sup> series, 6, 375, *Alio modo ibi erit castitas conjugalis, alio modo ibi erit integritas virginalis: alio modo ibi erit fructus boni operis, alio modo corona passionis. Illud alio modo: illud alio modo: tamen quantum pertinet ad vivere in aeternum, nec ille plus vivet illo, nec ille plus illo. Pariter enim sine fine vivunt, cum in suis quisque claritatibus vivat: et ille denarius vita aeterna est.* See also Augustine, *De Sancta Virginitate*, st.26(26): *PL* 40, 410; *WSA* I.9, 83-84. Cf. Bede, *De Tabernaculo (On the Tabernacle)*, bk.2: *CCSL* 119A, 52; Holder (1994) 57.

<sup>680</sup> See *First Epistle concerning virginity*, c.5: *ANF* 8, 55. Gregory of Nyssa, *De Virginitate*, c.23: *PG* 46, c.24, 415; *FOTC* 58, 75. John Chrysostom, *Quod Regulares Feminae Viris Cohabitare non Debeant*, st.2: *PG* 47, 516; Clark (1979) 214.

<sup>681</sup> Many works were also written by male teachers for other men to advise them on how best to lead the Christian life.

<sup>682</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *De Virginitate*, c.23: *PG* 46, 406-407; *FOTC* 58, 68-69.

of the earliest examples of such a relationship is in the apocryphal *Acts* of Paul and Thecla, in which Thecla rejected her fiancé to follow Paul and vowed to preserve her virginity.<sup>683</sup> Peter Brown notes that Paul usurped the role of male mentor to a young woman, normally held by her husband in Roman society.<sup>684</sup> The number of treatises on the virginal life and letters written to individual women on appropriate behaviour for them reveals how pervasive this belief was. Tertullian wrote an important treatise on Christianity for his wife and Ambrose wrote a work on virginity for his sister, Marcellina.<sup>685</sup> Jerome assumed the role of spiritual counsellor for his circle of female correspondents and sent many letters that continued to be influential after his own time.<sup>686</sup> He wrote to professed virgins on the ascetic life (the most famous of which was his *Epistle 22* to Eustochium); he urged the recently widowed to remain in that state; he advised mothers on how best to bring up their Christian daughters; and he wrote eulogies designed to demonstrate the holiness of the recently deceased.<sup>687</sup> Augustine's work *The Excellence of Widowhood* was written as a letter to the recently widowed, Juliana – the mother of Jerome's correspondent, Demetrias.<sup>688</sup> Brian Brennan also shows that in Venantius Fortunatus' poem *De Virginitate* the probable niece of Caesarius of Arles, called Caesaria, obtained eternal light after following the precepts of Caesarius and the poet urged his intended audience to do the same.<sup>689</sup>

In these various commentaries on the virginal life it is often stressed that bodily virginity alone was not worthy of praise. Only the wise virgins who had oil for their lamps were able to enter the bridechamber with the bridegroom in Christ's parable from Matthew's gospel (25:1-13). In a reference to this parable the *First Epistle concerning virginity* explains that even though a virgin in body,

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<sup>683</sup> *Acts of Paul and Thecla*: ANF 8, 487-491.

<sup>684</sup> See Brown, *Body and Society* 14. Thecla is included in Bede's *Martyrology* where he notes that Paul instructed her, September 23: Lifshitz (2000) 192.

<sup>685</sup> Tertullian, *Ad Uxorem (To his Wife)*: CCSL 1, 373-394; NPNF 1<sup>st</sup> series, 4, 39-49. Ambrose, *De Virginibus Ad Marcellinam Sororem Suam*: PL 16, 197-244; NPNF 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 10, 363-387.

<sup>686</sup> In his letter to Demetrias, Jerome described himself as her monitor, *Ep.130:8*: Labourt, 7, 177; NPNF 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 6, 265. See also *Ep.39.2*: Labourt, 2, 72; NPNF 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 6, 49. See J.M. Petersen, intro. to 'To Eustochium (Letter 22),' in Petersen, ed., *Handmaids of the Lord* (Kalamazoo 1996) 169.

<sup>687</sup> See e.g. Jerome, *Ep.22-24*, 31, 38-39, 44, 46, 54, 79, 107, 108, 127, 130: Labourt, 1-7; NPNF 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 6.

<sup>688</sup> Augustine, *De Bono Viduitatis*: PL 40, 431; WSA I.9, 113. See D.G. Hunter, intro. to *The Excellence of Widowhood*: WSA I.9, 111.

<sup>689</sup> Brennan, 'Deathless Marriage,' 79.

if without good works she cannot be saved.<sup>690</sup> In Methodius' *Symposium* virgins are told to supply the pure oil of wisdom and good works.<sup>691</sup> In his epistle to Demetrias, Jerome wrote that fasting and sanctification and chastity are all steps on the road to receiving the virgin's crown but are not complete virtues on their own, which is why the foolish virgins who did not have the oil of good works were shut out from the bridegroom's bridechamber.<sup>692</sup> He also noted (in an epistle to a young monk named Rusticus) that it was important to be chaste in mind as well as body, otherwise the bridegroom would shut him out because without the oil of good works his lamp would burn out.<sup>693</sup> Gregory the Great, in a homily on this gospel passage, explained that the foolish virgins merely sought the external honour of virginity but their flasks were empty because they were without inner glory.<sup>694</sup> On this theme in a reference to 2Cor 11:2-3, Augustine wrote that all the faithful have virginity of the heart but only some women in the Church preserve virginity in their bodies. However, if their heart's virginity is corrupted by the devil, then their bodily virginity is worthless. A virgin who has become married not to God but to the dragon in her heart is not better than a married woman who is faithful to God.<sup>695</sup>

True virginity therefore, is seen in a person's every action. It is not just a physical state. Gregory of Nyssa wrote that it pertains to all things and explained that if the soul is clinging to its Bridegroom through virginity, it must not only keep away from bodily defilements but its purity must begin in the soul. He continued to write that the body must not become involved in anything that is opposed to salvation, because if the soul is stained by any defilement it can no

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<sup>690</sup> *First Epistle concerning Virginity*, c.3: ANF 8, 55.

<sup>691</sup> Methodius, *Convivium Decem Virginum*, 6.4: PG 18, 119; ACW 27, 94. For full discussion of Matt 25:1-13, see *Convivium Decem Virginum*, 6.3-4: PG 18, 115-119; ACW 27, 92-95.

<sup>692</sup> Jerome, *Ep.*130.11: Labourt, 7, 181-182; NPNF 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 6, 267.

<sup>693</sup> Jerome, *Ep.*125.20: Labourt 7, 132-133; NPNF 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 6, 251. He also refers to 2Cor 11:2 in this context.

<sup>694</sup> Gregory the Great, *Homiliae in Evangelia (Gospel Homilies)*, 10: CCSL 141, *Hom* 12, 80-88 at 81 and 82-83; Hurst (1990) 68-75 at 68 and 70. In this homily Gregory returns to one of his favourite themes; even those who will not be saved sometimes do good works, but they are doing these for outward praises not inner glory. Cf. his views on miracle working as expressed in his letter to Augustine, part of which is in *HE* I.31, 108-111; for full letter see Gregory to Augustine, *Ep.*11.36: CCSL 140A, 925-929; see Martin (2004), NPNF 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 13, bk.11.28, 55-56.

<sup>695</sup> Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos (Expositions on the Psalms)*, Ps 90(91): CCSL 39, *sermo* 2, st.9, 1276; NPNF 1<sup>st</sup> series, 8, st.17, 451-452. See Chapter Two for discussion of this idea in relation to Æthelburh.

longer be spotless.<sup>696</sup> The good Bridegroom cannot live with a soul that has any passion or evil in it, as light and darkness, or justice and injustice, cannot have anything in common.<sup>697</sup> Ambrose also wrote that virgins should be on their guard against bodily passions or being stained by vile behaviour.<sup>698</sup> Virgins were encouraged to show in their manner of life that they had turned their backs on the world, and in particular personal adornment was discouraged.<sup>699</sup> Jerome was eager to point out examples of appropriate female behaviour and recounted the modesty of many of the ladies in his circle in the hope that all women would strive to emulate them. He described his favoured ladies' plain clothes of dark colours, made from coarse material such as sackcloth, so that even by their clothing they were demonstrating their resolve to condemn the world.<sup>700</sup> He wrote that Demetrias cast aside all her ornaments and costly attire, including 'precious necklaces, costly pearls, and glowing gems' after deciding to dedicate herself to the life of virginity.<sup>701</sup> Marcella got rid of all of her jewels, preferring to store her money in the stomachs of the poor rather than keep it for her own benefit.<sup>702</sup> Lea was careless of her dress, neglected her hair and ate only the coarsest food. Indeed Lea was careful to avoid ostentation in everything she did so that she might receive her reward in the next life and not in this world.<sup>703</sup> Although these ladies were encouraged to fast regularly, and many of them did

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<sup>696</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *De Virginitate*, c.15: *PG* 46, 383; *FOTC* 58, 51. See also Gregory of Nyssa, *De Virginitate*, c.18: *PG* 46, c.17, 390 and c.18, 394; *FOTC* 58, 56 and 59, where virginity is described as the foundation of the life of virtue and the other virtues need to be built on this.

<sup>697</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *De Virginitate*, c.16, referring to 2Cor 6:14: *PG* 46, c.15, 386; *FOTC* 58, 53-54. Cf. similar discussion of the soul as temple for the Lord in Chapter Two relating to Æthelburh.

<sup>698</sup> Ambrose, *De Virginitate*, IX.58: *PL* 16, X.58, 294-295; Callam (1996) 28.

<sup>699</sup> See further below.

<sup>700</sup> See Jerome, *Ep.*23.2 for Lea: *Labourt*, 2, 9; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 6, 42. *Ep.*24.3 for Asella: *Labourt*, 2, 12; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 6, 43. *Ep.*39.1 for Blaesilla: *Labourt*, 2, 72; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 6, 49. *Ep.*108.15 and 22 on Paula: *Labourt*, 5, 176-177 and 189; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 6, 202-203 and 207. *Ep.*108.20 for Paula's words to her companions on this subject: *Labourt*, 5, 185-187; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 6, 206.

<sup>701</sup> Jerome, *Ep.*130.5: *Labourt*, 7, 171; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 6, 262-263, *pretiosa monilia, et graues censibus unions, ardentisque gemmae...* As did Asella who, while still a child when she chose the life of virginity, sold a golden necklace in order to display her resolution, *Ep.*24.3: *Labourt*, 2, 11-12; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 6, 43.

<sup>702</sup> Jerome, *Ep.*127.3 (see Matt 6:21): *Labourt*, 7, 139; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 6, 254. Cf. Jerome on Paula, *Ep.*108.16: *Labourt*, 5, 179; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 6, 203.

<sup>703</sup> Jerome, *Ep.*23.2: *Labourt*, 2, 9; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 6, 42.

so, they were warned against engaging in excessive fasts that would weaken them and prevent them from doing other good works.<sup>704</sup>

The truly dedicated bride of Christ should also be regularly engaged in an earnest study of the scriptures, as it is there that she can learn about her Bridegroom. Jerome urged his correspondents to always have access to the scriptures, particularly the prophets and gospels.<sup>705</sup> In encouraging Furia to embark on the ascetic life, Jerome claimed that if she spent time with her ‘sister’ (thought to be a reference to her cousin, Eustochium) she might hear the whole of the Old and New Testaments come bubbling up from her pious heart.<sup>706</sup> He urged Demetrias to foster a love of the scriptures and to always have their words in her mind to ward off the assaults of the enemy,<sup>707</sup> and wrote that Marcella was forever singing the psalms.<sup>708</sup> They were also encouraged to pray unceasingly and always look for their Bridegroom’s coming. Jerome wrote that Asella spoke constantly to the Bridegroom in prayers and psalmody.<sup>709</sup> In his letter to Marcella on Lea’s death, Jerome praised Lea, saying that she had passed many sleepless nights in prayer.<sup>710</sup>

Augustine urged the readers of his *Holy Virginitate* to add other good qualities to their virginity if they wished to find favour with God.<sup>711</sup> He, in particular, stressed the need for virgins to preserve humility. This would protect them from falling into the sin of pride and allow them to follow the Lamb wherever he goes (Rev 14:4), for the Lord is meek and humble of heart (Matt 11:29). Augustine is clearly referring to Christ’s words:

Come to me, all you that labour and are burdened: and I will refresh you.  
Take up my yoke upon you and learn of me, because I am meek, and

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<sup>704</sup> Jerome, *Ep.44*: Labourt, 2, 95-96; *NPNF 2<sup>nd</sup> series*, 6, 58. *Ep.54.7* and 14: Labourt, 3, 30-31 and 37; *NPNF 2<sup>nd</sup> series*, 6, 104-105 and 107. *Ep.79.9-10*: Labourt, 4, 105-106; *NPNF 2<sup>nd</sup> series*, 6, 167-168. *Ep.130.11*: Labourt, 7, 181-182; *NPNF 2<sup>nd</sup> series*, 6, 267.

<sup>705</sup> Jerome, *Ep.54.11*: Labourt, 3, 34; *NPNF 2<sup>nd</sup> series*, 6, 106. See also *Ep.39.1*: Labourt, 2, 72; *NPNF 2<sup>nd</sup> series*, 6, 49. *Ep.79.9*: Labourt, 4, 104; *NPNF 2<sup>nd</sup> series*, 6, 167. Jerome’s letter to Laeta on the upbringing of her daughter, Paula, who was dedicated to Christ as an infant, *Ep.107.12*: Labourt, 5, 156-157; *NPNF 2<sup>nd</sup> series*, 6, 194.

<sup>706</sup> Jerome, *Ep.54.13*: Labourt, 3, 36; *NPNF 2<sup>nd</sup> series*, 6, 107.

<sup>707</sup> Jerome, *Ep.130.7* and 20: Labourt, 7, 176-177 and 193; *NPNF 2<sup>nd</sup> series*, 6, 265 and 272.

<sup>708</sup> Jerome, *Ep.127.4*: Labourt, 7, 139-140; *NPNF 2<sup>nd</sup> series*, 6, 254.

<sup>709</sup> Jerome, *Ep.24.4*: Labourt, 2, 12; *NPNF 2<sup>nd</sup> series*, 6, 43. Cf. *Ep.44*: Labourt, 2, 95; *NPNF 2<sup>nd</sup> series*, 6, 58. *Ep.54.13*: Labourt, 3, 36; *NPNF 2<sup>nd</sup> series*, 6, 107. *Ep.79.9-10*: Labourt, 4, 104-106; *NPNF 2<sup>nd</sup> series*, 6, 167-168.

<sup>710</sup> Jerome, *Ep.23.2*: Labourt, 2, 9; *NPNF 2<sup>nd</sup> series*, 6, 42.

<sup>711</sup> Augustine, *De Sancta Virginitate*, st.53(54): *PL* 40, 427; *WSA* I.9, 103-104.



humble of heart: and you shall find rest to your souls. For my yoke is sweet and my burden light (Matt 11:28-30).

This injunction presented an important pattern for all those who wished to follow Jesus, and was associated with monasticism from a very early stage, as it linked following Christ with accepting and imitating his humility and meekness.<sup>712</sup> Tertullian had urged women to fit the yoke of Christ on their necks.<sup>713</sup> The yoke, formerly a symbol of slavery and toil, is transformed in Christian thinking because if Christ is followed in true humility then the spiritual yoke will be gentle and light. The importance of humility for Augustine is clear as he explains that, ‘Married persons who are humble will follow the Lamb – if not wherever he goes, certainly as far as they are able – more easily than virgins who are proud.’<sup>714</sup> Virgins must follow the Lamb wherever he goes, but to do this they must learn to come in humility to the one who is humble and the more humble they are the more they will come to love him. Consequently if they are able to love the one who is gentle and humble, they are unlikely to fall into the sin of pride.<sup>715</sup> They will then be able to sing a hymn to the Lord and glorify him for all ages.<sup>716</sup> Augustine also urged virgins to imitate the example of Mary, who possessed many merits but always retained her humility.<sup>717</sup> Indeed, although only Mary was privileged to give birth to Christ, all those who have given up the chance to have children for Christ and do his will and the will of the Father, share in the motherhood of Christ.<sup>718</sup>

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<sup>712</sup> See Augustine, *De Sancta Virginitate*, st.35(35): PL 40, 416; WSA I.9, 90-91. John Cassian, *De Coenobiorum institutes (Institutes of the Coenobia)*, bk.12.32: SC 109, 498; NPNF 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 11, 290. Cf. *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, c.15: Ward (2003). *Rule of Benedict*, c.7: SC 181, 472-490; Fry (1982). Gregory the Great related the yoke to the ministry of teaching in the Church, see *Mor.* 7.14 and 35.41: CCSL 143, 343 and CCSL 143B, 1801; Bliss (1844-1850) I, 373-374 and III, part II, 690-691.

<sup>713</sup> Tertullian, *De Cultu Feminarum (On the Apparel of Women)*, bk.2, c.13: CCSL 1, 370; ANF 4, 25. In his treatise, *De Virginibus Velandis (On the Veiling of Virgins)*, Tertullian likened the virgin’s veil to the Lord’s yoke as the veil encircles the neck, *De Virginibus Velandis*, c.17: CCSL 2, 1225-1226; ANF 4, 37. The yoke also became associated with the vestments for bishops.

<sup>714</sup> Augustine, *De Sancta Virginitate*, st.51(52): PL 40, 426; WSA I.9, 102, *facilius sequuntur Agnum, etsi non quocumque ierit, certe quousque potuerint, conjugati humiles, quam superbientes virgines.*

<sup>715</sup> Augustine, *De Sancta Virginitate*, st.52(53) and 55(56): PL 40, 426-427 and 428; WSA I.9, 103 and 105.

<sup>716</sup> Augustine, *De Sancta Virginitate*, st.56(57) referring to Dan 3:87: PL 40, 428; WSA I.9, 105.

<sup>717</sup> Augustine, *Sermo* 51 (1), st.18: PL 38; ACW 15, 45. Augustine also argues that Mary is an appropriate role model in his *De Sancta Virginitate*, st.4(4): PL 40; WSA I.9, 69-70.

<sup>718</sup> Augustine, *Sermo* 192 (10), st.2, referring to Matt 12:50: PL 38; ACW 15, 113. See also Augustine, *De Sancta Virginitate*, st.5(5): PL 40; WSA I.9, 70.

Ambrose wrote that the Virgin Mary is an example of true virginity to everyone because she possessed all the virtues.<sup>719</sup> In Psalm 44(45) – as mentioned above, the marriage psalm – the queen is described as standing ‘on thy right hand, in gilded clothing; surrounded with variety’ (Ps 44:10) and the king’s daughter has all her glory within ‘in golden borders, surrounded with variety’ (Ps 44:14-15). In Christian exegesis their gilded and varied clothing was understood as the diversity of virtues in the saints. Jerome provides this interpretation in his letter to Demetrias and likens the queen’s and the king’s daughter’s clothing to Joseph’s coat of many colours, which was also formed of different virtues.<sup>720</sup> Cassiodorus similarly wrote that the variety in their clothes denotes the beautiful diversity of virtues and likens this to the garments of Aaron, the high priest.<sup>721</sup> The true bride of Christ is not concerned exclusively with bodily purity, but possesses all the virtues in her soul. However, while every Christian is a bride of Christ and all the faithful preserve their spiritual virginity, those who remain virgins dedicated to Christ are His brides in a special way as their external lives reflect their interior virtues.

## **Virginity and the Anglo-Saxons**

### *(i) Aldhelm’s De Virginitate*

These ideas concerning virginity were transmitted to the Anglo-Saxons and, just a century after Gregory’s missionaries first arrived in Britain, Aldhelm of Malmesbury wrote a prose and verse treatise on virginity. He wrote the *De Virginitate* in prose and verse for the nuns at Barking monastery,<sup>722</sup> and his views on virginity are worth briefly considering as Aldhelm and his *De Virginitate*

<sup>719</sup> Ambrose, *De Virginitate*, bk. 2, c.2, st.6-15: *PL* 16, 220-222; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 10, 374-375.

<sup>720</sup> Jerome, *Ep.*130.2: *Labourt*, 7, 167; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 6, 261. Jerome also understands Joseph’s coat of many colours and the queen’s clothing as a type of the diversity in the gifts of Christ, see *Adversus Jovinianum*, bk.1.8: *PL* 23, 222; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 6, 352. Cf. *Ep.*48.4: *Labourt* (*Ep.*49.4), 2, 124; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 6, 68.

<sup>721</sup> Cassiodorus, *Expositio Psalmorum (Explanation of Psalm)*, Ps.44.10 and 14, referring to Exodus 28 for Aaron: *CCSL* 97, 410 and 412; *ACW* 51, 447 and 450. Cf. Gregory the Great, *Regula Pastoralis (Pastoral Rule)*, part 2.3: *SC* 381, 182-186; *ACW* 11, 49-51, who relates the description of Aaron’s garments to the variety of virtues that must be conspicuous in the priest.

<sup>722</sup> Aldhelm wrote the prose version first and this was followed by a verse form, see O’Sullivan, ‘Aldhelm’s *De Virginitate*,’ on the conception of this dual work as an *opus geminatum*, 271-272.

were known to Bede and are mentioned in the *HE*.<sup>723</sup> The prose *De Virginitate*, which was written earlier, begins with a discussion of virginity and is followed by a series of virgins, both male and female. Aldhelm's is the first work on virginity to include both male and female virgins.<sup>724</sup> His views on virginity are for the most part typical.<sup>725</sup> Aldhelm believed that holy virginity is close to angelic beatitude and the highest of the virtues, and argued that the proof of this is that Christ was born from a virgin. Like many of the patristic writers he defends the position of marriage, though states that there is a great distance between virginity and marriage.<sup>726</sup> Like Augustine, Aldhelm recognised that virginity's exalted position can lead to the sin of Pride, and warned his readers that if they fall into this trap they will not be accepted at the wedding feast of the celestial bridegroom.<sup>727</sup> He also told them that to attain perfection, purity needs to be assisted by other virtues and likens this to the description of the queen in her golden vestments from Psalm 44(45); otherwise they will not return a hundredfold, but will be carrying burned-out lamps like the foolish virgins.<sup>728</sup> Aldhelm is also very clear that without spiritual purity, carnal integrity will not achieve a heavenly reward.<sup>729</sup> This is demonstrated in the very beginning of the work as he praised the community of Barking for their corporeal chastity, which is glorified by their spiritual purity.<sup>730</sup>

The most notable (and most commented on) innovation in Aldhelm's treatise was his adaptation of the threefold distinction of society into virginity, widowhood and marriage – as described above – to virginity, chastity and

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<sup>723</sup> *HE* V.18, 512-515; Bede says that Aldhelm 'wrote a most excellent book on virginity both in hexameter verse and in prose, producing a twofold work after the example of Sedulius', 514-515.

<sup>724</sup> This may have been because the work was intended for Barking, which is a double monastery, see Lapidge, intro., *The Prose De Virginitate*, in *Aldhelm: The Prose Works* (1979) 56-57. See also O'Sullivan, 'Aldhelm's *De Virginitate*,' 272.

<sup>725</sup> See O'Sullivan, 'Aldhelm's *De Virginitate*,' 280.

<sup>726</sup> Aldhelm, *Prose De Virginitate*, VII-VIII and XVII-XVIII: *CCSL* 124A, 77-93 and 197-217; Lapidge (1979) 63-65 and 73-75. St.IX compares the two states: *CCSL* 124A, 95-111; Lapidge (1979) 65-66. Aldhelm says that by comparing these two what is good is not disparaged, but is more willingly praised.

<sup>727</sup> Aldhelm, *Prose De Virginitate*, X-XIII: *CCSL* 124A, 111-165; Lapidge (1979) 66-70.

<sup>728</sup> Aldhelm, *Prose De Virginitate*, XV: *CCSL* 124A, 171-183; Lapidge (1979) 71-72. He also refers to the variety of colours in the curtains of the temple, explaining that varieties of colours and metals help to augment and amplify the rewards of chastity through allegory.

<sup>729</sup> Aldhelm, *Prose De Virginitate*, XVI: *CCSL* 124A, 185-195; Lapidge (1979) 72-73.

<sup>730</sup> Aldhelm, *Prose De Virginitate*: *CCSL* 124A, 27; Lapidge (1979) 59. See also Aldhelm, *Prose De Virginitate*, LVIII: *CCSL* 124A, 735-745; Lapidge (1979) 129. Cf. Aldhelm, *Carmen De Virginitate*, 140-200: Rosier (1985) 106-107. See O'Sullivan, 'Aldhelm's *De Virginitate*,' 288-293, on this theme. See also S. O'Sullivan, 'The Image of Adornment in Aldhelm's *De Virginitate*: Cyprian and his Influence,' *Peritia* 15 (2001) 48-57 at 52.

conjugality. These three ranks then corresponded to the hundredfold, sixtyfold and thirtyfold reward of the gospels, although Aldhelm acknowledged that some authorities believe the hundredfold belongs to the martyrs.<sup>731</sup> Aldhelm's division was suited to the society of his time, as many women left their marriages to enter convents and by replacing widowhood with chastity these women could be more suitably honoured.<sup>732</sup> Michael Lapidge has argued that Aldhelm's response to the situation allowed him to 'flatter his audience of once-married nuns' while simultaneously maintaining the orthodox view of marriage and virginity.<sup>733</sup> Aldhelm acknowledged that virgins were susceptible to pride, whereas the chaste because they are in an inferior position are inclined to continually strive after perfection and often will surpass the fallen virgin.<sup>734</sup> However, Sinéad O'Sullivan has pointed out that even though Aldhelm pays tribute to the members of the Barking community who had dissolved their marriages, he quite clearly regarded virginity as pre-eminent. She quotes a lengthy passage from the prose *De Virginitate* in which Aldhelm writes, 'virginity is gold, chastity silver, conjugality bronze; ... that virginity is the sun, chastity a lamp, conjugality darkness; ... that virginity is the living man, chastity a man half-alive, conjugality the (lifeless) body; ...'<sup>735</sup> This makes Aldhelm's view on the respective merits of these three states quite clear. O'Sullivan writes that Aldhelm's belief in the superiority of virginity is exemplified by the female virgins that he described in the work as they spurn all conjugal ties and she adds that the 'negative imagery used to describe marriage leaves us in no doubt as to Aldhelm's attitude towards conjugality vis-à-vis virginity.'<sup>736</sup> In most respects Aldhelm's views on virginity are clearly influenced by patristic commentaries on this subject.

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<sup>731</sup> Aldhelm, *Prose De Virginitate*, XIX: CCSL 124A, 217-225; Lapidge (1979) 75-76. Cf. Aldhelm, *Carmen De Virginitate*, 80-130: Rosier (1985) 105-196.

<sup>732</sup> See O'Sullivan, 'Aldhelm's *De Virginitate*,' 282.

<sup>733</sup> Lapidge, intro., *The Prose De Virginitate*, in *Aldhelm: The Prose Works* (1979) 56. See also O'Sullivan, 'Aldhelm's *De Virginitate*,' 280-282. O'Sullivan describes Aldhelm's innovative division as 'a token gesture of friendship towards his Barking audience', 282.

<sup>734</sup> Aldhelm, *Prose De Virginitate*, X: CCSL 124A, 111-121; Lapidge (1979) 66-67. See Lapidge, intro., *The Prose De Virginitate*, in *Aldhelm: The Prose Works* (1979) 56; O'Sullivan, 'Aldhelm's *De Virginitate*,' 281-284.

<sup>735</sup> Aldhelm, *Prose De Virginitate*, XIX: CCSL 124A, 219-220; Lapidge (1979) 75, ... *ut sit uirginitas aurum, castitas argentum, iugalitas aeramentum; ... ut sit uirginitas sol, castitas lucerna, iugalitas tenebrae; ... ut sit uirginitas homo, castitas semiuiuus, iugalitas corpus; ...* O'Sullivan, 'Aldhelm's *De Virginitate*,' 284. Cf. Aldhelm, *Carmen De Virginitate*, 200-230: Rosier (1985) 107-108.

<sup>736</sup> O'Sullivan, 'Aldhelm's *De Virginitate*,' 287.

(ii) *Bede and Æthelthryth's ascetic lifestyle*

Bede's account of Æthelthryth, which has been outlined above, needs to be considered in the light of this extensive patristic inheritance. While preserving her virginity during two marriages was the most remarkable aspect of her life, and set her apart from other Anglo-Saxon saints, this of itself would not have led to such widespread veneration. Æthelthryth's bodily virginity coupled with her other virtues revealed her inner purity, and this was made known to all in her *post mortem* incorruption. Her life was the ultimate example of renunciation. She gave up the benefits of marriage twice,<sup>737</sup> renounced her throne, and lived a life of extreme asceticism in her foundation at Ely. She follows closely Jerome's advice to Eustochium at the beginning of his Letter 22, and is like the bride of Psalm 44:11 who scorns all earthly things to cling to the Bridegroom in a close embrace.<sup>738</sup>

While Bede's account of Æthelthryth is influenced by patristic views on virginity, his presentation is quite different. There is very little explicit Christian teaching in the *HE*, but (as noted before) the narrative very subtly delivers orthodox Christian thinking.<sup>739</sup> In his account of Æthelthryth Bede does not overtly praise virginity or liken it to the angelic life, although this view is expressed in his exegetical works.<sup>740</sup> However, almost in passing, he describes Æthelthryth as leading a heavenly life: 'A year afterwards she was herself appointed abbess in the district called Ely, where she built a monastery and became, by the example of her *heavenly life* [italics mine] and teaching, the virgin mother of many virgins dedicated to God.'<sup>741</sup> Bede follows this comment with an account of her strict ascetic regime, which has generated a strong reaction from modern scholars who dismiss it either as a hagiographic

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<sup>737</sup> Though married she did not partake in the goods of marriage as defined by Augustine, see above.

<sup>738</sup> Jerome, *Ep.22.1*: Labourt, 1, 110-111; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 6, 22. See above.

<sup>739</sup> See Chapter Two.

<sup>740</sup> See Bede, *De Tabernaculo*, bk.2, st.4: *CCSL* 119A, 58; Holder (1994) 64-65. *De Templo (On the Temple)*, bk.1, st.7.3: *CCSL* 119A, 163; Connolly (1995) 26.

<sup>741</sup> *HE* IV.19(17), 392-393, *Post annum uero ipsa facta est abbatissa in regione quae uocatur Elge, ubi constructo monasterio uirginum Deo deuotarum perplurium mater uirgo et exemplis uitae caelestis esse coepit et monitis.*

convention or as an obsession with denying her body.<sup>742</sup> While Æthelthryth does undoubtedly disregard bodily comforts, this is not from disdain for her body, but because her mind was already focused on heavenly matters and no longer distracted by temporal things like fine clothes or good food. Bede says that she led a heavenly life and this is supported by her acknowledged disinterest in worldliness coupled with the length of time she spent in prayer every day. Her behaviour reveals that even in this life (after she was able to give up secular affairs) Æthelthryth focused all of her attention on her heavenly bridegroom.

The lives and deaths of many of the other holy women in the *HE* suggest a similar closeness to heaven. When Eorcengota (Æthelthryth's niece) died, members of her monastic community heard choirs of angels singing and saw a very great light coming down from heaven, which brought her soul released from bondage to the flesh to the joys of heaven.<sup>743</sup> The community of Barking also witnessed many such miracles. Bede had access to a *liber* or *libellus* from Barking, which may have been a *Life* of Abbess Æthelburh. In the *HE*, Bede wrote that shortly before Æthelburh of Barking died, one of her sisters saw a vision of a body brighter than the sun being raised up to heaven by golden cords, which Bede suggested represented the good deeds that this individual had done during her life.<sup>744</sup> Another sister was related to have seen a light fill the room where she lay on her deathbed and was told that at daybreak she would go to the eternal light.<sup>745</sup> After the bones of many of the community at Barking had been re-interred in the Church dedicated to Mary, a bright heavenly light and a wonderful fragrance and other signs were often witnessed there.<sup>746</sup> Two of Hild's disciples also saw her soul ascending to heaven at the moment of her death. Begu, who was living in the recently founded monastery of Hackness, saw Hild's soul being brought to heaven in the midst of a heavenly light and guided by angels, and realised that the abbess had ascended to the abode of eternal light to join the heavenly company.<sup>747</sup> Another of Hild's devoted followers who was based in the remotest part of the monastery at Whitby also saw her soul ascend to

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<sup>742</sup> *HE* IV.19(17), 392-393. See Fell, Thompson, Karkov and Blanton above.

<sup>743</sup> *HE* III.8, 238-239.

<sup>744</sup> *HE* IV.9, 360-361.

<sup>745</sup> *HE* IV.8, 358-359.

<sup>746</sup> *HE* IV.10, 364-365.

<sup>747</sup> *HE* IV.23(21), 412-415.

heaven in the company of angels.<sup>748</sup> Although Bede does not explicitly describe any of these women as leading the life of angels on earth, in the light of patristic comments on the virginal life, their immediate and glorious ascension to heaven in the company of angels suggests that their lives on earth were so virtuous and free from sin that they had a fore-taste of heaven and at the moment of death were united with their heavenly bridegroom for all eternity. It is also significant that members of their communities witnessed these miracles, which often took place at night, as the true bride of the Lord is forever watchful and waiting for her bridegroom's arrival.<sup>749</sup>

Æthelthryth's asceticism was also appropriate behaviour for those dedicated to Christ and demonstrated the important belief that bodily virginity without other virtues was worthless. She turned her back on fine clothes and jewellery (after her youth) and wore only woollen garments and, it seems, followed the same regimen, or an even stricter one, as the members of her community.<sup>750</sup> In particular, her willingness to be washed last after having assisted her attendants in washing the other members of her community demonstrated her humility which, according to Augustine, was an essential virtue for all virgins and suggests her closeness to the Lamb. The community of Whitby similarly behaved appropriately for those dedicated to Christ. Bede notes that Hild insisted that all those under her direction devoted time to studying the Holy Scriptures and performing good works.<sup>751</sup> Bede's descriptions of the communities of Barking and Whitby and Æthelthryth's life at Ely are as unlike the opulence of Coldingham monastery as is possible. While Æthelthryth (a former queen) wore woollen clothes, fasted and prayed, the Coldingham nuns dressed in elaborate garments as if they were brides, feasted and gossiped. While these virgins' sins are not sexual in nature, Bede writes that their behaviour

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<sup>748</sup> *HE* IV.23(21), 414-415. For similar type miracles see Gregory the Great, *Dialogi (Dialogues)*, bk.2.35, 37, 4.7-10, 12-13, 16; *SC* 260, 236-238 and 242-244 and *SC* 265, 128-130, 132 and 134; *FOTC* 39, 104-105, 107-108, 200-201, 203-205, 208-210.

<sup>749</sup> See Matt 25:1-13; Luke 12:35-36. See Jerome on the importance of watching in which he refers to the bride in the Song of Songs who says 'I was sleeping, but my heart kept vigil' (Song of Songs 5:2), *Homilia De Nativitate Domini (Homily on the Nativity of the Lord)*: *CCSL* 78, 525; *FOTC* 57 (*Homily* 88) 222.

<sup>750</sup> See below for Æthelthryth's attitude to jewellery. Venantius Fortunatus, in a poem sent to bishops in the East to seek books on Radegund's behalf, contrasted Radegund's life of luxury in the palace with the austerity of her life as a nun, *Carmen* 8.1: Reydellet (2003) 125-126. See Brennan, 'Deathless Marriage,' 76.

<sup>751</sup> *HE* IV.23(21), 408-409.

endangered their virginity – *i.e.* their spiritual virginity.<sup>752</sup> In his exegesis of the temple building, Bede explained that those who renounce marriage to become consecrated virgins must behave in a way that is appropriate for the life of virginity. They must:

abstain from useless talk, anger, quarrelling, detraction, immodest dress, carousing, drinking, strife and jealousy, and earnestly give themselves instead to holy vigils, prayer, divine readings and psalms, to doctrine and almsgiving and the other fruits of the Spirit (cf. Gal 5:20-22; Rom 1:28-32) so that those who by profession follow the state of the life to come in which they will neither marry nor be given in marriage but be as the angels in heaven (Matt 22:30) may strive to imitate the state of that life so far as is possible for mortals in the present life.<sup>753</sup>

The Coldingham community, though professed virgins, were not living appropriately and could be likened to the foolish virgins that were without the oil of good works in Matthew's gospel. Æthelthryth, on the other hand, cultivated other virtues (which would have been praiseworthy even if she were not a virgin) and lived the heavenly life on earth.

### *(iii) Æthelthryth and Wilfrid*

Æthelthryth is an exemplary figure in Bede's *HE*. Bede also presents Wilfrid as an important supporter of her religious vocation. Indeed, it is clear from both the *Life of Wilfrid* and Bede's *HE* that Wilfrid was a close adviser to Æthelthryth during her time at Ecgrith's court. Stephanie Hollis has suggested that, in supporting Æthelthryth's desire to not consummate her marriage with Ecgrith, Wilfrid was at odds with the views expressed in Theodore's penitential and

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<sup>752</sup> *HE* IV.25(23), 424-427, *uirgines quoque Deo dicatae, contemta reuerentia suae professionis, quotiescumque uacant, texendis subtilioribus indumentis operam dant, quibus aut se ipsas ad uicem sponsarum in periculum sui status adornent ...*; see further below. Hollis notes that Bede does not accuse the inhabitants of Coldingham of being engaged in carnality, they are feasting and weaving fine clothes for themselves, which are pursuits that she suggests were more appropriate to a worldly warrior society than a monastery, *Anglo-Saxon Women* 102. She also claims that Bede's account of Coldingham is thinly disguised polemic against double monasteries, *Anglo-Saxon Women* 103.

<sup>753</sup> Bede, *De Templo*, bk.1, st.7.3: *CCSL* 119A, ll 649-657, 163; Connolly (1995) 26, ... *abstineant ab otiosis eloquiis ira rixa detractione habitu impudico comesationibus potationibus contentione et aemulatione et e contrario uigiliis sanctis orationibus lectionibus diuinis et psalmis doctrinae et elemosinis ceterisque spiritus fructibus operam impendant ut qui futurae staturum uitae in professione tenent in qua non nubent neque nubentur sed sunt sicut angeli in caelo huius quoque staturum quantum mortalibus possibile est in praesenti contendant imitari.* Cf. Jerome's advice to his female correspondents, above.



argues that his presence in the narrative means that Æthelthryth was acting under ecclesiastical headship.<sup>754</sup> This is a very important point, the full significance of which is perhaps overlooked.<sup>755</sup> As has been noted above, it was believed that female virgins should receive guidance from learned teachers in the practice of the religious life for which there is much evidence in the surviving patristic sources. This practice is also evident among the Anglo-Saxons, as we know that Aldhelm was in contact with the community at Barking and wrote his *De Virginitate* for them. The prose form was dedicated to Abbess Hildelith and other members of her community, and towards the end of this work Aldhelm promised to write again on virginity in hexameter verse.<sup>756</sup> Indeed, in this work Aldhelm paid tribute to Jerome's efforts in teaching the ascetic life, describing him as 'a virgin guardian and interpreter of chastity'.<sup>757</sup> It is also clear from Boniface's surviving correspondence that he was closely associated with many women in the religious life during his mission to Germany.<sup>758</sup>

In the *HE* there are other similar religious couples: before Eorcenwold became bishop in London he founded the monastery of Barking for his sister Æthelburh;<sup>759</sup> Æthelhild, who was abbess of an unnamed monastery, was the sister of Bishop Æthelwine of Lindsey and Abbot Ealdwine of Partney, which was near to her monastery;<sup>760</sup> Hild was baptised by Paulinus, and was later a disciple of Aidan, who asked her to return to Northumbria rather than follow the religious life in Gaul and taught her many things;<sup>761</sup> Hild's predecessor as abbess of Hartlepool, Heiu, was also associated with Aidan;<sup>762</sup> and Ælflæd was greatly

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<sup>754</sup> Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women* 69 and 71, see above.

<sup>755</sup> Most commentators tend to focus on the political aspect of Wilfrid's relationship with Æthelthryth and his subsequent problems with Ecgfrith after their marriage was dissolved.

<sup>756</sup> See Aldhelm, *Prose De Virginitate*, introduction, st.I and LX: *CCSL* 124A, 27-31 and 753-761; Lapidge (1979) 59 and 130-131. The verse form does not have a clear dedication, *Carmen De Virginitate, Prefatio*: Rosier (1985) 102. See J.L. Rosier, intro. to *The Carmen De Virginitate*, in *Aldhelm: The Poetic Works* (1985) 97.

<sup>757</sup> Aldhelm, *Carmen De Virginitate*, 1620-1630: Rosier (1985) 139.

<sup>758</sup> Letters 4, 15, 17-18, 21, 41 in 'The Correspondence of St. Boniface,' in C.H. Talbot, tr. and ed., *The Anglo-Saxon Missionaries in Germany* (New York 1954) 65-149. See Y. Hen, 'Milites Christi Utriusque Sexus: Gender and the Politics of Conversion in the Circle of Boniface,' *Revue Bénédictine* 109:1-2 (1999) 17-31.

<sup>759</sup> *HE* IV.6, 354-357.

<sup>760</sup> *HE* III.11, 246-247.

<sup>761</sup> *HE* IV.23(21), 406-409.

<sup>762</sup> *HE* IV.23(21), 406-407.

assisted in the running of Whitby by Bishop Trumwine.<sup>763</sup> Paulinus played a similar role for Æthelburh at Edwin's court in Northumbria.<sup>764</sup> Adamnan's role at Coldingham is also relevant in this context. According to Bede's account, Æbbe – the abbess of Coldingham – was unaware of the sinful behaviour of members of her community until Adamnan told her, which suggests that her authority as abbess was limited. However Adamnan reassured her that the planned divine vengeance would not take place during her time, presumably in an attempt to absolve her of blame for the sinfulness of her community. After Adamnan intervened and assisted the abbess through informing her about the goings on in her monastery, the inhabitants of Coldingham temporarily gave up their sinful ways and did penance. After Æbbe's death they returned to their old ways, committing even worse sins and the monastery was burnt down in line with Adamnan's prophecy.<sup>765</sup>

It is against this extensive backdrop that Æthelthryth's relationship with Wilfrid, as attested by the *HE* and the *Life of Wilfrid*, should be considered. Wilfrid was certainly a key supporter of Æthelthryth during her marriage to Ecgfrith. Bede provides us with the important detail that Ecgfrith asked Wilfrid to persuade the queen to consummate their marriage revealing his importance as her adviser.<sup>766</sup> Æthelthryth preserved her virginity, presumably with Wilfrid's support and guidance, and after her husband finally allowed her to enter the religious life Wilfrid presided over the ceremony at which she became a professed virgin.<sup>767</sup> It seems most probable that he would have advised her in the proper practice of the religious life and the orthodox nature of her asceticism suggests that she was aware of established and appropriate practices. Finally, that Wilfrid was required to verify the sanctity of her life when questions were asked after her death reveals his closeness to her and suggests that he was Æthelthryth's recognised spiritual counsellor.

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<sup>763</sup> *HE* IV.26(24), 428-431. Consider also the relationship of Cuthbert and Ælflæd in both *Lives of Cuthbert*, see *Anonymous Life*, bk.3, c.6: Colgrave and Bede, *Life of Cuthbert*, c.23-24 and 34: Colgrave; Farmer (1998) 74-77 and 87-88.

<sup>764</sup> See *HE* II.9, 162-165.

<sup>765</sup> *HE* IV.25(23), 424-427.

<sup>766</sup> *HE* IV.19(17), 392-393.

<sup>767</sup> *HE* IV.19(17), 392-393.

(iv) *Virginity and Marriage in Bede's thought*

Although Bede had a special veneration for Æthelthryth because of the purity of her life, his descriptions of her life and the behaviour of the community at Coldingham reveal what is acceptable behaviour for those in the virginal life and refutes Stephanie Hollis' contention that he promoted 'physiological' virginity as the highest value in his account of Æthelthryth. Hollis unfavourably compares Bede to Aldhelm and claims that, unlike Bede, Aldhelm was concerned with the moral and psychological conception of purity.<sup>768</sup> However (as seen above), while Aldhelm did stress the need for spiritual purity along with bodily virginity and is complimentary about individuals who gave up marriage for the religious life, he regarded most highly those who remained virgins throughout their lives and believed that those who possessed both physical and spiritual virginity were pre-eminent.<sup>769</sup> Bede's attitude to virginity has considerably more nuances. It is apparent in his accounts of Coldingham and Æthelthryth that he followed the orthodox view that spiritual integrity is essential for virgins. He also described Æthelburh of Kent as a virgin in his account of her marriage to King Edwin, and it has been argued that this is a reference to her spiritual virginity which is most important for Christians.<sup>770</sup> When Bede does refer to the different orders of the faithful in his exegesis virginity is always ranked above marriage, but his emphasis varies slightly.<sup>771</sup> In his homily on the wedding feast at Cana in John's gospel, Bede wrote that conjugal chastity is good, the continence of a widow is better, and the virgin's perfection is best. He added that the Lord approved of each of these but determined the respective merit of each state, as he was born from the inviolate womb of a virgin; after his birth he was blessed by the widow Anna; and as a young man he honoured the married couple at Cana by the presence of his power.<sup>772</sup> In discussing the three floors of different width in the temple building, Bede again followed the traditional interpretation:

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<sup>768</sup> Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women* 81, see above.

<sup>769</sup> See above.

<sup>770</sup> See Chapter Two, referring to *HE* II.9, 162-163.

<sup>771</sup> Benedicta Ward notes that he affirms the sanctity of the three states of life (married, widows and virgins), *The Venerable Bede* (London 2002) 96.

<sup>772</sup> Bede, *Hom* I.14, referring to Luke 2:36-38 and John 2:1-11: *CCSL* 122; Martin and Hurst (1991) 134.

these three floors denote the corresponding number of levels of the faithful, namely, married people, those who practise continence, and virgins, levels distinguished according to the loftiness of their profession but all of them belonging to the house of the Lord and intently clinging to him by reason of their fellowship in the same faith and truth.<sup>773</sup>

In this case Bede (like Aldhelm) described the middle order as the continent, not widows. He explained that the top storey was narrower than the other two and the middle one was narrower than the bottom one, because virginity as the higher profession of virtue should follow a higher way of life, whereas the bottom storey was wider because less is demanded from married people.<sup>774</sup> The continent (who have renounced marriage, and their most glorious members are credited by Bede with building the original church in Jerusalem) are placed midway between the other two groups.<sup>775</sup> Bede makes it very clear that, even though on different levels, all are in the same house of God and notes that each of the three floors had sides all round, representing God's daily protection for all of us.<sup>776</sup>

In his commentary on the Tabernacle Bede described the lampstand, which had three branches on either side and related these branches to the three orders of the faithful but this time described them as 'the married, the continent, and the rulers.'<sup>777</sup> He explained that there were three branches on both sides of the lampstand because one side represented the time before the Lord's Incarnation and the other side the period afterwards and in both times the Church is made up of people who served the Lord faithfully from each of these three states.<sup>778</sup> This is seen in the Old Testament in Ezekiel's claim that there are only three men who will be saved: Noah, Daniel and Job (Ezek 14:14).

For surely in Noah, who steered the ark over the waves, he shows those who are set over the Church; in Daniel, who was zealous to live continently in

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<sup>773</sup> Bede, *De Templo*, bk.1, st.7.2: CCSL 119A, ll 637-641, 163; Connolly (1995) 25, ... *tabulata haec tria totidem fidelium gradus, coniugatorum uidelicet continentium et uirginum, designant distinctos quidem altitudine professionis sed societate fidei et ueritatis eiusdem omnes ad domum domini pertinentes eique fixa mente inhaerentes.*

<sup>774</sup> Cf. his *De Tabernaculo*, where Bede writes that those who are virgins in body and soul will follow the Lamb especially closely and sing hymns of praise to Him (referring to Is 56:4-5 and Rev 14:2-4), bk.2, st.4: CCSL 119A, 58; Holder (1994) 64-65.

<sup>775</sup> Bede, *De Templo*, bk.1, st.7.3: CCSL 119A, 163; Connolly (1995) 25-26.

<sup>776</sup> Bede, *De Templo*, bk.1, st.7.4: CCSL 119A, 163-164; Connolly (1995) 26.

<sup>777</sup> Bede, *De Tabernaculo*, bk.1, st.8: CCSL 119A, 31; Holder (1994) 33-34, ... *coniugatorum uidelicet continentium et rectorum.*

<sup>778</sup> Bede, *De Tabernaculo*, bk.1, st.8: CCSL 119A, 31-32 Holder (1994) 33-34.

the royal court, he shows the *continent or virgins* [italics mine]; in Job, who while situated in married life exhibited a wonderful example of patience to all, he shows the life of the virtuous married people.<sup>779</sup>

Bede then presents the corresponding description in the New Testament referring to Jesus' words from Luke's gospel that there will be two people in bed, two women grinding and two men in the field and in each case one will be taken and the other left (Luke 17:34-35). Bede writes that 'the quiet life of the continent is portrayed in the bed; the industry of those who preach in the cultivation of the field; and the labour of those who are married in the turning of the millstone'.<sup>780</sup> He also explains that the Lord will choose some members from each of those states and the others will be reprobated.<sup>781</sup> For Bede then, those who preach are in the first order, and the continent (which noticeably includes virgins) who have not applied themselves to the work of teaching are in the second order, and the married are in the third order.<sup>782</sup> Only those who exert themselves on behalf of others will be most exalted. In his commentary on the temple, Bede similarly suggested that those who have been committed to caring for the faithful and granted the keys of the kingdom of heaven rank higher than the rest of the faithful and must excel them in good actions, imitating in thought and action the life of angels on earth and the brightness of love should outshine the other flowers of virtue in them.<sup>783</sup>

While Bede regarded virgins as closer to God than the married, he is clear (like Augustine above) that all will share in the same eternal reward. He wrote that at the end of time the entire people of the Elect will be able to rejoice for all eternity in contemplation of God.<sup>784</sup> In his commentary on the temple, Bede explained that all the elect will share a common blessing but this will differ depending on their works for there are many mansions for the blessed in the

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<sup>779</sup> Bede, *De Tabernaculo*, bk.1, st.8: CCSL 119A, ll 1052-1056, 32; Holder (1994) 34, *In Noe namque qui archam in undis rexit praepositos ecclesiae in Danihele qui in aula regia continenter uiuere studuit continentes siue uirgines in Iob qui in coniugali uita positus mirandum cunctis exemplum patientiae praebuit bonorum uitam coniugatorum ostendit.*

<sup>780</sup> Bede, *De Tabernaculo*, bk.1, st.8: CCSL 119A, ll 1060-1062, 32; Holder (1994) 34, ... *in lecto quies continentium in agri cultura industria praedicantium in gyro molae labor exprimitur coniugatorum.*

<sup>781</sup> Bede, *De Tabernaculo*, bk.1, st.8: CCSL 119A, 32; Holder (1994) 34.

<sup>782</sup> Bede, *De Tabernaculo*, bk.1, st.8: CCSL 119A, 32; Holder (1994) 34.

<sup>783</sup> Bede, *De Templo*, bk.1, st.16.1: CCSL 119A, 186-187; Connolly (1995) 57.

<sup>784</sup> Bede, *Hom II.17*: CCSL 122, 308; Martin and Hurst (1991) 174. Cf. Bede, *Hom I.6*: CCSL 122, 45; Martin and Hurst (1991) 64. *Hom II.14*: CCSL 122, 273; Martin and Hurst (1991) 125. Bede, *De Tabernaculo*, bk.1, st.8: CCSL 119A, 31; Holder (1994) 33.

Father's house in heaven (see John 14:2).<sup>785</sup> In his discussion of the lampstand in his commentary on the tabernacle (as referred to above), Bede explained that the three branches all spring from the same shaft, which is Christ.<sup>786</sup> He added that even though all the branches proceed from different places on this shaft, they all reach to the same height at the top so that the lights on the branches of the lampstand are all positioned at the same level. This is because all the elect are imbued with one faith and even though their merits differ in rank, they all come to one light of eternal truth in heaven. However, the ones who try to cleave to Christ more in this life will enjoy a clearer vision of him in the heavenly life. They are the ones who will follow the Lamb wherever he goes (Rev 14:4) but all the peoples in heaven – as represented by the nearby branches on the lampstand – will be singing a new song before the throne and the four living creatures and the elders (Rev 14:3). Bede adds that 'those who in this life transcended the common life of the faithful by the special privilege of sacred virginity are there raised up into a special position above the others in the joy of song.'<sup>787</sup>

Bede, unlike Aldhelm, does not negatively compare the married to virgins and acknowledges that all the Elect from wherever they are called will share in the heavenly reward of all the faithful, although he does place virgins on a higher level. For Bede, though, those in the highest rank are the virgins both in body and soul who contain all the virtues, preach to others in the Church, and all their works are undertaken out of love.<sup>788</sup> Bede believed that all the just in this life try with all their strength to fulfil the Lord's greatest commandment, which is to love God and love their neighbour, and in the next life this commandment is brought to perfection.<sup>789</sup> In Bede's view the clearest way of demonstrating one's love for God and neighbour was through teaching.<sup>790</sup> It is unsurprising then, that all of Bede's outstanding saints behave in this fashion. Bede's Cuthbert exerted

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<sup>785</sup> Bede, *De Templo*, bk.2, st.18.14: *CCSL* 119A, 205-206; Connolly (1995) 82-83. Cf. *De Templo*, bk.2, st.25.3: *CCSL* 119A, 233-234; Connolly (1995) 117. See J. O'Reilly, intro., S. Connolly, tr., *Bede: On the Temple* (1995).

<sup>786</sup> Bede, *De Tabernaculo*, bk.1, st.8: *CCSL* 119A, 30 and 32; Holder (1994) 32 and 34.

<sup>787</sup> Bede, *De Tabernaculo*, bk.1, st.8: *CCSL* 119A, 32; Holder (1994) 34-35, ... *illi prae ceteris ibi specialius gaudio carminis sublimantur qui hic generalem uitam fidelium priuilegio sacrae uirginitatis trascenderunt.*

<sup>788</sup> See Bede, *De Tabernaculo*, bk.2: *CCSL* 119A, 58-59; Holder (1994) 65. Bede, *De Templo*, bk.1, st.16.1: *CCSL* 119A, 186-187; Connolly (1995) 57. See Bede, *Hom* II.14: *CCSL* 122, 276; Martin and Hurst (1991) 129, for description of love as the chief of virtues.

<sup>789</sup> Bede, *Hom* II.24: *CCSL* 122, 366; Martin and Hurst (1991) 252.

<sup>790</sup> See Chapter Two for discussion of this theme.

himself in preaching to various people throughout the kingdom, as he knew that assisting weaker brethren was equivalent to prayer because the Lord had said that one should love God and one's neighbour.<sup>791</sup> Bede described Æthelthryth as the virgin mother of many virgins through the example of her heavenly life and her teaching.<sup>792</sup> Her bodily remains were found to be incorrupt in her tomb and many miracles took place at this location to bear witness to the holiness of her life.<sup>793</sup> For Bede, there could be no doubt that because of the life she led, Æthelthryth belonged in the first order of the faithful and would be capable of following the Lamb wherever he goes for all eternity.

### **Æthelthryth's necklace**

Bede's account of the tumour on Æthelthryth's neck, which is related to her fondness for necklaces in her youth and is healed after her death leaving only a scar, has given rise to quite diverse interpretations. Most recently, Virginia Blanton has given this passage an overtly sexual meaning;<sup>794</sup> one that is, in this reader's view, wholly anachronistic. The key to understanding Æthelthryth's tumour is in Æthelthryth's reported speech on the subject. After Bede presented Æthelthryth's physician's account of her final illness and the discovery of her bodily incorruption at her translation including the *post mortem* healing of the wound he had made when lancing her tumour, he included Æthelthryth's reaction to her suffering and explanation for this:

It is also related that when she was afflicted with this tumour and by the pain in her neck and jaw, she gladly welcomed this sort of pain and used to say, 'I know well enough that I deserve to bear the weight of this affliction in my neck, for I remember that when I was a young girl I used to wear an unnecessary weight of necklaces; I believe that God in His goodness would have me endure this pain in my neck in order that I may thus be absolved

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<sup>791</sup> *HE* IV.28(26), 438-439. Bede describes Cuthbert as taking the yoke twice in his life – he firstly put his neck to the yoke of monastic discipline because of the sweetness of this way of life and he later submitted himself to the yoke of the episcopacy, *Vita Cuthberti*, c.1 and 24: Colgrave; Webb (1998) 45 and 77. See above for taking Christ's yoke.

<sup>792</sup> *HE* IV.19(17), 392-393. See Bede, *De Temporum Ratione*, c.66 (*Chronica Maiora*): *CCSL* 123B, 529; Wallis (1999) 232, for similar reference to Æthelthryth as mother of virgins, and see above.

<sup>793</sup> Bede also recorded Æthelthryth's incorruption in the *Chronica Maiora*: *CCSL* 123B, 529; Wallis (1999) 232, see above.

<sup>794</sup> See above.

from the guilt of my needless vanity. So, instead of gold and pearls, a fiery red tumour now stands out upon my neck.<sup>795</sup>

Æthelthryth's speech is the most didactic piece in this chapter and reveals that she understood and explained to everyone around her (including the reader of the *HE*) why she had received the tumour on her neck, and rejoiced that she had to bear it.<sup>796</sup> Æthelthryth's interpretation is also very much in line with biblical and patristic thinking on the subject of female adornment.

*(i) Dangers of Adornment*

The outward adornment of women was disapproved of from the beginning of Christian thinking. A concern for worldly things was regarded as inappropriate for Christian women and could distract them from more important concerns. Those who become pre-occupied with the desire for riches and temporal gains are the opposite of the Lord's bride, and in biblical terms are presented as the harlot or wanton wife, who is often attired in beautiful clothes with gold jewellery. Through her regard for worldliness, she ignores the wishes of her espoused Lord and, turning her back on their marriage, loses what the Lord had given her and her chance of eternal life. On this subject Ezekiel wrote that the harlot trusted in her beauty and abused the clothes and other beautiful things that the Lord had given her, which she subsequently lost (Ezek 16:15-18).<sup>797</sup> In Revelations the great harlot is described as 'clothed round about with purple and scarlet, and gilt with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand, full of the abomination and filthiness of her fornication' (Rev 17:4). After her condemnation she receives torment and sorrow for all the delicacies and glories she had enjoyed in the world, and all her riches become nothing.<sup>798</sup> Her seduction by this world and her rejection of God is undoubted. She is

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<sup>795</sup> *HE* IV.19(17), 394-397, *Ferunt autem quia, cum praefato tumore ac dolore maxillae siue colli premeretur, multum delectata sit hoc genere infirmitatis, ac solita dicere: 'Scio certissime quia merito in collo pondus languoris porto, in quo iuuenulam me memini superuacua moniliorum pondera portare; et credo quod ideo me superna pietas dolore colli uoluit grauari, ut sic absoluar reatu superuacuae leuitatis, dum mihi nunc pro auro et margaretis de collo rubor tumoris ardorque promineat.'*

<sup>796</sup> Blanton suggests that the lancing of Æthelthryth's throat by her doctor symbolically silences her (see above); however, Æthelthryth's important explanation for her illness comes after Bede described the doctor's work.

<sup>797</sup> Cf. Isaiah 1:21-22.

<sup>798</sup> See Rev 18:7,16-17. Cf. also Mich 1:7; Nah 3:4-5.



described as drunk from the blood of the saints and martyrs of Jesus, and when she has been destroyed the blood of the prophets and saints and all that were slain on earth is found in her (Rev 17:6; 18:24). Those who, like the whore of Babylon, focus their attention on worldly goods and temporal things thereby turning their backs on God cannot partake in the marriage-feast of the Lamb.

Christians are warned about behaving like the harlot and being pre-occupied with transient things. In the first letter to Timothy, the author wrote that women should be adorned with ‘modesty and sobriety, not with plaited hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly attire: But as it becometh women professing godliness, with good works’ (1Tim 2:9-10). Their true adornment takes place internally and is unseen by the world. Similarly, Peter, in his first epistle, wrote that women’s adorning should not be ‘the outward plaiting of the hair, or the wearing of the gold, or the putting on of apparel: But the hidden man of the heart, in the incorruptibility of a quiet and a meek spirit which is rich in the sight of God’ (1Pet 3:3-4). He warned women that they should be concerned with preserving purity and goodness in their hearts, adding that the holy women who trusted in God in the past adorned themselves in this way (1Pet 3:5-6). Although all Christian women are urged to ignore personal adornment, it is especially important that virgins who have resolved to turn their backs on the world and shun all forms of worldly approval avoid this behaviour.

Many Christian writers believed that personal adornment was introduced to the world by fallen angels. Cyprian wrote that sinning angels introduced practices like using make-up and hair-dye, so that they could drive truth from the face and head by their corruption.<sup>799</sup> As the virginal life was likened to the life of angels, it was especially important that virgins avoid behaviour brought into the world by fallen angels. Cyprian’s treatise, *On the Dress of Virgins*, makes clear what is appropriate for virgins and stresses the dangers of adornment. In referring to 1Tim 2:9 and 1Pet 3:3-4, he wrote that if even women who adorn themselves for their husbands need to restrain themselves because of religious observance, then there can be no defence for a virgin who wears fine clothes and jewellery as she cannot claim to be doing this in order to please anyone but herself.<sup>800</sup> He also

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<sup>799</sup> Cyprian, *De Habitu Virginis*, st.14: *PL* 4, 453-454; *ANF* 5, 434. See O’Sullivan, ‘The Image of Adornment,’ 56.

<sup>800</sup> Cyprian, *De Habitu Virginis*, st.8: *PL* 4, 447-448; *ANF* 5, 432.

warned that virgins should have nothing to do with earthly dress or any forms of adorning because while they are in this way striving to please men, they may offend God.<sup>801</sup> Cyprian wrote that the harlot city is described in Revelations because the Lord wished Christians to know what they must avoid. He continued to explain that if virgins who put on silk and purple can no longer put on Christ, or by adorning themselves with gold and silver and pearls they have lost the ornaments of the heart and spirit, then God will punish them.<sup>802</sup>

Tertullian similarly blamed fallen angels for the evils of adornment and wrote that they conferred these things particularly upon women because they knew that such ornamentation was displeasing to God. He continued to argue that as these are the angels that we renounce in baptism and are destined to judge, we should have nothing to do with them or ‘their things’.<sup>803</sup> He warned his readers that if they adorn themselves with cosmetics and will not keep God’s lineaments in their own persons, then they will similarly not be able to keep His precepts in their lives.<sup>804</sup> Tertullian also regarded earthly ornaments as bonds that endanger our hope and urged his readers to cast them away if they desire heavenly things.<sup>805</sup> He urged virgins to flee with Christ from all worldly allurements and follow him across the desert in strict fasting.<sup>806</sup> He urged them to remove cosmetics from their eyes and all the follies of artificial beauty, as these are the allurements of adulterous affection, and he stated that the ears were not intended to carry heavy loads but to be decorated by listening to what is profitable.<sup>807</sup>

Much of Jerome’s advice to the women in his circle concerned their need to avoid worldly ostentation. His attitude to the displays of worldly women is summed up most devastatingly in his *Epistle* 38 to Marcella. In this letter Jerome wrote that the women who cause scandal for all Christians are those who use cosmetics to paint their eyes and lips, and who make their faces unnaturally

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<sup>801</sup> Cyprian, *De Habitu Virginis*, st.5: *PL* 4, 444; *ANF* 5, 431. See also st.6: *PL* 4, 446; *ANF* 5, 432.

<sup>802</sup> Cyprian, *De Habitu Virginis*, st.12-13: *PL* 4, 450-452; *ANF* 5, 433-434.

<sup>803</sup> Tertullian, *De Cultu Feminarum*, bk.1, c.2: *CCSL* 1, 345-346; *ANF* 4, 15.

<sup>804</sup> Tertullian, *De Cultu Feminarum*, bk.2, c.5: *CCSL* 1, 358-359; *ANF* 4, 20-21.

<sup>805</sup> Tertullian, *De Cultu Feminarum*, bk.2, c.13: *CCSL* 1, 369-370; *ANF* 4, 25.

<sup>806</sup> Ambrose, *De Virginitate*, VIII.44: *PL* 16, 291; Callam (1996) 23. See also Ambrose, *De Virginitate*, bk. 1, c.9, st.52: *PL* 16, 214; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 10, 371, where he writes that a virgin is the bride of Christ, but harlots make gods for themselves.

<sup>807</sup> Ambrose, *De Virginitate*, XIII.79: *PL* 16, 300; Callam (1996) 37. See also Ambrose, *De Virginitate*, XII.71 and XIII.82: *PL* 16, 298 and 301; Callam (1996) 33 and 38.

white with chalk, ‘like those of idols; upon whose cheeks every chance tear leaves a furrow’. He continued to say that women who behave like this fail to realize that it is the years that make them old and therefore attempt to remove all the signs of old age, while heaping their heads with hair that is not their own, and disgracefully behaving like trembling school-girls in the presence of their grandsons. He completed this attack by writing that ‘A Christian woman should blush to do violence to nature, or to stimulate desire by bestowing care upon the flesh. “They that are in the flesh,” the apostle tells us, “cannot please God.”’<sup>808</sup> In a letter to Furia on the same theme he wrote that adorning of that type ‘is not of the Lord; a mask of this kind belongs to Antichrist. With what confidence can a woman raise features to heaven which her Creator must fail to recognize?’<sup>809</sup> He also told Furia that indulging in such behaviour indicates an unchaste mind.<sup>810</sup> Jerome, like Cyprian, was concerned that women were concentrating all their efforts on attempting to change their features to receive attention from those around them and ignoring God. Jerome similarly disapproved of those who adorned themselves with jewels and gold chains or in anyway ornamented their hair.<sup>811</sup> He warned Marcella to consider what is said about the woman in purple and the end of Babylon in Revelations and the Lord’s advice to come away from her and not partake of her sins.<sup>812</sup> Jerome praised the lives of those women who were careless of their clothing, but he warned against wearing extremely plain clothing in an attempt to draw attention and praise, writing that Blaesilla’s attire

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<sup>808</sup> Jerome, *Ep.*38.3, referring to Rom 8:8: Labourt, 2, 69; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 6, 48, *Illae Christianos oculos potius scandalizent quae purpurisso et quibusdam fucis ora oculosque depingunt, quarum facies gypseae et nimio candore deformes idola mentiuntur, quibus si forte inprudens lacrimarum stilla eruperit, sulco defluit, quas nec numerus annorum potest docere quod uetulae sunt, quae capillis alienis uerticem instruunt, et praeteritam iuuentutem in rugis anilibus poliunt, quae denique ante nepotum gregem trementes uirgunculae conponuntur. Erubescat mulier Christiana, si naturae cogit decorem, si carnis curam facit ad concupiscentiam, in qua qui sunt secundum apostolum Christo placere non possunt.* Cf. also *Ep.*107.5: Labourt, 5, 150; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 6, 191. *Ep.*108.15: Labourt, 5, 177; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 6, 202-203. *Ep.*127.3: Labourt, 7, 139; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 6, 254. *Ep.*130.7: Labourt, 7, 176-177; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 6, 265. This is similar to Cyprian, above, *De Habitu Virginis*, st.14: *PL* 4, 452-454; *ANF* 5, 434. See also Tertullian, who cites similar arguments, *De Cultu Feminarum*, bk.2, c.5: *CCSL* 1, 357-359; *ANF* 4, 20-21; Ambrose, *De Virginibus*, bk.1, c.6, st.28: *PL* 16, 207; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 10, 367.

<sup>809</sup> Jerome, *Ep.*54.7: Labourt, 3, 30; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 6, 104, *Ornatus iste non Domini est, uelamen istud antichristi est. Qua fiducia erigit ad caelum uultus quos conditor non agnoscat?*

<sup>810</sup> Jerome, *Ep.*54.7: Labourt, 3, 30; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 6, 104.

<sup>811</sup> For jewellery, see *Ep.*107.5: Labourt, 5, 150; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 6, 191. *Ep.*127.3: Labourt, 7, 139; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 6, 254. *Ep.*130.7: Labourt, 7, 176-177; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 6, 265. For hair, see *Ep.*38.3: Labourt, 2, 69; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 6, 48. *Ep.*107.5: Labourt, 5, 150; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 6, 191-192. *Ep.*130.7: Labourt, 7, 176-177; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 6, 265.

<sup>812</sup> Jerome, *Ep.*46.12: Labourt, 2, 112; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 64.

was plain, ‘but this plainness was not, as it often is, a mark of pride’.<sup>813</sup>

Augustine also warned virgins to avoid worldly behaviour, urging them not to wear clothes that were too elegant for their chosen life or to dress their hair in elaborate or outlandish styles.<sup>814</sup>

(ii) *Heavenly Adornment*

Although outward adornment was vigorously criticised, the language of ornamentation was also given a spiritual interpretation. Indeed the tradition of interpreting garments and jewels symbolically and spiritually is already in scriptural texts. We have already seen that the gloriously coloured garments of the queen and the king’s daughter from Psalm 44(45) were related to the diversity of virtues in the virgin dedicated to Christ.<sup>815</sup> In a masterful piece, Tertullian applied all the trappings of worldly beauty to the inner person. He disapproved of the use of cosmetics and other adornments (as does Jerome later) and inverted this imagery to urge his audience to be:

arrayed in the cosmetics and ornaments of prophets and apostles; drawing your whiteness from simplicity, your ruddy hue from modesty; painting your eyes with bashfulness, and your mouth with silence; implanting in your ears the words of God; fitting on your necks the yoke of Christ. Submit your head to your husbands, and you will be enough adorned. Busy your hands with spinning; keep your feet at home; and you will “please” better than (by arraying yourselves) in gold. Clothe yourselves with the silk of uprightness, the fine linen of holiness, the purple of modesty. Thus painted, you will have God as your Lover!<sup>816</sup>

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<sup>813</sup> Jerome, *Ep.*39.1: Labourt, 2, 72; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 6, 49. Jerome similarly recognised the dangers of Pride, particularly for virgins who had dedicated themselves to God and chosen the life of humility. See above for Augustine on this.

<sup>814</sup> Augustine, *De Sancta Virginitate*, st.34(34): *PL* 40, 415; *WSA* I.9, 90.

<sup>815</sup> See above. Jerome, *Ep.*130.2: Labourt, 7, 167; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 6, 261. See also Jerome, *Ep.*107.7: Labourt, 5, 152; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 6, 192.

<sup>816</sup> Tertullian, *De Cultu Feminarum*, bk.2, c.13: *CCSL* 1, 370; *ANF* 4, 25, *Prodite uos iam medicamentis et ornamentis exstructae prophetarum et apostolorum, sumentes de simplicitate candorem, de pudicitia ruborem, depictae oculos uerecundia et os taciturnitate inserentes in aures sermonem dei, adnectentes ceruicibus iugum Christi. Caput maritis subicite, et satis ornatae eritis. Manus lanis occupate, pedes domi figite, et plus quam in auro placebunt. Vestite uos serico probitatis, byssino sanctitatis, purpura pudicitiae. Taliter pigmentatae deum habebunt amatorem.* Cf. John Chrysostom who wrote that the woman who ‘adorns her soul has God as the lover of her beauty (*Nam cum ea quae animam ornat, Deum suae pulchritudinis habeat amatorem ...*),’ *Quod Regulares Feminae Viris Cohabitare non Debeant*, st.10: *PG* 47, st.7, 528; Clark (1979) 239.

All the beautiful things desired by the worldly for their physical improvement are here given a spiritual meaning, thereby presenting the means by which the pure soul will be accepted by Christ as his bride. Cyprian similarly wrote that the virgin should not seek to be ornamented with garments or necklaces but by her conduct.<sup>817</sup> In his *Life of Macrina*, Gregory of Nyssa attested that the only form of adornment his sister ever wanted was the pure life, which he described as the ‘ornament of her life and the shroud of death’.<sup>818</sup> Ambrose told the recipients of his *De Virginibus*, including his sister, that they were fortunate not to have to be concerned with adorning themselves with expensive clothing or jewels for husbands and so are free to become more beautiful through their holy modesty and sweet chastity. Their own beauty furnished through the practice of virtues will endure forever, unlike bodily beauty that can be impaired through age or sickness and will be lost through death.<sup>819</sup> In his description of Agnes’ martyrdom in this work, Ambrose wrote that she went joyfully to the place of punishment having ‘her head not adorned with plaited hair, but with Christ.’<sup>820</sup>

This internal adorning of the soul with virtues is the only sort of adornment that Christ, the heavenly spouse, wants. John Chrysostom wrote that the Bridegroom has commanded that all of a person’s glory should be deposited in their soul.<sup>821</sup> He also wrote that pure souls are golden, and glow even more through their contact with God.<sup>822</sup> John Cassian believed that the good and bad qualities that we attain in this life stay with us after death as our possessions and the soul will be beautiful or ugly for eternity depending on its virtues or vices. If the soul had un-repentant sins or other faults that it never removed then it will be stained with foul colours and be black and ugly; similarly, if the soul had cast off sin and acquired good qualities, particularly charity, which is the source of all goodness, it will be lovely and glorious and may hear from the prophet ‘And the

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<sup>817</sup> See Cyprian, *De Habitu Virginis*, st.22: *PL* 4, 462; *ANF* 5, 436. Cyprian also wrote that the sufferings of martyrdom were the precious jewels of the flesh and the better ornaments of the body, *De Habitu Virginis*, st.6: *PL* 4, 446; *ANF* 5, 432.

<sup>818</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *Vita S. Macrinae Virginis*: *PG* 46, 990; *FOTC* 58, 184, ... *quod et vitam ipsius decoraret et sepulturam*.

<sup>819</sup> Ambrose, *De Virginibus*, bk.1, c.6, st.30: *PL* 16, 208; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 10, 368.

<sup>820</sup> Ambrose, *De Virginibus*, bk.1, c.2, st.8: *PL* 16, 201; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 10, 364, ... *non intorto crine caput compta, sed Christo*.

<sup>821</sup> John Chrysostom, *Quod Regulares Feminae Viris Cohabitare non Debeant*, st.10: *PG* 47, st.7, 528; Clark (1979) 239.

<sup>822</sup> John Chrysostom, *Quod Regulares Feminae Viris Cohabitare non Debeant*, st.9: *PG* 47, st.7, 527; Clark (1979) 238.

king shall greatly desire thy beauty' (Ps 44:12). If we renounce our sins we can attain perfection but by clinging to them we shall suffer the punishment of eternal death.<sup>823</sup> Prudentius' *Psychomachia* describes the victory of the virtues over the vices in the battle for the soul, and after the virtues are victorious in the soul where sin used to reign, he describes the adorning of this with the jewels of the virtues, as the Lord builds his temple of gold there in which Wisdom will rule.<sup>824</sup> In his exposition of Psalm 44(45), Augustine described the ivory palaces of verse nine as the magnificent houses and tabernacles of God, which are the hearts or the souls of the saints, who rule over their flesh.<sup>825</sup> Cassiodorus writes that these ivory houses refer to women who have followed the Lord's precepts through chastity.<sup>826</sup>

The soul of the virtuous virgin is then adorned with the virtues as a bride prepared for her husband and will be resplendent in white robes for all eternity. The biblical descriptions of the bride refer to her, just as the harlot represents the worldly that turn their backs to God. The prophet Isaiah describes the future adorning of the Lord's chosen, writing that she will be clothed with the garments of salvation, with the robe of justice and will be like a bridegroom with his crown and a bride with her jewels (Is 61:10).<sup>827</sup> A little later he writes that when the just and glorious one comes to his bride, she will be 'a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God', and the bridegroom shall rejoice over his bride and God will rejoice over her (Is 62:1-5).<sup>828</sup> The bride's beauty and adornments are described in Psalm 44(45) and in the Song of Songs. In the book of Revelations, the bride of the Lamb is prepared for her marriage: 'And it is granted to her that she should clothe herself with fine linen, glittering and white. For the fine linen are the justifications of saints' (Rev 19:8). The glory of the new Jerusalem who descends from heaven as a 'bride adorned for her husband' (21:2) is recounted in Rev 21:11-21: the city is built of precious stones and the walls are of jasper, it is pure gold 'like to clear glass', and the

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<sup>823</sup> John Cassian, *Conl.* 3, c.8: *SC* 42, 151; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 11, 323-324.

<sup>824</sup> Prudentius, *Psychomachia* ll 910-915: Burton, *BMLC* (2004) 34; *FOTC* 52, 110.

<sup>825</sup> Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, Ps.44: *CCSL* 38, st.23, 510; *NPNF* 1<sup>st</sup> series, 8, st.21, 8, 152. Augustine reminded virgins that God wants interior beauty from them, adding that he does not look for bodily beauty but the moral beauty of their having control over their bodies, *De Sancta Virginitate*, st.(55)56: *PL* 40, 428; *WSA* I.9, 104.

<sup>826</sup> Cassiodorus, *Expositio Psalmorum*, Ps.44.10: *CCSL* 97, 409; *ACW* 51, 446.

<sup>827</sup> See Chapter One for discussion of this verse.

<sup>828</sup> See also Is 49:18-21.

foundations of the walls of the city are adorned with various sorts of precious stones – the twelve foundations each from a different, named gem – the gates are each made from different pearls and the street is pure gold.

The bride is similarly described as beautifully adorned in Ezekiel 16. Ezekiel presented the Lord's relationship with Israel as a marriage and explained that the Lord had found her as an outcast and entered into a covenant with her, giving her embroidered clothes, fine linen, violet coloured shoes and ornaments including bracelets, chains for her neck, jewels, earrings and a beautiful crown. She was 'adorned with gold and silver' and was 'made exceeding beautiful' by the Lord and was 'advanced to be a queen' (Ezek 16:10-14). However the bride trusted in her beauty and was unfaithful to the Lord, and misused all the good things he had given her. Israel became like a harlot but repented, was subsequently punished for her transgressions, and through this chastisement brought back to the Lord (Ezek 16:15-63). Jeremiah describes a similar process, noting that God took pity on Israel because he loves her with an everlasting love and resolved to build her up and adorn her once again (Jer 31:3-4). Anyone who turns away from the Lord will suffer this fate and lose all the good things that they have received from him. Jerome warned Eustochium, who he likened to the queen of Psalm 44, that if she fell into sin she would go from being the beautifully attired queen to the disgraced harlot described by Ezekiel and Jeremiah, and he added 'I pray you, let not Zion the faithful city become a harlot: let it not be that where the Trinity has been entertained, there demons shall dance and owls make their nests, and jackals build.'<sup>829</sup>

If she is faithful to her espoused, the Lord's bride will be glorified in heaven for her purity. In Revelations those who have not been defiled and follow the Lamb will walk with the Lord in white, which will be given to them;<sup>830</sup> the Bride of the Lamb is dressed in fine linen that is glittering and white;<sup>831</sup> and the heavenly hosts are also arrayed in white, as Christ will be when revealed in his

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<sup>829</sup> Jerome, *Ep.22.6*, referring to Jer 13:26, Ezek 16:25 and Is 1:21: Labourt, 1, 116; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series 6, 24, *Non fiat, obsecro, ciuitas meretrix fidelis Sion, ne post trinitatis hospitium ibi daemones saltent et sirenae, nidificent et hiricii.*

<sup>830</sup> See Rev 3:4-5, 18; 6:11; 7:9. Cf. Ecclesiastes 9:8.

<sup>831</sup> Rev 19:8. Fine linen is associated with virginity and chastity, see Origen, *In Exodum homiliae (Homilies on Exodus)*, 9.3: SC 321, 292; *FOTC* 71, 340; Gregory the Great, *Regula Pastoralis*, part 2.3: SC 381, 186; ACW 11, 51.

glory.<sup>832</sup> In his letter to Eustochium, Jerome told her that when the bride of Christ has fully desired true Wisdom, scaled the heights of virtue and has come to her Lord, He will bring her into his chamber (see Song of Songs 1:3) and miraculously transform her from her natural blackness to white (Song of Songs 1:4); then it will be said of her, who is this that goes up and has been made white (Song of Songs 8:5)?<sup>833</sup> Jerome urged many of the women in his circle to strive to keep their garments white and like the lily, the symbol of virginity. In a letter to Demetrias, he wrote that we are told that the Bridegroom feeds among the lilies (Song of Songs 2:16), meaning that he is among those souls who listened to his precept to keep their garments white (Eccles 9:8) and have remained virgins.<sup>834</sup> In his consoling letters written to close relatives of recently deceased women, Jerome often assured them that those who had lived virtuous lives here are now clothed in white raiment and following the Lamb.<sup>835</sup> In his work *Concerning Virgins* Ambrose described the kingdom where virgins would be adorned with gold and beauty because of their faith and devotion to the Lord.<sup>836</sup> Venantius Fortunatus' *De Virginitate* describes the celestial wedding between the faithful virgin and Christ. Before the choirs of heaven Christ praises the virgin for her constancy and devotion while awaiting his coming and she is vested in state robe and jewels.<sup>837</sup> Brian Brennan argues that it is only through virginity that women can achieve this immortal royal status.<sup>838</sup> Many commentators believed that signs such as *post mortem* bodily incorruption or fragrant odours like flowers at virgins' tombs revealed the purity of the deceased and that they have been rewarded with eternal glory.<sup>839</sup>

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<sup>832</sup> For Christ, Dan 7:9; Matt 17:2; Mark 9:2; Luke 9:29; Rev 19:13.

<sup>833</sup> Jerome, *Ep.*22.1 (Song of Songs 8:5 in the Septuagint version): Labourt, 1, 111-112; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 6, 23.

<sup>834</sup> Jerome, *Ep.*130.8: Labourt, 7, 177-178; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 6, 265. Cf. *Ep.*108.31: Labourt, 5, 200; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 6 (*Ep.*108.32), 211, where he also says that the lily represents virginity. See also Jerome, *Liber ad Pammachium*, st.34: *CCSL* 79A, 62-63; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 6, 441-442. Cf. Gregory the Great, *Mor.* 24.17: *CCSL* 143B, 1199-1200; Bliss (1844-1850) III, part I, 61.

<sup>835</sup> See Jerome, *Ep.*39.1 (on the death of Blaesilla): Labourt, 2, 72; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 6, 49. *Ep.*77.12 (on the death of Fabiola): Labourt, 4, 52; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 6, 162. *Ep.*108.22 (on the death of Paula): Labourt, 5, 189; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 6, 207.

<sup>836</sup> Ambrose, *De Virginitate*, bk. 1, c.7, st.37: *PL* 16, 210; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 10, 369.

<sup>837</sup> Brennan, 'Deathless Marriage,' 78 and 92.

<sup>838</sup> Brennan, 'Deathless Marriage,' 82-83 and 86.

<sup>839</sup> See Ambrose, *De Virginitate*, bk. 1, c.7, st.39: *PL* 16, 210; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 10, 369.

Augustine said that the perfumed garments of Psalm 44:9 are the saints in Christ's Church, who are a sweet savour in Christ, see *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, Ps.44: *CCSL* 38, st.22, 509-510; *NPNF* 1<sup>st</sup> series, 8, st.20, 152. See Brennan, 'Deathless Marriage' (1996) 85, for Frankish



(iii) *Adornment in Anglo-Saxon sources*

The patristic attitude to adornment greatly influenced Aldhelm in his *De Virginitate*.<sup>840</sup> Aldhelm warned his readers that worldly ostentation is undoubtedly a sign of inexcusable arrogance ‘from the fact that no one wishes to be dressed in precious and colourful clothing when she can be seen by no one.’<sup>841</sup> He compared the married woman with the virgin, noting that the married woman decorated herself with jewellery while the virgin desires to be adorned by her virtues and merits, and he also likened the married woman to the whore of Babylon (Rev 17:3-4) who is both pleasing and harmful to spectators, while the virgin displays chaste behaviour and the example of the heavenly citizens to those who wish to follow her.<sup>842</sup> Sinéad O’Sullivan notes that Aldhelm distinguished between the virginal and married states and described these in terms of inner and outer adornment, explaining that inner adornment and spiritual virginity went together, while outer adornment revealed a concern for worldly things.<sup>843</sup> She continues to argue that in Aldhelm’s view, earthly adornments are symbols of sin and death, and for this reason many of the virgins in his *De Virginitate* refuse to receive these gifts from would-be suitors, preferring to receive spiritual adornments from their heavenly bridegroom instead.<sup>844</sup>

Stephen’s *Life of Wilfrid* contains a narrative illustration of the Christian attitude to adornment, demonstrating this writer’s awareness of patristic thinking. Wilfrid was thrown into jail after falling out of favour with Egfrith and all his possessions, including his reliquary containing holy relics, were confiscated. Queen Iurminburg took his reliquary and wore this as an ornament when she was

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accounts of such miracles. Gregory of Nyssa wrote that his sister’s body glowed in the darkness in the room where she was laid out, *Vita S. Macrinae Virginis*: PG 46, 991; *FOTC* 58, 186.

<sup>840</sup> See Aldhelm, *Prose De Virginitate*, LV-LVIII: CCSL 124A, 715-733; Lapidge (1979) 124-128. Sinéad O’Sullivan says that Aldhelm regarded ‘ornamentation as a female allurements’, ‘Aldhelm’s *De Virginitate*,’ 279.

<sup>841</sup> Aldhelm, *Prose De Virginitate*, LV: CCSL 124A, 721; Lapidge (1979) 125, ... *quod nemo ibi pretiosis et coloratis uestibus indui desiderat, ubi a nullo ualet uideri*.

<sup>842</sup> Aldhelm, *Prose De Virginitate*, XVII: CCSL 124A, 197-203; Lapidge (1979) 73. Aldhelm also believed that female adornment was dangerous for men, *Prose De Virginitate*, LVII: CCSL 124A, 731; Lapidge (1979) 127.

<sup>843</sup> O’Sullivan, ‘The Image of Adornment,’ 49-50.

<sup>844</sup> O’Sullivan, ‘The Image of Adornment,’ 53-54. Cf. O’Sullivan, ‘Aldhelm’s *De Virginitate*,’ 279. See e.g. description of Agnes in Aldhelm, *Carmen De Virginitate*, 1930-1950: Rosier (1985) 146.

at home and abroad in her chariot. Stephen explains that this action brought evil to her, as evil came to the Philistines after they routed the people of Israel and brought the captured Ark of the Covenant through their cities.<sup>845</sup> Stephen returns to the queen later when describing the royal party's progress around the kingdom until they reached the monastery of Coldingham under the abbacy of Æbbe, Ecgfrith's aunt. While there the queen became seriously ill and Æbbe believed close to death. She warned the king that his mistreatment of Wilfrid had brought this about, and told him to release Wilfrid from prison and return the relics that the queen had taken from his neck and carried around like the Ark of God leading to her destruction. She added that if Ecgfrith was unwilling to let Wilfrid remain in Northumbria then he should allow him to leave the kingdom with his friends; doing all this would ensure the queen's recovery but if Ecgfrith refused to do so, he would not go unpunished. Ecgfrith quickly followed his aunt's advice and the queen recovered.<sup>846</sup> This short anecdote is very revealing about attitudes to adornment. Even though Iurminburg is divinely chastised for wearing the reliquary, Wilfrid had previously been wearing it around his neck, which was clearly not a sin. Stephen twice likened the reliquary to the Ark of the Covenant, which spread illness among the Philistines after they had captured it as only the worthy could possess the Ark. Wilfrid's reliquary of the saints could similarly be worn only by those who were worthy of it. Iurminburg misunderstood the nature of the reliquary and treated it merely as 'an ornament' with which she could adorn herself, thus revealing her concern for external appearances rather than inner virtues and she was subsequently struck down in Old Testament fashion for her abuse of the holy object. Wilfrid, on the other hand, wore the reliquary for devotional reasons and because of his spiritual virtues was fit to bear the relics of the saints.

It is in this context that the behaviour of the Coldingham community must also be considered. Their interest in adorning themselves 'as if they were brides', when they should have been concerned about cultivating the virtues of modesty and sobriety (see 1Tim 2:9-10) led to their downfall. Indeed they behave like the whore of Babylon being only concerned with transient things and worldly acclaim. By turning their backs to their heavenly spouse and behaving like

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<sup>845</sup> *Life of Wilfrid*, c.34, referring to 1Kings (Sam) 4-6: Colgrave (1985) 70-71.

<sup>846</sup> *Life of Wilfrid*, c.39: Colgrave (1985) 78-79.

earthly brides, they lose out on all the good things of the Lord and even compromise their heavenly reward. In his commentary on Peter's first epistle Bede wrote about the dangers of adornment, explaining that if married women who adorn themselves for the sake of their husbands are urged not to do this because of their religious observance, then there can be no excuse for the dedicated virgin who engages in this behaviour.<sup>847</sup> The fate of Coldingham demonstrates this belief and fulfils the prediction of Cyprian that virgins who wear fine clothes and adorn themselves will lose the ornaments of the heart and spirit, will not be able to put on Christ, and will be punished by God.<sup>848</sup>

(iv) *Æthelthryth's statement*

The Christian view of external female adornment underlies Æthelthryth's statement on wearing too many necklaces in her youth. She is aware of the dangers of worldliness and is happy to repent for her behaviour. However, the relatively minor nature of Æthelthryth's transgression is worth noting: in her youth, before she took the veil and habit of a virgin, she wore necklaces. Considering her royal background and the importance of treasure in Anglo-Saxon culture, this is not an outrageous revelation.<sup>849</sup> Indeed, Æthelthryth's words recognise that her sin was minor, she describes it as *superuacua leuitas* (unnecessary shallowness/lightness/fickleness).<sup>850</sup> This is not vanity and is certainly not the dangerous sin of pride, as claimed by Virginia Blanton recently, who also regards this passage 'as a moral lesson on female vanity.'<sup>851</sup> Æthelthryth's behaviour is nothing like the ostentatious displays of worldly women criticised by Jerome and other writers. She could not be accused of doing violence to nature by changing her features with cosmetics or ornamenting her

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<sup>847</sup> Bede, *In Epistolas Septem Catholicas (On the Seven Catholic Epistles)*, 1 Pet 3.3: CCSL 121, 243; Hurst (1985) 95.

<sup>848</sup> Cyprian, *De Habitu Virginis*, st.12-13: PL 4, 450-452; ANF 5, 433-434; see above.

<sup>849</sup> See *Beowulf* and consider the material evidence from Sutton Hoo and even Whitby. However, cf. Jerome on Paula, who believed that she should disfigure her face because she used to apply rouge, white lead and antimony, needed to weep because she used to laugh, *etc.*, *Ep.*108.15: Labourt, 5, 176-177; NPNF 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 6, 203.

<sup>850</sup> *HE* IV.19(17), 396-397; see above.

<sup>851</sup> Blanton, *Signs of Devotion* 46-51; see above. Blanton also dislikes that Bede places words in Æthelthryth's mouth and these suggest that the punishment for woman's vanity is disease and women should be grateful for this, 49. Considering the orthodox nature of Æthelthryth's interpretation of her tumour, which is presented to the reader of the *HE*, Bede's account suggests her spiritual maturity.

hair, thereby making herself unrecognisable to God.<sup>852</sup> However, as Christian women are urged to forego all forms of adornment, from the strictest viewpoint Æthelthryth's behaviour could be deemed inappropriate, even for a secular member of the Anglo-Saxon aristocracy. In commenting on her tumour, Æthelthryth said that 'instead of gold and pearls, a fiery red tumour now stands out upon my neck.'<sup>853</sup> She knew that the tumour adorned her neck and that this would absolve her of her earlier sin. Through this suffering she would be made perfect and could be presented to the heavenly bridegroom adorned with her virtues.<sup>854</sup>

(v) *White and red*

Æthelthryth's description of her tumour is very important, because the virtuous are often described as white and ruddy (red) in a reference to Song of Songs 5:10: 'My beloved is white and ruddy (*candidus et rubicundus*), chosen out of thousands.'<sup>855</sup> This verse is commonly related to Christ who is described as white and ruddy, suggesting his bloodstained body at the Passion and his later glorified body. The red and white were also a means of signifying the two natures in Him – human and divine.<sup>856</sup> Ambrose wrote that it was important for virgins to fully know their beloved, who is white and ruddy, and to recognize the mystery of his Divine nature and the body he assumed: He is white as He is the Brightness of the Father, and ruddy because He was born of a virgin.<sup>857</sup> The two colours in the Beloved were also related to his virginity and martyrdom: white for virginity, red for martyrdom.<sup>858</sup> The beloved of the Song of Songs is also linked with Isaiah

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<sup>852</sup> See above.

<sup>853</sup> *HE* IV.19(17), 396-397, ... *mihi nunc pro auro et margaretis de collo rubor tumoris ardorque promineat.*

<sup>854</sup> This is a major theme in the Christian tradition. See 1Pet 5:10, 'But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory in Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a little, will himself perfect you and confirm you and establish you.' See also Matt 5:48; 19:21; Luke 8:15; John 17:23; Acts 3:16; Rom 12:2; 1Cor 2:6; 2Cor 7:1; 12:9; 13:9, 11; Gal 3:3; Eph 4:12-13; Phil 3:12, 15; Col 1:28; 4:12; 2Tim 3:17; Heb 2:10; 6:1; 9:9, 11; 10:1, 14; 11:40; 12:23; Jam 1:4, 17, 25; 2:22; 1John 2:5; 4:12, 17-18. Cf. Gen 17:1; Deut 18:13.

<sup>855</sup> The following verses describe the beloved's beauty in detail (11-16).

<sup>856</sup> See J. O'Reilly, '*Candidus et Rubicundus*: An image of Martyrdom in the *Lives* of Thomas Becket,' *Analecta Bollandiana* 9, 303-314 at 304. O'Reilly also explains that 'the whiteness of his purity and innocence in life illumined the redness of his death, as the radiance of his whiteness was made even more glorious by virtue of his bloody Passion', 307.

<sup>857</sup> Ambrose, *De Virginibus*, bk.1, c.9, st.46: *PL* 16, 212; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 10, 370.

<sup>858</sup> See Jerome, *Adversus Jovinianum*, bk.1:31: *PL* 23, 254; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 6, 369-370.

63:1-4, where an unrecognised but beautiful figure is seen coming from Edom wearing garments that have been dyed red with blood. Jerome combines these two passages and says that his garments are red and shining because he has conquered the world, but because of the glory of his triumph they are changed into a white robe.<sup>859</sup> At the end of Prudentius' *Psychomachia*, Wisdom sits enthroned in the pure soul after the vices have been defeated and holds a living sceptre of green wood (which was prefigured by Aaron's rod that flowered) that blooms with blood-red roses and white lilies.<sup>860</sup> Bede also notes that it has been mystically indicated in Scripture that the Mediator between God and Man would be of two colours, white and ruddy.<sup>861</sup>

Red and white complexions were regarded as desirable in the ancient world and were likened to roses and lilies but exegesis on Song of Songs 5:10 gave this a spiritual meaning. Worldly women tried to make themselves white and red with cosmetics but the Lord's chosen, avoiding such physical adornment, spiritually share in the Lord's twofold colouring. The writer of Revelations described those who come out of the great tribulation of Revelations 7:14 as wearing white robes that have been washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb.<sup>862</sup> White is associated with purity, particularly with the purity of virginity,<sup>863</sup> and red usually refers to the glory of martyrdom.<sup>864</sup> Indeed virgins who die as martyrs are directly imitating Christ and can be regarded as being both white and ruddy.<sup>865</sup> However, it was not necessary to suffer actual martyrdom to be crowned with both colours. In Jerome's letter to Eustochium on the death of her mother, Paula, who had spent much of her widowhood living the celibate life in Bethlehem under his guidance, Jerome referred to Song of Songs 5:10. Earlier in the letter, he wrote that Paula wished to disfigure her face as she

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<sup>859</sup> Jerome, *Liber ad Pammachium*, st.34: *CCSL* 79A, 62-67; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 6, 441-442 (Jerome interprets Edom as 'either earthly or bloody', 441). See O'Reilly, 'Candidus et Rubicundus,' 309-310.

<sup>860</sup> Prudentius, *Psychomachia*, ll 881-888: Burton, *BMLC* (2004) 33; *FOTC* 52, 108-109. See J. O'Reilly, *Studies in the Iconography of the Virtues and Vices in the Middle Ages* (New York and London 1988) 27 and 32, who notes that these symbolize the Incarnation and Redemption.

<sup>861</sup> Bede, *De Schematibus et Tropis (Concerning Figures and Tropes)*, c.2: *CCSL* 123A, 165-166; Tannenhaus (1973) 119.

<sup>862</sup> Cf. Rev 22:14. See O'Reilly, 'Candidus et Rubicundus,' 307-308.

<sup>863</sup> See Jerome, *Adversus Jovinianum*, bk.1:29: *PL* 23, 251; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 6, 368. See above for virgins made white and dressed in white robes.

<sup>864</sup> See Brennan, 'Deathless Marriage,' 84-85, on this imagery.

<sup>865</sup> See Ambrose, *De Virginibus*, bk.1, c.2, st.9: *PL* 16, 201-202; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 10, 364-365; bk.1, c.3, st.10: *PL* 16, 202; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 10, 365.

had previously painted it with rouge, white lead and antimony.<sup>866</sup> When describing her death Jerome told Eustochium that her mother had won her crown after a long martyrdom and explained that blood need not be spilt to receive that crown, as ‘the spotless service of a devout mind is itself a daily martyrdom’. He continued to say that both are crowned, one with roses and violets and the other with lilies (the lily being associated with the reward of chastity), and added that it is for this reason that the Song of Songs describes the beloved as white and ruddy, because whether the victory is won in peace or war, God gives the same reward to all those who win it.<sup>867</sup>

Bede believed that virgins and martyrs were very closely linked and raised higher than all others but, unlike many Church Fathers, Bede believed that virgins were closer to God. In discussing the different coloured coverings of rams’ skins on the tabernacle, he explained that the dyed red skins were on the roof as they represent the apostles and apostolic men whose teaching led to their martyrdom, and over these skins there was another covering of blue-coloured skins representing virgins, because sacred virginity holds a special place even among the pre-eminent members of the Church. He continued to praise virgins and wrote that the blue-coloured skins are the highest in the tabernacle of God, because the heavenly colour is positioned near heaven and indicates virgins in body and soul who follow the Lamb especially closely.<sup>868</sup> Bede also explained that the red and blue-coloured skins were on the roof and did not touch the ground unlike the veils of the curtains and coverings and the columns and boards, which all reached the ground, because the prize of martyrdom and the dignity of virginity consecrated to God are elevated above all the lowly things of this earth and associated especially with the citizens of heaven.<sup>869</sup> As martyrs were rare in the post-persecution Church, virgins dedicated to God from both sexes became increasingly important. Bede’s *Martyrology* commemorates many saints that

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<sup>866</sup> Jerome, *Ep.*108.15: Labourt, 5, 176-177; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 6, 203.

<sup>867</sup> Jerome, *Ep.*108.31: Labourt, 5, 200; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 6 (*Ep.*108.32), 211, ... *sed deuotae quoque mentis seruitus immaculata cotidianum martyrium est* ... Cf. Gregory of Nyssa, *De Virginitate*, c.23: *PG* 46, c.24, 414-415; *FOTC* 58, 74-75. Baudonivia, *The Life of Saint Radegund*, 2: Petersen (1996) 422, which states that Gregory of Tours came to visit the place where Radegunde’s body lay and said that her face was resplendent like the rose and the lily.

<sup>868</sup> Bede, *De Tabernaculo*, bk.2: *CCSL* 119A, 58; Holder (1994) 64-65.

<sup>869</sup> Bede, *De Tabernaculo*, bk.2: *CCSL* 119A, 58-59; Holder (1994) 65.

were not physically martyred and Æthelthryth is among them.<sup>870</sup> Indeed apart from her, the only other Anglo-Saxons featured in this calendar are the two Hewalds, whose inclusion is more expected as they were the only Anglo-Saxon martyrs from the period.<sup>871</sup>

In Bede's account of Æthelthryth in the *HE*, it is clear that instead of gold and pearls a *red* tumour adorns her neck. Her physician lanced the tumour three days before her death and she was buried with a gaping wound where it had been. At her translation when her body was discovered to be incorrupt, her doctor noted that the wound had healed with only a small scar remaining to mark the place of the tumour.<sup>872</sup> The original linen cloths in which Æthelthryth's body was wrapped were found to be clean and fresh after sixteen years in her tomb and proved the source of miraculous cures. Æthelthryth's pure body was subsequently wrapped in new robes and re-interred in a miraculous white marble sarcophagus.<sup>873</sup> In death she was adorned with miraculously preserved linen robes, a white sarcophagus that was a perfect fit for her body and a faint scar marking the place of her healed red tumour. She is both white and red representing her virginal purity and her spiritual martyrdom. While not physically martyred the life Æthelthryth led evokes the daily martyrdom of Paula, Jerome's esteemed friend, and Æthelthryth rejoiced in the pain from her tumour as many virgin martyrs rejoiced in going to meet their executioner.<sup>874</sup> For Bede, Æthelthryth's virginity preserved through two marriages brought her closer to God than martyrdom could have done. This, the manner of her life, and her acceptance of the tumour that led to her death set her apart and proved her worthy to be regally adorned in red and white with her celestial beloved.

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<sup>870</sup> Bede, *Martyrology*, June 23: Lifshitz (2000) 186. See Lifshitz on the background to, and importance of, Bede's *Martyrology*, intro. 'Bede, *Martyrology*,' in T. Head, ed., *Medieval Hagiography: An Anthology* (New York and London 2000) 169-177. Lifshitz argues that Bede was the first to move away from lists of saints and martyrs to historical martyrologies, which 'historicized the regular commemorative process', intro. 171.

<sup>871</sup> Bede, *Martyrology*, October 3: Lifshitz (2000) 192. See *HE* V.10, 480-485. The British martyr Alban is the only other from these islands to feature, June 22: Lifshitz (2000) 186.

<sup>872</sup> Although Blanton claims that the surgeon's knife silences Æthelthryth (*Signs of Devotion* 52; see above), it is possible that this act represents the executioner's sword.

<sup>873</sup> *HE* IV.19(17), 394-397.

<sup>874</sup> See e.g. Agnes in Prudentius, *Peristephanon Hymn*. 14, *Passio S. Agnetis Virginis (Passion of Agnes)*: *PL* 60, 586; *FOTC* 43, 277 and in Ambrose, *De Virginibus*, bk.1, c.2, st.8: *PL* 16, 201; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 10, 364. See also Eulalia in Prudentius, *Peristephanon Hymn*. 3, *In Honorem B. Eulaliae Martyris (Hymn in honour of the passion of the most holy martyr Eulalia)*: *PL* 60, 343; *FOTC* 43, 130.

## Bede's Hymn for Æthelthryth – *HE* IV.20(18)

Bede immediately follows his account of Æthelthryth's life, death, and the miraculous preservation of her body with a praise poem he had written many years earlier in her honour. The poem is important both of itself as a very skilful example of elegiac poetry and also because Bede chose to insert it into the text of his *HE*.<sup>875</sup> While Bede does include verse epitaphs for Gregory the Great and Cædwalla in his narrative,<sup>876</sup> these were the inscriptions written on their tombs in Rome and their recording would have served a different purpose. His poem for Æthelthryth is his own composition and his justification for including it is worth consideration:

It seems fitting to insert in this history a hymn on the subject of virginity which I composed many years ago in elegiac metre in honour of this queen and bride of Christ, and therefore truly a queen because the bride of Christ; imitating the method of holy Scripture in which many songs are inserted into the history and, as is well known, these are composed in metre and verse.<sup>877</sup>

Calvin Kendall argues that much of the *HE* such as Bede's inclusion of letters, reports, epitaphs, miracle stories and regnal lists in his narrative is in direct imitation of the Bible, and the intention that underlies Bede's imitation is revealed in his introduction to the poem for Æthelthryth, as he writes that he included it in the *History* in imitation of Scripture.<sup>878</sup> Bede had other examples of such behaviour however. Jerome often quoted lines of verse in his letters to various correspondents and in his famous letter to Eustochium on the death of her mother he included his own verse epitaph inscribed on Paula's tomb and also the inscription in front of the cavern, which contained her tomb.<sup>879</sup>

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<sup>875</sup> I disagree entirely with Virginia Blanton's argument for Bede's inclusion of this poem, see *Signs of Devotion* 61-63 and above.

<sup>876</sup> *HE* II.1, 132-133; V.7, 470-472.

<sup>877</sup> *HE* IV.20(18), 396-397, *Videtur oportunum huic historiae etiam hymnum uirginitatis inserere, quem ante annos plurimos in laudem ac praeconium eiusdem reginae ac sponsae Christi, et ideo ueraciter reginae quia sponsae Christi, elegiaco metro conposuimus, et imitari morem sacrae scripturae, cuius historiae carmina plurima indita et haec metro ac uersibus constat esse composita.*

<sup>878</sup> C.B. Kendall, 'Imitation and the Venerable Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*,' in M.H. King and W.M. Stevens, ed., *Saints, Scholars and Heroes* (Collegeville, Minnesota 1979) 161-190 at 176-177.

<sup>879</sup> Jerome, *Ep.*108.33: Labourt, 5, 201; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 6 (*Ep.*108.34), 212.



It is significant that Bede introduced a poem of his own composition in Book Four of the *HE*. Books One to Three, which deal primarily with the beginnings of Christianity among the Anglo-Saxons, contain many papal letters and correspondence associated with the Roman missionaries. Book Four, which is concerned with the growth and development of the Church after it has been securely established during the archbishopric of Theodore, does not reproduce any sources from outside Britain. Pope Vitalian's letter to Oswiu on appointing a new archbishop is contained in book III.29, but Theodore's name is not mentioned until book IV.1.<sup>880</sup> Book IV contains the proceedings of the Synods of Hertford and Hatfield, and Bede's poem in praise of Æthelthryth.<sup>881</sup> It also relates the development of successful Anglo-Saxon monasteries, such as Barking, Ely and Whitby, the beginnings of Anglo-Saxon literacy with Cædmon, and contains an account of Cuthbert's life.<sup>882</sup> The maturity of the Anglo-Saxon Church is increasingly evident to the discerning reader and the orthodoxy of the Anglo-Saxons' faith is recognised in Rome and by the reader of the *HE*. It is against this background with the Anglo-Saxons taking their place in the universal Church that Bede includes his poem, which he had written many years earlier. The poem is a very sophisticated work, described by George Hardin Brown as a 'tour de force',<sup>883</sup> and further demonstrates the developed state of the Anglo-Saxon Church.

Bede's poem is both abecedarian and epanaleptic – each of the first twenty-three verses begins with a successive letter of the Latin alphabet and the first letter of each of the last four verses spells AMEN, the last quarter of each verse repeats the first quarter.<sup>884</sup> Calvin Kendall suggests that the composition of the poem was based on biblical models known to Bede, such as the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32:1-43 and Psalms 118(119) and 144(145) and notes that these two psalms are abecedaries. He also argues for the influence of Sedulius and Venantius Fortunatus on Bede.<sup>885</sup> The abecedarian form using all

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<sup>880</sup> See *HE* III.29, 318-323; IV.1, 328-333.

<sup>881</sup> *HE* IV.5, 348-353; IV.17(15), 384-387; IV. 20(18), 396-401.

<sup>882</sup> *HE* IV.24(22), 414-421 for Cædmon; IV.27(25)-32(30), 430-449 for Cuthbert.

<sup>883</sup> G.H. Brown, *Bede the Venerable* (Boston 1987) 74.

<sup>884</sup> See Brown, *Bede the Venerable*, 74, and Kendall, 'Imitation and the Venerable Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*,' 177.

<sup>885</sup> Kendall, 'Imitation and the Venerable Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*,' 177-178. See J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People: A Historical Commentary* (Oxford 1988, repr. 1991) 161, and Fell, 'Saint Æðelþryð,' 26 and above for influence of

the letters of the alphabet was very important in patristic exegesis as a symbol of completion and perfection. Psalms 110, 111 and 118 use all twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet successively at the beginning of each verse, whereas Psalms 24, 33, 36 and 144 only use some letters from the Hebrew alphabet in their structure. Cassiodorus, in his commentary on the Psalms which was known to Bede, drew attention to the seven psalms that use an alphabetical structure and believed that the psalms using all twenty-two letters referred to the just and righteous that praise the Lord perfectly in their lives.<sup>886</sup> Bede's poem, although written in Latin not Hebrew, significantly contains all twenty-three letters of the Latin alphabet in succession. That Bede praised Æthelthryth using a poetic form that is related to perfection and completion, and appropriate for the righteous, suggests his remarkably high regard for her. The poem also contains very refined and carefully orthodox views on the nature of virginity. In patristic thinking (as seen already) virginity was likened to the life of angels and pre-lapsarian bliss and became possible for humanity through the Incarnation of Christ. As sin had entered the world through Eve's disobedience, the gift of virginity was bestowed in a special way on women through the Virgin Mary's obedience. Virginity is a higher state than marriage and as all virgins are followers of Mary, they have the capacity to share in her motherhood of God. The reward for their faithfulness is marriage to their heavenly spouse, to whom they will sing a new song (see Rev 14:4) and be united with in a celestial marriage for all eternity. These doctrines, which were central components in many tracts in praise of virginity, are all present in Bede's poem.

The poem begins with an appeal to the Triune God to bless the poet's enterprise, immediately demonstrating that this is Christian poetry, and the next three verses contrast the violent themes of Classical epics with the devout interests of a Christian writer, implying that Christian writing has superseded

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Venantius Fortunatus. Wallace-Hadrill compared Bede's poem unfavourably to Venantius Fortunatus' work, *Historical Commentary* 161, and 'Bede and Plummer,' repr. in Wallace-Hadrill, *Historical Commentary*, xv-xxxv at xxix.

<sup>886</sup> J. O'Reilly, 'The Wisdom of the Scribe and the Fear of the Lord in the *Life of Columba*,' in D. Broun and T.O. Clancy, ed., *Spes Scotorum – Hope of Scots* (Edinburgh 1999) 159-211 at 187-191. In this context it was also believed to be important that the Hebrew Bible contained twenty-two books equalling the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet, the book of Revelations similarly has twenty-two chapters, see O'Reilly, 'Wisdom of the Scribe,' 187-189.

classical culture.<sup>887</sup> The poem then describes the Incarnation of God from the womb of a virgin to free humanity, at which the virgin-choir (presumably with the angels in heaven) rejoice.<sup>888</sup> Bede explains that Mary's glory produced other virgins and presents a sequence of six who faced martyrdom for the Lord during the pre-Constantinian persecution of the early Church.<sup>889</sup> These are paired according to the form of their martyrdom and are Agatha and Eulalia who stood firm in the furnace, Thecla and Euphemia to whom lions yielded, and Agnes and Cecilia who faced swordsmen.<sup>890</sup> The next line introduces Æthelthryth and demonstrates that the miraculous preservation of virginity that had taken place in the Church of earlier times continues in the time of the Anglo-Saxons in Æthelthryth's spiritual martyrdom: 'Nor lacks our age its ÆTHELTHRYTH as well; Its virgin wonderful nor lacks our age.'<sup>891</sup> The poem continues to describe Æthelthryth's life, noting that she was of royal blood but believed that God's service was nobler than her birthright,<sup>892</sup> and is far more proud in heaven than she was when on an earthly throne. She is urged to seek Christ, her spouse, and told that while a follower of the Mother of Heaven's King, she could also become a mother of Heaven's King. The poem continues to say that she pledged herself to God in the cloister after twelve years of marriage, and through her devotion to heaven until her death she won new fame.<sup>893</sup> The discovery of her

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<sup>887</sup> See Bede's *De Schematibus et Tropis* (*On Schemes and Tropes*), which replaces phrases from the Classics used as examples in grammatical text books with Biblical phrases: CCSL 123A, 142-171; Tannenhaus (1973) 97-122.

<sup>888</sup> See Brennan, 'Deathless Marriage,' 77, for description of the opening of Venantius Fortunatus' *De Virginitate*, which describes a heavenly scene with Mary and her virgin entourage in the presence of God, *Carmen* 8.3, ll 1-42; Reydellet (2003) 129-131.

<sup>889</sup> Bede describes these virgins as a holy plant that was grown by the glory of Mary, and as virgin flowers, *HE* IV.20(18), 398-399. The imagery of flowers is often associated with virgins and paradise is described as blooming with many flowers, particularly roses, violets and lilies, referring to martyrs, widows and virgins. See Deshman, *Benedictional of Æthelwold* 123.

<sup>890</sup> These six are all in Bede's *Martyrology*: Lifshitz (2000). Fell, 'Saint Æðelþryð,' 26, notes that Bede's six virgin martyrs are all in Venantius Fortunatus' work. Aldhelm includes five of these in his *De Virginitate*, in order, Caecilia, Agatha, Agnes, Thecla, and Eulalia. *Carmen De Virginitate*, 1721-1780 and 1920-2020: Rosier (1985) 141 and 145-146. *Prose De Virginitate*, XL-XLI and XLV-XLVI: CCSL 124A, 583-597 and 631-641; Lapidge (1979) 107-108 and 111-113.

<sup>891</sup> *HE* IV. 20(18), 398-399, *Nostra quoque egregia iam tempora uirgo beaut; Aedilthryda nitet nostra quoque egregia*. See Ward, *The Venerable Bede* 95-96.

<sup>892</sup> This theme of noble by birth, but nobler in life is one of Bede's favourites, see *HE* II.1, 123-124 on Gregory the Great's family; II.7, 156-157 for Mellitus; III.19, 270-271, Fursa; IV.9, 360-361, a sister from the community at Barking; V.10, 482-483, Tilmon. See also Bede, *Historia Abbatum* (*Lives of the Abbots*), c.1 for Benedict Biscop and c.8 for Eosterwine: Plummer (1969) 364 and 371; Farmer (1998) 187 and 194.

<sup>893</sup> See Christine Fell who notes that Bede used the terminology of everything she rejected on earth to paradoxically describe what she would gain in heaven, 'Saint Æðelþryð,' 24.

bodily incorruption after sixteen years is recounted, and associated with the power of Christ who can preserve her spotless body even in the tomb and everything yields to her holy remains. The saint has triumphed over the foe that conquered Eve. All this is recounted in the first twenty-three verses of Bede's poem beginning with each successive letter of the Latin alphabet. The next four verses begin with the letters of the word Amen and describe the marriage between Æthelthryth and her heavenly Bridegroom:

Affianced to the Lamb, now famed on earth! Soon famed in heaven,  
affianced to the Lamb! / **M**any thy wedding gifts while torches blaze. The  
Bridegroom comes; many thy wedding gifts. / **E**ver on sweetest harp thou  
sing'st new songs (Rev 14:3?). Hymning thy Spouse ever on sweetest harp;  
/ **N**e'er parted from the Lamb's high company, Whom earthly love ne'er  
parted from the Lamb.<sup>894</sup>

The number of orthodox ideas regarding the life of virginity that Bede includes in such a short poem is astounding. As in his prose chapter, Æthelthryth's personal sanctity and closeness to the Lamb are revealed. In the first chapter of the account of her life, Æthelthryth is presented as living a heavenly life on earth, is described as the mother of virgins, as is her role model, Mary, and her eternal reward is revealed through her bodily incorruption and the posthumous healing of the scar on her neck. In the poem, though the details of her asceticism are not repeated, the message is the same. Her bodily incorruption similarly reveals her heavenly reward and she will be ranked among the 144,000 virgins of Revelations 14:1, who sing new songs to the Lord and will be joined to the Lamb for all eternity.<sup>895</sup> Indeed following the Lamb for all eternity was used elsewhere in Insular sources to describe the rewards of the most holy, e.g. Bede uses this verse for Benedict Biscop in his *Lives of the Abbots* and Adomnán does so for Columba in his *Vita*.<sup>896</sup> Following his account of Æthelthryth's life in the previous chapter, Bede's poem is a very beautiful and suitable finale.

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<sup>894</sup> HE IV.20(18), 400-401, *Aspice, nupta Deo, quae sit tibi Gloria terris; quae maneat caelis aspice, nupta Deo. / Munera laeta capis, festiuis fulgida taedis; ecce uenit sponsus, munera laeta capis. / Et noua dulcisono modularis carmina plectro, sponsa hymno exultas et noua dulcisono. / Nullus ab altithroni comitatu segregat Agni, quam affectu tulerat nullus ab altithroni.* See Deshman, *Benedictional of Æthelwold* 123.

<sup>895</sup> See above for a very similar description of the virgin's reward in Bede's exegetical works.

<sup>896</sup> Benedict Biscop opted to follow the Lamb of spotless virginity (Rev 14:4) and lived the life of chastity because he wanted to belong to the 144,000 who sing a new song before the throne of the Lamb that no one else can sing (Rev 14:1,3), Bede, *Historia Abbatum*, c.1: Plummer (1969) 365;

When taken together, Bede's prose and verse accounts of Æthelthryth as presented in the *HE* are regarded as an *opus geminatum*.<sup>897</sup> The *opus geminatum* was an important classical form and was introduced in Christian writing to demonstrate to the educated elites of Classical society that rhetorical techniques could also be applied to the subject matter of Scripture.<sup>898</sup> Aldhelm's *De Virginitate* is an *opus geminatum* and the first of its type from Anglo-Saxon England. In the *HE*, Bede described it as such and identified Sedulius' twofold work as an influence on Aldhelm.<sup>899</sup> Peter Godman has noted that this reveals that in Bede's time the two parts of the *opus geminatum* had come to be regarded as elements of a single whole, whereas in Sedulius' time they were regarded as distinct works.<sup>900</sup> He also argues that Bede had a clearer understanding of this tradition than Aldhelm. He explains that the development of the *opus geminatum* was closely connected with writing a verse counterpart for an already existing prose work and notes that Bede, like Venantius Fortunatus in his *Life of Martin*, wrote a prose *Vita S. Felicis* to go with the earlier work in verse.<sup>901</sup> Godman suggests that Bede pioneered the application of this form of writing to an Anglo-Saxon subject in his prose and metrical *Lives* of Cuthbert.<sup>902</sup> Although Bede drew on the anonymous *Life of Cuthbert* for his metrical work, Godman argues that he intended to complete the work with a prose *Life*.<sup>903</sup> Bede refers to his *Lives* of Cuthbert in his short autobiography at the end of the *HE*, writing: 'I have also described the life of the holy father Cuthbert, monk and bishop, first in heroic

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Farmer (1998) 187-188. Bede, *Hom* I.13: *CCSL* 122, 92; Martin and Hurst (1991) 130. See also Adomnán, *Vita Columbae (Life of Columba)*, bk.iii.23; Sharpe (1995) 232-233.

<sup>897</sup> See Wallace-Hadrill, *Historical Commentary* 161; P. Godman, 'The Anglo-Latin *Opus Geminatum*: From Aldhelm to Alcuin,' *Medieval Aevum* 50 (1981) 215-229. Godman notes that Sedulius initiated this genre and influenced the Anglo-Latin literary tradition from Aldhelm to Alcuin, 215-219. Cf. Kendall, above, who argued for Sedulius' influence on Bede, 'Imitation and the Venerable Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*,' 178.

<sup>898</sup> Godman, 'The Anglo-Latin *Opus Geminatum*,' 217-218.

<sup>899</sup> See *HE* V.18, 514-515 and above. Bede writes: *quem in exemplum Sedulii geminato opere et uersibus exametris et prosa composuit*. See Rosier, intro. to *The Carmen De Virginitate*, in *Aldhelm: The Poetic Works* (1985) 97-98.

<sup>900</sup> Godman, 'The Anglo-Latin *Opus Geminatum*,' 220.

<sup>901</sup> Godman, 'The Anglo-Latin *Opus Geminatum*,' 221-222. See *HE* V.24, 568-569, for Bede's reference to his book on the life and passion of Felix the confessor, which he had put into prose from Paulinus' metrical version.

<sup>902</sup> Godman, 'The Anglo-Latin *Opus Geminatum*,' 221-222.

<sup>903</sup> Godman, 'The Anglo-Latin *Opus Geminatum*,' 222. See W. Berschin who argues for a parallelism between Bede's verse and prose *Lives* of Cuthbert and suggests that one of the main reasons for Bede writing his prose *Life* was because the *Vita metrica* and the anonymous *Life* did not match, '*Opus deliberatum ac perfectum: Why Did the Venerable Bede Write a Second Prose Life of St Cuthbert?*' in G. Bonner, D. Rollason and C. Stancliffe, ed., *St Cuthbert, his Cult, and his Community to AD 1200* (Woodbridge 1989) 95-101 at 99 and 101.

verse and then in prose.<sup>904</sup> His mention of Cuthbert in the *Greater Chronicle* is of greater relevance, however, as after briefly describing Cuthbert's life and miraculous incorruption, Bede noted that he had recounted this 'in the book of his life and miracles recently composed in prose, and some years ago in hexameter verse.'<sup>905</sup> In this case Bede significantly described his verse and prose *Lives* as one book.

Æthelthryth and Cuthbert are the only two saints that Bede opted to praise in this way, demonstrating his view of their importance. As noted already, Æthelthryth is also commemorated in Bede's *Martyrology*, though Cuthbert is not.<sup>906</sup> I have argued that Bede's prose account of Æthelthryth in the *HE* suggests that she underwent a spiritual martyrdom and is adorned with the two colours of red and white. That Bede associates her with the virgin martyrs of the early Church in his poem confirms this view and further demonstrates the synchronisation between his verse and prose accounts of her.<sup>907</sup> In both chapters he also delights that the miracle of Æthelthryth's virginal status preserved during two marriages could take place in his time. In the description of her life, he writes that it should not be doubted that such a miracle could happen in the Anglo-Saxons' time, because the Lord has promised to be with his people until the end of the age (Matt 28:20), and in his poem he states, 'Nor lacks our age its ÆTHELTHRYTH as well'.<sup>908</sup> The miracle of Æthelthryth's virginity is important not only for the Anglo-Saxon Church but, because of the nature of this miracle, it is important for the universal Church as well. All Christians everywhere should commemorate Æthelthryth, as the virgin martyrs are commemorated, and rejoice in her heavenly marriage to her long-desired espoused Lord. Her universal significance is most probably the reason that she is the only Anglo-Saxon (who was not physically martyred) that was worthy to be included in Bede's *Martyrology*.

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<sup>904</sup> *HE* V.24, 570-571, *uitam sancti patris monachi simul et antistitis Cudbercti et prius heroico metro et postmodum plano sermone descripsi*. See also *HE* IV.28(26), 434-435.

<sup>905</sup> Bede, *De Temporum Ratione*, c.66: *CCSL* 123B, ll 1963-1965, 530; Wallis (1999) 233, *sicut in libro de eius Vita ac Virtutibus, et prosa nuper et exametris uersibus scripto ante aliquot annos*

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<sup>906</sup> See above and Bede, *Martyrology*, June 23: Lifshitz (2000) 186.

<sup>907</sup> As noted above, the six virgin martyrs in the poem are in his *Martyrology*: Lifshitz (2000).

<sup>908</sup> *HE* IV.19(17), 392-393; IV.20(18), 398-399.

Every aspect of Bede's dual account of Æthelthryth in the *HE* is significant. She was an outstanding saint, who would have been distinguished by the merits of her life at any time in the Church's history, and Bede's references to her in the *Greater Chronicle* and his *Martyrology* support this. She was also a very important figure in the Anglo-Saxon Church, demonstrating how far it had advanced in a very short time. As noted at the beginning, she is the third named queen of Northumbria in the *HE* and as her husband's grandfather, Edwin, was a pagan at the time of his marriage to Æthelburh, this demonstrates how much had changed in three generations. Bede's account of her life is a most impressive rhetorical feat, demonstrating to the reader that the Anglo-Saxons have taken their destined place in the universal Church and in Christian intellectual culture.

## **C.5 – Hand-maids of the Lord: Hild and other holy women in Bede’s *HE***

The previous three chapters have considered different aspects of the Christian interpretation of marriage as they arise in the *HE*: a literal marriage between a king and queen; marriage between Christ and the Church as it relates to the conversion of a new people; and the spiritual marriage between every Christian soul and Christ in the person of Æthelthryth. Each of these chapters was concerned with a different queen of Northumbria, the only three named Northumbrian queens in Bede’s book. Indeed Æthelburh, Eanflæd and Æthelthryth between them represent three generations of Northumbrian rule. While these women were at the highest level of society and had a corresponding influence, there are many other women in the book of lower status whose lives also leave their legacy. Of these, Hild of Whitby is one of the most significant but there are others who are worthy of mention. This chapter will briefly consider Bede’s account of Hild in the light of the methodological approach followed in earlier chapters; it will then compare Bede’s description of her death, which is the longest part of Bede’s account with the deaths of various other holy women mentioned in the book. The thesis will conclude with an examination of the location in the *HE* of all the major narratives concerning women in the monastic life, thereby demonstrating their cumulative importance in the overall development of the book.

### **Hild in the *HE***

Hild’s life spanned the most significant decades in the development of Christian life in Northumbria and she personally knew many of the most significant figures in the seventh-century Anglo-Saxon Church. Hild was related to Edwin, who was her father’s uncle, and was baptised by Paulinus in company with him; she subsequently became an eager disciple of Aidan’s and with his encouragement entered the monastic life, later becoming abbess of Whitby; she was on the Irish side at the debate on Easter hosted at her monastery in 664, but accepted the ruling of the Synod and from then on followed the Roman method of calculating Easter. Her monastery has been regarded as a ‘nursery’ for bishops, producing five for the fledgling English Church at a time when need was great. Bede



described her warmly as mother to all, and loved by many holy men for her innate holiness and wisdom. She died in 680, the year after the Synod of Hatfield was held, having witnessed the first half of Theodore's active archbishopric.

As with Æthelthryth, our major source for Hild's life and subsequent influence is Bede's *HE*. Quite surprisingly, she is not mentioned in the *Earliest Life of Gregory the Great*, which was from her monastery of Whitby and written a couple of decades after her death.<sup>909</sup> In the *HE* Bede relates that at the age of thirty-three Hild decided to enter the monastic life and went to the kingdom of the East Angles intending to follow her sister to the monastery of Chelles in Gaul.<sup>910</sup> That she was thirty-three may be significant as it is the accepted age of Jesus at his death. Christine Fell argues against the view that this is a hagiographical motif suggesting that Bede could not adapt facts relating to well known people for hagiographical purpose.<sup>911</sup> However, Hild's exact age would have been difficult to determine and Bede may have chosen thirty-three as an appropriate age for such a life-changing decision. He emphasises that she spent an equal number of years in the secular habit and, still more nobly, in the monastic life. After waiting in the kingdom of the East Angles for a year, Aidan recalled Hild to Northumbria and she spent another year living the monastic life with a small number of companions on a hide of land on the north bank of the River Wear.<sup>912</sup> After this Hild became abbess of the monastery of Hartlepool, as the previous incumbent, Heiu, had retired to another dwelling not long after founding this monastery. We know very little about Heiu, although she is credited with being the first woman to follow the monastic life in Northumbria,

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<sup>909</sup> For brief comment on the Whitby *Life*, specifically in relation to Edwin, see Chapter Two. It is possible that the Whitby writer did not want to include anything that might detract from the cult of Edwin. It was noted in Chapter Three that Oswald and Oswiu are similarly not mentioned. Eanflæd and Ælflæd are included but this is presumably because of their close relationship to Edwin.

<sup>910</sup> *HE* IV.23(21), 406-407. Modern scholars have suggested that she had previously been married and on becoming widowed decided to retire to the monastic life, as many noble Anglo-Saxon women did, e.g. Eanflæd, *HE* IV.26(24), 428-431. Considering so many Anglo-Saxon men die young and in battle, many women would have been widowed at a young age – one wonders how old Æthelburh of Kent was when Edwin was killed in 633 – but there is no way of confirming or denying this theory. Had she been married it is probable that Bede would have mentioned a husband or children.

<sup>911</sup> C.E. Fell, 'Saint Ædelþryð: A Historical-Hagiographical Dichotomy Revisited,' *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 38 (1994) 18-34 at 25.

<sup>912</sup> *HE* IV.23(21), 406-407.

having been ordained by Aidan.<sup>913</sup> Hild went from Hartlepool to Whitby, where she spent the rest of her life engaged in the monastic life and teaching others within her monastery, including Ælfflæd, and many from outside the monastic life.<sup>914</sup> Indeed Bede notes that that not only ordinary people but also kings and princes used to come to Hild for advice and counsel.<sup>915</sup> Bede praised the manner of life led in her monastery, likening it to the life of the early Church in the Acts of the Apostles, and stressed that Hild insisted on the importance of studying the scriptures, noting that her monastery produced five bishops: Bosa, Ætla, Otfor, John, and Wilfrid (II).<sup>916</sup>

The remainder of Bede's account of Hild is concerned with visionary experiences. He relates that while Hild was an infant, at the time that her father was poisoned in exile, her mother had a dream that she was unable to find her husband and during her search discovered a most precious necklace under her clothes from which a great blaze of light spread out and filled all Britain with its splendour. Bede notes that this dream was fulfilled in the life of Hild, who was a living example of the works of light to all who desire to live well.<sup>917</sup> Bede also includes a description of the glorious vision of Begu, one of Hild's nuns based at her new foundation of Hackness, of Hild's ascension into heaven in the midst of a great light and guided by angels. This vision took place at the moment of her death, and Begu immediately informed her superior, so that the nuns at Hackness knew of Hild's death before they received word from Whitby the following morning.<sup>918</sup> Bede also notes that, on the same night, another of Hild's virgins in a remote part of Whitby saw Hild's soul ascend to heaven in company with angels

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<sup>913</sup> *HE* IV.23(21), 406-407. We may know little about her because Bede may not have approved of her behaviour. He believed that leading an active life that involved teaching the flock of Christ out of love was at least as beneficial as the life of contemplation, as complete contemplation can only be attained in heaven and that. See his account of Cuthbert, *HE* IV.28(26), 438-439; see also Chapter Two on Cuthbert's motivation for teaching. For Bede on contemplation, see S. DeGregorio, 'The Venerable Bede on Prayer and Contemplation,' *Traditio* 54 (1999) 1-39; A.G. Holder, 'Christ as Incarnate Wisdom in Bede's Commentary on the Song of Songs,' in S. DeGregorio, ed., *Innovation and Tradition in the Writings of the Venerable Bede* (Morgantown 2006) 169-188 at 181-184.

<sup>914</sup> *HE* IV.23(21), 408-411. *HE* III.24, 290-293. It is sometimes argued that Whitby was one of the twelve new monasteries founded by Oswiu after he defeated Penda of Mercia in 655, but this cannot be determined with any satisfaction.

<sup>915</sup> *HE* IV.23(21), 408-409.

<sup>916</sup> *HE* IV.23(21), 408-409. On the theme of following the primitive Church in the *HE*, see Chapter Three.

<sup>917</sup> *HE* IV.23(21), 410-411.

<sup>918</sup> *HE* IV.23(21), 412-415.

at the hour of her death, before word of this had reached the community.<sup>919</sup> The following chapter concerns Bede's description of Cædmon's gift, which is often discussed and will not greatly concern us here. However it is important to note that Cædmon received this ability after an encounter with a mysterious stranger, and it was Hild who recognised that he had received the grace of God. She instructed him to enter the monastic life and ordered that he be taught the whole of sacred history, which he subsequently turned into melodious verse, leading to the famous description of his teachers becoming his audience.<sup>920</sup> It has been suggested that, as Hild is not referred to by name in this chapter, it is not clear that the 'abbess' involved is her.<sup>921</sup> Indeed Clare Lees and Gillian Overing argue that Bede has effectively silenced Hild by recording her death in the chapter before his account of Cædmon.<sup>922</sup> However, there is no reason to believe that the abbess, who is expressly credited with recognising the divine nature of Cædmon's gift, in this case is not Hild.

### **Hild and Æthelthryth**

These are regarded as the central 'facts' of Hild's life as presented in the *HE*, which have led to Bede's account of Hild provoking a very different response in modern scholarship from his description of Æthelthryth's life. The information he provides in his chapter on Hild is regarded as history, compared to his account of Æthelthryth, which is dismissed as hagiography.<sup>923</sup> Elsewhere it is argued that Hild and Æthelthryth represent different aspects of female sanctity – Æthelthryth demonstrates personal piety, and Hild appropriate public behaviour for a woman – as Bede wished to give the reader 'a composite picture of the types of piety

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<sup>919</sup> *HE* IV.23(21), 414-415.

<sup>920</sup> *HE* IV.24(22), 414-419.

<sup>921</sup> Blanton, *Signs of Devotion* 24.

<sup>922</sup> C.A. Lees and G.R. Overing, 'Birthing Bishops and Fathering Poets: Bede, Hild, and the Relations of Cultural Production,' *Exemplaria* 6 (1994) 35-65. In his description of Cædmon's gift, they write that 'Bede does not just relegate Hild to the margins by refusing to name her; he silences her textually by the more radical method of "killing" her', see 48. They also argue that Bede's account is an attempt to place himself at the origins of Anglo-Saxon cultural production, cf. Blanton, *Signs of Devotion* 22 ff.

<sup>923</sup> See Fell, 'Saint Ædelþryd,' 27-29. N. Bauer, 'Abbess Hilda of Whitby: All Britain was lit by her splendour,' in M. Schmitt and L. Kulzer, ed., *Medieval Women Monastics: Wisdom's Wellsprings* (Collegeville, MN 1996) 13-31 at 15.

appropriate to female saints.<sup>924</sup> However, such an interpretation ignores the many similarities between Bede's accounts of these two women.<sup>925</sup> It is also important to note that, while Hild was (and is) regarded as 'active', much of Bede's short account of her life is concerned with visionary experiences.

While the differences between Hild and Æthelthryth are always stated in modern scholarship, the similarities between these two rarely are. They are both noted for their teaching work, Æthelthryth within her monastery, while Hild was praised for her teaching in all the monasteries that she ruled and her influence even extended beyond Whitby.<sup>926</sup> Both are also regarded as (spiritual) mothers, which is related to their roles as teachers. Bede described Æthelthryth as the mother of many virgins dedicated to God and in his praise poem for her recognised that through the virginal life, she too could be a mother of Heaven's King, like her role-model, the Virgin Mary.<sup>927</sup> Bede notes that everyone who knew Hild used to call her mother.<sup>928</sup> In modern accounts of Æthelthryth her role as spiritual mother gets little attention. Æthelburh of Barking and Æbbe of Coldingham are similarly described as mothers, and Bede notes on two occasions that his founding abbot, Benedict Biscop, refused to have sons in the flesh because he was predestined to bring up sons for Christ that would live forever in the world to come.<sup>929</sup>

Spiritual parenthood is a very potent image, as these individuals sacrifice the chance to have children in the flesh, to produce spiritual children for God.<sup>930</sup> Paul applies the image in his letter to the Galatians: 'My little children, of whom I am in labour again, until Christ be formed in you' (Gal 4:19); and also to the

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<sup>924</sup> See V.A. Gunn, *A Study of Bede's 'Historiae'*, unpub. Ph.D Thesis, Univ. of Glasgow (1999) 235 ff, with quotation at 237. See also V. Blanton, *Signs of Devotion: The Cult of St. Æthelthryth in Medieval England, 695-1615* (Pennsylvania 2007) 23-28.

<sup>925</sup> See below.

<sup>926</sup> *HE* IV.19(17), 392-393, for Æthelthryth. *HE* IV.23(21), 406-411, for Hild.

<sup>927</sup> *HE* IV.19(17), 392-393; *HE* IV.20(18), 398-399. See Chapter Four.

<sup>928</sup> *HE* IV.23(21), 410-411.

<sup>929</sup> *HE* IV.6, 356-357; *HE* IV.25, 424-425. Bede, *Historia Abbatum (Lives of the Abbots)*, c.1: Plummer (1969) 365; Farmer (1998) 187-188. Cf. Bede, *Hom* I.13: *CCSL* 122, 93; Martin and Hurst (1991) 130. On both occasions Bede links Benedict's spiritual children with his decision to reject earthly marriage.

<sup>930</sup> This image can be linked with teachers providing milk to beginners in the faith, see Aidan's words at the conference on Iona to the missionary who returned from Northumbria because the Anglo-Saxons would not listen to him, *HE* III.5, 228-229; see Chapter Three. See Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos (Expositions on the Psalms)*, Ps 50, st.27: *CCSL* 38; *NPNF* 1<sup>st</sup> series, 8, 187-188. See Holder, 'Christ as Incarnate Wisdom,' 184-187, on the theme of apostolic motherhood in Bede's exegesis and in the *HE*, particularly in relation to Hild.

Corinthians: ‘For in Christ Jesus, by the gospel, I have begotten you’ (1Cor 4:15). This image is often applied to the work of teachers in the Church.<sup>931</sup> Indeed by producing spiritual children for Christ, virgins, in this respect, imitate the virginity of the Church who produces spiritual children for her espoused husband, Christ.<sup>932</sup> Bede also applied this image. In his commentary on Tobias he wrote that, after coming to the faith of Christ, teachers and martyrs arose from among the gentiles, and suggests that cows and rams represent these. They are cows because they can bear the gospel’s yoke, and they beget and suckle by their preaching those who grow up to bear the same yoke. They are rams because they are the fathers and the leaders of those following them.<sup>933</sup> Bede regarded Benedict Biscop as the spiritual father of many monks, as noted above. On this theme he wrote that Benedict’s children are those who imitate him in holding to the path of virtues and are not turned away from the narrow path of the rule that he taught.<sup>934</sup> This can also be applied to the accounts of spiritual parenthood in the *HE*, as mentioned above. The five bishops produced by Hild continue to spread the word of Christianity among the Anglo-Saxons and, in this sense, are very much her sons.<sup>935</sup>

When discussing similarities between Hild and Æthelthryth, it is perhaps most notable that both women are famous for stories involving necklaces. Chapter Four discussed Bede’s description of the tumour on Æthelthryth’s neck. Bede writes that Æthelthryth gracefully accepted this as she claimed that, having worn too many necklaces in her youth, it was appropriate that the fiery red tumour adorned her neck.<sup>936</sup> It was argued in Chapter Four that Bede’s account was influenced by biblical and patristic views of female adornment, which stress

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<sup>931</sup> Origen, *In Exodum homiliae (Homilies on Exodus)*, Hom 1(3): *SC* 321; *FOTC* 71, 230. Origen, *Homilies on Leviticus*, 6.6: *SC* 286, 294-197; *FOTC* 83, 127-128. Gregory the Great, *Mor.* 30.41-43: *CCSL* 143; Bliss (1844-1850) III, 393-394. *Mor.* 30.47: *CCSL* 143; Bliss (1844-1850) III, 396.

<sup>932</sup> See Origen, *Genesis Homily* 6(3): *FOTC* 71, 125-126. Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, Ps 127, st.5: *CCSL* 40; *NPNF* 1<sup>st</sup> series, 8, 607-608.

<sup>933</sup> Bede, *In Tobiam (On Tobias)*: *CCSL* 119B, 12; Foley (1999) 70.

<sup>934</sup> Bede, *Hom* I.13: *CCSL* 122, 93; Martin and Hurst (1991) 131.

<sup>935</sup> Bosa was bishop of York, and had instructed Acca, bishop of Hexham, from the time of his childhood, producing the next generation of bishops, *HE* IV.12, 370-371; *HE* IV.23(21), 408-409; *HE* V.20, 532-533. John of Beverley became bishop of Hexham and later succeeded Bosa as bishop of York (he also ordained Bede to the diaconate and the priesthood at the request of Ceolfrith, thus linking Bede to Hild), *HE* IV.23(21), 408-409; *HE* V.2-6, 456-469; *HE* V.24, 566-567. Wilfrid (II) succeeded John of Beverley as bishop of York, *HE* IV.23(21), 408-409; *HE* V.6, 468-469; *HE* V.23, 558-559. Indeed Hild had produced three successive bishops of York.

<sup>936</sup> *HE* IV.19(17), 396-397. See Chapter Four.

that the inner adornment of the soul with virtues is required of Christians.<sup>937</sup> The necklace image in Bede's account of Hild is related to this, but different. Bede described her mother's vision of a very precious necklace from which light spread out to fill all of Britain, and claims that this was fulfilled in Hild's life.<sup>938</sup> It is clear that, in Bede's view, the necklace represents Hild, an interpretation that becomes increasingly meaningful when considered in the light of another understanding of the Bride's adornments in patristic comment.

### **Hild's mother's vision**

#### *(i) Hild as necklace*

Chapter Four examined patristic views of adornment as they related to internal virtues and, in this way, adorn the bride of Christ. However, the adornments of the bride in the Old and New Testament (particularly the description of the heavenly Jerusalem in Revelations 21) can also refer to the devout souls that are themselves adorned spiritually, and in turn adorn the true Bride of Christ, the Church. In discussing the beautiful and varied clothing of the queen in Psalm 44(45):10, Augustine explained that the various colours in the queen's clothing represent all the faithful in the universal Church.<sup>939</sup> Cassiodorus believed that this queen's garments represent the diversity of virtues that are found in the Church, because the Church is adorned with the gold of the apostles, the silver of the prophets, the jewels of virgins, the crimson of martyrs and the purple of penitents.<sup>940</sup>

This image of Christians adorning and ornamenting the Bride of Christ is further developed when architectural language for the Church is used. As discussed in Chapter One, the Church is often described as a building made from living stones with Christ as the foundation.<sup>941</sup> In exegesis these living stones are often linked with the precious stones upon which the heavenly Jerusalem, as it is

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<sup>937</sup> See Chapter Four.

<sup>938</sup> *HE* IV.23(21), 410-411; see above.

<sup>939</sup> Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, Ps.44: *CCSL* 38; *NPNF* 1<sup>st</sup> series, 8, st.22, 153. See also Jerome, *Tractatus de Psalmo (Homily on Psalm)* 143(144), v.13: *CCSL* 78, 320; *FOTC* 48, 388.

<sup>940</sup> Cassiodorus, *Expositio Psalmorum (Explanation of Psalm)*, Ps.44.10: *CCSL* 97, 410; *ACW* 51, 447.

<sup>941</sup> See 1Pet 2:5, and Chapter One. See also J. O'Reilly, intro., S. Connolly, tr., *Bede: On the Temple* (Liverpool 1995) xvii-lv at xlvi-li.

described in Revelations 21, is built.<sup>942</sup> This interpretation is frequently found in the writings of Jerome. In describing the growth of asceticism during his own time, he wrote that the desert was bright with the flowers of Christ (i.e. virgins), and added that from this solitude will come the stones that will build the city of the great king, as it is described in Revelations.<sup>943</sup> In another letter he returned to this idea, noting that the city of the great king in the revelation of John will be built of living stones (i.e. Christians) and that these stones will be transformed into sapphire, emerald, jasper and other gems for this heavenly city.<sup>944</sup> In further comment on the heavenly Jerusalem, Jerome linked this spiritual interpretation of jewels with the view, described in Chapter Four, that adornment represents the virtues in the saints. He wrote that the heavenly Jerusalem is built of all kinds of precious stones, as the inhabitants of the city are both dwellers in it and gates for it. Similarly they are both houses, and dwellers in the houses. He adds that in this way the individual soul can be both the temple of God, it can be Sion, and it can also be part of the heavenly city within which the Lord dwells.<sup>945</sup> Christians who are the living stones upon which the Church is built are, following this interpretation, transformed into precious stones in the heavenly Jerusalem and adorn the Bride of the Lamb.<sup>946</sup> It is presumably in this context that Jerome, when praising Fabiola and Eustochium, referred to them both as necklaces. In his eulogy for Fabiola, he wrote that her death meant that the holy places had ‘lost a necklace of the loveliest,’<sup>947</sup> and in his letter to Eustochium in praise of Paula’s life, Jerome wrote that Eustochium was ‘a precious necklace of virginity and of the Church’.<sup>948</sup> The implication is that, through their virtuous lives, these ladies adorn the Church in life and presumably will similarly adorn the Heavenly Bride for all eternity.

Bede was aware of this exegesis as seen in his discussion of the building of Solomon’s temple in various commentaries. He wrote that the costly stones used in the foundation of the earthly building represent holy and virtuous men,

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<sup>942</sup> See esp. Rev 21:18-21.

<sup>943</sup> Jerome, *Ep.*14.10, referring to Rev 21:19-20: *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 6, 17.

<sup>944</sup> Jerome, *Ep.*108.16, referring to Rev 21:14, 19-21: *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 6, 203.

<sup>945</sup> Jerome, *Tractatus de Psalmo* 133(134), v.3: *CCSL* 78, 290-291; *FOTC* 48, 349-350. Cf. Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 44: *CCSL* 38; *NPNF* 1<sup>st</sup> series, 8, st.28, 154.

<sup>946</sup> Cf. Isaiah who described the beloved as ‘a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God’ (Is 62:3).

<sup>947</sup> Jerome, *Ep.*77.9: *Labourt*; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 6, 161.

<sup>948</sup> Jerome, *Ep.*108.4: *Labourt*; *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 6, 197.

who help to support the edifice of the Church, and later notes that the white marble used to build the temple represents the elect, who are the precious stones that Paul wished to lay upon the foundation of Christ.<sup>949</sup> Similarly, in a gospel homily for the dedication of a Church, he explained that the precious stones used in the building of Solomon's temple represent the extraordinary teachers of the Church.<sup>950</sup> These teachers build up the Church and will adorn the heavenly city when the Bride of the Lamb will be united in marriage to Christ at the end of time. In his commentary on the book of Revelations, Bede presented a lengthy exposition of the precious stones upon which the heavenly city is built.<sup>951</sup> Following Bede's exegesis on the precious stones used in the building of Solomon's temple, particularly as he relates these to teachers, it is possible that Bede's belief (as described in the *HE*) that the necklace in her mother's vision represents Hild, suggests that Hild, because of the holiness of her life, adorns the Church and will consequently adorn the heavenly Bride of Christ at the end of time.

(ii) *Necklace and Light Imagery*

The bright blaze of light emanating from the necklace in Hild's mother's vision is also important in understanding Bede's account of Hild. In Christian thinking, Christ is Light, who brings light to the world at the time of the Incarnation and is subsequently regarded as the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies, such as Isaiah 9:2.<sup>952</sup> However, this world is darkness compared to heaven, which is the abode of light and, for this reason, light in this world comes from Christ.

Augustine's first two tractates on John's gospel discuss this imagery in detail and

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<sup>949</sup> Bede, *De Templo (On the Temple)*, bk.1, st.4.1: *CCSL* 119A, 154; Connolly (1995) 14. *De Templo*, bk.1, st.4.6, referring to 2Cor 7.1: *CCSL* 119A, 156; Connolly (1995) 17.

<sup>950</sup> Bede, *Hom II.25*: *CCSL* 122, 373-374; Martin and Hurst (1991) 262.

<sup>951</sup> Bede, *Expositio Apocalypseos*: *CCSL* 121A. Bede's commentary on the precious stones was later excerpted from the larger work and read and copied independently. See Sinéad O'Sullivan on its subsequent influence, *Early Medieval Glosses on Prudentius' Psychomachia: The Weitz Tradition* (Brill 2004) 24, 31, 122-127 and 129.

<sup>952</sup> This theme is in many of Leo the Great's Christmas homilies, see *Sermo (Sermons)* 21-30: *FOTC* 93. Cf. references to Jesus setting his 'tabernacle in the sun', Ps 18:6(19:5), and the need for Christ's divinity to be covered with the cloud of humanity so that he could be seen while in the world in Chapter One. On Christ as Light, see Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana (On Christian Teaching)*, bk.1(45): *CCSL* 32; Green (1999) 18. *Confessionum (Confessions)*, bk. 7.10: *CCSL* 27,103-104; Pine-Coffin (1961) 146-147. In *Iohannis Evangelium Tractatus (Tractates on the Gospel of John)*, 2.5-7: *CCSL* 36, 14-15; *FOTC* 78, 65-67.



note that teachers can only be seen to give light if they have first received it from Christ. He explains that it was from the true light that John the Baptist was enlightened, and John the Evangelist was enlightened in the same way.<sup>953</sup> He also warns his audience to remember when admiring John the Baptist's life, that he was a witness for the Light, but not the Light.<sup>954</sup> Augustine continues to explain that while John the Baptist was a light in the world, he was not the true light because he needed to be enlightened by the true light, without which he would have been darkness. This is the reason that Paul told the Ephesians that they were once darkness, but are now light in the Lord (Eph 5:8). When they were without the Lord they were in darkness, but when they had received the Lord they were in light.<sup>955</sup> John Chrysostom also recognised the importance of light imagery, noting that the life of a Christian should shine brightly on every side, so that it would also be of benefit to others.<sup>956</sup>

Bede similarly believed that Christ is the true light and the source of all light.<sup>957</sup> He also recognised that Christian teachers are lights for others. In his *Commentary on Acts*, he notes that the apostles have taken on themselves Christ's description of himself as the light for the Gentiles, because the apostles are members of him and part of his body.<sup>958</sup> He also writes that holy people, who are aflame with love for the Lord, act as a shining light for people through their teaching.<sup>959</sup> In the same commentary he later adds that holy teachers are the children of light and their words and actions shine brightly because of God's gifts.<sup>960</sup> Considering the other information that Bede gives us about Hild's life and actions, it seems appropriate to suggest that her mother's vision is a means of

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<sup>953</sup> Augustine, *In Iohannis Evangelium Tractatus*, 1.18 (1-2): *CCSL* 36, 10-11; *FOTC* 78, 58.

<sup>954</sup> Augustine, *In Iohannis Evangelium Tractatus*, 2.5 (1-2): *CCSL* 36, 14; *FOTC* 78, 65.

<sup>955</sup> Augustine, *In Iohannis Evangelium Tractatus*, 2.6 (1-2): *CCSL* 36, 14-15; *FOTC* 78, 65-66. Augustine also added that the Lord had to enlighten John the Baptist so that John could point him out to the people, *In Iohannis Evangelium Tractatus*, 2.7 (1): *CCSL* 36, 14-15; *FOTC* 78, 66.

<sup>956</sup> John Chrysostom, *Contra Eos Qui Subintroductas Habent Virgines (Instruction and Refutation directed against those Men Cohabiting with Virgins)*, st.7 (8): *PG* 47; Clark (1979) 186-187.

<sup>957</sup> See Bede, *Hom I.3*: *CCSL* 122, 19; Martin and Hurst (1991) 25. *Hom I.24*: *CCSL* 122, 172-173; Martin and Hurst, 237-238. *Hom I.25*: *CCSL* 122, 182-183; Martin and Hurst (1991) 251. *Hom II.15*: *CCSL* 122, 286-287; Martin and Hurst (1991) 143-144. *Hom II.20*: *CCSL* 122, 333-334; Martin and Hurst (1991) 209-210.

<sup>958</sup> Bede, *Expositio Actuum Apostolorum (Commentary on Acts of the Apostles)*, c.13.47, referring to Luke 2:32 and Acts 26:23: *CCSL* 121, 63; Martin (1989) 120.

<sup>959</sup> Bede, *In Habacuc (On the Canticle of Habakkuk)*, referring to Matt 5:16: *CCSL* 119B, 386-387; Connolly (1997) st.7, 71-72.

<sup>960</sup> Bede, *In Habacuc*: *CCSL* 119B, 397; Connolly (1997) st.26, 83.

revealing Hild's role as a teacher. Bede notes that her holy life was not only an example to those in her monastery 'but she also provided an opportunity for salvation and repentance to many who lived far away and who heard the happy story of her industry and virtue.'<sup>961</sup> In Bede's exegesis, he expresses the view that teachers act as a shining light for other people, and this is given narrative expression in his account of Hild. Her life and teaching shine as a light for many people across Britain and this is in fulfilment of her mother's vision – which immediately follows Bede's account of Hild's influence – of a blaze of light spreading from the precious necklace she had discovered that filled all of Britain with its gracious splendour.<sup>962</sup>

### **Ascension to Heaven**

The other visions associated with Hild's life reveal her immediate ascension into heaven at the moment of her death. Begu, who had been dedicated to the virginal life for over thirty years and was based at Hackness, and an unnamed sister at Whitby, who had recently entered the monastery, both witnessed Hild's glory at the moment of her death.<sup>963</sup> Begu saw the roof of the house she was in rolled back and the house fill with light from above, which then bore Hild's soul to heaven in the company of angels. The other woman's vision did not contain this great light but she similarly saw Hild's soul ascend to heaven with angels. Various other women throughout the *HE* are similarly witnessed ascending to heaven at the moment of their deaths in similar fashions. Eorcengota of Kent entered the monastery of Brie where she distinguished herself by her virtuous life. At the time of her death, of which she had previously been made aware, many of the brothers in the monastery heard choirs of angels singing and the sound of a large group entering the monastery. On going outside they saw a great light come down from heaven, which carried her holy soul back to the joys of eternal life.<sup>964</sup>

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<sup>961</sup> *HE* IV.23(21), 410-411, ... *sed etiam plurimis longius manentibus, ad quos felix industriae ac uirtutis eius rumor peruenit, occasionem salutis et correctionis ministravit.*

<sup>962</sup> *HE* IV.23(21), 410-411. Hild's designation as mother is another means of recognising her role as a teacher. As well as Æthelthryth (see above), Bede similarly describes Æthelburh of Barking and Æbbe of Coldingham as mothers, *HE* IV.6, 356-357 and *HE* IV.25, 424-425.

<sup>963</sup> *HE* IV.23(21), 412-415.

<sup>964</sup> *HE* III.8, 238-239.

Many such miracles also took place at the double foundation of Barking, during the abbacy of Æthelburh, Bishop Eorcenwold's sister. While the abbess was trying to decide on a suitable location in the monastery's grounds for the sisters' graveyard, a great light appeared from heaven, which was related to be brighter than the brightest daylight, and came upon the congregation at prayer one night. It then rose from their place and moved to the south side of the monastery, where it remained for some time, before withdrawing back to heaven. It was clear to the community that this light was intended to guide and receive their souls into heaven and was also pointing out the location of their graveyard where their bodies were to rest until the Day of Resurrection.<sup>965</sup> On another occasion when a member of the community was dying from the plague, she saw a very bright light in her room (a light so bright that the lamp burning in the room seemed dark to her), but the supernatural light was not visible to those who were attending on her. The light filled her room all night and at dawn, Bede relates that she departed to the eternal light.<sup>966</sup> Shortly before the death of Abbess Æthelburh, another sister in the community, named Torhtgyth, saw a vision of a human body wrapped in a shroud that was brighter than the sun. While she watched this body was raised up from within the house where the sisters used to sleep by cords, brighter than gold, and brought up into the open heavens until she could see it no longer. She realised that a member of the community was soon to die, who would be drawn to heaven by their good deeds, and a few days later Abbess Æthelburh died. Bede adds that all who knew of her goodness believe that, as the vision predicted, on departing this life the gates of heaven were opened to her.<sup>967</sup> After Æthelburh's death Hildelith succeeded her as abbess.<sup>968</sup> She transferred the bones of many of those dedicated to Christ (both male and female)<sup>969</sup> to the church of the blessed Mother of God where they were re-buried. Afterwards, Bede relates, that the brightness of a heavenly light, a wonderful fragrance, and other signs often appeared there.<sup>970</sup>

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<sup>965</sup> *HE* IV.7, 356-359.

<sup>966</sup> *HE* IV.8, 358-359.

<sup>967</sup> *HE* IV.9, 360-361.

<sup>968</sup> Hildelith and the sisters of Barking are the dedicatees of Aldhelm's prose *De Virginitate*, see Chapter Four.

<sup>969</sup> *HE* IV.10, 362-363, ... *famulorum famularumque Christi*.

<sup>970</sup> *HE* IV.10, 362-364. Although Bede is using a source from Barking monastery for his information, and undoubtedly had a source for his account of Eorcengota, it has been argued at various points in this thesis that Bede often edited his sources and only included what was

That so many miracles of light are associated with women in the *HE* has never been seriously commented upon in modern scholarship. Such miracles are not exclusive to women, however.<sup>971</sup> In the *HE* Bede relates that a heavenly light appeared above the grave of Peter (the first abbot of Peter and Paul's in Canterbury), who drowned on a mission to Gaul and was given an unworthy burial by the local inhabitants. A heavenly light appeared above his grave every night until the population realised that he was a saint and transferred him to the church in Boulogne.<sup>972</sup> When the community at Bardney were unwilling to receive the bones of Oswald, a column of light stretched from the carriage that held his remains up to heaven and was visible throughout the kingdom of Lindsey, thereby revealing his great holiness.<sup>973</sup> After King Sebbi of the East Saxons renounced his throne to enter a monastery, he was concerned that he might behave unworthily on his deathbed and, shortly before he died, he received a vision of three men in shining robes who reassured him that he would die without any pain in a great splendour of light in three days times. Bede revealed that these things were fulfilled as the king had been told.<sup>974</sup> These similar-type miracles of light reveal quite clearly that, in Bede's view, the same heavenly reward is open to men and women who follow the Lord devoutly.<sup>975</sup> However, so many women ascending to heaven in this way reveals that Bede was very aware that salvation is open to all.

In this context it is also worth noting who were the beneficiaries of these visions. At the time of Hild's death, two women at very different stages in the religious life witness her soul receiving its eternal reward. Begu had been a dedicated virgin for more than thirty years, whereas Bede's account suggests that the other, unnamed, woman had only recently entered the monastery, although

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relevant to his purpose. In the cases of Barking and Brie he notes that many other signs were witnessed in both places, so it is significant that he opted to include these similar-type miracles in his book.

<sup>971</sup> Cf. Gregory the Great's *Dialogi (Dialogues)*, where there are many examples of such miracles for both men and women, see bk.2.34-35 and 37: *SC* 260; *FOTC* 39, 104-106 and 107-108. Bk.4.7-12, 14 and 16-18: *SC* 265; *FOTC* 39, 200-212.

<sup>972</sup> *HE* I.34, 116-117.

<sup>973</sup> *HE* III.11, 246-247.

<sup>974</sup> *HE* IV.11, 366-367. Cf. Cuthbert's vision of Aidan's death, *Vita Cuthberti Auctore Anonymo (The Anonymous Life of Cuthbert)*, i.5: Colgrave (1940) 68-72. Bede, *Vita Sancti Cuthberti (Life of Saint Cuthbert)*, c.4: Colgrave (1940) 164-167.

<sup>975</sup> See Chapter Four for discussion of heavenly rewards. Although everyone's reward is for all eternity, those who were more devoted to the Lord in this life will be closer to the Lamb in heaven.

she is described as a devoted virgin and very attached to Hild. When Eorcengota of Kent died many of the brothers in the monastery heard the angelic choirs and witnessed the heavenly light that bore her soul away. At Barking, many (if not all) of the community witnessed the heavenly light that identified the location of the sisters' cemetery, and there seem to have been regular occurrences of heavenly light and other signs at the church dedicated to Mary where many of the community had been re-buried. However, the relatively insignificant Torhtgyth received the vision prophesying the death of Abbess Æthelburh, and an unnamed member of the community witnessed a heavenly light in the room where she spent her last few hours that could not be seen by anyone else. Many of these figures could be regarded as little ones in the faith who are blessed in this way and their visions often clearly reveal the holiness of the recently deceased. However, even these have their place in God's kingdom. These miracles of heavenly light are important for various reasons, but are very significant because they reveal that all peoples in all conditions of humanity have their place in the *HE*.<sup>976</sup>

### **Location of narratives concerning holy women in the *HE***

The various holy women encountered throughout the pages of the *HE* may seem insignificant individually but it is clear that cumulatively these women have an important part to play. This thesis has demonstrated the importance of four major women in the book – namely Æthelburh, Eanflæd, Æthelthryth and Hild – who each, in their own way, have a role in the development of the Church among the Anglo-Saxons and the Christianisation of Anglo-Saxon society. Bede's presentation of these women's lives and their location within the book (with the exception of Hild) has been discussed in their respective chapters. However, away from the major players at the upper echelons of the Anglo-Saxon world, all the narratives concerning women, particularly those in the monastic life, are important in the development of the book and comment on the Christian life, as it is encountered in seventh-century Anglo-Saxon England.

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<sup>976</sup> This is apparent at other times throughout the book also, the story of Cædmon, an insignificant figure in social terms, being an important example.

The first description of Anglo-Saxon women's interest in the monastic life occurs in *HE* III.8, when Bede describes the lives of Eorcengota of Kent and her aunt, Æthelburh of the East Angles, at the monastic house of Brie in Gaul. Bede also notes that at this time there were very few monastic houses in Britain so many people went to Frankish monasteries to practise the monastic life or sent their daughters there.<sup>977</sup> This clearly reveals the advanced state of many Anglo-Saxon Christians at the time, some of whom are only second-generation but they have reached a very high level of conversion. This chapter is located in the middle of Bede's account of Oswald's reign, during which the Ionan mission to the Northumbrians was begun. The chapter just before describes the conversion of the West Saxons and the difficulties faced in that kingdom, which follows after Bede's description of the beginning of the Ionan mission, and the respective merits of Aidan and Oswald.<sup>978</sup> The five chapters that follow Bede's account of the holy Anglo-Saxon women in Gaul demonstrate Oswald's sanctity by a series of miracles related to the place of his death and his remains, including his installation at Bardney monastery, revealing the beginnings of monasticism among the Anglo-Saxons in Britain.<sup>979</sup> The remainder of Book Three is then concerned with the reign of Oswald's brother and successor, Oswiu, and the final chapter relates the apostasy and subsequent re-conversion of part of the kingdom of the East Saxons.<sup>980</sup> Chapter Three has discussed the developments in the Northumbrian Church during Oswiu's reign, which include the king's support for the monastic life and the Synod of Whitby.<sup>981</sup> The variety in the levels of Christian life attained by the Anglo-Saxons is demonstrated in this book. Though the Roman missionaries sent by Gregory the Great had originally converted Kent, East Anglia, the kingdom of the East Saxons, and Northumbria, these kingdoms are all at very different stages of Christian development in the mid-seventh century. During this period the Church also extends to the kingdom of the West Saxons for the first time through the work of another Italian missionary, Birinus, and the influence of Oswald. It is clear that within these kingdoms, various individuals have attained to different levels of the Christian life,

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<sup>977</sup> *HE* III.8, 236-241.

<sup>978</sup> *HE* III.7, 233-237; *HE* III.3-6, 218-231.

<sup>979</sup> *HE* III.9-13, 240-255; *HE* III.11-12, 244-253, for Bardney.

<sup>980</sup> *HE* III.14-29, 254-323, for Oswiu's reign; *HE* III.30, 322-323, for the East Saxons.

<sup>981</sup> *HE* III.24-25, 290-309; see Chapter Three.

demonstrating Bede's awareness that the development of the Church among people does not constantly move forward. While the women in Gaul have attained to the highest level and Eorcengota's soul is witnessed ascending to heaven in glory, and the faith and devotion of Oswald, the recently converted Northumbrian king, is also recognised, it is apparent that part of the kingdom of the East Saxons is at a very primitive stage in its Christian development.

A similar pattern is in evidence in *HE IV*, although there are many more monastic foundations to be considered in this period. This book describes the consolidation of the Church among the Anglo-Saxons, post-Whitby, during the archbishopric of Theodore and also reveals the remarkable growth in monasteries over a relatively short period.<sup>982</sup> While many of these foundations – such as Whitby, Hartlepool, and Coldingham – were in existence before this stage in the Church's development, Bede chooses to provide detailed information about them at this point in the book. In *HE IV.5*, Bede describes the Synod of Hertford called by Theodore in the first year of his archbishopric.<sup>983</sup> This is followed by Bede's description of the founding of Barking monastery, and the next four chapters relate the way of life and miracles that took place in that monastery.<sup>984</sup> The last miracle at Barking relates the curing of a laywoman's blindness, revealing the strength of her faith in the community at the monastery.<sup>985</sup> The next chapters recount Sebbi of the East Saxons' desire to give up his kingdom and enter a monastery and the manner of his death; the state of bishoprics in various kingdoms in Britain; Wilfrid's travels after being expelled from his see; the recent conversion of the kingdom of the South Saxons and one boy's vision of Peter and Paul on the feast of Oswald; the kings of the Gewisse; and the devastation and Wilfrid's subsequent conversion of the Isle of Wight.<sup>986</sup> This account of the conversion of the last place in Britain to receive Christianity is immediately followed by the proceedings of the Synod of Hatfield, at which the Church of the Anglo-Saxons is given the *imprimatur*.<sup>987</sup> Bede next describes Abbot John's visit to Britain in Benedict Biscop's company and explains that he

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<sup>982</sup> After the Battle of the Winwæd in 655, Oswiu built twelve new foundations in his kingdom, six in Deira and six in Bernicia, *HE III.24*, 292-293. See Chapter Three.

<sup>983</sup> *HE IV.5*, 348-355.

<sup>984</sup> *HE IV.6-10*, 354-365.

<sup>985</sup> *HE IV.10*, 364-365.

<sup>986</sup> *HE IV.11-16(14)*, 364-385.

<sup>987</sup> *HE IV.17(15)*, 384-387.

was sent to by the pope to inquire into the beliefs of the English Church and, even though he died on his way back to Rome, the testimony of the English to the Catholic faith was brought to Rome and received by the pope in preparation for the General Council at Constantinople.<sup>988</sup>

The next few chapters are concerned with the monasteries of Ely, Whitby and Coldingham. Bede presents his description of Æthelthryth's life, followed by his poem in praise of her.<sup>989</sup> This is followed by his report of Archbishop Theodore's successful intervention that prevents further hostilities between Northumbria and Mercia after Ecgfrith's brother's death in a battle between these kingdoms; and his account of Imma (one of Æthelthryth's thegns), who had been captured during the Northumbrian battle with Mercia but could not be kept in bonds because of the masses offered for his soul by his brother, Tunna.<sup>990</sup> The next two chapters contain his account of Hild and Cædmon's gift.<sup>991</sup> After his discussion of Hild and Whitby, Bede describes the events at the monastery of Coldingham that led to its destruction; this is followed by Ecgfrith's death in battle against the Picts, having ignored the advice of Cuthbert and others, and the subsequent weakening of Northumbrian power; and then his account of Cuthbert's life and *post mortem* miracles bringing us to the end of Book Four.<sup>992</sup> Bede's presentation reveals that the Christian life was in a very advanced state in some parts of Northumbria, as illustrated in his account of Æthelthryth,<sup>993</sup> while the behaviour of the community at Coldingham and the rashness of King Ecgfrith reveal that many Christians had not progressed very far in the spiritual life for various reasons. As an illustration of this in microcosm, the reader encounters Christians at very different stages of Christian development in the chapters on Cuthbert. The holy life of one of the greatest figures of the young Anglo-Saxon Church is described and, as part of this, his practice of giving very basic instruction to the people in the vicinity of his monastery and even preaching to

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<sup>988</sup> *HE* IV.18(16), 388-391.

<sup>989</sup> *HE* IV.19(17)-20(18), 390-401.

<sup>990</sup> *HE* IV.21(19)-22(20), 401-405.

<sup>991</sup> *HE* IV.23(21)-24(22), 404-421. Bede begins his account of Hild with the words, 'In the following year, that is, the year of our Lord 680, Hild ... departed on 17 November, ... to receive the rewards of the heavenly life,' *HE* IV.23(21), 404-407. This presumably means the year following the battle between Mercia and Northumbria during Ecgfrith's reign.

<sup>992</sup> *HE* IV.25(23)-32(30), 420-449.

<sup>993</sup> See discussion in Chapter Four.



those in remote mountain villages that rarely, if ever, received Christian teachers is related.<sup>994</sup>

The role of the monasteries of Barking, Ely, Whitby, and Coldingham are very important in *HE IV*. Although Barking, Ely and Whitby are significant because of the holiness of the lives of their inhabitants and particularly for the influence of their abbesses, Coldingham also serves its purpose in the book. It warns all Christians that the Lord will take his vengeance on those who overly indulge in worldliness or ignore the judgement of God and reminds the reader to avoid complacency. The monasteries of Barking, Whitby, and Coldingham contain individuals of both sexes and together with Ely all four of these monasteries include a cross-section of people from different levels of society and at different stages in the spiritual life. These monasteries, individually and together, successfully represent not only the development of the Church among the Anglo-Saxons but also the universal Church throughout the world, as this similarly includes all people, irrespective of gender or social status, at various spiritual states. Bede's accounts of these Anglo-Saxon religious women show their renunciation of all earthly concerns and offer glimpses into the rewards received for the lives they lead, when they enter into the fullness of the angelic heavenly life. As the *HE* progresses to the visionary material contained in Book Five, heaven is revealed unambiguously to be the Christian's true home.

In considering Bede's account of the conversion of the English in the *HE* various women frequently appear in the pages of the book and, from the beginnings of the Gregorian mission onwards, the idea of Christian marriage and instances of royal marriage repeatedly recur. A close examination of this material suggests that Bede's treatment of marriage in the *HE* is one of several ways in which he sustains his presentation of the conversion process of a new Christian people.

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<sup>994</sup> See *HE IV.27(25)*, 433-435.

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