

The Journey of Young Souls in Early Medieval England (c. 850 - c. 1050)



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Short Abstract

This thesis explores the complex theological beliefs about young souls expressed during the late Anglo-Saxon period. Scholars have paid surprisingly little attention to the theology of the soul between the ninth and eleventh centuries except in relation to its fate after death. Yet, the living soul appears prominently in Latin and Old English prose and verse demonstrating the extent to which beliefs about the whole of the soul's life journey were still evolving. So great an interest did contemporary writers show in questions relating to the origins of the soul and its early experiences that it proved impossible to address the whole life journey of the soul from creation to judgment within the space of a single doctoral thesis. This thesis therefore focuses on the life journey of the young soul up to the cusp of adulthood, following pivotal moments from the birth of the soul to its adolescence.

The first substantive chapter analyses the transfer of beliefs about the soul's origin across this period from a Neoplatonic stance arguing for the soul's pre-existence to a Creationist outlook. The second chapter questions the point at which the soul was first believed to enter the body and addresses the inconsistencies surrounding ensoulment during the period. The next chapter addresses ideas about the state of a child's soul at the start of corporeal existence and the degree to which we can tell that the Anglo-Saxons believed in an inherited condition of original sin. The fourth chapter asks how long the soul received immediate entrance into heaven after baptism and where Anglo-Saxon writers drew the spiritual boundary between childhood and adulthood.

A conclusion addresses the necessity of looking further into Anglo-Saxon beliefs about the life journey of the soul. The following epilogue studies souls outside living bodies to demonstrate the diverse and dynamic beliefs which continually appear in later Anglo-Saxon sources.

Long Abstract

Scholars of the period between the ninth and eleventh centuries have paid surprisingly little attention to the theology of the soul in later Anglo-Saxon England except in relation to the fate of the soul after death. Yet, the living soul appears prominently in Latin and Old English prose and verse from the period demonstrating the extent to which beliefs about the whole of the soul's life journey were still evolving. So great an interest did contemporary writers show in questions relating to the origins of the soul and its early experiences that it has proved impossible to address the whole life journey of the soul from creation to judgement in the space of a single doctoral thesis. This dissertation therefore focuses on the life journey of the young soul up to the cusp of adulthood. Previously, scholars such as Godden, Ross, Harbus, Lockett, and Foxhall Forbes have explored aspects of Anglo-Saxon psychology and belief and considered the relationship between souls, minds, and bodies in this era; their work lays the foundations on which this thesis rests. Modern theologians of the early medieval period have hitherto only nominally considered Anglo-Saxon contributions to contemporary western theological debates about the soul; my work demonstrates the importance and creativity of English ideas on this subject.

When I first devised a structure for this thesis, it was to have covered what I believed to be the entire life of the soul from ensoulment to Judgement day. Chapters were to address:

1. Ensoulment
2. The Living Soul
3. Out of Body Experiences
4. The Hour of Death
5. The Lingering Soul
6. Judgement

This scheme proved too ambitious. As my research progressed, it became apparent that I needed to focus on some prior questions before I could return to exploration of my original queries. To address the topic of ensoulment, for example, we must first know about Anglo-Saxon beliefs about the origin of souls. Furthermore, both the topics of the origin of souls and ensoulment greatly affect, and are deeply entrenched in, beliefs about the stain left on the soul by original sin. My finished thesis still follows the life chronology of the soul, but it seeks to study the soul from the very beginning of its life journey, answering questions about theologies intrinsically rooted in one another, rather than briskly cover too much information within too little space. The new chapter order is as follows:

1. A Soul's Origin
2. Ensoulment
3. An Infant's Unbaptized Soul
4. The Coming of Age of the Soul

In order to build as complete a picture of these specific Anglo-Saxon beliefs about the soul as possible, this study relies on a large range of different hierarches of texts drawing from the Bible, influential works by early Christian exegetes and theologians, homilies, hagiographies, poetry, vernacular translations, prognostics, charms, penitentials, law, artwork, archaeology, and liturgy. This approach is necessary particularly when studying the early life of the soul, when primary sources seldom discuss each topic and, in the few instances where they do, often do so only in an indirect manner.

Before turning to the soul's life journey, this thesis begins by focusing on the progress already made in our understanding of Anglo-Saxon beliefs about the nature of the soul through a detailed study of the secondary literature produced on the topic. As well as asking about the relationship between mind, body, and soul – the topic which has attracted the most recent study and debate – this chapter addresses important questions including who the Anglo-Saxons believed capable of possessing a soul and of what they believed the

soul to consist. At the start of this literature review covering our understanding on the Anglo-Saxon soul are Clemons' essay '*Mens absentia Cogitans* in *The Seafarer* and *The Wanderer*' published in 1969 and Godden's defining article 'Anglo-Saxons on the Mind' which both studied Anglo-Saxon psychological perspectives influenced by patristic theologies and the vernacular tradition. More recent work on the Anglo-Saxon mental lexicon by Low and the interdisciplinary approaches taken by Harbus and Lockett have better shaped our understanding of Anglo-Saxon beliefs about the soul while Foxhall Forbes' monograph has brought into question our previous assumptions about popular theology during this period. These themes studied by recent literature both reveal the gaps in our knowledge on this topic and set the necessary groundwork for the chapters to follow which step away from the general characteristics of the soul and turn to the story of the soul from its beginning.

My first substantive chapter addresses Anglo-Saxon views concerning the origin of the soul. With no orthodox view established on the topic even by the time of Anselm of Canterbury's death (1109), we see multiple beliefs about the soul's origin circulating in this period, with some sources stating that no answer could ever be known on the subject. This chapter addresses the degree to which the three historic beliefs on the origin of souls – Traducianism, Pre-existence, and Creationism – can be found in the late Anglo-Saxon period. Although little evidence survives to point to a continued belief that each individual soul stemmed from Adam directly through his or her parents (Traducianism), we see strong evidence from the translations of King Alfred's court at the end of the ninth century discussing the existence of souls from the beginning of time (Pre-existence) and, at the end of the tenth century after the Benedictine reform, attempts by Ælfric and Wulfstan of Winchester to create an orthodox view that God creates bespoke souls for each person at the moment of their ensoulment (Creationism). Although both the Pre-existence and

Creationist doctrines had their strong supporters during this period, a number of anonymous religious texts neither confirmed nor refuted either doctrine when they discussed the very beginning of a soul's life. By studying each of these categories, this chapter concludes that the topic of soul's origin inspired firm but conflicting stances in the long tenth century supporting both the pre-existence of souls and Creationism, suggesting that theological discussions on the birth of individual souls were taking place in courts and religious spaces. Although these disagreements certainly took place, some accord can be found between these sources agreeing on God's active role in the individual placement of each soul into its body.

The second chapter asks at what point the Anglo-Saxons believed initial ensoulment, or the first entry of the soul into the body, took place. Although surviving sources seem to consistently follow a 'delayed ensoulment' theology – where the soul first enters the body at some time between conception and birth – the approaches to describe more specifically when ensoulment occurred from this time period seem to branch across several traditions. The first strand of ensoulment descriptions found in late Anglo-Saxon sources followed the model set by Adam's creation in the Bible, connecting the process of ensoulment with the attainment of bodily autonomy in the womb; the second strand associated the first physical sensation of foetal movement – the quickening – with the soul first entering the body. After analysing these two theologies of ensoulment, this chapter addresses the inconsistencies in ensoulment beliefs found in abortion clauses in penitentials and law codes before turning to the difficulties which the embryology of Christ brings into the equation. This chapter concludes that beliefs from this period about ensoulment were fraught with inconsistencies, suggesting that no official doctrine on the subject had been established; however, by narrowing down the timing of ensoulment

between the first forty days of pregnancy and the first sensation of movement, we find a theology with a pastoral role which might have allowed for early term pregnancy loss.

Chapter three questions beliefs about unbaptized infant souls and the degree to which we can state that the Anglo-Saxons believed in the inherited condition of original sin. It begins with a brief study of the doctrine, focusing on its decrease in popularity in religious literature as the early Middle Ages progressed, before attempting to find the Old English term for original sin searching through vernacular texts which translated Latin works explaining it and Old English interlinear glosses for the Latin *peccatum originale*. It finds that vernacular texts employed no single consistent terminology describing this doctrine, which, whilst not excluding the doctrine's presence from late Anglo-Saxon England, certainly tells us a great amount about attitudes towards it during this period. This chapter then addresses how texts portrayed those holy figures supposedly born without original sin, such as Jesus, Mary, and John the Baptist, before turning to what vernacular homilies taught about the state of the soul before baptism: while many did refer to Adam's role in the fall of humanity, they would not explain the transmission of sin along with that fall. With these issues outlined on the popularity of the doctrine of original sin, this chapter then examines alternative beliefs about infant souls which might have spurred the drive for infant baptism in the late Anglo-Saxon period: the first visualizing the child as possessed by the devil before baptism occurred and the second categorizing each unbaptized child as a heathen 'other.' The chapter concludes that although a range of texts from homilies to penitentials emphasized the damned state of an unbaptized infant's soul, the reasoning given for this belief rarely, if ever, centred around the idea that a child's soul inherited the condition of original sin on which Augustine of Hippo wrote.

The Anglo-Saxons believed that the soul of a child who died immediately ('sona') after baptism was pure; the fourth chapter asks when the Anglo-Saxons believed this

period of perceived purity ended and an individual's soul lost this reassurance of immediate entry into heaven. It is already understood that the late Anglo-Saxons treated children's souls differently from those of adults, but no previous study has focused on when an individual's soul began to be weighed and measured by its actions. This chapter follows three different potential endpoints of childhood innocence/immunity as proposed by patristic and early medieval theologians: the acquisition of speech, an age of reason, and puberty. Through a tale found in Gregory the Great's *Dialogues* about a blaspheming child dragged to hell preserved in Old English by Waerferth and Ælfric, this chapter observes the role which speech played in both condemning a child and providing its salvation. Next, the chapter studies how Augustine's boundary of an age of reason marking the end of childhood immunity permeated through homilies, hagiography, penitentials, and law codes. The final section of this chapter asks if the association between puberty and purity found in Isidore's highly influential *Etymologies* affected Anglo-Saxon thoughts on the soul's coming of age. This chapter identifies, with the help of hagiographical accounts of virgin saints, that whilst adolescence appeared as an important point in life where an individual's soul was newly susceptible to sexual sin, an undercurrent of beliefs existed that promoted the idea that an age of reason marked the boundary between childhood and adulthood, even if no text explicitly authorized this point of view.

This thesis concludes by reflecting on the complexity of beliefs about the early life of the soul during this period of less than two hundred years, addressing the necessity of looking further into Anglo-Saxon beliefs about the life journey of the soul. To expand on the additional perplexities of the soul still yet to be explored, an epilogue follows which analyses cases of out-of-body experiences describing the soul's ability to separate from a still-living body during dreams and sickness. By demonstrating the diverse and dynamic

beliefs which continue to appear in later Anglo-Saxon sources, this survey sets a precedent for further work to be done in this field of theological, historical, and literary research.

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I owe so much to the continued love and support from my family. Grandmother, Mother, Father, Betsy, Caroline, Daniel, and Abigail: y'all are my foundation. Knowing that you are always there for me has made every difference.

Jamie Williams: *no hay palabras*. This adventure could not have been done without you.

List of Abbreviations

Ælfric, <i>CH I</i>	Ælfric, <i>Catholic Homilies</i> , First Series, ed. P. Clemoes (Oxford, 1997).
Ælfric, <i>CH II</i>	Ælfric, <i>Catholic Homilies</i> , Second Series, ed. M. Godden (Oxford, 1979).
Ælfric, <i>LoS</i>	Ælfric, <i>Ælfric's Lives of Saints</i> , ed. and trans. W. Skeat (London, 1881-1900; repr. in 2 volumes 1966).
Ælfric, <i>Supplementary</i>	Ælfric, <i>Homilies of Ælfric: a supplementary collection</i> , 2 volumes, ed. J. Pope (London, 1967-1968).
CCCM	Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum Series Latina
<i>Councils and Synods I.i</i>	<i>Councils and Synods, with other documents relating to the English Church: I, A.D. 971-1204</i> , Part I: 871-1066, eds. and trans. D. Whitelock, M. Brett, and C. Brooke (Oxford, 1981).
CSEL	Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum
DOE	<i>Dictionary of Old English Web Corpus</i> , eds. A. diPaolo Healey et al. < https://www.doe.utoronto.ca >(2019).
<i>Fontes</i>	<i>Fontes Anglo-Saxonici: World Wide Web Register</i> , ed. Fontes Anglo-Saxonici Project < http://fontes.english.ox.ac.uk/ >.
MGH	Monumenta Germaniae Historica

- OEB, I* *The Old English Boethius*, Vol. I, C Text, ed. M. Godden and S. Irvine (Oxford, 2009), 383-541.
- OEB, II* *The Old English Boethius*, Vol. II, C Text, ed. and trans. M. Godden and S. Irvine (Oxford, 2009), 97-199.
- PL J. Migne, *Patrologia Latina* (Paris, 1844-91).
[Citations by volume and column]
- PG J. Migne, *Patrologia Graeca* (Paris, 1857-66).
[Citations by volume and column]
- Vercelli Homilies* *The Vercelli Homilies and Related Texts*, ed. D. Scragg (Oxford, 1992).
- Wulfstan,
Homilies *The Homilies of Wulfstan*, ed. D. Bethurum (Oxford, 1957).

Poetry

Unless otherwise stated all quotations from Old English poetry are taken from *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records: A Collective Edition*, eds. G. Krapp and E. Van Kirk Dobbie, 6 volumes (New York, 1931-1953).

- Andreas *Andreas: an Edition*, eds. R. North and M. Bintley (Liverpool, 2016).
- Beowulf *Klaeber's Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, 4th edition, eds. R. Fulk, R. Bjork, and J. Niles, intr. H. Damico (Toronto, 2008).
- Christ III ‘Christ III,’ in *The Exeter Book*, eds. G. Krapp and E. Van Kirk Dobbie, ASPR 3 (New York, 1936), 27-49.
- Daniel ‘Daniel’ in *The Junius Manuscript*, ed. G. Krapp, ASPR 1 (London, 1931), 111-132.
- Dream of the
Rood ‘The Dream of the Rood’ in *The Vercelli Book*, ed. G. Krapp, ASPR 2 (London, 1932), 61-65.

- The Fortunes of Men ‘The Fortunes of Men’ in *The Exeter Book*, eds. G. Krapp and E. Van Kirk Dobbie, ASPR 3 (New York, 1936), 154-156.
- Genesis A *Genesis A: A New Edition, Revised*, ed. A. Doane (Tempe, 2013).
- Genesis B ‘Genesis B’ in *The Saxon Genesis: An Edition of the West Saxon Genesis B and the Old Saxon Vatican Genesis*, ed. A. Doane (Madison, WI, 1991), 207-231.
- Juliana ‘Juliana’ in *The Exeter Book*, eds. G. Krapp and E. Van Kirk Dobbie, ASPR 3 (New York, 1936), 113-133.
- Precepts ‘Precepts’ in *The Exeter Book*, eds. G. Krapp and E. Van Kirk Dobbie, ASPR 3 (New York, 1936), 140-143.
- Riddle 43 ‘Riddle 43’ in *The Exeter Book*, eds. G. Krapp and E. Van Kirk Dobbie, ASPR 3 (New York, 1936), 204.
- The Seafarer ‘The Seafarer’ in *The Exeter Book*, eds. G. Krapp and E. Van Kirk Dobbie, ASPR 3 (New York, 1936), 143-147.
- The Seasons for Fasting ‘The Seasons for Fasting’ in *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, ed. E. Van Kirk Dobbie, ASPR 6 (New York, 1942), 98-104.
- Soul and Body I ‘V’ in *The Old English Soul and Body*, ed. and trans. D. Moffat (Wolfeboro, NH, 1990), 49-64.
- Soul and Body II ‘E’ in *The Old English Soul and Body*, ed. and trans. D. Moffat (Wolfeboro, NH, 1990), 48-60.

Biblical Quotations

Unless otherwise stated all quotations from the Bible are taken from *The Vulgate Bible* (trans.) Douay-Rheims < <http://www.drbo.org/>>(2019). Psalms are cited with their Vulgate numbers

Note on Translations

Translations from Old English are my own unless otherwise stated in the footnotes. Where no translated edition of a Latin work is given in the footnotes the translation is my own.

List of Images

1. London, British Library, Harley MS 603, f. 73r¹ (page 18)
© British Library Board Harley MS 603 f73r.
Harley Psalter depiction of Psalm 142
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Bury Psalter depiction of Abraham cradling souls
3. Graph made by Elaine Flowers (page 159)
Number of occurrences of *peccatum originale* including similar phrasing by century
4. London, British Library, Harley MS 603, f. 72r (page 209)
© British Library Board Harley MS 603 f72r.
Harley Psalter depiction of Psalm 140
5. London, British Library, Stowe MS 944, f. 7r (page 246)
© British Library Board Stowe MS 944 f7r.
New Minster *Liber Vitae* depiction of Judgement Day with Saint Peter and a devil fighting over the soul of a young boy

¹ Images from British Library manuscripts have been collected using the online database *British Library Digitised Manuscripts* <<http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/>>.

² Images from Vatican Library manuscripts have been collected using the online database *Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana Digitized Manuscripts* <<http://www.mss.vatlib.it/guii/scan/link.jsp>>.

Introduction

Very often it happens through God's might
that a man and a woman bring children
into the world through birth and adorn them with colours,
coax them and cheer them until the time comes,
happens through a number of years, that the young limbs,
the members endowed with life, become grown.
Thus father and mother carry them along and walk with
them, give to them and dress them. God alone knows
what winters will bring them as they are growing up.
For some sufferers it happens that the end
woefully occurs during youth.

Ful oft þæt gegonged, mid godes meatum,
þætte wer ond wif in woruld cennað
bearn mid gebyrdum ond mid bleom gyrwað,
tennaþ ond tætaþ, oþþæt seo tid cymeð,
gegæð gearrimum, þæt þa geongan leomu,
liffæstan leoþu, geloden weorþað.
Fergað swa ond feþað fæder ond modor,
giefað ond gierwaþ. God ana wat
hwæt him weaxendum winter bringað!
Sumum þæt gegonged on geoguðfeore
þæt se endestæf earfeðmæcgum
wealic weorþeð. ('The Fortunes of Men,' ll. 1-12).¹

A carefully nurtured child, wrapped in colours and loved by his parents, might have the happiest of youths, but the Old English poem 'The Fortunes of Men' quickly reminded its audience that a child's life could prove fleeting; God alone knew what his future might hold. The poem continues, listing the possible fates of this child: a wolf might consume him, hunger might take him, he might fall out of a tree in the forest, unable to withstand

¹ Translations for 'The Fortunes of Men' from: 'The Fortunes of Mortals,' in *Old English Shorter Poems: Wisdom and Lyric*, trans. R. Bjork (Cambridge, MA, 2014), 57.

the fall because he is ‘featherless’ (‘fīþerleas,’ l. 22). It was so easy to become ‘bereft of soul’ (‘sawle bireafod,’ l. 25), particularly as the child aged into an adult. This poem, described as ‘one of the saddest images of parenting in Anglo-Saxon Literature,’ kept its focus on the transitory nature of life and the power of God, yet at the same time it gives us a rare glimpse into the early stages of a child’s life in early medieval England.² It speaks about limbs being given life, the process of birth, and the upbringing given by one’s parents. These few lines of poetry raise a whole series of questions about Anglo-Saxon beliefs concerning the souls of the young. Where did they believe the soul came from before it gave life to this child’s limbs? When did this soul supposedly first enter the body? What level of impurity did they perceive the souls of unbaptized children to contain? As a child grew older, was its soul considered to be different from that of an adult? These are the questions that underpin this thesis.

Patristic writers and scholastic theologians might have stated that they knew the answers to each of these questions, but that does not necessarily signify that between these two eras we see a uniform system of beliefs in discussions on young souls. These are complex questions which have achieved no consensus even in the modern age; we cannot simply project our own multi-faceted beliefs about the soul, let alone the beliefs of a select few theologians of the past, onto those of the Anglo-Saxons between the late-ninth and the mid-eleventh centuries. Authors from this period often addressed questions about the soul in works which survive to this day: theologians circulated their homilies in the vernacular in an attempt to teach to the masses on the salvation of their souls; Old English poets entrenched their verse with mentions of the soul, sometimes writing with the soul’s voice, casting it as a poem’s persona. Scriptoria produced handbooks of penance as guides for priests to remedy the ailing souls of their confessors. Images of the souls of the dead – not

² S. Klein, ‘Parenting and Childhood in *The Fortunes of Men*,’ in *Childhood and Adolescence in Anglo-Saxon Literary Culture*, eds. S. Irvine and W. Rudolf (Toronto, 2018), 95.

so immaterial as Augustine of Hippo had argued in the fifth century – appear in Anglo-Saxon psalter books. Studied together, these references to the soul reveal a unique perspective on the developing beliefs about the inner spiritual substance of each person in the early Middle Ages.

As the Psalms were translated into Old English at the turn of the tenth century, the translator might have considered the verse from Psalm twenty-one:

Lord, you drew me out of my mother's womb; you have been my hope since I have been weaned from my mother's breasts. I have been committed to your care, since I emerged from her womb, you have been my God.

Drihten, þu eart se þe me gelæddest of minre modor innoðe; þu wære min tohopa syþþan ic fram minre modor breoston gelæd wæs. Þinre gymenne ic wæs beboden, syððan ic of hire innoðe eode, þu wære min God.³

and wondered about a person's spiritual identity before they left the womb, maybe even whether a child could belong to God before it received baptism. One of the surprising findings of this thesis is the extent to which Anglo-Saxon literature addressed the soul across a large range of genres – it is rare to find a piece of written work where the soul is not mentioned in some capacity. Enhancing our understanding of Anglo-Saxon beliefs about the soul thus enlightens our readings of both the Latin and Old English texts produced in this time. It also reveals how a select few of the Anglo-Saxon populace interacted with doctrines established by early Christian scholars, highlights religious perspectives on pregnancy, and offers a glimpse into Anglo-Saxon family life and the early medieval Church's expectations about the upbringing of children. To do all of this, this thesis explores the complex theological beliefs about young souls articulated during the late Anglo-Saxon period by chronologically following the life journey of the soul from its origin to the cusp of adulthood.

³ *Old English Psalms*, Psalm 21, ed. and trans. P. O'Neill (Cambridge, MA, 2016), 68-69. The Old English translator here was rendering Psalm 21:10-11 [Vulgate numbering].

Defining the Soul*What is the soul?*

First, we must define what the Anglo-Saxons considered the soul to be. To start linguistically, Phillips' semantic study of the Old English psychological lexicon – *mod*, *hyge*, *sefa*, *ferhð*, *heorte*, *sawol*, and *gast* – separated those terms which dealt with the mortal centre of emotions and intellect, or the 'non transcendent' – *mod*, *hyge*, *sefa*, *ferhð*, and *heorte* – from the 'transcendent' immortal side of the inner life corresponding with the Old English words *sawol* (from which we derive the Modern English word 'soul') and *gast* (in Modern English 'ghost' or 'spirit').⁴ Phillips importantly noted that modern readers should be aware of the distinction made between *sawol* and *gast* in Anglo-Saxon usage 'because *gast* has several different senses – because it can also mean Holy Spirit, angel/devil, spirit as opposed to letter, spirit as opposed to flesh, spirit of prophecy or wisdom – that poets can profitably employ it in non-literal ways. *Sawol*, lacking such secondary senses, is never used figuratively in Old English.'⁵ This understanding concerning the words *sawol* and *gast* was actually described by a leading vernacular homilist writing at the end of the tenth century, Abbot Ælfric of Eynsham (d. 1010), who

⁴ M. Phillips, *Heart, Mind, and Soul in Old English: a Semantic Study*, unpublished dissertation (University of Illinois, 1985), 19. Phillips wrote that all of these terms 'are simply different names for the same thing' (7), but studies published after this have argued the case for a wider distinction of these terms to be understood. This separation of *sawol* and *gast* from the rest of the Old English mental lexicon due to their eternal, transcendental natures is agreed in other works on Anglo-Saxon psychologies: M. Godden, 'Anglo-Saxons on the Mind,' in *Learning and Literature in Anglo-Saxon England: Studies Presented to Peter Clemoes on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, eds. P. Clemoes, M. Lapidge and H. Gneuss (Cambridge, 1985), 271-298; S-A. Low, 'Approaches to the Old English Vocabulary for "Mind",' *Studia Neophilologica*, 73 (2001), 11; A. Harbus, *The Life of the Mind in Old English Poetry* (Amsterdam, 2002), 56; V. Thompson, *Dying and Death in Later Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge, 2004), 7; L. Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies the Vernacular and Latin Traditions* (Toronto, 2011), 19.

⁵ Phillips, *Heart, Mind, and Soul*, 285.

stated ‘every soul is a spirit, but, nevertheless, not every spirit is a soul’ (‘ælc sawul is gast ac swa þeah nis na ælc gast sawul’).⁶

The Anglo-Saxons were not only reading and writing in Old English, however. Latin sources and Anglo-Latin literature held a significant place in schools of learning, and glossed Latin texts would provide marginal or interlinear translations in the vernacular for better comprehension. *Sawol* would most often translate the Latin word for soul, *anima*, and *gast* most often translated the Latin word for spirit, *spiritus*.⁷ This thesis will not neglect the terms linked most directly with the intellectual and emotional – *mod*, *hyge*, *sefa*, *ferhð*, *heorte* – when authors discuss them in relation to young souls, particularly because sources so seldomly discuss children. Low has emphasized that it is always worth remembering that even with these sometimes-clear-cut definitions there was still a ‘polysemousness of “mental” vocabulary [...] [that] proliferated according to the emotional expressive need of its speakers.’⁸ With this caveat kept in mind, for the most part this thesis directs its attention to the Old English *sawol* and *gast* or Latin *anima* and *spiritus*.⁹

How, then, did the Anglo-Saxons define the soul? Preaching on Christmas Day at the end of the tenth century, Abbot Ælfric of Eynsham gave his audience a discourse on the soul and its nature. This included a comprehensive definition of the soul which left little doubt as to what properties it held:

⁶ Ælfric, *LoS*, Homily 1, 22.

⁷ On the development of the Latin word *anima* and its separation from the term *animus*, see R. Onians, *The Origins of European Thought about the Body, the Mind, the Soul, the World, Time and Fate* (Cambridge, 1951), 168-170.

⁸ S-A. Low, ‘Approaches to the Old English Vocabulary,’ 20.

⁹ The Anglo-Saxon mind and the Anglo-Saxon conception of psychology has attracted a great deal of scholarly attention with the starting point often marked at P. Clemoes, ‘*Mens Absentia Cogitans* in *The Seafarer* and *The Wanderer*,’ in *Medieval Literary and Cultural Studies Presented to G. N. Garmonsway*, eds. D. Pearsall and R. Waldron, (London, 1969), 62-77. For further discussion of pre-existing literature, see below.

She is called many names in books in reference to the use of her labour. Her name is *anima*, that is soul, and the name suits her life; and *spiritus*, spirit, in regards to her contemplation. She is *sensus* that is perception or sensation, when she feels. She is *animus*, that is heart/mind, when she knows. She is *mens*, that is heart/mind, when she understands. She is *memoria*, that is memory, when she remembers. She is *ratio*, that is reason, when she decides. She is *voluntas*, that is will, when she desires for something. But nevertheless, all these names are soul.

Heo is on bocum manegum naman gecyged, be hyre weorces þenungum. Hyre nama is *anima*, þæt is sawul, and seo nama gelympð to hire life; and *spiritus*, gast, belimpð to hire ymbwlatunge. Heo is *sensus*, þæt is andgit oððe felnyss, þonne heo gefret. Heo is *animus*, þæt is mod, þonne heo wat. Heo is *mens*, þæt is mod þonne heo understent. Heo is *memoria*, þæt is gemynd, þonne heo gemanð. Heo is *ratio*, þæt is gescead, þonne heo toscæt. Heo is *uoluntas*, þæt is wylla, þonne heo hwæt wyle. Ac swa þeah ealle þas naman syndon sawul.¹⁰

The soul constituted every inner psychological principle, ranging from spiritual to mental, of a person. Mind, memory, perception – these were all roles of the soul, but Ælfric could not lay claim to the originality of this idea. Here he was actually translating directly from *De animae ratione*, a Latin work on the soul by an eighth-century Northumbrian writing at the Carolingian court named Alcuin (d. 804) who, in turn, was quoting Isidore of Seville (d. 636).¹¹ All together, these works present a smooth historical narrative where the soul was defined as a unitary construct consisting of both the immortal, spiritual side of a person and the mental side which controlled the body. However, these tenets so clearly laid out above are only one side of the story of how the Anglo-Saxons imagined the soul.

This understanding of the soul was not the only one existent in the late Anglo-Saxon period; Malcolm Godden has revealed there were two competing discourses of belief for how the Anglo-Saxons conceived the soul. The works of Alcuin, the Alfredian translations, and the religious writings of Ælfric followed the ‘classical tradition’ which drew from works by late-antique writers and theologians and presented the soul and mind

¹⁰ Ælfric, *LoS*, Homily 1, 20.

¹¹ Alcuin, *De animae ratione liber ad Eulaliam virginem*, ch. 11, PL 101:644B-C; Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, Book 11, ch. 1, Items 12-13, PL 82:399A-B.

as a single unit. The ‘vernacular tradition,’ which Godden has found to be particularly apparent in Old English poetry, alternatively, treated the mind and soul as distinct entities.¹² For example, in the Old English poem ‘Soul and Body,’ which survives in both the tenth-century Exeter Book and Vercelli Book, we see a soul berating its now decomposing body for the actions the *body* decided to take in life which then condemned the soul:

You were proud of eating and sated with wine;
 you boasted majestically and I craved
 the body of God, the drink of the spirit.
 If you had thought then, while alive here,
 while I was obliged to dwell in the world with you
 that you were by flesh and by sinful desires
 strongly forced and stabilized by me,
 and that I was a soul sent into you by God

wære þu þe wiste wlanc and wines sæd
 þrymful þunedest, and ic ofþyrsted wæs
 godes lichoman gastes drynces
 forðan þu ne hogodest her on life
 syððan ic ðe on worulde wunian sceolde
 þæt ðu wære þurh flæsc and þurh fyrenlustas
 strange gestryned and gestaðolod þurh me
 and ic wæs gast on ðe fram gode sendeð (‘Soul and Body I,’ ll. 39-46).¹³

The anonymous poet cast the soul as a prisoner of the body, trapped and forced to withstand the accumulation of sins which the body chose to perform.¹⁴ Had the soul been granted with the mental faculties which controlled the body, it stated that it would have led a more pious life. Unfortunately for the soul and its immortal fate, the mortal mind was conceived as not only being separate from the soul but as also holding that power over the body’s actions. Leslie Lockett has further characterized these two traditions in attempting to understand the competing psychologies of the Anglo-Saxon era: the classical tradition

¹² Godden, ‘Anglo-Saxons on the Mind,’ 271-295.

¹³ Translation from *The Old English Soul and Body*, ed. and trans. D. Moffat (Wolfeboro, NH, 1990), 52.

¹⁴ On the theme of flesh imprisoning the soul, see M. Hoek, ‘Violence and Ideological Inversion in the Old English *Soul’s Address to the Body*,’ *Exemplaria* 10 (1998), 271-285.

specifically was ‘most directly indebted to the Platonist-Christian tradition,’ which was not necessarily congruent with the beliefs promoted by Augustine of Hippo, and the vernacular tradition branched out further than just the Old English poems: the homiletic corpus also often conceived each human as a mind, body, and soul ‘most clearly manifest in the portrayal of an impersonal, impotent soul who is utterly at the mercy of the body’s decisions and actions.’¹⁵ With two conflicting understandings of the soul persistent in the surviving corpus, how can we address the soul in this study of younger souls?

Both Anglo-Saxon psychological models do appear to have followed what MacDonald has called ‘anthropic dualism’ which describes a belief that ‘in their essence they [humans] are a composite of psychical and physical components, each of which could exist independently of the other, but which are dependent when they are considered parts of a greater functional whole, the individual person.’¹⁶ However, which side of the dualist concept actually controlled the body appears to have been more ambiguous. At the most basic level, both strands of thought found agreement that the soul was the immortal essence of a human being; it gave the body life at first entrance and lived eternally after the body’s death. This followed the Platonic stream of philosophy which conceived ‘the soul as an immortal, autonomous entity contingently joined with its host’s body.’¹⁷ This definition will thus be the foundation on which we further construct our understanding of the Anglo-Saxon narrative of the soul’s journey.

¹⁵ Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies*, 179, 390.

¹⁶ P. MacDonald, *History of the Concept of Mind: the Heterodox and Occult Tradition* (Aldershot, 2007), 403.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, xiii.

Having a soul

Some insight into understanding the Anglo-Saxon conception of the soul comes through asking who or what they excluded from possessing a soul. First, and perhaps easiest, the Anglo-Saxons did not consider dead bodies to still retain their souls. A study of Old English variations of the word for ‘soulless’ (‘sawulleas’) most often finds the word ascribed to a dead body.¹⁸ In the heroic vernacular poem ‘Beowulf,’ for example, Grendel’s monstrous mother took revenge against King Hrothgar for the murder of her son by killing one of Hrothgar’s favoured warriors, Æschere, and carrying his ‘soulless’ (‘sawolleasne,’ l. 1406) body back to her watery lair. Later in the poem, the tribe of the Geats found Beowulf’s soulless body on the sand (‘on sande sawulleasne,’ l. 3033) after his fatal battle with the dragon. Soulless proved to be an effective term to describe someone without life.

The next instance is more complicated – did they consider animals to have souls? If you asked this of Ælfric of Eynsham, he would have said no. Repeatedly through his works he insisted that animals had no souls.¹⁹ For instance, in his exegesis on Mark 16:15 – ‘Go ye into the whole world, and preach the gospel to every creature’ – Ælfric did not want to confuse his audience as to whom Christ’s disciples were meant to teach. Jesus might have said ‘preach the gospel to every creature,’ but Ælfric explained that:

But only man is designated with that name. Stones are created beings: but they do not have any life, and cannot feel anything. Grass and trees live without sensation: they do not live through a soul but through their greenness. Animals live and have sensation without reason. They do not have any reason because they are soulless. Angels live, and feel, and

¹⁸ Comprehensive studies of Old English words are done through the ‘Toronto Old English Dictionary Word wheel,’ *Dictionary of Old English Web Corpus*, eds. A. diPaolo Healey with J. Wilkin and Xin Xiang <<https://www.doe.utoronto.ca>>(2019).

¹⁹ See also Ælfric, *CH II*, Homily 20, 176; Ælfric *CH II*, Homily 21, 185; Ælfric *LoS*, Homily 1, 12; Ælfric, *Exameron Anglice: or, The Old English Hexameron*, ed. and trans. S. Crawford (Hamburg, 1921; repr. 1968), 59. Further on this subject, see Godden, ‘Anglo-Saxons on the Mind,’ 280-283.

discern. Now man has a certain thing from all created beings. He holds in common with stones that he is existing. He holds in common with trees that he lives, with animals that he feels, with angels that he understands. At present man is called every created being because he has a certain thing in common with all of creation.

ac mid þam naman is se mann ana getacnod. Stanas sind gesceafta: ac hi nabbað nan lif. ne hi naht ne gefredað. Gærs 7 treowa lybbað buton fēlnysse: hi ne lybbað na þurh sawle. ac þurh heora grennysse. Nytenu lybbað. 7 habbað fēlnysse buton gesceade. Hi nabbað nan gescead: for þan ðe hi sind sawullease. Englas lybbað. 7 gefredað. 7 tosceadað. Nu hæfð se man ealra gesceafta sum ðing. Him is gemæne mid stanum þæt he beo wunigende. him is gemæne mid treowum þæt he lybbe. mid nytenum þæt he gefrede mid englum þæt he understande. Nu is se man gecweden eall gesceaft. for ðan ðe he hæfð sum ðing gemæne mid eallum gesceafta.²⁰

Ælfric maintained a clear hierarchy of God's creation within his works with humans elevated above everything else created by God due to their possession of reason and thus a soul. Without reason, an animal could only be soulless ('sawullease'). Godden has found that even though Ælfric interpreted this passage from Mark with the exegesis of Gregory the Great (d. 604), he reworked Gregory's message which could have carried the implication that animals might have souls whilst plants did not. Ælfric's insistence on this issue across the body of his work has made Godden question if perhaps Ælfric 'was consciously taking issue with others, perhaps his contemporaries, perhaps his patristic authorities, perhaps Alfred.'²¹ As with the nature and faculties of the soul, we should thus not presume that Ælfric's views on any topic were indicative of the beliefs of all other Anglo-Saxons.

In the passage above we see remnants of the Platonic tripartition of the soul which early Christian theologians in both the West and the East adopted. Plato subdivided the soul into three parts in his *Republic*:

Logistikon, the 'rational' or 'intellectual' aspect;
Thymikon, the 'spirited' or 'incensive' aspect;

²⁰ Ælfric, *CH I*, Homily 21, 239.

²¹ Godden, 'Anglo-Saxons on the Mind,' 281.

Epithymētikon, the ‘appetitive’ or ‘desiring’ aspect.²²

Whilst animal souls were different from that of humans, Plato and his student Aristotle still ascribed the term *psychē* to their inner life-giving essence. As this scheme was adapted into Christianity, however, there appear to have been different approaches to applying the language of the soul onto non-humans. Ware has found that Gregory of Nyssa (d. 394) refused to designate *psychē* to anything other than a rational human soul because ‘the animal soul, and still more the vegetable soul, is not a soul in the true sense.’²³ Origen and Basil of Caesarea both believed, however, that animals had mortal souls.²⁴ Augustine of Hippo, who arguably had a greater impact on Anglo-Saxon theology than these eastern theologians, maintained that animals had souls, albeit irrational souls.²⁵ In *De civitate Dei* he wrote ‘we adore God who made heaven and earth and all that they contain, God who made every kind of soul, from the lowest that lives without sensation and intellection through the sentient up to the soul that can think.’²⁶ Following the Platonic concept of the threefold soul, Augustine repeated across several works that animals had souls even if

²² K. Ware, ‘The Soul in Greek Christianity,’ in *From Soul to Self*, ed. M. Crabbe (London, 1999), 55. Aristotle also described the soul using a tripartite system, but instead split the three into ‘the vegetable soul (nutritive); the animal soul (sensitive); the human soul (rational/intellectual)’: *ibid.*, 55-56.

²³ *Ibid.*, 56.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 62-65.

²⁵ The impact of Augustine’s complete theology on Anglo-Saxon England has been a cause for recent debate. Whilst the assumption used to be that we could apply his doctrines onto the belief system of the Anglo-Saxons, this notion is slowly being dismantled. Leslie Lockett’s monograph *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies* has played an important role in questioning this Augustinian bias of previous studies into Anglo-Saxon theology, and as my work on the soul progresses in this thesis, I also address the reception of patristic thought in Anglo-Saxon England and the degree to which it influenced their budding theology on young souls.

²⁶ ‘Nos Deum colimus, non caelum et terram, quibus duabus partibus mundus hic constat; nec animam uel animas per uiuentia quaecumque diffusas, sed Deum, qui fecit caelum et terram et omnia, quae in eis sunt; qui fecit omnem animam, siue quoquumque modo uiuentem et sensus ac rationis expertem, siue etiam sentientem, siue etiam intellegentem’: Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, Book 7, ch. 29, CCSL 47, 211; Augustine, *The City of God*, Books I-VII, trans. D. Zema, S. Walsh and G. Walsh (Washington, D.C., 1950), 386; another example like this may be found in Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram libre duode*, Book 9, ch. 14, CSEL 28(1), 285.

those souls did not constitute as the fully rational souls which formed a human.

MacDonald has summarised that:

For Augustine, the basic sense of soul pertains to the appearance of life in certain things; in this he follows the most long-lasting concept of *psyche* in Greek thought, as well as the [Old Testament] notion of life-force. It answers the question of what makes living things breathe, move and change states. The kinds of beings that have life are ensouled, and those that do not have life are soul-less. But there are various grades of life and these correspond with levels or grades of the soul.²⁷

Attributing the term *anima* to living things, even if those souls are not considered immortal, carries certain connotations particularly in contrast to those who refuse to apply a soul-term to all but humans. Clarity on this issue is important – language impacts how things are perceived.

Whether or not animals were believed to have souls depended on how the soul was defined. Several decades before the period studied in this thesis, John Scottus Eriugena followed the philosophy of Plato ‘that soul is life, and more significantly, that life need not be sentient life.’²⁸ The human soul simply diverged from all other souls in that it was rational. Although Ælfric stated that animals held two of the three qualities of the human soul, this did not mean that he believed animals had two-thirds of a soul; without reason they had none. This idea that animals did not have souls was not, however, so clearly explained or understood at the turn of the tenth century in the Alfredian translation of Boethius’ *Consolation of Philosophy* as it tackled the concept of the tripartite soul.²⁹ The translator expanded a line from the Latin – ‘You, binding soul together in its threefold nature’s midst, Soul that moves all things, then divide it into harmonious parts’ – to provide

²⁷ P. MacDonald, *History of the Concept of Mind: Speculations about Soul, Mind and Spirit from Homer to Hume* (Aldershot, 2003), 147.

²⁸ C. Kavanagh, ‘The Nature of the Soul According to Eriugena,’ in *The Afterlife of the Platonic Soul*, eds. M. El-Kaisy and J. Dillon (Leiden, 2009), 81. On the history of the tripartite soul in Latin sources up to the twelfth century, see D. Bell, ‘The Tripartite Soul and the Image of God in the Latin Tradition’ *Recherches de Théologie ancienne et médiévale* 47 (1980), 16-52.

²⁹ For detailed discussion of the Alfredian translations and *Old English Boethius*, see chapter one below.

a better understanding of what a threefold nature actually entailed.³⁰ The Old English stated:

Oh, God of nations, you established in us a threefold soul [...] for all philosophers say that one faculty of every soul is irascibility, the second concupiscence. The third faculty, reason, is better than those two; that is not a virtue to be ashamed of because no animal has it except man. A countless number of creatures have the other two [...]

Hwæt, þu, ðioda God, ðriefalde on us sawle gesettest [...] forðæm uðwitan ealle seggað ðætte an gecynd ælcra saule irsung sie, oðer wilnung. Is sio ðridde gecynd þæm twæm betere, sio gesceadwisnes; nis ðæt scandlic cræft, forðæm hit nænig hafað neat buton monnum. Hæfð þa oðra twa unrim wuhta [...]³¹

Szarmach has investigated the possible Latin sources and traditions for this particular expansion of Boethius' Book 3, metre 9 and has found that while similarities exist particularly within the Remigian family of glosses and commentaries to the Latin text, nothing quite matches this Alfredian interpretation.³² This expansion of the original Latin text did not say that animals were soulless, likewise it did not outright state that animals possessed souls. The latter could certainly be implied, but ambiguity still reigns, particularly when other written sources produced in this period largely seem to remain quiet on the subject of animal souls.

Although Ælfric subscribed to the platonic three-fold soul system, he did not agree with past philosophers and theologians that having two of the three soul-aspects meant that animals had any type of soul. This is less clear in the Alfredian translation of Boethius, where irrational animals are not directly stated as having souls but are also not described as being without a soul. Ælfric's repeated insistence on the topic of animal souls might make

³⁰ 'Tu triplicis mediam naturae cuncta moventem Conectens animam per consona membra resolvis': *DCP* 3m9, 272-273.

³¹ *OEB*, I: Metre 20, ll. 176-190; *OEB*, II: 151.

³² P. Szarmach, 'Alfred, Alcuin, and the Soul,' in *Manuscript, Narrative, Lexicon: Essays on Literary and Cultural Transmission in Honor of Whitney F. Bolton*, eds. R. Beonig and K. Davis (London, 2000), 130-139.

us question if he was attempting to censor a popular belief among his audience, but in the absence of any definitive or even compelling evidence surviving to this day, this question cannot be conclusively answered at this point. For the purpose of this thesis we will only be examining human souls.

A separate but related avenue still to be explored is the question asking if the Anglo-Saxons believed that the monstrous had souls. After attempting to answer how animals could still be found on islands after the great flood, Augustine of Hippo addressed the idea that one of Adam or Noah's progeny produced a race of human-like monsters. He went on to describe different cases which he believed to be monstrous, including someone with an eye in the middle of their forehead, neckless creatures with eyes in their shoulders, hermaphrodites, Sciopodes, and others. Whatever the abnormality to Augustine's norm, and no matter if it were a single case in history or an abnormality amongst a whole race, Augustine argued that:

What is true for a Christian beyond the shadow of a doubt is that every real man, that is, every mortal animal that is rational, however unusual to us may be the shape of his body, or the color of his skin, or the way he walks, or the sound of his voice, and whatever the strength, portion or quality of his natural endowments, is descended from the single first-created man.³³

If somebody were rational and mortal, even if society deemed them to be monstrous, Augustine argued that they were descended from Adam and consequently worthy of salvation.

Where, then, did the Anglo-Saxons draw the line between normality and monstrosity, and how did the soul factor in to that equation? Some insight on this question might be gleaned by examining the monsters found in Anglo-Saxon literature. Grendel, the

³³ 'uerum quisquis uspiam nascitur homo, id est animal rationale mortale, quamlibet nostris inusitatam sensibus gerat corporis formam seu colorem siue motum siue sonum siue qualibet ui, qualibet parte, qualibet qualitate naturam: ex illo uno protoplasto originem nullus fidelium dubitauerit': Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, Book 16, ch. 8, CCSL 48, 508-509; Augustine, *The City of God*, Books VIII-XVI, trans. G. Walsh and G. Monahan (Washington, D.C., 1952), 502.

monstrous kin of Cain in ‘Beowulf’ whom the poet often described using demonic identifiers, had his ‘heathen soul’ (‘hæþene sawle,’ l. 852) sent to hell after his fight with the poem’s protagonist.³⁴ Even though the poet described him as physically distinct from other humans, Grendel still descended from Adam and held a degree of rationality which included him in the ranks of the ensouled. The Latin *Liber Monstrorum*, an early Anglo-Saxon work found in five separate ninth- and tenth-century manuscripts, told of a ‘sea-girl’ or ‘siren’, ‘which if it has a head of reason is followed by all kinds of shaggy and scaly tales.’³⁵ The author did not question further if a siren had a soul based on its ability to reason, but this work quoted the same book and chapter of Augustine’s *De civitate Dei* relating rationality and salvation mentioned above, so the author might have been aware of Augustine’s position on the subject.³⁶ Furthermore, the figure of Saint Christopher, appearing in several Anglo-Saxon works and manuscripts, must have had a soul even with his ‘head of a dog’ (‘hundes heafod’).³⁷ Anglo-Saxon literature conceived at least some individuals with monstrous features as having souls. Stepping away from manuscript evidence, this line of questioning raises the related issue of how the Anglo-Saxons would have responded to severely disabled infants. For example, would a set of conjoined twins only destined to live several days have been rushed to baptism to save their souls?³⁸ Our

³⁴ A. Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the Beowulf-Manuscript* (Cambridge, 1995), 39.

³⁵ ‘marinae puellae [...] sirenae [...] ut sit capite rationis quod tamen diuersorum generum hispidae squamosaeque sequuntur fabulae’: *Liber Monstrorum*, ed. and trans. A. Orchard in Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, 256-257

³⁶ A. Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, 318.

³⁷ *The Old English Martyrology*, ed. C. Rauer (Cambridge, 2013), 90.

³⁸ Although not addressed in the Anglo-Saxon period, the issue of the souls of conjoined children and the status of severely disabled children was raised in England during the Late Middle Ages: N. Orme, *Medieval Children* (New Haven, 2001), 97. On a related point, a curiosity in Isidore of Seville’s *Etymologies* relates the tale of the Spanish king Geryon of classical legend who reportedly had three bodies shared by one soul. Anglo-Saxon evidence discussing twins is sparse, and I have not found anyone discussing multiple births in the same way; Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, Book 11, ch. 33, item 28, PL 82:422C.

records cannot answer this and the many other difficult questions which follow, but whenever we ask where the Anglo-Saxons drew the boundary between the ensouled and the soulless, we must keep these grey areas in mind.

Perceiving the soul

How was the soul perceived? Turning back to Ælfric's Nativity homily in the *Lives of Saints* we see him quote Alcuin to describe how 'she is invisible and incorporeal, without weight and without colour, encompassed by the body, and inhabiting all the limbs' ('Heo is ungesæwenlic and unlichomlic butan hæfe and butan bleo mid þam lichaman befangen and on eallum limum wunigende').³⁹ He later reminded his audience that 'we said previously that she was without colour because she is not corporeal' ('We cwædon ær þæt heo wæron butan bleo forþan ðe heo nis na lichamlic').⁴⁰ This is not a lengthy homily, and yet Ælfric chose to repeat this message that the soul was incorporeal and imperceptible, reinforcing the significance of this matter. Lockett has thoroughly studied the extent to which this strict Platonic idea of the soul's incorporeality had entered the Anglo-Saxon belief system and concluded that 'outside the writings of Ælfric, the idea that the soul was truly incorporeal, indivisible, and non-localized has left little impression on [Old English] literature.'⁴¹ Whilst someone at the highest level of learning might have encountered Alcuin's *De ratione animae* where 'Alcuin took the trouble to crystallize the esoteric notion of the incorporeal soul into a prominent point of orthodox doctrine,' Lockett has argued that Ælfric was 'the first author working in England to assimilate the Platonizing

³⁹ Ælfric, *LoS*, Homily 1, 20.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁴¹ Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies*, 23.

concept of the incorporeal unitary soul, to recognise the interdependence of the ontological and the epistemological ramifications of the soul's incorporeality, and to render such a discourse in a form that had the potential to be disseminated to a broader audience.'⁴² Until the end of the tenth century, access to the concept of an utterly incorporeal soul was limited to a small sphere of the highly educated, and even then the idea seems to have only taken root slowly.

Images drawn to accompany the Psalms in the first half of the eleventh century further affirm this unconsolidated stance on the incorporeality of souls. The image above Psalm 142 in the Harley Psalter, seen below, pictures the psalmist's soul in the shape of his robed earthly body as a demon torments it with a spear: 'for the enemy hath persecuted my soul.'⁴³ As the reader's eyes scan from left to right, the image follows the narrative of the psalm which describes the shift in the psalmist's soul from spiritual anguish to tranquillity as he recognises that the Lord will protect his soul. The artist of this image then chose to convey this newfound inner peace by portraying an angel raising the psalmist – potentially interpreted as either a soul or fully resurrected body – out of a coffin by the arm. While many of the images accompanying the Psalms in the Harley Psalter were modelled after the continental Utrecht Psalter, this drawing by 'Artist F' is part of a group of images which do not correspond to any continental source. In her unpublished dissertation, Duffey labelled these images as 'inventive' with features that were 'distinctly Anglo-Saxon' and further suggested that this artist was 'thinking carefully about the meaning and associations of the text.'⁴⁴

⁴² *Ibid.*, 418.

⁴³ Psalm 142:3.

⁴⁴ J. Duffey, *The Inventive Group of Illustrations in the Harley Psalter (British Museum MS. Harley 603)*, unpublished dissertation (University of California, Berkeley, 1977), 234-235.



Image 1: London, British Library, Harley MS 603, f. 73r

Another early English depiction of corporeal souls may be found in a marginal illustration for Psalm 65:12 in the eleventh-century Bury Psalter: ‘thou hast set men over our heads. We have passed through fire and water, and thou hast brought us out into a refreshment.’ In the image to the right-side of the text, pictured below, Abraham cradles the heads of four souls against his chest, sheltering them with one hand as the other reaches out to caress a new soul which an angel has brought to him. A gold inscription reads ‘locum refrigerii qui est sinus Abrahae’ which Harris linked to the parable of Dives and the beggar Lazarus.⁴⁵ The image itself appears to have no antecedents and holds distinct Anglo-Saxon features; Harris has further noted: ‘even the manner in which the souls are held, in the bosom of the patriarch, has no parallel in any other version of this scene, but seems rather to be based upon the literal sense of the phrase, “in sinus Abrahae.”’ Taken together these

⁴⁵ M. Harris, *The Marginal Drawings of the Bury St. Edmunds Psalter* (Rome, Vatican Library MS Reg. Lat. 12) [with] *Figures*, unpublished dissertation (Princeton University, 1960), 247. In the parable (Luke 16:19-31) both men passed away at the same time, but Angels brought Lazarus to paradise at the side of Abraham whilst Dives was tormented in hell where he begged Abraham for refreshment.

details suggest the more spontaneous and personal nature of this image rather than its filiation with a set iconographic tradition.⁴⁶ The image portrayed Abraham as a figure who could comfort and guard souls. To achieve this visually the artist chose to depict the souls in a recognisable, even if potentially unorthodox, form.



Image 2: Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica, MS Reg. lat. 12, f. 72r

Souls, and particularly souls living in the afterlife, were often imagined to take some type of visual form. Carozzi has argued that Carolingian writers, particularly in texts which portrayed the afterlife or visions of the afterlife, demonstrate that there were two competing representations of the soul: one which followed the spiritual, celestial patristic imagining of the incorporeal soul and the other which visualized a concrete image of the

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 249.

soul envisaged as the double of its former human body.⁴⁷ Turning to England, several Latin and Old English texts contained instances of the expulsion of the soul ‘represented as a bird which upon death is seen departing the body.’⁴⁸ This might have been influenced by the second book of Gregory the Great’s *Dialogues* which described how Saint Benedict witnessed the soul of his sister Scholastica flying towards heaven ‘in the form of a dove.’⁴⁹ Clemoes believed that this instance, along with several others described in the *Dialogues*, represents a ‘precedent’ for the description of Paulinus’ soul-departure in the eighth-century anonymous *Life of Saint Gregory*.⁵⁰ The unnamed Whitby monk described how ‘when he died, his soul journeyed to heaven in the form of an exceedingly beautiful great white bird, like a swan.’⁵¹ In the vernacular later-ninth-century *Old English Martyrology*’s entry for the martyrs Vitus and his foster-father Modestus, ‘some Christians saw their souls fly to heaven like doves, and they were seven times whiter than snow’ (‘Ðær gesegon Christne men heora sawle fleogan to heofonum swa swa culfran, ond hi wæron seofon siðum hwittran þonne snaw’).⁵² The Blickling Homily for the Assumption of the Virgin Mary from the middle of the tenth century might not have imagined Mary’s soul as a bird, but it did state that the apostles ‘found no soul as white as that of holy Mary [...] They all saw that the blessed Mary had a soul as white as snow’ (‘Ond hie ne gemetton nane swa white saule swa þære eadigan Marian wæs [...] hie gesawon ealle þæt seo eadige Marie

⁴⁷ C. Carozzi, *Le voyage de l’âme dans l’Au-delà d’après la littérature latine (Ve-XIIIe siècle)* (Rome, 1994), 183.

⁴⁸ N. Hultin, ‘The External Soul in *The Seafarer* and *The Wanderer*,’ *Folklore*, 88 (1977), 40.

⁴⁹ ‘in columbae specie’: Grégoire le Grand, *Les Dialogues*, Book 2, ch. 34, ed. A. de Vogüé (Paris, 1980), 234; Gregory the Great, *Dialogues*, trans. O. Zimmerman (New York, 1959), 104.

⁵⁰ Clemoes, ‘*Mens absentia cogitans*,’ 69.

⁵¹ ‘quod huius viri anima in cuiusdam magne, qualis est cignus, alba specie avis, satisque pulchra, quando moritur migrasset ad celum’: Anonymous Monk of Whitby, *The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great*, Ch. 17, ed. and trans. B. Colgrave (Cambridge, 1985), 100-101.

⁵² *Old English Martyrology*, ed. and trans. Rauer, 116-117.

hæfde swa hiwte saule swa snaw’).⁵³ Although the belief in the incorporeal, invisible soul existed in the writings of several well-educated authors from this time period, the visible soul, often described by its colour and shape as it left the human body, cannot be categorised as an idiosyncrasy.

There might also be echoes in this time of a more physical conception of the existence of the soul within the body. Ælfric found it necessary in his treatise on natural phenomena, *De temporibus anni*, and also in his Nativity homily to explain that ‘the breath which we exhale and inhale is not our soul, but it is the air in which we live in this mortal life’ (‘Nis na seo orðung ðe we utblawað 7 innateoð ure sawul, ac is seo lyft þe we on lybbað on ðisum deadlicum life’).⁵⁴ Blake has argued that ‘we only know of such an apparently primitive belief in the identity of soul and breath in late Anglo-Saxon England through Ælfric’s perceived need to refute it.’⁵⁵ Perhaps a belief still existed that breath and soul coincided which Ælfric was attempting to rebuke. Debates have also been made considering if the Anglo-Saxons believed that the soul existed in the body’s blood.⁵⁶ For example, the prose *Solomon and Saturn*, a dialogue of questions and answers, had this exchange:

Tell me where does man’s soul rest when the body sleeps.
I tell you, it is in three places; in the brain, or in the heart, or in the blood.

Saga me hwar restedð þas mannes sawul þone se lichaman slepð.

⁵³ *Blickling Homilies*, Homily 13, ed. and trans. Kelly, 104-105; for beliefs about the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, see J. Neville, ‘Selves, Souls, and Bodies: the Assumption of the Virgin in Anglo-Saxon England,’ in *Miracles and the Miraculous in Medieval Germanic and Latin Literature*, eds. K. Olson, A. Harbus and T. Hofstra (Leuven, 2004), 141-154; for the visualisation of the soul in other anonymous vernacular homilies, see T. Hall, ‘The Psychedelic Transmogrification of the Soul in Vercelli Homily IV,’ in *Time and Eternity: Tthe Medieval Discourse*, eds. G. Jaritz and G. Moreno-Riaño (Turnhout, 2003), 309-322.

⁵⁴ Ælfric, *De temporibus anni*, ed. and trans. M. Blake (Cambridge, 2009), 92-93; Ælfric, *LoS*, Homily 1, 22.

⁵⁵ M. Blake, ‘Commentary,’ in Ælfric, *De temporibus anni*, 127.

⁵⁶ F. Robinson, ‘Lexicography and Literary Criticism: a Caveat,’ in *Philological Essays: Studies in Old and Middle English Language and Literature in Honour of Herbert Dean Meritt*, ed. J. Rosier (The Hague, 1970), 99-110; M. Clayton, ‘Blood and the Soul in Ælfric,’ *Notes and Queries* 54 (2007), 365-367.

Ic þe secge, on þrim stowum heo byð; on þam bragene, oððe on þere heortan, oððe on þam blode.⁵⁷

Robinson used this to defend his claim that ‘it was widely held, of course, that blood was identical with the soul,’ but even here there seems to be multiple places described where the soul could lie.⁵⁸ The repetitive use of the term *oððe* – ‘or’ – here seems to imply that Saturn was not quite sure about the answer he was giving Solomon. The evidence that has survived to this day remains ambiguous; it cannot fully confirm nor deny whether a number of the Anglo-Saxons believed that there was a bodily seat of the soul and, if so, where that seat might be. At this point, it is worth taking into account that idea might have existed rather than choosing definitely whether one belief was preferred over the other. Nevertheless, there is plenty of evidence to demonstrate that the soul was not fully conceived as incorporeal. A large range of written works and art depicted the soul as at least visible if not also perceptible by other senses.

Scholars who have previously investigated the Anglo-Saxon soul have already found that beliefs about the soul in this time were diverse, complex, and worthy of our attention. A brief cross-examination of different genres of texts produced within the span of less than two hundred years has revealed that a single conception of the soul did not gain full support even within a small, elite section of the literate community: we must approach the historic soul with an open mind. What was the soul? Who had a soul? How was the soul perceived? These questions each seem to yield different answers based on what evidence is closest at hand. However, if we start at the most basic place of agreement – that the soul was the immortal essence of a human being giving the body life at first

⁵⁷ *The Prose Solomon and Saturn in The Prose Solomon and Saturn and Adrian and Ritheus*, eds. and trans. J. Cross and T. Hill (Toronto, 1982), 31, 105. On the potential Latin sources for this question, see Cross and Hill, ‘Commentary,’ in *The Prose Solomon and Saturn*, 105-107.

⁵⁸ Robinson, ‘Lexicography and Literary Criticism,’ 103.

entrance and living eternally after the body's death – we can weave the tapestry of the soul in the late Anglo-Saxon period starting from the very beginning of its journey.

The ability to answer, or at least address, each of these three questions would be impossible without the growth in our insight into the early English soul over the past fifty years. The starting point for the study of Anglo-Saxon ideas about the inner life is often taken to be Clemons' 1969 essay '*Mens absentia cogitans* in *The Seafarer* and *The Wanderer*' which noted a range of potential patristic and Carolingian psychological perspectives which might have influenced English vernacular poets as they wrote about the mind and the soul.⁵⁹ Searching more deeply for how the Anglo-Saxons perceived mind and soul, Godden then charted certain discrepancies in depictions of the inner life between the works of Alcuin, Alfred, and Ælfric and those of vernacular poetry in his 1985 article.⁶⁰ The first group Godden created, following what he labelled as the 'classical tradition,' demonstrated 'the gradual development of a unitary concept of the inner self, identifying the intellectual mind with the immortal soul and life-spirit' whilst the second group, the 'vernacular tradition,' separated the powerless immortal soul from the mind which in turn controlled all psychological functions. Following this, in a largely unacknowledged unpublished dissertation Ross (1992) asked how the Old English homiletic corpus approached different questions on the soul: including the origin of the soul, the characteristics and value of the soul, the temporary fate of the departed soul, the soul's relationship with the body, imagery of the soul, and prayers for the soul. She concluded

⁵⁹ Clemons, '*Mens absentia cogitans*,' 62-77. This article set off a number of responses, particularly about the soul's supposed flight in *The Seafarer*, which are addressed in the Epilogue about souls outside living bodies.

⁶⁰ Godden, 'Anglo-Saxons on the Mind,' 271-298.

that not only did this period see the development of the individualization of souls but the theology of the soul taught by Ælfric did not always resemble that taught by other homilists from the same time, raising further questions about the degree to which supposed orthodox beliefs about the soul were ingrained into Anglo-Saxon religion.⁶¹ It was around this same time that a series of contributions to semantic studies on the Anglo-Saxon mental lexicon began to appear, starting with Phillips' unpublished dissertation (1985) followed by Low's unpublished dissertation (1998) and subsequent article on the subject (2001). Both scholars have further progressed our knowledge of how the Anglo-Saxons used the many different words they had at their disposal describing the mental sphere.⁶² These earlier studies established that the Anglo-Saxons conceived the soul, and its relationship to the mind and the body, in a different way from most modern notions about the subject.

The mind, particularly in the realm of vernacular poetry, has inspired the most attention within this realm of study. Depending on whether an Anglo-Saxon author's beliefs followed the 'classical' or 'vernacular' tradition, these studies singularly on the mind play an important part in our learning on the historic soul. In particular, work into how Anglo-Saxon writers perceived the mind as studied through the lens of conceptual metaphor theory have yielded a large range of fascinating results.⁶³ In two separate works, Harbus expanded our understanding of the mental side of the Anglo-Saxon inner self, first in *The Life of the Mind in Old English Poetry* (2002) which questioned previous

⁶¹ A. Ross, *Anglo-Saxon Teaching on the Soul*, unpublished dissertation (The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1992). Ross also has provided a valuable appendix of conciliar statements on the soul up until the tenth century, see 'Appendix A,' 226-238.

⁶² Phillips, *Heart, Mind and Soul*; S.-A. Low, *The Anglo-Saxon Mind: Metaphor and Common Sense Psychology in Old English Literature*, unpublished dissertation (University of Toronto, 1998). This thesis also argued for the application of cognitive theory onto Old English Scholarship: Low, 'Approaches to the Old English,' 11-22.

⁶³ For a starting point in this scholarship, see Low, *The Anglo-Saxon Mind*; M. Matto, *Containing Minds: Mind, Metaphor, and Cognition in Old English Literature*, unpublished dissertation (New York University, 1998); B. Mize, 'The Representation of the Mind as an Enclosure in Old English Poetry,' *Anglo-Saxon England* 35 (2006), 57-90; D. Wilton, *Metaphors of Turning: the Mind, Agency, and Free Will in Anglo-Saxon Literature*, unpublished dissertation (University of Toronto, 2016).

application of modern psychological perceptions onto those of the Anglo-Saxons and used Old English poetry's emphasis on the mind in an attempt to shape how the Anglo-Saxon conception of the mind differs from our own.⁶⁴ Her later work *Cognitive Approaches to Old English Poetry* (2012) applied aspects of cognitive science on to Anglo-Saxon thought to better understand how metaphors in vernacular poetry impact how we should perceive Anglo-Saxon thought and language about the mind.⁶⁵

Two more important interventions in 2011 gave a more equal weight to both the mind and the soul. Fox's unpublished dissertation took a step away from the large amount of attention paid to Old English poetry when considering the inner self to focus on the theme of identity in the Alfredian translations by analysing the mind-body-soul relationship as it was conceptualized within the corpus.⁶⁶ She found certain commonalities among the Alfredian translations in the presentation of the inner self, the soul, and identity which support the argument that 'these translations demonstrate a shared scholarly preoccupation, or school of understanding, that can be accessed via analysing the elaboration of vocabularies and metaphors of interiority, the relationship they articulate between the mind, soul, and body.'⁶⁷ From this work we see that as early as the end of the ninth century there were attempts in intellectual circles to make a consistent philosophical portrayal of the inner self.⁶⁸ Next, Leslie Lockett's monograph expanded on and reevaluated Godden's thesis that two separate psychological traditions were at play in the Anglo-Saxon

⁶⁴ A. Harbus, *The Life of the Mind in Old English Poetry* (Amsterdam, 2002).

⁶⁵ A. Harbus, *Cognitive Approaches to Old English Poetry* (Cambridge, 2012).

⁶⁶ H. Fox, *Mind, Body, Soul, and Self in the Alfredian Translations*, unpublished dissertation (University of Notre Dame, 2011).

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁶⁸ See also Faulkner's argument for the inclusion of the Old English Prose Psalms within the Alfredian intellectual sphere through an analysis of psychological terms in other works grouped as Alfredian: A. Faulkner, 'The Mind in the Old English Prose Psalms,' *Review of English Studies* 70 (2019), 1-21.

era whilst also arguing that surviving Anglo-Saxon literature supports a belief in the cardio-centric ‘hydraulic model’ of mental activity.⁶⁹ Her work on early English beliefs about the relationship between the soul, the mind, and the body and the theological and philosophical issues which subsequently appear in those discussions set the foundation for all future work on the Anglo-Saxon soul. In particular, her survey of patristic and early medieval sources and the impact which they did, or more importantly *did not* have in the case of Augustine of Hippo, on Anglo-Saxon psychologies has put into question the ‘medievalist bias’ often weighing down critical approaches to this period.

Together these foundational contributions to the field have illuminated the complexity of Anglo-Saxon beliefs about the mind, the soul, and their relationship with the body. Defining the inner self and the language used to describe it, identifying differing beliefs about the functions of the soul, classifying how the soul was conceived and perceived – these are all crucial building blocks on which any work on the Anglo-Saxon soul must rely. Having this more complete understanding of Anglo-Saxon definitions about the general characteristics of the soul allows for further analysis into Anglo-Saxon theology and also reveals a gap in our knowledge on the topic. It is now possible and necessary to take another step forward in this line of questioning and untangle Anglo-Saxon beliefs about the life chronology of the soul. Beliefs about the soul’s journey during life, particularly its existence before the moment of death, have yet to be explored fully, and, as children were believed to come to their parents with souls intact, it is only logical to begin a study on the Anglo-Saxon soul starting with a soul’s very beginning, its origin.

The topic of childhood in the Middle Ages saw a rise in interest after the publication of Ariès’ famous treatise (1962) on the subject where he concluded:

In medieval society the idea of childhood did not exist; this is not to suggest that children were neglected, forsaken or despised. The idea of childhood is

⁶⁹ Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies*.

not to be confused with affection for children: it corresponds to an awareness of the particular nature of childhood, that particular nature which distinguishes the child from the adult, even the young adult. In medieval society this awareness was lacking. That is why, as soon as the child could live without the constant solicitude of his mother, his nanny or his cradle-rocker, he belonged to adult society.⁷⁰

Ever since the publication and translation of this book (where Ariès focused mostly on medieval art to make his conclusion that the ‘idea of childhood’ did not exist in the Middle Ages) scholars have repeatedly argued against the validity of this statement.⁷¹ However, although the study of childhood has gained greater attention since Ariès first published his book, only a few scholars have written on the subject for the time period between late antiquity and Thomas Aquinas.⁷²

When Kuefler specifically analysed Anglo-Saxon beliefs about childhood in 1991, he found that whilst evidence was limited in quantity, there was enough to counter that the Anglo-Saxons had a developed sense of childhood and that they recognised it as a psychologically distinct age-group from adulthood.⁷³ Crawford (1999) also contributed to the debate against Ariès’ thesis with an interdisciplinary approach, weaving archaeological, literary, and artistic evidence to support an argument that the Anglo-Saxons held a distinct

⁷⁰ P. Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood*, trans. R. Baldick (Paris, 1960; trans. 1962), 128.

⁷¹ J. Nelson has discussed the scholarship refuting Ariès up to 1994 in ‘Parents, Children, and the Church in the Earlier Middle Ages (Presidential Address),’ in *The Church and Childhood*, ed. D. Wood (Oxford, 1994), 82, footnote 3. For a helpful summary of both sides of the debate, see B. Hanawalt, ‘Medievalists and the Study of Childhood,’ *Speculum* 77 (2002), 440-460.

⁷² For example, the period is skipped over in *The Child in Christian Thought*, ed. M. Bunge (Grand Rapids, 2001); S. Shahar, *Childhood in the Middle Ages* (London, 1990; repr. 1992); and by J. Berryman in *Children and the Theologians: Clearing the Way for Grace* (New York, 2009). The collection of chapters in *The Church and Childhood*, ed. D. Wood (Oxford, 1994) is also heavily unbalanced in favour of the second half of the Middle Ages. For perceptions of childhood in the Bible, see *The Child in the Bible*, ed. M. Bunge, T. Fretheim, B. Gaventa (Grand Rapids, 2008); and for those in the early church, see O. Bakke, *When Children Became People: the Birth of Childhood in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis, 2005).

⁷³ M. Kuefler, “‘A Wryed Existence’: Attitudes towards Children in Anglo-Saxon England,’ *Journal of Social History* 24 (1991), 823-834; see also B. Baily, M. Bernard, G. Carrier, et al., ‘Coming of Age and the Family in Medieval England,’ *Journal of Family History* 33 (2008), 41-60; ‘Childhood,’ in A. Frantzen, *Anglo-Saxon Keywords* (Malden, MA, 2012), 49.

view of childhood.⁷⁴ Her work addressing pregnancy, infant care, rites of passage, and family life among other themes presented a glimpse into the experience of childhood in early medieval England, concluding that ‘both girls and boys were loved by their families and were educated during their childhood to prepare them for their lives as adults.’⁷⁵

Nicholas Orme’s monograph *Medieval Children* (2001) followed the life of the medieval English child from its arrival into the world through the many daily activities, religious ceremonies, play, education, and dangers he or she might encounter.⁷⁶ Orme’s sources largely date from the later Middle Ages, but occasionally a limited number of references to Bede, King Alfred, King Æthelstan, and Ælfric of Eynsham emerge. Nevertheless, Orme’s work highlighted the sweeping narrative of the Church’s continued interaction with children from their very earliest days through to their adolescence and has emphasised how the Church paid special care to those who died as juveniles. Focusing specifically on sources from the Anglo-Saxon period, the collected volume *Childhood and Adolescence in Anglo-Saxon Literary Culture* (2018) took the necessary steps to address the shortage of literature on the topic of childhood in Anglo-Saxon England with each contribution approaching the topic from a different genre of text.⁷⁷ Theology and belief play an important role in several contributions, particularly in Winfried Rudolf’s chapter on homilies and childhood and Joyce Hill’s review of young saints in Anglo-Latin hagiographies, but this collection of essays’ main focus remains childhood rather than young souls in particular. This volume demonstrates the potential fruits this line of

⁷⁴ S. Crawford, *Childhood in Anglo-Saxon England* (Stroud, 1999).

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 174.

⁷⁶ Orme, *Medieval Children*.

⁷⁷ *Childhood and Adolescence in Anglo-Saxon Literary Culture*, eds. S. Irvine and W. Rudolf (Toronto, 2018).

questioning might yield with further study, but it also neglects the potential discoveries a cross-genre approach might grant which this thesis addresses.

Little previous work lies at the intersection between these two fields of study, the history of the soul and the history of childhood. A notable exception is David Jones' *The Soul of the Embryo* (2004) which attempted to survey the entire Christian tradition for the history of beliefs about the soul during its earliest existence and first encounters with the body.⁷⁸ Whilst there is merit to this style of approach, particularly as it opened a door into historic beliefs about the youngest of souls, it has highlighted the need to expand our knowledge of these beliefs on a more micro level and focus specifically on theologies of young souls during a shorter span of years. This thesis demonstrates the multiplicity of beliefs about young souls that a single geographic area over the span of two hundred years can produce.

The period which this thesis covers begins with the reign of King Alfred the Great starting in 871 where we see an island left ravaged by Viking attacks with little evidence of manuscript production or Latin learning remaining from before Alfred's accession. At the other end, in 1066, we see the influx of a new culture and new ideas with the Norman Conquest. Neither of these are hard borders for this thesis – the Anglo-Saxon world and the Old English language certainly survived both before and after this thesis' proposed boundaries – but this span of roughly two hundred years offers a confined range of important historical and religious developments which, working together, produced a condensed body of literature allowing for the feasible extraction of certain theologies and beliefs about the soul. This thesis treats the late Anglo-Saxon period as a whole but it is sensitive to change over time. It is not searching for a single theology preached over the

⁷⁸ D. Jones, *The Soul of the Embryo: an Enquiry into the Status of the Human Embryo in the Christian Tradition* (London, 2004).

span of two hundred years – although it is open to that possibility – but instead attempts to discern which beliefs actually were present and how they were changing and developing.

This was not a static time either politically, economically, religiously, or culturally. It not only saw the consolidation of south-west England under King Alfred followed by the amalgamation of all Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms under Æthelstan and his successors, the establishment of the Danelaw, continued Viking attacks, the rise of an apocalypse mindset as the year 1000 approached, and foreign kingship, but it also involved a period of royal-sponsored monastic reform under the Benedictine Rule, educational reform, and liturgical reform which combined led to the emergence of religious authors well versed in some patristic and early medieval theologies.⁷⁹ Along with a rise in Latin learning, there was an expansion in the production of vernacular texts including translations of eminent Latin works, homilies which blended different patristic Latin sources into Old English, and the preservation of Anglo-Saxon poetry in manuscript form.

Almost a thousand years after the Incarnation we see the soul infiltrating almost every type of literature created by the Anglo-Saxons which survives to this day. In order to build as complete a picture of these specific Anglo-Saxon beliefs about young souls as possible, this study relies on a large range of different hierarchies of texts drawing from the Bible, influential works by early Christian exegetes and theologians, homilies, hagiographies, poetry, vernacular translations, prognostics, charters, medical charms,

⁷⁹ This thesis cannot catalogue the entirety of scholarly literature on these categories but it can provide entry points for different studies on developments during this time. For a survey of Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastical history and its interaction with political, social, and economic aspects throughout the Anglo-Saxon period, see J. Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford, 2005). For more specific information on the political formation of Anglo-Saxon England, see: P. Stafford, *Unification and Conquest: a Political and Social History of England in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries* (London, 1989); S. Foot, 'The Making of Angelcynn: English Identity before the Norman Conquest,' *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 6 (1996), 25-49; G. Molyneaux, *The Formation of the English Kingdom in the Tenth Century* (Oxford, 2015). On the Viking and Danelaw influence, see: S. Keynes, 'The Vikings in England,' in *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Vikings*, ed. P. Sawyer (Oxford, 1997), 48-82. On the Benedictine Reform, see C. Cubitt, 'Review Article: The Tenth-Century Benedictine Reform in England,' *Early Medieval Europe* 6 (1997), 77-94. On the apocalyptic mindset, see J. Palmer, *The Apocalypse in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2014).

penitentials, law codes, artwork, archaeology, and liturgy. Solely analysing a single genre of texts from this period does not produce enough information to reveal whether or not there was a uniform understanding of the soul being read, taught, and preached. This multidisciplinary approach is necessary particularly when studying the early life of the soul, when primary sources seldom discuss each topic and, in the few instances where they do, often do so only in an indirect manner. When younger souls appear in our sources, authors are often only passively referring to them rather than using their appearance as an active point of ministry. These brief allusions placed together, however, have the ability to greatly inform our understandings of how young souls were perceived. Furthermore, when these texts are situated alongside their earlier medieval and patristic literary inheritance, we can understand how Anglo-Saxon authors interacted with their sources: either translating a source directly, making small but important changes, or veering off into original territory. Integrating these sources into our analysis reveals not only aspects about the soul which stood uncontested over time but also those which garnered little to no agreement.

Even with this broad range of primary sources we must recognise that there are limits to accessing the beliefs of medieval Christians. History has left us with a number of texts which, whilst created for different types of audiences, often only reveal the theology of a largely-masculine, educated, religious elite. It must be kept in mind that, more often than not, this was a small literary elite reading, listening to, and understanding both the Old English and Latin works which this thesis handles and an even smaller literary elite composing and producing said texts.⁸⁰ Sometimes, we can access what beliefs were being

⁸⁰ For a brief overview of the extent to which Latin coexisted alongside the English language in Anglo-Saxon England, see O. Timofeeva, 'Anglo-Latin Bilingualism before 1066: Prospects and Limitations,' in *Interfaces Between Language and Culture in Medieval England: A Festschrift for Matti Kilpiö*, eds. A. Hall, O. Timofeeva, Á. Kiricsi and B. Fox (Leiden, 2010), 3-16. For a summary of Latin literary production between 900 and 1066, see M. Lapidge, 'Schools, Learning, and Literature in Tenth-Century England,' in *Anglo-Latin Literature 900-1066* (London, 1993), 1-46.

taught to a wider, perhaps lay, audience through homiletic material, but for the most part measuring the beliefs of the majority and the degree to which Christian theology infiltrated Anglo-Saxon society is not the task of this thesis.⁸¹ Through a careful approach to these texts with consideration of their (often nuanced) contexts we may, however, gauge the state of theology's development during this time and assess the changing nature of religion.

My first substantive chapter addresses Anglo-Saxon views concerning the origin of the soul. With no orthodox view established on the topic even by the time of Anselm of Canterbury's death (1109), we see multiple beliefs about the soul's origin circulating in this period. This chapter addresses the degree to which the three historic beliefs on the origin of souls – Traducianism, Pre-existence, and Creationism – can be found in the late Anglo-Saxon period, but it first assesses the reception of Augustine's argument that no answer could be known on the subject. Although little evidence survives to point to a continued belief that each individual soul stemmed from Adam directly through his or her parents (Traducianism), we see strong evidence from the translations associated with King Alfred's court at the end of the ninth century discussing the existence of souls from the beginning of time (Pre-existence) and, at the end of the tenth century after the Benedictine reform, attempts by Ælfric and Wulfstan the Cantor to create an orthodox view that God creates bespoke souls for each person at the moment of their ensoulment (Creationism). Although both the Pre-existence and Creationist doctrines had their strong supporters during this period, a number of anonymous religious texts neither confirmed nor refuted either doctrine when they discussed the very beginning of a soul's life.

The second chapter asks at what point the Anglo-Saxons believed initial ensoulment, or the first entry of the soul into the body, took place. Although surviving sources seem to consistently follow a theology of ensoulment *in utero* – where the soul

⁸¹ Excellent work in this field has been done in H. Foxhall Forbes, *Heaven and Earth in Anglo-Saxon England: Theology and Society in an Age of Faith* (Farnham, 2013).

first enters the body at some time between conception and birth – the approaches to describe more specifically when ensoulment occurred from this period seem to branch across several traditions. The first strand of ensoulment descriptions found in late Anglo-Saxon sources followed the model set by Adam's creation in the Bible, connecting the process of ensoulment with the attainment of bodily autonomy in the womb; the second strand associated the first physical sensation of foetal movement – the quickening – with the soul first entering the body. After analysing these two theologies of ensoulment, this chapter addresses the inconsistencies in ensoulment beliefs found in abortion clauses in penitentials and law codes before turning to the difficulties which the embryology of Christ brings into the equation.

Chapter three queries what the Anglo-Saxons believed about an infant's unbaptized soul, questioning the degree to which they believed in the inherited condition of original sin. It begins with a brief study of Augustine of Hippo's doctrine, focusing on its decrease in popularity in religious literature as the early Middle Ages progressed, before attempting to find the Old English term for original sin searching through vernacular texts which translated Latin works explaining it and Old English interlinear glosses for the Latin *peccatum originale*. It finds that vernacular texts employed no single consistent terminology describing this doctrine, which, whilst not excluding the doctrine's presence from late Anglo-Saxon England, certainly tells us a great amount about attitudes towards it during this period. This chapter then addresses how texts portrayed those holy figures supposedly born without original sin, such as Jesus, Mary, and John the Baptist, before turning to what vernacular homilies taught about the state of the soul before baptism: while many did refer to Adam's role in the fall of humanity, they would not explain the transmission of sin along with that fall. With these issues outlined on the popularity of the doctrine of original sin, this chapter then examines alternative beliefs about infant souls

which might have spurred the drive for infant baptism in the late Anglo-Saxon period: the first visualizing the child as possessed by the devil before baptism occurred and the second categorizing each unbaptized child as a heathen ‘other.’

The Anglo-Saxons believed that the soul of a child who died immediately (‘sona’) after baptism was pure; the fourth chapter asks when the Anglo-Saxons believed this period of perceived purity ended and an individual’s soul lost this reassurance of immediate entry into heaven. It is already understood that the late Anglo-Saxons treated children’s souls differently from those of adults, but no previous study has focused on when an individual’s soul began to be weighed and measured by its actions. This chapter follows three different potential endpoints of childhood innocence/immunity as proposed by patristic and early medieval theologians: the acquisition of speech, an age of reason, and the onset of sexual desire. Through a tale found in Gregory the Great’s *Dialogues* about a blaspheming child dragged to hell preserved in Old English by Bishop Wærferth of Worcester and Ælfric, this chapter observes the role which speech played in both condemning a child and providing its salvation. Next, the chapter studies how Augustine’s boundary of an age of reason marking the end of childhood immunity permeated through homilies, hagiography, penitentials, and law codes. The final section of this chapter asks if the association between physical puberty and purity found in Isidore’s highly influential *Etymologiae* affected Anglo-Saxon thoughts on the soul’s coming of age.

The conclusion addresses the necessity of looking further into Anglo-Saxon beliefs about the life journey of the soul and considers what other aspects of the Anglo-Saxon soul might best be re-evaluated in the future. An epilogue follows discussing one of these aspects: souls outside living bodies. It features out-of-body experiences which describe the soul’s ability to separate from the body during dreams and sickness to demonstrate one of the many diverse and dynamic beliefs about adult souls which appear in late Anglo-Saxon

England. The findings from this epilogue set a precedent for further work to be done in this field of theological, historical, and literary research.

Chapter One

A Soul's Origin

Weak and incapable of eating, Anselm of Canterbury lay on his death-bed on Palm Sunday in 1109 after suffering from years of debilitating sickness. Speaking to his disciples surrounding him, including his soon-to-be biographer Eadmer, Anselm accepted his own passing as the Lord's will but reportedly professed that 'if He would prefer me to remain among you, at least until I can settle a question about the origin of the soul, which I am turning over in my mind, I should welcome this with gratitude, for I do not know whether anyone will solve it when I am dead.'¹ As dawn broke three days later, Anselm died without having offered any solution to this central problem in Christian doctrine.

The story of the soul's journey must naturally begin at the starting point of the soul, the moment of its creation. But even to begin here – attempting and seeking to answer how the Anglo-Saxons believed the soul originated – one encounters difficulties. The quandary to which Anselm referred involves finding a solution to the three competing discourses on the origin of the soul as explained by Augustine in his letter to Jerome written around 415: whether 'souls are propagated from that one soul that was given to the first man [...] whether new souls are even now created for each individual, or whether, already existing somewhere,

¹ 'Verum si mallet me adhuc inter vos saltem tam diu manere, donec quaestionem quam de origine animae mente revolve absolvere possem gratanter acciperem, eo quod nescio utrum aliquis eam me defuncto sit soluturus': Eadmer, *The Life of St Anselm Archbishop of Canterbury*, ch. 66, ed. and trans. R. Southern (Oxford, 1972), 142-143.

souls are either sent by God or fall of their own accord into bodies.’² These theories, respectively, represent the three available theories of Traducianism, Creationism, and the Neoplatonic tradition of pre-existence. At the start of the twelfth century, it seems no orthodox view on the origin of souls had been established, potentially because prioritizing a single one had consequences which would impact several of the most prominent debates of Christian theology including the immortality of the soul, the transmission of original sin, and the moment of ensoulment. With nothing clearly defined in Scripture, arguments over the ‘correct’ solution had permeated Christian debates as early as the third century. With that in mind, this chapter offers an analysis of each of these origin theories, including Augustine’s conclusion that the answer was beyond human knowledge, questioning if and, if so, how they were received in England between the late ninth and early eleventh centuries.

Whilst the topic of the soul at death and the Last Judgement in Anglo-Saxon England has inspired a vast array of scholarly literature, relatively few have attempted to examine Anglo-Saxon theories about the soul’s origin. In his essay ‘Anglo-Saxons on the Mind,’ Godden briefly surveyed Ælfric’s homiletic writings on the soul’s origin and mentioned their lack of direct sources whilst also identifying what he believed to be a peculiarity in the belief of pre-existent souls found in Alfred’s version of Augustine’s *Soliloquia*.³ Although Godden’s work stimulated a series of articles and books on the relationship between mind and soul in pre-Conquest England, the unanswered questions that he raised surprisingly did not inspire more research on the topic. Lockett’s recent monograph *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies in the*

² ‘utrum ex illa una, quae primo homini data est, ceterae propagentur, an singulis quibusque nouae etiam modo fiant, an alicubi iam existentes uel mittantur diuinitus uel sponte labantur in corpora’: Augustine, *Epistulae*, Letter 166, CSEL 44, 556; Augustine, *Letters 156-210*, trans. R. Teske (Hyde Park, NY, 2004), 82.

³ Godden, ‘Anglo-Saxons on the Mind,’ 283-285.

Vernacular and Latin Traditions devoted a paragraph to describe different early English origin beliefs, including the Neoplatonist, Creationist, and Traducianist theories, analysed some cases of poetic ensoulment, and concluded that ‘the corpus of [Old English] narratives attests no communal preference for any one of these positions.’ Later on, she discussed ‘the Platonic theory of anamnesis or recollection’ in regards to the Alfredian translation of the *Soliloquia* and how it affected the *Boethius* translation.⁴ Nonetheless, as the soul on its own was never the subject of her work, the book does little more to further our understanding of theories of the soul’s origin.

Early medieval English views concerning the origin of the soul were most extensively researched by Ross in her 1992 unpublished dissertation *Anglo-Saxon Teaching on the Soul* which has left little impact on scholars of early medieval England.⁵ Focusing on Old English vernacular homiletic collections, Ross began her work with a chapter entitled ‘The Origin of the Soul,’ organising the chapter into three sections based on the three available theories and giving a brief introduction to the patristic discourses on each. Ross concluded that ‘if anything in the way of definite theological positions on the origin of the soul can be drawn from the Anglo-Saxon writers, we can say that Ælfric teaches Creationism with an occasional hint of Traducian influence, [and] the anonymous homilists appear to accept the theory of Pre-existence.’⁶ Ross’ work laid a crucial foundation for any study into pre-Conquest beliefs about the soul’s origin, but with improved access to sources and the publication of new resources it

⁴ Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies*, 20-21, 319-321.

⁵ Ross, *Anglo-Saxon Teaching on the Soul*, 9-31. Her research has been vital for several references here to the Vercelli homilies and Napier homily 29.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 24-25.

is now time to reassess not only Ross' conclusions but also embrace the intricacies to the story of the soul's origin which other genres, beyond just homilies, contribute to our understanding.

Quite often, scholars writing historical overviews on debates about the soul's origin will skip from the later patristic philosophers to the Scholastics in the twelfth century. Shedd wrote that 'in the Middle Ages, the theory of Creationism prevailed over the rival theory' with the works of the scholastics as his main source evidence.⁷ More recently, Jones neglected any evidence from Augustine to Thomas Aquinas in his chapter 'Whence the Soul?' and generalised that 'the dominant view among Western Catholic Christians since the fifth century has been that the soul is immediately created by God and infused into the new human being that is formed in the womb.'⁸ Evidence from this chapter, however, suggests that Anglo-Saxon authors were not only aware of the multiple theories about the soul's origin, but were expanding upon them, and endorsing more than just Creationist doctrine.

With such significant theological implications made by assigning a single belief of the soul's origin on an individual or time, we need to explore this question further. Extending the types of evidence explored beyond just homilies to study this conundrum can provide scholars with a more comprehensive understanding of early English beliefs regarding the origin of the soul. With only three authors in this time period explicitly stating their opinions on the origin of the soul (the Alfredian translation of Augustine's *Soliloquia* promoted pre-existence, whilst Wulfstan the Cantor and Ælfric supported Creationism) every type of relevant source material available must be consulted; homilies, particularly of the eschatological variety, provide an

⁷ W. Shedd, *A History of Christian Doctrine*, volume 2 (New York, 1864), 23.

⁸ Jones, *The Soul of the Embryo*, 107.

important perspective, but poetry, translations, exegesis and hagiography enhance the possible insights into this study, even considering its limited resources.

This chapter offers an analysis of each origin theory, exploring moments where beliefs could conform to the Traducianist, Creationist and Pre-existence beliefs. However, placing each Latin or Old English reference to the beginning of a soul's life under the branch of one of these three theories, as Ross has done, cannot provide the most complete understanding possible of the influences on, and beliefs of, the English concerning the origin of the soul. In addition to the three origin theories, one must insert the category particularly promoted by Augustine of Hippo in several of his works: that the answer to this question was unknowable to anyone but God. Additionally, warranting their own category, there are several references to the soul's origin which cannot readily be placed into a single category, since to do so would be an imposition on the source itself; caution must be implemented and I have labelled these sources 'the undiagnosable.'

Each section which follows begins with a more detailed definition of each theory including identifying any potential patristic or early medieval influence on Anglo-Saxon thinkers. Furthermore, not only does this chapter cover the evidence which defends the existence of beliefs of each origin theory, but, just as importantly, it also embraces the evidence which outright refutes or implicitly denies the validity of that theory. In this way, this chapter is able to highlight more than just the measurable degrees of existence of these competing theories in the late-ninth, tenth, and early-eleventh centuries, but it also tries to provide an understanding as to why these competing theories continued to exist, casting new light on the attempts made by Ælfric and Wulfstan the Cantor to create an orthodox view concerning the origin of the soul at the end of the tenth century.

Beyond Human Knowledge

When presented with these three competing theories concerning the origin of the soul – Traducianism, Pre-existence, and Creationism – one could easily forget that one of the writers whose works have largely been assumed to have the greatest influence on early English thought, Augustine of Hippo (d. 430), refused in his works to select a single origin theory as correct.⁹ Augustine certainly did not ignore the topic of the soul's origin. In a similar fashion to Letter 166 mentioned above, Augustine listed out the differing theories concerning the origin of the soul in *De libero arbitrio* where he concluded that 'it would be rash to affirm any of these [...] what matters is that we have the faith to believe nothing false or unworthy about the nature of the Creator.'¹⁰ In further exploration of the topic, this time concerning Ecclesiastes 12:7, Augustine wrote a letter to Marcellinus about the 'darkest question' concerning the origin of the soul that 'anyone who wants to argue for and defend one of those four opinions on the soul should bring forth either such proofs from the scriptures that have been accepted as authoritative by the Church and that cannot be interpreted in another way.'¹¹

⁹ Several modern scholars have attempted to discover Augustine's 'true' beliefs on the subject, but no consensus has been reached. As a starting point for these discussions, see S. Lyonnet, 'Augustin et Rm 5.12 Avant la Controverse Pélagienne,' *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 89 (1967), 842-49; R. O'Connell, *St. Augustine's Early Theory of Man* (Cambridge, MA, 1968) and *The Origin of the Soul in St. Augustine's Later Works* (New York, 1987); J. Rist, *Augustine: Ancient Thought Baptized* (Cambridge, 1994), 121-129, 317-320; R. Rombs, *Saint Augustine & the Fall of the Soul* (Washington, D.C., 2006). Lyonnet's argument that Augustine clandestinely supported Traducianism has been influential on Anglo-Saxon scholars such as Clayton, but no proof exists that the Anglo-Saxons believed Augustine held any belief but those written in his works (which were consistent that the question was inapprehensible): M. Clayton, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary in Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge, 2002), 16.

¹⁰ 'nullam temere adfirmare oportebit [...] tantum adsit fides nihil de substantia creatoris falsum indignumque sentiendi': Augustine, *De libero arbitrio*, Book 3, ch. 21, CCSL 29, 309-310; Augustine, *On Free Choice of the Will*, trans. T. Williams (Cambridge, 1993), 111.

¹¹ 'obscurissima quaestione'; 'quisquis illarum quattuor de anima sententiarum aliquam uoluerit adstruere atque defendere, talia proferat uel de scripturis in auctoritatem ecclesiasticam receptis, quae non possint aliter accipi': Augustine, *Epistulae*, Letter 143, CSEL 44, 261; Augustine, *Letters 100-155*, trans. R. Teske (Hyde Park, NY, 2003), 305, 307.

With no scriptural consensus, Augustine chose not to bow to external pressures compelling him to follow one theory and challenged anyone who proclaimed that they could. This accepted ignorance continued all the way into his later life where in his *Retractationes*, in reference to his letter to Jerome, he wrote: ‘I published the first book to warn the reader either not to search at all into the question of how the soul is given to men at birth, or certainly to concede, on a very obscure subject.’¹² For those with access to at least one of these several Augustinian works which addressed the origin of souls, there would be an understanding that choosing between any of these three theories acted directly against Augustine’s advice on the issue.¹³

Augustine’s treatises were not the only place that English scholars might find this hesitancy. In his treatise *De anima*, Cassiodorus (d. 585) refused to select a single doctrine, accepting that this was something which only God could know. He similarly catalogued the different theories of the origin of the soul before mentioning Augustine’s ‘scrupulous hesitation’ over choosing a single theory.¹⁴ Cassiodorus followed this with a warning: ‘in such mysterious matters it is better to confess ignorance than to assume a boldness, perhaps dangerous, especially since the Apostle says: ‘for “Who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been His counsellor?”’ [Romans 11:34]. And again: “For we know in part and we prophesy in part” [I Cor. 13:9]’ before ending the chapter admitting ‘I cannot say much

¹² ‘ad hoc edidi priorem, ut qui legit admoneatur aut non quaerere omnino, quomodo detur anima nascentibus, aut certe de re obscurissima eam solutionem quaestionis huius admittere’: Augustine, *Retractationum libri duo*, Book 2, ch. 45, CCSL 57, 127; Augustine, *Retractations*, trans. Sister M. Bogan (Washington, D.C., 1968), 218.

¹³ Other examples of Augustine’s hesitation on this issue potentially available in Anglo-Saxon England may be found in the tenth book of *De Genesi ad litteram*. For a full catalogue of Augustine’s works known to a select number of Anglo-Saxons, see M. Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library* (Oxford, 2006), 282-291 and *Fontes*, Search query: Augustine.

¹⁴ ‘religiosissima dubitatione’: Cassiodorus, *De anima*, ch. 9, CCSL96, 552; Cassiodorus, *Institutions of Divine and Secular Learning and On the Soul*, trans. J. Halporn (Liverpool, 2004), 260.

here.¹⁵ *De anima* might have been a source for Ælfric's opening sermon in his *Catholic Homilies*, but, as will be examined later, Ælfric chose not to follow Cassiodorus or Augustine's example, instead strongly advocating the theory of Creationism to explain the soul's origin.¹⁶

Gregory the Great reiterated Augustine and Cassiodorus' opinion on the topic in a letter to Secondinus in the spring of 599. Secondinus had asked Gregory for advice in explaining the fate of unbaptized children's souls to their parents when their children died too young to consent to sin. Gregory conceded that certain issues with Secondinus' dilemma revolved around the origin of the soul and the transmission of original sin which not even patristic scholars could explain, stating:

among the holy Fathers there has been no small inquiry over the origin of the soul, but it remains uncertain whether it descended from Adam or is in fact given to individuals, and the Fathers have admitted that the question is insoluble in this life. For it is an important question and human reason cannot understand it.¹⁷

Gregory explained that finding the answer to the soul's origin was beyond the capability of the human mind and then told his correspondent that pastorally it was more important to emphasise the bindings of original sin rather than how the soul came into existence.

Furthermore, Isidore of Seville's statement of faith in *De ecclesiasticis officiis* – a widely

¹⁵ 'Melius est enim in tam occultis causis confiteri ignorantiam quam periculosam assumere fortassis audaciam, cum dicat Apostolus: *quis enim cognouit sensum Domini aut quis eius consiliarius fuit?* Et iterum: *ex parte scimus, et ex parte prophetamus [...]* dicere multa non possumus': Cassiodorus, *De anima*, Book 9, CCSL 96, 552-553; Cassiodorus, *Institutions*, trans. Halporn, 260.

¹⁶ M. Godden, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: Introduction, Commentary and Glossary* (Oxford, 2000), 9.

¹⁷ 'inter sanctos patres requisitio non parua uersata est, sed utrum ipsa ab adam descenderit an certe singulis detur incertum remansit, eam que in hac uita insolubilem fassi sunt esse quaestionem. Grauis enim est quaestio nec ualet ab homine comprehendi': Gregory the Great, *Registrum epistularum*, Book 9, Letter 148, CCSL 140A, 703; *The Letters of Gregory the Great*, volume 2, trans. J. Martyn (Toronto, 2004), 634.

disseminated text throughout early medieval England – even included the declaration that ‘the origin of souls is unknown.’¹⁸

A strong literary tradition of hesitancy appears to have found its way to the libraries of early medieval England, but, perhaps unexpectedly, Augustine, Cassiodorus, Gregory the Great, and Isidore of Seville’s accepted ignorance on the topic was barely, if ever, echoed in surviving Anglo-Saxon works. Indeed, probably the best example which comes to mind associated ignorance on the subject with paganism. In Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History*, whose popularity in the long tenth century is attested by a translation into the vernacular, we find King Edwin taking advice from his counsellors for and against converting to Christianity. Bede (d. 735) put words into the mouth of one of Edwin’s chief counsellors, having him say: ‘a sparrow flies swiftly through the hall. It enters in at one door and quickly flies out through the other [...] so this life of man appears but for a moment; what follows or indeed what went before, we know not at all. If this new doctrine brings us more certain information, it seems right that we should accept it.’¹⁹ Bede made a distinction here between pagan ignorance and Christian certainty, with ‘more certain information’ on the soul’s existence both before and after corporal life as a significant defining point separating the two. Bede, however, did not

¹⁸ ‘quod animae origo incerta sit’: Isidore of Seville, *De ecclesiasticis officiis*, Book 2, ch. 24, CCSL 113, 100. Lapidge has included this work as part of the short list of texts found in ‘the typical Anglo-Saxon library’: Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*, 127. It was known to Theodore, Aldhelm, Bede, Lantfred, and Ælfric: *ibid.*, 310. Bishop Æthelwold also used it as a source: R. Jayatilaka, ‘The Sources for Æthelwold’s *Old English Benedictine Rule* (Cameron C.B.10.3.1),’ 2002, *Fontes*. Furthermore, direct transmission into the Carolingian empire of this statement may be seen in Hrabanus Maurus’ ninth-century *De institutione clericorum*: Hrabanus Maurus, *De institutione clericorum*, volume 2, Book 2, ch. 57, *Fontes Christiani* 61, ed. D. Zimpel (Turnhout, 2006), 424.

¹⁹ ‘adueniens unus passerum domum citissime peruolauerit; qui cum per unum ostium ingrediens mox per aliud exierit [...] Ita haec uita hominum ad modicum apparet; quid autem sequitur, quidue praecesserit, prorsus ignoramus. Vnde, si haec noua doctrina certius aliquid attulit, merito esse sequenda uidetur’: Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, Book 2, ch. 13, ed. and trans. B. Colgrave and R. Mynors (Oxford, 1969), 184-185; the Old English translation of the *Ecclesiastical History* followed its source closely here, stating ‘what goes before, or what comes after, we know not’ (‘hwæt þær foregange, oððe hwæt þær æfterfylige, we ne cunnun’): Bede, *The Old English Version of Bede’s Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, Book 2, ch. 10, ed. and trans. T. Miller (London, 1890), 136-137.

appear in his other works to have chosen which theory about the origin of souls to support.²⁰ Perhaps this line was intended to be humorous to the educated reader familiar with Augustine and Cassiodorus' refusal to commit on the subject.

Alcuin of York included a small section on the origin of the soul in his treatise on the soul *De animae ratione* written during his time at the court of Charlemagne. Alcuin started his chapter about the topic with a concise statement expressing that 'only God' could really know the origin of the soul.²¹ He then referenced the exchange of letters between Augustine and Jerome on the subject, but admitted that the letters were something he had read 'in his own country' – most likely alluding to York – and that he could not find them, along with the other works by Augustine which discuss the topic, where he was on the continent.²² Alcuin followed his predecessors' opinions that the answer to the soul's origin proved beyond the limits of human understanding, continuing the conclusion of accepted ignorance into the early ninth century.

Echoes of this accepted ignorance did not regularly resurface in the later Anglo-Saxon period despite the literary inheritance supporting this claim. The strongest case for it appears

²⁰ Bede might have insisted that souls were created *ex nihilo*, but that does not necessarily signify a belief in Creationist doctrine. Instead, Bede would use this term when describing the creation of man in Genesis 2:7 to disqualify the belief that the soul was created from the same substance as God: Bede, *In principium Genesis*, Book 1, ch. 2, CCSL 118A, 45. Bede's exegesis on Genesis might reveal something further though about his opinions on the origin of souls. When discussing Abraham's move to the land of Canaan in Genesis 12:5, he wrote: 'Nor do those who think that just as flesh is begot from flesh, so soul is begot from soul, derive any help from this sentence, since, as I have said, the whole person is designated by the word 'soul.' This could be read as an attempt by Bede to separate himself from those who believed in Traducianism. 'Neque ex hac sententia quicquam habent auxilii qui sicut carnem ex carne, ita ex anima animam, aestimant procreari, cum uocabulo animae, ut diximus, totus homo designetur': *ibid.*, Book 3, ch. 12, 171; Bede, *On Genesis*, trans. C. Kendall (Cambridge, 2008), 248.

²¹ 'Origo vero animarum unde sit, solius Dei cognitioni relinquendum est': Alcuin, *De animae ratione*, ch. 13, PL 101:645B.

²² 'Quem libellum in patria legimus, sed hic nobiscum non reperitur; nec etiam epistola responsionis ad eum': *ibid.*, ch. 13, PL 101:645C.

in the Old English poem ‘Instructions for Christians,’ surviving in a twelfth-century manuscript with scribal omissions which suggest the likelihood of it being ‘a copy of a somewhat older original.’²³ The anonymous poet here presents the origin of the soul as an unknown:

You do not fully entirely know the path of your soul,
how it came into you or where it was beforehand.

Pu ful gearowe na wast wege þines gastes,
hu heo ðe on com oððe hwær heo æror was (ll. 221-222).²⁴

These lines of poetry signify some degree of attitudes towards accepted ignorance still at work at the end of the Anglo-Saxon period. They acknowledge the ignorance of both the poet and the audience, but do not offer any of the potential solutions discussed by Augustine. It is difficult to measure the amount of support which the argument for accepted ignorance actually had, especially because the evidence which this chapter goes on to explore includes written pieces from highly-educated authors who stated outright support for a single belief. Some even declared that continued faith in other beliefs was heretical. However, although the evidence for admitting ignorance was scarce, we cannot dismiss the idea that for many believers no answer to this question might have been necessary to follow the Christian faith.

Traducianism

The word Traducianism derives from the Latin word *tradux* meaning ‘a shoot or sprout, and more specifically a vine branch made to take root so as to propagate the vine’; the doctrine

²³ J. Rosier, ‘Instructions for Christians: a Poem in Old English,’ *Anglia* 82 (1964), 4.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 17, ll. 221-222. Whilst similar in idea, the syntax and language here do not parallel that found in the late ninth or early tenth century *Old English Bede*: see footnote 19 of this chapter.

itself promoted the belief that ‘in the process of generation, the human spiritual soul is transmitted to the offspring by the parents.’²⁵ It was supported by Tertullian in his work *De anima* and later by Gregory of Nyssa in *De opificio hominis*, and this theory teaches that all human souls are an extension of the soul of Adam, strictly maintaining that Genesis 2:2 signified the end of God’s creation and that God continues to rest.²⁶ Adam, as the only biblical instance where God explicitly created a soul and put it in a body – ‘breathed into his face the breath of life, and man became a living soul’ (Gen 2:7) – gives ‘his own image and likeness’ (Gen 5:3) to his descendants, understood by Tertullian and Gregory to include both the physical and spiritual aspects passed on by each parent. This understanding would have further consequences, which are explored in the next chapter on ensoulment, because ‘Traducianism would have to insist that [...] the intellectual aspect of the soul would have to be at least potentially present in the foetus from the moment of conception. Such a notion would render theologically irrelevant any such distinction between an unformed and a formed foetus.’²⁷

Lapidge and Winterbottom have noted that ‘by the late 10th c[entury] [...] Traducianism had been a dead letter for centuries (it was condemned by Pope Anastasius II in 498), and the commonly held theological view was the Creationism’ doctrine.²⁸ However, this has not stopped Godden, Lockett, and Ross from each choosing to include Traducianism as a possible origin belief during this time. Traducianism might very well have not been

²⁵ ‘Traducianism,’ in *Catholic Encyclopedia*, eds. C. Herbermann et al. (New York, 1907; repr. online, 2007).

²⁶ Genesis 2:2: ‘And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made: and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had done.’

²⁷ D. Billy, ‘Traducianism as a Theological Model in the Problem of Ensoulment,’ *Irish Theological Quarterly* 55 (1989), 27.

²⁸ Wulfstan the Cantor, *Life of St Æthelwold*, eds. and trans. M. Lapidge and M. Winterbottom (Oxford, 1991), 8, footnote 2.

completely obsolete during the late Anglo-Saxon period. After the Norman Conquest, Gilbert Crispin showed firmer confidence than his mentor Anselm and indicated his preference for the theory of Traducianism in his tract *De anima* to explain Christ's atonement for original sin.²⁹ Furthermore, immediately before the period of this study, in an attempt to support his contested theology of predestination, Gottschalk of Orbais (d. late 860s) defended the doctrine of Traducianism in his letter *Quaestiones de anima*. Haverkamp has noted that in the letter 'Gottschalk comes to his insight of Traducianism and thereby makes a much stronger claim than Augustine would be willing to allow. But his starting point, the premises from which he draws his implication and from there on went his own way, are all Augustine's.'³⁰ Gottschalk would use some of Augustine's truncated ideas on Traducianism and add to them, creating an argument for what he believed to be the orthodox doctrine. Strong supporters of Traducianism existed in the centuries before and after the period of this study, so one must ask, then, to what extent did Traducianist beliefs travel into England? To answer this question, this section first examines the availability of patristic works favouring Traducianism to pre-Conquest scholars. Afterwards, the attacks on Traducianism by Wulfstan the Cantor and Ælfric are analysed before turning to the treatment of Eve in the Old English poem 'Genesis A'.

The two quintessential patristic works discussing Traducianism – Tertullian's formulating *De anima* and Gregory of Nyssa's *De opificio hominis* – seemingly were unknown in early medieval England.³¹ The only work of Tertullian surviving in late-eleventh

²⁹ J. Robinson, *Gilbert Crispin, Abbot of Westminster* (Cambridge, 1911), 72.

³⁰ S. Haverkamp, '*Si Adam et Eva peccaverunt, quid nos miseri fecimus?: The Reception of Augustine's Ontological Discourse on the Soul in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, unpublished dissertation (University of St Andrews, 2013), 155.

³¹ I. McFarland, 'Traducianism,' in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christian Theology*, eds. I. McFarland, D. Fergusson, K. Kilby, and I. Torrance (Cambridge, 2011), 514; *Fontes*, Search query: Tertullian; no available search query in *Fontes* for Gregory of Nyssa.

or twelfth-century English manuscript, *Apologeticum*, did not discuss the origin of the soul in depth, only stating that, in a chapter on the resurrection of the body, ‘for you would remember, if you had existed. You were nothing before you came into being,’ countering the Neoplatonic idea that souls existed before embodiment.³² *Apologeticum* presupposes an understanding of the progenerate soul, but does not specifically define it. We also cannot prove that later arguments for Traducianism found in Gottschalk’s *Quaestiones de anima* made it to Anglo-Saxon England. This might, however, not be a surprise as Gottschalk became the Carolingian ‘empire’s most notorious religious outlaw’ due to his attempts to cause an upheaval in theology, and his steadfast belief in the soul’s progeneration might have been actively suppressed.³³

From my own research I have found no texts supporting Traducianism, but we do see several authors making specific arguments against Traducianist doctrine. In the *vita* of Saint Æthelwold written at the end of the tenth century, Wulfstan the Cantor gave a short discourse on the origin of the soul after describing the miracle at Bishop Æthelwold’s ensoulment. He wrote: ‘the soul of a man, once begotten, does not, as some suppose, take its first rise from his father or mother; instead, as we believe in truth and without any doubt, the vital spirit is quickened by our Creator and none other, and is given individually to each man.’³⁴ Wulfstan notably did not declare who these ‘some’ people are that believed in Traducianism. In his

³² ‘Meminisses enim, si quid fuisses. Qui ergo nihil fueras priusquam esses’: Tertullian, *Apologeticum*, Book 48, ch. 5, ed. and trans. T. Glover (Cambridge, MA, 1931), 214-215; Gneuss and Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts*, 501.

³³ M. Gillis, *Heresy and Dissent in the Carolingian Empire: the Case of Gottschalk of Orbais* (Oxford, 2017), 232.

³⁴ ‘Animam procreati hominis non, ut quidam aestimant, a patre uel a matre existendi initium sumere, sed, ut uere et absque omni dubietate creditur, a solo creatore uitalem spiritum uiuificari et singillatim uniuersis dare’: Wulfstan, *Life of St Æthelwold*, ch. 4, ed. and trans. Lapidge and Winterbottom, 8-9.

early eleventh-century abbreviated version of Wulfstan's *Vita S. Æthelwoldi*, Ælfric also chose to include a version of this passage targeting Traducianism ('animam hominis non a patre uel a matre uenire sed a solo creatore unicuique dari'), leading Lapidge and Winterbottom to speculate that this 'may well suggest that Ælfric and Wulfstan derived the doctrine [of Creationism] from Æthelwold, their teacher.'³⁵ Indeed, at the beginning of this chapter in the *vita*, Wulfstan prefaced the section which rejects Traducianism by writing 'this is what I was told later by the very saint whose birth was then imminent, when he had become a bishop,' handing the authority to Æthelwold himself.³⁶

From this example alone, we cannot ascertain whether or not Ælfric simply reiterated the convictions on the process of ensoulment found in Wulfstan the Cantor's composition or was propagating his own beliefs. However, attacks against Traducianism appear in Ælfric's own vernacular homilies, most visibly in his sermon on Creation where Ælfric wrote:

Now some men will wonder, from where does the soul come to him? Whether from the father or from the mother? We say from neither of them; but the same God who formed Adam with his hands, he forms every man's body in his mother's womb; and the same who blew into Adam's body, and gave him a soul, the same gives a soul and life to children in their mother's womb.

Nu smeiað sume men hwanon him cume sawul hwæðer þe of þam fæder. þe of þære meder. we cweðað of heora naðrum. ac se ylca god þe gesceop adam mid his handum he gescypð ælces mannes lichaman on his moder Innoðe; 7 se ilca se ðe ableow on adames lichaman 7 him forgeaf saule. se ylca forgyfð cildum saule 7 lyf on hyra moder innoðe.³⁷

³⁵ Ælfric, *Vita S. Æthelwoldi*, ch. 3, in Wulfstan of Winchester, *Life of Æthelwold*, Appendix A, 71-72.

³⁶ 'sicut postea ipse sanctus qui nasciturus erat, iam episcopus, nobis gaudento referebat': Wulfstan of Winchester, *Life of Æthelwold*, ch. 4, eds. and trans. Lapidge and Winterbottom, 6-7.

³⁷ Ælfric, *CH I*, Homily 1, 184. Ælfric also speaks out against Traducianist beliefs in his homily 'Feria VI in prima ebdomada quadragesimæ' mentioned below.

Ælfric's use of rhetorical questions addressing 'some men' – so very similar to Wulfstan's 'as some suppose' – might lead to the interpretation that both authors were correcting what they perceived to be a common contemporary misconception. Is it possible that Traducianism was not such a 'dead letter' to the Anglo-Saxons as Lapidge and Winterbottom suggested? Godden has proposed that Ælfric's use of the term *sume men* is 'referring not to the idle speculations of contemporaries but to the uncertainties of such authorities as Augustine and Cassiodorus';³⁸ however, when analysing the language used by both Wulfstan and Ælfric in their discussions covering Traducianist theories along with the lack of texts which advocate Traducianist beliefs, the clear-cut rejections made by Ælfric and Wulfstan appear to be countering more than just the aforementioned accepted ignorance of Augustine and Cassiodorus. With this in mind, one must wonder if Traducianism was a more commonly discussed, possibly popular, belief than Lapidge and Winterbottom have initially suggested if it warranted such consternation from the students of the School of Winchester.

It is worth considering one of the main scriptural arguments for Traducianism in the context of an Old English poem recounting the creation narratives in Genesis. This argument maintained that in Genesis 'Eve was taken completely, both body and soul, from the side of Adam.'³⁹ Open to interpretation, Genesis 2:21-22 only states 'the Lord God cast a deep sleep upon Adam: and when he was fast asleep, he took one of his ribs, and filled up flesh for it. And the Lord God built the rib which he took from Adam into a woman: and brought her to Adam.' O'Connell has noted Augustine's wariness concerning 'the silence of Genesis on the creation of Eve's soul' in *De Genesi ad litteram* and if it actually 'entitle[s] us to infer that she

³⁸ Godden, 'Anglo-Saxons on the Mind,' 285.

³⁹ Billy, 'Traducianism,' 20.

received her soul from Adam in the way Traducianists explain the “propagation” of all post-Adamic souls.’⁴⁰ However, for advocates of Traducianism, believing that the first soul after the creation of man stemmed directly from Adam’s soul remained a chief tenet. God could not have created a new soul for Eve; both Eve’s body and soul must have propagated directly from Adam.

Genesis’ silence on the origin of Eve’s soul, however, did not transfer to the Old English poem ‘Genesis A’ located in the tenth-century Junius Manuscript.⁴¹ Whilst Adam’s ensoulment does not remain due to manuscript damage, Eve’s ensoulment is described in detail: ‘from that [Adam’s rib] God created a glorious woman. Put in spirit, eternal soul. These two were like the angels. Then was Adam’s bride equipped with spirit’ (‘of þam worhte god/freolice fæmnan, feorh in gedyde,/ ece saula. heo wæron englum gelice./ þa wæs adames bryd/gaste gegearwod,’ ll.183b-187a). Here appears a distinct ensoulment for Eve not found in the Vulgate Genesis. Notably, the poet explicitly credited God with the endowment of Eve’s soul after he has formed her body. Indeed, the apposition of *saula* and *gaste* at this point serves to stress the importance of Eve’s ensoulment within these lines and highlights the discord to the scripture in Genesis.

This ensoulment of Eve seemingly contradicts one of the main precepts of Traducianism that her soul derived directly from Adam, and could potentially help support an understanding that Traducianism was not one of the commonly believed theories concerning the origin of the soul in later Anglo-Saxon England. In the commentary for this section of

⁴⁰ O’Connell, *The Origin of the Soul*, 226.

⁴¹ Although ‘Genesis A’ survives solely in an illustrated manuscript dating to the tenth century, its composition has been dated by Fulk to before *c.* 825 because it does not conform to Kaluza’s Law: D. Fulk, *A History of Old English Meter* (Philadelphia, 1992), 391-392. For further information about the poetic tradition of ‘Genesis A,’ see below, 178-179.

‘Genesis A,’ Doane could provide no immediate source beyond its parallel to the creation of Adam but noted that ‘the separate inbreathing of the individual soul of Eve suggests the common hexameral topic of the separate creation of each individual soul often introduced in conjunction with the creation of Eve.’⁴² Doane has suggested that these lines of poetry could have been influenced by the tenth Book of Augustine’s *De Genesi ad litteram* which reflects on this topic, and thus ‘the poet indicates the proper response and cuts through the doctrinal complexities by simply repeating the in-breathing of the soul in his narrative of the creation of Eve.’⁴³ This seeming obligation to provide a ‘proper response’ could imply that an agreed stance on the origin of the soul already existed, leaving the need to outright reject Traducianist doctrine as superfluous, or it might equally suggest the existence of theological discussions concerning theories about the soul’s origin which motivated the poet’s decision to incorporate Eve’s ensoulment to ‘Genesis A’.

Although no specific evidence points to the continuation of Traducianist beliefs in Anglo-Saxon England, we cannot completely ignore the question of Traducianism during this time. The status of Eve’s ensoulment in the poem ‘Genesis A’ as the most important evidence against Anglo-Saxon beliefs in progeneration is not enough to refute completely Traducianism’s continued existence, particularly when we cannot identify who Ælfric and Wulfstan the Cantor’s ‘some’ people might have been. Both Ælfric and Wulfstan’s comments ensure to us that Traducianist beliefs persisted to some degree, ranging from only in the outlined definitions found in Augustine to a predominance in popular religion, unmeasurable here. What can best be understood from all of these sources is that discussions at some point,

⁴² A. Doane, ‘Commentary,’ in *Genesis A: a New Edition* (Madison, 1978), 236.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 236.

perhaps at Winchester under Æthelwold as part of the Benedictine reforms, were being made concerning Traducianism, the origin of the soul, and quite possibly the promotion of an orthodox view of Creationism.

Pre-existence

But before that was all occurring in later half of the tenth century, we must go back to as early as the end of the ninth when those at King Alfred's court appear to have had their own theory about the soul's origin; to these select scholars, all souls had existed from the beginning of creation. The Neoplatonic origin theory discussing the pre-existence of souls chiefly concerns itself with establishing the immortality of souls, an issue which Creationism and Traducianism fail to address fully. This theory, adapted by some Christian scholars as early as the third century, argues that God simultaneously created all souls during the act of Creation before his rest on the seventh day. Each soul, therefore, was already present before the ensoulment of Adam in Genesis 2:7, and all souls exist somewhere in a disembodied state before embodiment. Two separate discourses stem from this theory to explain how souls may pre-exist, as explained by Jerome in his letter to Marcellinus and Anapsychia. The first, Jerome wrote, states that the soul 'has fallen from heaven, as the philosopher Pythagoras and all the Platonists and Origen think;' the second argues 'they were created long ago by God and are held in a storehouse, as certain men of the Church believe in their foolish conviction.'⁴⁴

Neither of these two theories garnered Jerome's commendation, but whilst Origen's 'fallen

⁴⁴ 'utrum lapsa de caelo sit, ut Pythagoras philosophus omnes que Platonici et Origenes putant [...] an in thesauro habeantur dei olim conditae, ut quidam ecclesiastici stulta persuasione confidunt': Jerome, *Epistulae*, Letter 126, CSEL 56, 143 and in Augustine, *Epistulae*, Letter 165, CSEL 44, 542; Augustine, *Letters 156-210*, Letter 165, trans. Teske, 74.

souls' theory appears to have lost favour after being deemed heretical, the 'storehouse' theory of pre-existing souls seems to have persisted in different circles all the way to Alfred's court at the end of the ninth century. This section offers a brief description of the two types of Neoplatonic theories on pre-existent souls before turning to the textual transmission of these ideas to Anglo-Saxon England, the evidence of beliefs in pre-existent souls found in the Alfredian translations of Boethius' *De Consolatione Philosophiae* and Augustine's *Soliloquia*, and the later occurrence of these beliefs in Napier Homily 29.

The theory of pre-existence is considered to be Neoplatonic in nature because 'some things akin to it are to be found in the Pythagorean and Platonic speculations [...] [including] the theory that man's innate ideas are reminiscences of an antecedent life in a higher world than that of sense and time.'⁴⁵ This recollection, also called anamnesis, was discussed by Plato in the *Phaedo* where he 'proposed not just a theory of *innate* knowledge, but of *forgotten* knowledge, and this, of course, goes hand in hand with his interest in the pre-existence of the soul.'⁴⁶ Plato compared the soul to 'a winged chariot whose driver struggles to control two disparate horses, one good and one bad. Before it enters the body, the soul inhabits the realm of the gods where reason, the charioteer, beholds the Forms. The unruly horses of appetite drag the soul down, pulling it away from pure intellectual contemplation.'⁴⁷ The soul then loses its wings and becomes burdened by the body, forgetting most of the knowledge gained from its pre-corporeal state. As Christian philosophers such as Origen and Nemesius read

⁴⁵ Shedd, *Christian Doctrine*, 5.

⁴⁶ D. Scott, 'Platonic Anamnesis Revisited,' *Classical Quarterly* 37 (1987), 346.

⁴⁷ A. Sheppard, 'Plato and the Neoplatonists,' in *Platonism and the English Imagination*, eds. A. Baldwin and S. Hutton (Cambridge, 1994), 9.

Plato, they would apply his philosophical ideas to a Christian paradigm to answer some of the more complex questions of Christianity, including the origin of the soul.

The theory of ‘fallen souls’ mentioned by Jerome found its strongest advocate among the early Church theologians in Origen (d. 253/254). In his work *De Principiis*, Origen argued that souls lived in a heavenly existence like the angels but, due to free will, chose ‘by sloth and negligence to fall from happiness into wickedness and ruin’ and as punishment must suffer the imprisonment of the body.⁴⁸ Origen most famously attempted to explain the confusion surrounding Romans 9:11-13 with his theory of fallen souls.⁴⁹ He argued that if all souls were equal when they enter the body, the supplanting of Jacob over Esau in the womb could be considered an unjust decision by God. Origen righted this by explaining how each soul gained its condition on earth based on merit achieved from a previous existence. Therefore, God remained just and righteous in this case of disparity as Jacob and Esau’s souls, from their previous existence, each earned their unequal conditions in the womb.⁵⁰ Furthermore, Origen cited the case of John the Baptist leaping in Elisabeth’s womb to argue against Traducianist and Creationist beliefs on the origin of the soul. He asked: ‘How could his soul and its images be formed along with his body, who, before he was created in the womb, is said to be known to God, and was sanctified by Him before his birth?’⁵¹ Despite the strong scriptural stance

⁴⁸ ‘per desidiam et negligentiam a beatitudine in malitiam et perditionem’: Origen, *De principiis*, Book 1, ch. 5, PG 11:164; Origen, *De Principiis*, trans. F. Crombie in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, volume 4, ed. A. Coxe et al. (Grand Rapids, 1885), 260. With only remnants left of the original Greek, this text comes to us from the Latin translation by Rufinus which was criticized by Jerome for its inaccuracies.

⁴⁹ Romans 9:11-13: ‘For when the children were not yet born, nor had done any good or evil (that the purpose of God, according to election, might stand), Not of works, but of him that calleth, it was said to her: The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written: Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated.’

⁵⁰ Origen, *De principiis*, Book 1, ch. 7, PG 11:173 and later Book 2, ch. 9, PG 11:231.

⁵¹ ‘Quomodo cum corpore simul ficta est et plasmata etiam illius anima, qui antequam in utero formaretur, notus esse Deo dicitur, et antequam de vulva procederet, sanctificatus est ab eo?’: Origen, *De Principiis*, Book 1, ch. 7, PG 11:174; Origen, *De Principiis*, trans. Crombie, 264.

used to defend it, the theory of ‘fallen souls’ in *De Principiis* factored into the charge of heresy against Origen by the ancient Church, ‘a charge from which even his firmest friends felt it no easy matter absolutely to defend him.’⁵² Consequently, Shedd argued that ‘the theory of pre-existence may be said to rise and set with Origen. Only here and there was a voice heard in its favour after his death [...] by the latter part of the 4th century it had become obsolete.’⁵³

However, a simpler discourse on pre-existent souls *did* persist after the death of Origen in the third century. Scholars such as Nemesius of Emesa popularised the second theory of pre-existence mentioned by Jerome – where God holds souls in a ‘storehouse’ before they enter the body – in his Greek text *On the Nature of Man* at the end of the fourth century. Nemesius rejected Origen’s ‘fallen souls’ theory ‘as not suited to the divine writing nor in harmony with Christian dogma,’ but he argued that souls must pre-exist in an incorporeal state ‘for everything that has a bodily, and thus temporal, origin is perishable and mortal,’ thus rebuffing Creationism and Traducianism.⁵⁴ Many diverse theories under this second discourse exist, each arguing for different beliefs in where souls are stored, the degree of agency of the soul, and what causes its descent, but discussing the intricacies of each theory on pre-existence is beyond the scope of this work.⁵⁵ Consistency does occur, however, in the base beliefs that the soul exists as a separate entity in some state before embodiment and that a small degree of

⁵² A. Coxe, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, volume 4, ed. P. Schaff (Grand Rapids, 1885), 562.

⁵³ Shedd, *Christian Doctrine*, 8-9.

⁵⁴ Nemesius, *On the Nature of Man*, Section 3 and Section 2, trans. R. Sharples and P. Van Der Eijk (Liverpool, 2008), 86, 69.

⁵⁵ For an in-depth analysis of the development and debates of beliefs in the soul’s pre-existence from Mesopotamian myth through patristic sources and to the modern age, see T. Givens, *When Souls Had Wings* (Oxford, 2009).

knowledge from that previous existence remains once the soul enters the body. Both Nemesius' *On the Nature of Man* and Origen's *De Principiis* appear to have been unknown, even in translation from their original Greek, to the Anglo-Saxons; however, while it would appear that Origen's 'fallen souls' theory did not find its way into Anglo-Saxon thought, Nemesius' simpler pre-existence theory was transmitted through fourth- to sixth-century Latin texts influenced by the idea, and these texts were able to cross the Channel to Anglo-Saxon England from the ninth century onwards.

Nauta has explored the continental discussions ranging from the fifth to the fourteenth century on the theme of the pre-existent soul's descent along with the corresponding Neoplatonic idea of knowledge as recollection. He has discussed how even though Augustine held reservations on the pre-existence of the soul,

it was precisely this descent of the soul that medieval scholars found alluded to or extensively discussed in four texts that from Carolingian times held an important place in the curriculum in the cathedral and monastic schools: Macrobius' *Dream of Scipio*, Martianus Capella's *On the Marriage of Philology and Mercury*, Calcidius' translation of Plato's *Timaeus*, and Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*. These texts are well known as *loci classici* for the Neoplatonic theme of the pre-existence of the soul and its descent to earth.⁵⁶

If these texts were a crucial part of the Carolingian educational curriculum, it would not be an impossible step to consider that they also might have been brought over to Anglo-Saxon England by continental scholars, such as Grimbold of St Bertin or John the Old Saxon, invited by Alfred the Great to help English religious and cultural reforms. Indeed, each of these texts which transmitted ideas on the pre-existent soul was known in some manner by at least two

⁵⁶ L. Nauta, 'The Pre-existence of the Soul in Medieval Thought', *Recherches De Théologie Et Philosophie Médiévales* 63 (1996), 102. Anlezark has reconstructed a controversy in the early ninth-century Carolingian empire between Fredegisus and Agobard of Lyons concerning Fredegisus' belief in pre-existent souls. More still needs to be studied on this doctrine in eighth- and ninth-century Francia to build a more complete story, but for now we can at least say that the topic of the soul's origin inspired a range of debates: D. Anlezark, 'The Soul in the Old English *Soliloquies* and Ninth-Century Neoplatonism,' in *Germano-Celtica: a Festschrift for Brian Taylor*, eds. A. Ahlquist and P. O'Neill (Sydney, 2017), 56-57.

prominent Anglo-Saxon authors of the tenth and eleventh centuries, and only Calcidius' *Commentarius In Platonis Timaeum* cannot be found in any extant manuscripts of Anglo-Saxon origin or provenance before 1100.⁵⁷ Most importantly for this discussion, a ninth-century copy of *De Consolatione Philosophiae* [hereafter *Consolatio*] moved from the Loire region to Wales, Cornwall or southwest England near the end of the ninth century before finding a resting place in England, possibly Glastonbury, by the middle of the tenth century.⁵⁸ Even if this specific manuscript did not enter England until after Alfred's reign, evidence of the *Consolatio*'s presence before the turn of the tenth century arguably exists in the form of its translation into the vernacular.⁵⁹ By the end of the ninth century, at least one, if not all, of these *loci classici* texts which mediated the Platonic ideas of the pre-existent soul to a Latinate audience were being studied and discussed in educated circles.

Each of these four texts left some type of mark on late Anglo-Saxon authors, but there is little doubt that the *Consolatio* made the largest impression in Anglo-Saxon England as evidenced from the number of surviving manuscripts holding it and its translation into Old English. Boethius' text, written while he was imprisoned for treason against Theodoric the Ostrogoth in 523, follows a fictional imprisoned Boethius overwhelmed with misery and

⁵⁷ Macrobius's *Commentarii in Somnium Scipionis*, survives in five manuscripts and was known to Abbo of Fleury and Byrhtferth of Ramsey (Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*, 320); Capella's *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii* – known by Bede, Lantfred of Fleury, Abbo, Byrhtferth – survives in six manuscripts (*ibid.*, 321); Calcidius' *Commentarius in Platonis Timaeum* was cited by Lantfred and Abbo (*ibid.*, 295); Boethius' *De consolatione Philosophiae*, extant in 17 manuscripts of late Anglo-Saxon origin or provenance, was known to Lantfred, Abbo and Byrhtferth (*ibid.*, 293-294) and quite likely Ælfric: see P. Szarmach, 'Boethius's Influence in Anglo-Saxon England: The Vernacular and the *De Consolatione Philosophiae*,' in *A Companion to Boethius in the Middle Ages*, eds. N. Kaylor and P. Phillips (Leiden, 2012), 236-243.

⁵⁸ Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Vat. lat. 3363: Gneuss and Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts*, 657.

⁵⁹ Little is known about the *Consolatio*'s transmission from the sixth to eighth centuries, but scholars generally point to 'Alcuin (735-804) as the providential figure who rescued the famous prosimetrum from oblivion, and brought it to the attention of the Carolingian world': A. Papahagi, 'The transmission of Boethius's *De consolatione philosophiae* in the Carolingian Age,' *Medium Aevum* 78 (2009), 1.

despair. Lady Philosophy (Wisdom in the Alfredian *Boethius*) approaches him and offers him solace through gradual discussions on the transitory nature of human life in interchanging dialogue and verse forms. By the end of Book 5, Philosophy has rejuvenated Boethius' hopes through the means of *sensus*, *imaginatio*, *ratio*, and finally *intellegentia*.

Perhaps due to its consoling theme of solace in the face of adversity or simply its popularity, the *Consolatio* was included in the translation programme associated with King Alfred as one of the books 'which are most necessary for all people to know' ('ða ðe niedbeðearfosta sien eallum monnum to wiotonne'), a small piece of a wider project towards educational and religious reform.⁶⁰ Of the works attributed to this translation circle only four have been confirmed as part of the literary Alfredian canon. Bately has written that 'if we accept Alfred's authorship of the *Pastoral Care*, the many agreements in matters of lexis, syntax and style, as well as the shared approach to the processes of translation, indicat[e] a strong link between [...] the *Boethius*, *Psalms* and (to a lesser extent) *Soliloquies*.'⁶¹ Fox's and Faulkner's arguments that these translations share a consolidated psychological perspective conscious of their portrayal of soul and mind further emphasise the connection between these texts and the care placed into the translation process.⁶² Arguments persist over the extent to which King Alfred contributed to these works: Pratt has argued that 'a high degree of personal involvement has generally been assumed,' whilst Godden has remained largely sceptical of

⁶⁰ *King Alfred's West-Saxon Version of Gregory's Pastoral Care*, ed. H. Sweet (Oxford, 1871; repr. 1934), 7.

⁶¹ J. Bately, 'Alfred as Author and Translator,' in *A Companion to Alfred the Great*, eds. N. Discenza and P. Szarmach (Leiden, 2015), 140.

⁶² Fox, *Mind, Body, Soul*, 36; Faulkner, 'The Mind in the Old English,' 1-21; see above, page 25.

this assumption along with its earlier dating.⁶³ For ease of discussion this thesis will refer to the author of these translations as Alfred, but it understands that the authorship of these translations cannot be attributed easily to a single person and that the dating of these translations is still largely debatable. While the translations of the *Psalms* and *Pastoral Care* remained relatively faithful to their source texts, those of the *Soliloquia* and the *Consolatio* contain original expansions, independent digressions, and omissions of ‘unorthodox’ aspects.⁶⁴ Consequently, by analysing these translations in tandem with the original work, we can best observe how Alfred and his circle interacted with the Neoplatonic discourse on the soul’s origin running through Boethius’ text.

Alfred did not explain his beliefs concerning the origin of the soul in clear didactic terms in his translation of the *Consolatio*, but his rendering of the text is interspersed with allusions to the pre-corporeal life of the soul that together created a clear theory of pre-existence. These references, often expanding greatly from Boethius’ own words, developed through the translation of Book 3 of the *Consolatio* to create a full portrait of the circumstances surrounding the soul’s pre-existence. References to the soul’s origin started as small and ambiguous. Metre 13 described how every creature – be it a lion, bird, tree, or human – desires to return to its natural state, ‘the dwelling-place from which it came, which is tranquillity and eternal rest – that is clearly almighty God’ (‘to þam earde þe hio of becom,/

⁶³ D. Pratt, *The Political Thought of King Alfred the Great* (Cambridge, 2007), 116; Godden, ‘Did King Alfred Write Anything?’ *Medium Ævum* 76 (2007), 1-23; in the new edition of the *Old English Boethius*, Godden and Irvine ‘worked on the hypothesis that the [Old English] *Boethius* was the work of an unknown writer of substantial learning, not necessarily connected with King Alfred or his court, but working sometime in the period 890-930, probably in southern England’: M. Godden and S. Irvine, ‘Introduction,’ in *The Old English Boethius*, volume 1, ed. M. Godden and S. Irvine (Oxford, 2009), 146.

⁶⁴ For an introduction to the extensive differences between these Alfredian translations and their source texts, see M. Godden, *The Translations of Alfred and his Circle, and the Misappropriation of the Past* (Cambridge, 2004).

þæt is orsorgnes and ecu rest / þæt is openlice ælmihti God’).⁶⁵ Furthermore, each creature turns upon itself ‘so that it may come again to where it was before’ (‘þæt hio eft cume þær hio æror wæs’).⁶⁶ The souls of humankind desire to return to God, but whether or not they were immediately created by God for each body or existed in some type of ‘storehouse’ before embodiment has yet to be explained. The next metre, corresponding to 3m3 of the *Consolatio*, described the futility of a man’s love for his material possessions because he cannot bring any more of the worldly goods to heaven ‘than he brought here’ (‘ðonne he hiðer brohte’).⁶⁷ This reference to a man’s life before embodiment emerges as an addition to the original; Boethius did not mention the soul’s existence before entering the body, only that a man’s wealth does not follow him after death.⁶⁸ This ambiguous anecdote arguably could promote either Creationism or pre-existence, particularly because it did not specify the temporal limits of the soul. Although vague, both these comments serve only as the starting point for the translation’s promotion of Neoplatonic beliefs in the pre-existent soul.

The *Boethius*’ next encounter with the soul’s origin adds some, but not complete, clarity for the reader. Wisdom sings about the origin of humankind in Metre 17 (*DCP* 3m6) and how God ‘first created people in the beginning, each person equally noble under the clouds (‘æt fruman ærest folc under wolcnum/ emnæðele gesceop æghwilecne mon’).⁶⁹

⁶⁵ *OEB*, I: Metre 13, 441, ll. 70-72; *OEB*, II: 134.

⁶⁶ *OEB*, I: Metre 13, 441, l. 76; *OEB*, II: 134.

⁶⁷ *OEB*, I: Metre 14, 444, l. 11; *OEB*, II: 136.

⁶⁸ *DCP* 3m3, 244-245, l. 6.

⁶⁹ *OEB*, I: Metre 17, 453, ll. 13-14; *OEB*, II: 142.

Wisdom then becomes accusatory, asking humankind why it acts without reason and laments that:

now every man who is entirely subject to his vices first leaves life's original creation, and likewise his own nobility, and also the father who created him in the beginning. Therefore, the almighty God debases him.

nu æghwīlc mon þe mid ealle bið / his unþeawum underðieded, he forlæt ærest lifes frumsceaft/ and his agene æþelo swa selfe/ and eac þone fæder þe hine æt fruman gesceop. Forðæm hine anæþelað ælmihtig God.⁷⁰

Alfred expanded Boethius' metre by twenty lines and chose to omit how God 'locked into limbs spirits brought down from their high abode': a definite example of Boethius' belief in souls pre-existing in the heavens.⁷¹ However, the concept of pre-existence still persists in Alfred's grammatical decisions. The verbs used to describe God's interaction with humans constantly alternate between past and present tense. The past tense here consistently describes God's creation of men in the beginning (l. 11, 14, 26). God, quite importantly, finished creating them so that each individual contains the same nobility which is 'not in the flesh of earth-dwellers' ('nales on ðæm flæsce foldbuendra').⁷² Alfred repeated, using very similar language, that each individual was created 'in the beginning' (ll. 13-14, 26). However, God's actions in this metre do not remain in the past tense. The poetry continued to explain that due to the individual's fall, God debases ('anæþelað') him. God could very well be debasing individual souls by placing them into bodies. The present tense here corresponds to Boethius' 'spirits brought down from their high abode' which Alfred initially appeared to have eliminated in his rendering of the verse. Unfortunately, the continued vague nature of this

⁷⁰ *OEB*, I: Metre 17, 453, ll. 22-27; *OEB*, II: 142.

⁷¹ 'Hic clausit membris animos Celsa sede petitos': *DCP* 3m6, 256-257, l. 5.

⁷² *OEB*, I: Metre 17, 453, l. 21; *OEB*, II: 142.

passage offers little more than a hint of solace for the scholar attempting to pinpoint the Alfredian position on the soul's origin.

However, a later potential reference in the same text to the soul's pre-corporeal existence offers more substance for beliefs in the pre-existence of the soul in the *Boethius*. Metre 20, corresponding to Boethius' hymn to Creation in 3m9 of his *Consolatio*, describes the cosmos as inspired by Plato's *Timaeus*. This particular verse in the *Consolatio* stimulated commentaries found in interlinear and marginal glosses from the ninth century onwards attempting to reconcile the Neoplatonic content with Christian teachings. Glossators found unease with Boethius' allusive description of Plato's 'World Soul' – the universe's soul – which 'encircles, and makes the heaven turn, in likeness to itself' along with the 'lesser living souls' who descend to earthly bodies in 'light chariots.'⁷³ Distinct commentary traditions ranged from explaining this passage as to be understood purely metaphorically to labelling the Neoplatonic notions here as 'monstrous comments.'⁷⁴ Scholars are still debating the degree to which the few pre-tenth century commentaries could have affected Alfred's translation of the

⁷³ 'Circuit et simili convertit imagine caelum': *DCP* 3m9, 272-273, l. 17; 'animas [...] vitasque minores,' l. 18; 'levibus curribus,' l. 19.

⁷⁴ 'Monstruosa commenta,' Bovo of Corvey, *Latin Commentary on O qui perpetua*, in R. Huygens 'Mittelalterliche Kommentare zum O qui perpetua,' *Sacris Erudiri* 6 (1954), 397; for an introduction to the commentaries on *DCP* 3m9, see L. Nauta, 'The *Consolation*: The Latin Commentary tradition, 800-1700,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Boethius*, ed. J. Marenbon (Cambridge, 2009), 258-259, and S. McCluskey, 'Boethius's Astronomy and Cosmology,' in *A Companion to Boethius in the Middle Ages*, eds. N. Kaylor and P. Phillips (Leiden, 2012), 68-71.

text, but with few conclusions made on this subject, this thesis will take changes made from the Latin source to be understood as choices made by Alfred and his intellectual circle.⁷⁵

The Alfredian rendering of the *Consolatio* avoided the more confusing Neoplatonic elements by eliminating the ‘World Soul’ – instead translating it as ‘man’s soul’ (‘monnes saul’)⁷⁶ – a translation choice which has no textual precedent as ‘none of the glosses give that interpretation.’⁷⁷ The descent of the soul through a ‘light chariot’ is likewise removed, but importantly, it did not eliminate the concept of pre-existing souls. The interplay of verb tenses appears once again in a direct address to God about his creation and interaction with the world’s occupants. God ‘created’ (‘gesceope’) invisible things (likely both angels and souls as discussed in metre 33) but ‘controls’ (‘wealdest’) bright creatures.⁷⁸ He ‘established in us a threefold soul’ (‘ðriefalde on us / sawle gesettest’) but then afterwards ‘directs’ (‘styrest’) and

⁷⁵ The influence of Latin commentaries on Alfred’s translation was first discussed by G. Schepss, ‘Zu König Alfreds Boethius,’ *Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen und Literaturen* 94 (1895), 149-160. The degree of influence of these early commentaries has been hotly debated. Bolton has argued that Alfred likely used the commentaries by the Anonymous of St Gall and an early Remigius of Auxerre in ‘The Study of the Consolation of Philosophy in Anglo-Saxon England,’ *Archives D’histoire Doctrinale et Littéraire du Moyen Âge* 44 (1977), 33-78. However, Wittig has argued that Alfred’s translation did not rely on any extant Latin commentary in his article ‘King Alfred’s *Boethius* and its Latin Sources: a reconsideration,’ *Anglo-Saxon England* 11 (1983), 157-198. Most recently, Love has summarised the academic debates surrounding this and has argued that ‘simple common-sense suggests that whoever made the translation in English had a glossed copy of the text’ in her ‘Latin Commentaries on Boethius’s *Consolation of Philosophy*,’ in *A Companion to Alfred the Great*, eds. N. Discenza and P. Szarmach (Leiden, 2015), 97. For Metre 20 itself, Godden and Irvine have noted that the translator ‘turns an ear occasionally to the Latin but seems to know what he wants to say and what he believes and is not prepared to follow the views of Boethius or the glosses except for where they fit his [...] The OE author shows parallels with some of this material but would have needed to read and reject a lot if he was using it,’ *The Old English Boethius*, volume 2, eds. M. Godden and S. Irvine (Oxford, 2009), 378.

⁷⁶ *OEB*, I: Metre 20, 469, l. 210; *OEB*, II: 151.

⁷⁷ N. Discenza, ‘The Old English *Boethius*,’ in *A Companion to Alfred the Great*, 221.

⁷⁸ *OEB*, I: Metre 20, 463, ll. 5-8; *OEB*, II: 149.

‘arranges’ (‘stihrest’) them throughout the entirety of the body.⁷⁹ And finally, in the most complete allusion to pre-existent souls in the *Boethius*, Alfred wrote:

Oh, eternal God, you gave a territory to the souls in heaven [...] they all shine brightly in heaven through the clear night [...] you also mingle the heavenly here with the earthly, soul with body [...] they always strive to go from here to you; indeed they came here from you before, and must go back to you. The body must remain behind back on earth because it previously came from it.

Hwæt, þu, ece God, eard forgeafe/ saulum on heofonum [...] Ealle hi scinað ðurh þa sciran neaht [...] eac gemengest / þa heofoncundan hider wið eorðan,/ saula wið lice [...] hi simle to ðe/ hionan fundiað; forðæm hi hider of ðe / æror common, sculon eft to ðe./ Sceal se lic-hama last weardigan / eft on eorðan, forðæm he ær of hire.⁸⁰

In an independent expansion from the Latin source – Alfred extended Boethius’ work here from 28 to 281 lines – Alfred composed lines of poetry which supported the pre-existence of souls.⁸¹ He continued to use the past tense once again to denote God’s previous action which created all souls together, but he also used the present tense to describe God’s continual task of placing souls in bodies. Moreover, the souls which have yet to be embodied still exist as stars in their place in heaven which God established for them. Alfred then eliminated the unaccompanied descent of the soul described in earlier Latin sources to confirm God’s hand in the ensoulment of bodies as a condition for this Neoplatonic stem of doctrine describing the soul’s origin.

⁷⁹ *OEB*, I: Metre 20, 468, ll. 176-181; *OEB*, II: 151. I have modified Godden and Irvine’s translation of *styrest* and *stihrest* here from the text’s second person singular present tense to third person singular present tense for ease in prose.

⁸⁰ *OEB*, I: Metre 20, 469, ll. 225-242; *OEB*, II: 152.

⁸¹ Godden and Irvine have called this section ‘a highly imaginative adaptation of the Latin [...] the lines are very heavily glossed in the manuscripts and the glosses offer many different views [...] and the *OEB* seems to have drawn on them selectively to give a coherent rendering’: Godden and Irvine, ‘Commentary,’ in *The Old English Boethius*, volume 2, 385-386.

Having established that souls existed before entering the body, Alfred further decided to include the corresponding Neoplatonic belief in anamnesis. This appeared at the end of metre 22 of the *Boethius* (corresponding to *Consolatio* 3m11) and not only confirmed the theory of recollection but also expanded Boethius' discussion of innate and forgotten knowledge. The burden of the body and its sins exists as the cause for forgetfulness ('oforgiotolnesse') in the mind ('mod') of the knowledge of righteousness which once existed in a person's soul.⁸² However, even with this forgotten knowledge, 'a certain grain of the seed of truth is always kept in the soul while the spirit lives united with the body' ('bið sum corn sædes gehealden/ symle on ðære saule soðfæstnesse,/ þenden gadertang wunað gast on lice').⁸³ Lockett has explained the use of both the terms 'mind' and 'soul' here by writing that 'Alfred's translation, though ponderous, judiciously uses *mod* to name the locus of forgetfulness during life and *sawol* to name that entity which acquired the "seed of reason" during its pre-existence.'⁸⁴ Furthermore, while Boethius had ended his text by lacing some doubt for the reader on recollection in the penultimate line – 'If Plato's muse rings true, What each man learns, forgetful he recalls'⁸⁵ – Alfred chose to remove the conditional and repeat the theory of reminiscence without any doubt.

Alfred was not afraid to attack ideas which he considered unorthodox or pagan within his rendering of the *Consolatio*. He eliminated allusions to Phoebus, tales about Jove and Orpheus were described as 'old false stories' ('ealdum leasum spellum'), and those who

⁸² *OEB*, I: Metre 22, 483, ll. 25-32; *OEB*, II: 161.

⁸³ *OEB*, I: Metre 22, 483, ll. 37-39; *OEB*, II: 161.

⁸⁴ Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies*, 320.

⁸⁵ 'Quod si Platonis musa personat verum, Quod quisque discit immemor recordatur': *DCP* 3m11, 296-297, ll. 15-16.

believed in all the magic in the tale of Ulysses and Circe were ‘foolish men’ (‘dysegan men’).⁸⁶ Plato’s supposed ‘unorthodox’ views towards pre-existence and recollection did not receive such treatment here. Once Metre 22 finished describing how the soul could recollect things from its pre-corporeal existence, the narrator stated: ‘I agree that that was a true statement that Plato said’ (‘Ic eom geðafa þæt þæt was soð spell þæt Plato sæde’).⁸⁷ Later on, Alfred added an epithet and called him ‘Wise Plato’ (‘wisan Platones’).⁸⁸ Although Alfred and his circle chose to eliminate or change certain aspects of Boethius’ Neoplatonic beliefs in this rendering of the *Consolatio*, an active choice was made not to vilify Plato in a similar manner to other ‘pagan’ aspects of the text.

When rendering this text, Alfred and his circle discussed and made decisions, potentially informed by glossed texts, to include and expand on the Neoplatonic beliefs concerning the soul’s origin as part of their translation of the *Consolatio*. Analysis of the verb tenses used here can determine that Alfred chose to follow Boethius’ work that stated that God finished his creation of all individual souls ‘in the beginning.’ Alfred diverged from his source, however, by describing how God still actively places souls into their bodies rather than having souls descend on their own through chariots from the cosmos as Boethius described in his *Consolatio*. By analysing the *Boethius* next to the *Consolatio*, we can see that distinct choices were made in how to present the theory of pre-existent souls to a vernacular audience. Whether or not the reader was familiar with the beliefs in pre-existent souls from the popular

⁸⁶ *OEB*, I: Prose 22, 487, l. 87; *OEB*, II: 163; *OEB*, I: Metre 26, 507, l. 98; *OEB*, II 176.

⁸⁷ *OEB*, I: Prose 22, 484, ll. 1-2; *OEB*, II: 162.

⁸⁸ *OEB*, I: Prose 22, 489, l. 159; *OEB*, II: 165.

Latin text, they would encounter a clear doctrine outlining tenets of the soul's pre-existence in the Old English translation.

The *Boethius'* transmission of the Neoplatonic theory for the origin of souls could be understood simply as an attempt to render accurately the ideas running through the *Consolatio* and not an attempt to portray Alfred's own beliefs. However, the belief in the pre-existence of souls continued into the Alfredian translation of Augustine's unfinished *Soliloquia*. This translation, extant only in a mid-twelfth century manuscript but containing early and late West-Saxon forms, began as a more faithful rendering of Augustine's philosophical conversation with Reason in Book 1 before becoming largely detached from Augustine's work in Book 2 and finally developing into a completely separate work of intellectual prose in Book 3, indebted to nothing from the Latin original. The first expansion to the Latin text centred the topic of the Old English *Soliloquies* firmly around the question of the eternal self, wondering 'whether his mind and his soul were mortal and perishable, or they were always living and eternal' ('hwæper hys mod and hys sawel deadlic were and gewitendlice, þe heo were alibbendu and ecu'), and we see the enquiry into proving the soul's eternal existence continued in the Alfredian translation through the inclusion of pre-existence theory.⁸⁹

Augustine of Hippo might have begun Book 2 by asking Reason about man's immortality, but most of the discussion on the subject found in the Old English rendering of the text is supplementary to the Latin. This additional dialogue includes a conversation on the Neoplatonic beliefs in the pre-existence of souls and their previous, forgotten knowledge as part of an explanation for the soul's immortality.

Then she [Reason] said: [...] and it [the unitary mind and soul] therefore strives towards that which it previously was, that which it previously knew, though it is

⁸⁹ King Alfred's Version of St. Augustine's *Soliloquies*, ed. T. Carnicelli (Cambridge, MA, 1969), 48-49.

now so weighed down with the burden of the body that it cannot know what it previously knew [...]

Then I [Augustine] said: I think now that you have clearly said now that every person's soul at present is, and always will be, and always was since God first created the first man.

Then she said: There is no doubt that souls are immortal.

Ða cwæð heo: [...] and hyt forði fundige wið þæs þe hyt ær were, þæt to witanne þæt hyt ær wiste, þeah hyt nu myd þære byrðene þæs lichaman gehedefgod sio, þæt hyt þæt witan ne mage þæt hyt ær wiste [...]

Ða cwæð ic: me ðincð nu þæt þu hæbbe genoh swetole gesæd þæt ælces mannes sawl nu si, and a beo, and a were syððan god ærest þone forman man gescop

Ða cwæð heo: Nis hyt nan tweo þæt sawla beoð undeadlice.⁹⁰

The addition of the Neoplatonic ideals here of pre-corporeal existence of the soul, including its previous memories, settles the concern of the fictional 'Augustine' on the immortality of man.

However, any work by Augustine known to the Anglo-Saxons which discussed the origin of the soul would have promoted his belief that the answer to the soul's origin was beyond human comprehension.⁹¹ Nevertheless, Anlezark has argued convincingly that the author of this translation 'is far from confused in his discussion of the soul, but rather carefully develops his own ideas, derived from, and sometimes against, those of Augustine.'⁹² This firm belief in the pre-existence of souls and their recollection would have been placed in Augustine's mouth by Alfred and his collaborators, and when this is combined with the Neoplatonic origin myths in the *Boethius*, this translation of the *Soliloquia* heavily suggests that discussions and

⁹⁰ King Alfred's Version of St. Augustine's *Soliloquies*, 90-91.

⁹¹ See above, pages 41-42. When considering the Alfredian translations' additions to their original texts, Godden has summarized that 'on the one hand, the Alfredian authors appropriate to their own purposes the texts which they are supposedly translating, making them say and mean new things, radically so in the "Soliloquies"; on the other, they work hard at developing the identity of the original author in the text, in ways which seem to lend the authority of Orosius, Boethius and Augustine to the Old English texts.' This certainly appears to be the case with the original Old English expansions explaining the pre-existence of the soul in the *Soliloquies* with the authority of Augustine's voice and in the *Consolation of Philosophy* using that of Boethius: Godden, *The Translations of Alfred*, 26.

⁹² Anlezark, 'The Soul in the Old English *Soliloquies*,' 58.

conclusions in support of the Neoplatonic theory of the origin of souls were being made and promoted at King Alfred's court.

Additional evidence pointing towards beliefs in the pre-existence of souls extended further into the late Anglo-Saxon period beyond the Alfredian translations in a vision sequence found in the Old English anonymous homily Napier 29 where a holy man saw a soul being tormented by devils. These devils dragged the soul past the bright gates of heaven, but she had no recollection of them. She enquired what they were, and a devil responded by asking if the soul does not remember the holy kingdom of heaven where she previously was before joining her body:

The devils then carried the wretched soul into the darkness: then she saw along the path an intense brightness; when she asked the devils who led her what the brightness was, they said 'You do not recognise that it is the Kingdom of Heaven's glory from whence you previously came to your body who you dwelled in on earth?'

ða deoflu feredon þa earman sawl þa to þystrum; þa geseah heo be þam wege mycele beorhtnyssa; þa axode heo þa deoflu, þe hi læddon, hwæt seo beorhtnys wære. Hi cwædon: 'ne ongytst ðu, þæt hit ys heofonan rices gefea, þanon þu wære ær cumen to þinum lichaman, þe þu on eorðan on wunodest?'⁹³

The devils' words suggest that the soul should remember its former existence in heaven, strongly supporting that the homilist held beliefs in both the pre-existence of souls and the theory of recollection similar to those found in the Alfredian translations of the *Consolatio* and *Soliloquia*. Not much further along in the homily, the soul's pre-existent state is once more reiterated. The soul cried: 'woe [is] wretched me, that I ever had to see worldly light, and that I had to relinquish so great a brightness' ('wa me earmre, þæt ic æfre middaneardes leoht

⁹³ 'Homily 29,' in *Wulfstan: Sammlung Der Ihm Zugeschriebenen Homilien Nebst Untersuchungen Über Ihre Echtheit*, ed. A. Napier (Berlin, 1883), 141.

geseon sceolde, and þæt ic swa mycele beorhtnesse forlætan sceolde’).⁹⁴ The homilies identified as the closest antecedents to Napier 29 – the Old English Macarius Homily, the Latin Nonantola Homily, and *Sermo 69 ad fratres in eremo* – each contain one of these expressions of woe lamenting being born, but none so clearly express Napier 29’s opinions in the soul’s pre-mortal existence.⁹⁵ Di Sciacca has argued convincingly that this homily was composed ‘later than the Macarius homily’ but still within ‘an early stage in the history of vernacular homiletic composition.’⁹⁶ If this is true, then the homilist of Napier 29 actively expanded this expression of woe from previous homilies, drawing from some other source material which included stronger views on the pre-existence of souls.

The existence of these works which promoted the pre-existence of souls before ensoulment counters the presumption by Shedd and Jones that Creationism existed as the main doctrine for the origin of the soul after the fifth century. Neoplatonic beliefs concerning the soul’s origin appear to have held a major influence at the court of King Alfred, potentially inspiring further religious works including Napier Homily 29. Godden has previously admitted his confusion as to where Alfred would have acquired his belief in the pre-existence of souls: ‘I do not know where he found this idea. It is not from his main source (Augustine’s *Soliloquia*) and the editors have suggested no parallels; the pre-existence of souls is taken for granted by Boethius, but there is nothing to match Alfred’s proof.’⁹⁷ However, if we consider

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 141.

⁹⁵ C. Di Sciacca, ‘The “Ubi Sunt” Motif and the Soul-and-Body Legend in Old English Homilies: Sources and Relationships,’ *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 105 (July 2006), 376-377. For a side-by-side presentation of these four homilies, see L. Dudley, ‘An Early Homily on the “Body and Soul” Theme,’ *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 8 (1909), 225-253.

⁹⁶ Di Sciacca, ‘Ubi Sunt,’ 378-379.

⁹⁷ Godden, ‘Anglo-Saxons on the Mind,’ 284.

the existence and interaction with the Carolingian *loci classici* of Neoplatonic beliefs in the pre-existence of souls held in the late Anglo-Saxon period, we might have an explanation. Ideas about the origin of souls were probably being discussed at Alfred's court before they were transposed into two of the Alfredian translations, and we can confirm that at least one anonymous homily continued that tradition. However, these remain the only confirmable instances of beliefs in pre-existent souls – the following body of works from the tenth century that mention the soul at its beginning cannot be so easily categorised.

The Undiagnosable

In the oft-quoted preface to his first series of *Catholic Homilies*, Ælfric justified his work in the vernacular 'because I have seen and heard great error in many English books which untaught men – through their simplicity – consider as great wisdom' ('for ðan ðe ic geseah 7 gehyrde mycel gedwyld on manegum engliscum bocum. ðe ungelærede menn ðurh heora bilewitnysse to micclum wisdom e tealdon').⁹⁸ Although we cannot confirm which English books held the *gedwyld* which Ælfric referred to here, scholars have argued variously about the role that the Vercelli and Blickling homiletic collections and vernacular poetry played in informing Ælfric's criticism. Wilson found the Blickling Homilies to contain 'little if anything to deserve Ælfric's blame,' but admitted the possibility that he 'is referring to some of the Old English Christian poems.'⁹⁹ General consensus has changed over time on this matter, and although more caution must be taken before stating 'Ælfric was undoubtedly here referring to

⁹⁸ Ælfric, *CH I*, Preface, 174.

⁹⁹ R. Wilson, *The Lost Literature of Medieval England* (London, 1952), 71.

many of the apocryphal selections in the Blickling and Vercelli Homilies,' scholars agree that these vernacular texts provide a useful tool in understanding the context for Ælfric's call to arms against *gedwyld*.¹⁰⁰ Beyond comparisons to Ælfric's work, these vernacular texts – existent as the 'principal collection[s] of homiletic material available in Anglo-Saxon England before Ælfric prepared the *Catholic Homilies* sequence in the 990s'¹⁰¹ – provide insight into what was being written on the origin of the soul between the Alfredian translations and the attempts led by Ælfric and Wulfstan the Cantor at establishing Creationism as the orthodox belief.

A collection of undiagnosable references to the soul's origin from the Vercelli Homilies, the Blickling Homilies, and Old English poetry describing the fate of souls at Judgement Day offers a different type of insight into Anglo-Saxon beliefs about the start of a soul's life. No anonymous homily or poem directly addressed the question of the soul's origin, but certain remarks on the soul's condition before the ensoulment process often function as rhetorical devices to emphasise the soul's pure or impure status. For example, as the damned soul of the poem 'Soul and Body I' recounted in detail how the body's 'sinful-desires crushed me' ('me fyrenlustas þine geþrungon,' ll. 34-35), she interrupted the upbraiding with a reminder that God sent her, juxtaposing her current ruined state with its former uncorrupted existence. These references neither wholly confirm nor deny a specific theory, but inferences

¹⁰⁰ S. Greenfield and D. Calder, *A New Critical History of Old English Literature* (New York, 1986), 77. For further information on this topic, see M. Godden, 'Ælfric and the Vernacular Prose Tradition,' in *Old English Homily and its Backgrounds*, eds. P. Szarmach and B. Huppé (Albany, 1978), 99-117; M. Gatch, *Preaching and Theology in Anglo-Saxon England: Ælfric and Wulfstan* (Toronto, 1977); and K. Powell and D. Scragg, eds., *Apocryphal Texts and Traditions in Anglo-Saxon England* (Suffolk, 2003) particularly Joyce Hill's contribution 'The Apocrypha in Anglo-Saxon England: The Challenge of Changing Distinctions,' 165-168.

¹⁰¹ M. Toswell, 'The Codicology of Anglo-Saxon Homiletic Manuscripts, Especially the Blickling Homilies,' in *The Old English Homily: Precedent, Practice, and Appropriation*, ed. Aaron J. Kleist (Turnhout, 2007), 217.

may still be made from the content available. Close analysis of the language employed in these moments within the Vercelli and Blickling homiletic collections and Old English poetry will demonstrate the potential to limit the origin theories existing in the mid to late tenth century and also will provide a noteworthy backdrop for Ælfric's later discussions of the topic.

The eschatologically-themed Vercelli Homily 4 provided vivid imagery of hell before turning to the trial at Judgement Day of a virtuous soul followed by that of a wicked soul. Three sections of the homily contain potential sources to inform our understandings of Anglo-Saxon views towards the origin of souls. In the first, as the virtuous soul received her judgement, she was congratulated for her good works and then is commanded to 'go into your house where you previously were' ('gang in þin hus, ðær ðu ær wær') where both soul and body (referred now as the dual 'gyt') may forevermore enjoy 'eternal rest' ('eccc este').¹⁰² When summarising these lines, Hall has construed this section to mean: 'He [God] orders the blessed body and soul together to enter into their rightful abode in heaven, whence they originally came, and enjoy eternal rest.'¹⁰³ At face value, Hall's interpretation of *þin hus* as heaven combined with the use of the word *ær* would suggest that this contributes as the strongest case for belief in the pre-existence of souls in Anglo-Saxon England outside the Alfredian translations and Napier homily 29.

However, further analysis of the text points in a different direction. Earlier in the trial of this virtuous soul, we encounter a form of *þin hus* in a indicative context; the angels declared: 'Blessed are you, soul, because you took a good living in your house – and I saw

¹⁰² *Vercelli Homilies*, Homily 4, 97. This homily also survives complete in the margins of Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 41. Ker 32. s. xi.

¹⁰³ Hall, 'The Psychedelic Transmogrification of the Soul,' 313.

(you) preparing your house in the holy glory of the kingdom of heaven’ (‘Eadigu eart ðu, sawl, for ðan þu name on þe gode eardunge in þinum huse – 7 ic geseah gearwian þin hus on ðam halgan heofona rices wuldre’).¹⁰⁴ The most likely interpretation of *þinum huse* here would be ‘the body’ which the soul occupied well to earn her place in heaven. This translation could change within fifty lines to mean Hall’s ‘rightful abode in heaven, whence they originally came,’ but if one combines this analysis of the earlier section of the text with the singular pronoun *þin* in ‘Gang in þin hus, ðær ðu ær wære’ which is then followed in the next sentence with the dual pronouns ‘Nu gyt ær inc geearnodan ece reste,’ one might understand this passage best as the soul being told to ‘go enter your body where you previously were.’ Unless *ær* in line 165 can be translated as ‘originally,’ one cannot claim this phrase as evidence for beliefs in the pre-existence of souls.

As Ross has shown, Vercelli 4 potentially sheds new light on Anglo-Saxon beliefs in the pre-existence of souls. She translated a phrase in the next section of the homily – ‘Wa me þæt ic þin æfre owiht cuðe, swa unsofte swa ic on þe eardude!’¹⁰⁵ – as ‘Woe me, that I ever knew anything as uncomfortable as [when] I dwelled in you!’ to understand this passage to mean ‘that the soul had known a more congenial place before being sent to the body’ to categorically ‘imply a belief in Pre-Existence.’¹⁰⁶ Interpreted this way, the soul’s recollection here would provide a strong case for pre-existent anamnesis; however, Ross’s understanding of the phrase appears to be another case of over-optimistic translation. A more direct translation would be ‘Woe [is] me that I ever knew anything of you, so harshly as I dwelt

¹⁰⁴ *Vercelli Homilies*, Homily 4, 95. Many thanks to Paul Bibire for his help interpreting this passage.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 98.

¹⁰⁶ Ross, *Anglo-Saxon Teaching*, 15.

within you'. The differences are slight, but this translation eliminates the pretence of foreknowledge and instead reminds the reader of a familiar modern literary device of characters declaring 'I wish I had never been born.' Indeed, when studying thematic and verbal parallels of Vercelli 22, Zacher has highlighted the popularity of these laments in extant Old English homilies and Latin texts known in Anglo-Saxon England.¹⁰⁷ However, none of these expressions of woe cited by Zacher contain evidence to support beliefs in pre-existence apart from the passage from Napier Homily 29. Instead, they appear closer to biblical verses of men cursing their existence, such as Job 3:1-5:

After this Job opened his mouth, and cursed his day, And he said: Let the day perish wherein I was born, and the night in which it was said: A man child is conceived. Let that day be turned into darkness, let not God regard it from above, and let not the light shine upon it. Let darkness, and the shadow of death cover it, let a mist overspread it, and let it be wrapped up in bitterness.

Or Matthew 26:24, where at the Last Supper Jesus spoke: 'woe to that man by whom the Son of man shall be betrayed: it were better for him, if that man had not been born.' Whilst Ross's example is enlightening, it should not be used to discuss Anglo-Saxon beliefs on the soul's origin.

This would mean that Vercelli 4 does not contribute any further to advancing our understanding Anglo-Saxon beliefs on the origin of the soul. Further along in that homily, however, a damned soul confronted her body telling it: 'I was a spirit from God sent into you, and you were the soil of clay' ('Ic wæs gast fram Gode on þe sended, 7 ðu wære eorðan lames').¹⁰⁸ The use of the verb *sendan* here suggests a more active part taken by God at the beginning of the soul's journey. Possibly eliminating Traducianist beliefs – for Traducianists

¹⁰⁷ S. Zacher, *Preaching the Converted: The Style and Rhetoric of the Vercelli Book Homilies* (Toronto, 2009), 161-168.

¹⁰⁸ *Vercelli Homilies*, Homily 4, 98.

believe that God does not interfere with the creation of souls after Adam – this moment alerts the reader to a ‘hands on’ approach from God in the soul’s origin, which could imply pre-existent or Creationist beliefs, to search for in other works.

One does not have to look far to find another example of this type of manual interaction between the divine and souls. Vercelli 8, another homily revolving around the theme of Judgment Day, contains a central scene where Christ, acting as judge, delivered a speech where he commanded: ‘return your soul to me as pure as I gave it to you’ (‘Agif me þine sawle swa clæne swa ic hy ðe sealde’).¹⁰⁹ Although this section of the homily heavily follows Caesarius’ Sermon 58, Scragg has noted that, rather than following Caesarius at these lines, ‘the Old English inserts an extended legal image.’¹¹⁰ This line offers no distinction as to whether the soul existed for some time before ensoulment or if it was created anew, only that it was pure before given to the body. And, once again, we have a verb (*sellan*) which implies an active rather than passive role taken by Christ, allowing speculation that the homilist followed either pre-existent or Creationist doctrine but probably not Traducianist. The purity of the soul here before being given to the body does seem to contradict Origen’s ‘fallen souls’ theory on the soul’s origin as a particular belief of this homilist, but that specific theory might already have been eliminated as noted above.¹¹¹

Reminiscent of Vercelli Homily 8’s legal imagery, the closing remarks of the Blickling Homily for Rogation Monday remind the audience that God ‘asks of us no other recompense but that we should return our bodies and souls to Him on Doomsday as undefiled as He had

¹⁰⁹ *Vercelli Homilies*, Homily 8, 146.

¹¹⁰ Scragg, *The Vercelli Homilies*, 146.

¹¹¹ See above, pages 56-57.

previously created them and entrusted [fastened] them to us' ('Ond ne bideþ he æt us nænig oþor edlean, buton þæt we urne lichoman ond ure saule swa unwemme him ageofan on Domesdæg, swa he hie ær gesceop ond us æt fæste').¹¹² We once again encounter the equivocal *ær*, but the addition of *gesceop* and *fæste* affirms God's hand in creating the soul. Consequently, Traducianism can be eliminated as the underlying belief of this homilist. However, confirming pre-existence or Creationism as the homilist's belief is impossible without further information.

Two Old English poems also parallel the hand imagery and divine involvement with individual souls without confirming any belief to the reader. In both the 'Soul and Body' poems, as the damned soul addresses its body in the poem (here quoting from 'Soul and Body I' located after Homily 18 in the Vercelli Book), it exclaims:

Lo, behold, an angel from Heaven above
sent a soul into you through his own hand
the almighty Creator

hwæt, þe la engel ufan of roderum
sawle onsende þurh his sylfes hand
meotod ælmihtig (ll.27-29).¹¹³

Although the text is confusingly vague as to whether God or an angel is actually responsible for the ensoulment process, importantly the soul is manually sent (*onsende*) into the vessel of the human body. 'Christ III' from the Exeter Book echoes this construction of divine hands

¹¹² *Blickling Homilies*, Homily 8, ed. and trans. R. Kelly, 72-73. Here I might offer an alternative translation for Kelly's *fæste* – instead of simply 'entrusting' a soul to a body, I would argue that perhaps the better translation comes from the first definition of *fæstan* in the dictionary: 'fastens' – fixing firmly, securing – thus implying an even more hands-on/interactive ensoulment.

¹¹³ The shorter 'Soul and Body II', found in The Exeter Book, repeats these lines almost word for word (ll. 24-26a). Orton notes that the first section of the Vercelli version resembles 'sufficiently closely to [the Exeter] to point unmistakably to an archetype version from which both VI and E derive'; P. Orton, 'Disunity in the Vercelli Book *Soul and Body*,' *Neophilologus* 63 (1979), 450. With such proximities between these texts noted, I have chosen to only handle the Vercelli Book version.

delivering individual souls to their bodies. The Lord addressed the wicked at Judgement Day saying that it was with ‘my hands’ (‘minum hondum,’ l. 1379) that ‘I gave you living spirit’ (‘geaf ic ðe lifgendne gæst,’ l. 1381). Together these poems offer a different type of evidence when considering late Anglo-Saxon thought on the origin of souls, but, as we saw in the case of the homilies, they equally support the Creationist or Neoplatonic approach rather than the Traducianist, which would have the soul formed at the same time as the body without direct divine involvement.

These anonymous homilies and poems offer inconclusive but informative evidence for late Anglo-Saxon beliefs about the origin of souls. Although references to the soul’s origin remain scarce and ambiguous, there exists a certain value in examining these ‘undiagnosable’ sources. First, these references, perhaps unintentionally, contradict the mainstay of Traducianism that the soul progenerates from Adam. Vercelli Homily 4, Vercelli Homily 8, the Blickling Homily for Rogation Monday, ‘Soul and Body I and II’ and ‘Christ III’ all see God or Christ as having direct involvement with the shaping and/or assigning of individual souls. Second, none of these references to the soul’s origin appear to conflict with one another. A consensus in origin beliefs could already have existed by the time Ælfric wrote his homilies. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the homilists and poets made no didactic effort to explain where or how souls originate in these texts. We can speculate that this could relay either a confusion similar to Augustine’s by the homilists, a general lax attitude on the topic itself, or an assumed knowledge on the audience’s part. Whatever the case, a lack of concern for explaining the topic of the soul’s origin exists in these works, one which conflicts with the efforts for orthodoxy that scholars see later in Wulfstan the Cantor and Ælfric’s writings on the subject.

Creationism

The doctrine of Creationism in reference to the human soul advocates that God constantly creates and places a new, individual soul in each person at some point during his or her formation. Every human soul is created *ex nihilo* or out of nothing. Creationism found its strongest advocate in Jerome, who wrote most fervently on the subject around 398 in his treatise *Contra Joannem Hierosolymitanum* at the peak of the Origenist controversy:

Surely (as the Church teaches in accordance with the Saviour's words) 'My Father works hitherto and I work' [John 5:17]; and the passage in Isaiah, 'Who makes the spirit of man in him' [Zechariah 12:1]; and in the Psalms, 'Who fashions one by one the hearts of them' [Psalms 33:15- Latin vulgate 32:15], God is daily making souls— He, with whom to will is to do, and who never ceases to be a Creator.¹¹⁴

Here, Clark has noted that 'Jerome tried to make it sound as if the Church had ruled in favour of Creationism' even though no decision on the topic had been made by this point.¹¹⁵

Although evidence of some sort can be found to support the availability of all other major treatises written by Jerome in Anglo-Saxon England, *Contra Joannem* remains the exception and has yet to be counted as a known source.¹¹⁶

However, the more cautious (yet still adamant) letter by Jerome might have been available to the Anglo-Saxons. Similar to Augustine's works which listed the separate origin theories, Jerome's letter to Marcellinus and his wife Anapsychia recounted the different origin

¹¹⁴ 'an certe, quod ecclesiasticum est secundum eloquia saluatoris, *Pater meus usque modo operatur, et ego operor*, et illud Esaiiae: *Qui format spiritum hominis in ipso*, et in Psalmis: *Qui fingit per singulos corda eorum*, cottidie deus fabricatur animas, cuius uelle fecisse est et conditor esse non cessat?': Jerome, *Contra Iohannem*, Paragraph 22, CCSL 79A, 35; Jerome, 'To Pammachius against John of Jerusalem,' trans. W. Fremantle, G. Lewis, and W. Martley, eds. P. Schaff and H. Wace, *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series*, volume 6 (Edinburgh, 1988-1991), 939.

¹¹⁵ E. Clark, *The Origenist Controversy* (Princeton, 1992), 12.

¹¹⁶ Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*, 313-316; *Fontes*, Search query: Jerome.

debates, albeit with more self-assurance than Augustine. Any theory that souls pre-exist – as mentioned above¹¹⁷ – constituted a ‘foolish conviction;’ Traducianist beliefs implied that the human soul ‘subsists in a condition like that of brute animals;’ and only the theory that souls ‘are made by God every day and sent into bodies in accord with the word we read in the gospel, My Father is at work even now, and I am at work (Jn 5:17),’ garnered Jerome’s acceptance in its description.¹¹⁸ This letter also appears as letter 165 in Augustine’s *Epistulae*, but neither occurrence of this letter in Augustine or Jerome’s *Epistulae* is directly alluded to or quoted in this age. Ælfric knew of at least three letters from Jerome’s collection of *Epistulae*, so it is possible that he had encountered the full collection, but there is no direct evidence to suggest the Anglo-Saxon authors who promoted Creationism had familiarity with other central patristic works supporting Creationist doctrine such as Hilary of Poitiers’ *Tractus super psalmos* or Lactantius’ *De opificio dei*. If their Creationist views took root from patristic thought, Jerome’s works might have seemed like the most likely, if unprovable, candidate for the transmission of Creationism.

Rather than looking solely at patristic authors as past scholars have done, perhaps we should have instead been focusing on authors writing slightly beyond the patristic era into the early Middle Ages. We saw earlier in Isidore of Seville’s *De ecclesiasticis officiis* that he wrote in a statement of faith that ‘the origin of the soul is unknown.’¹¹⁹ This work was quoted

¹¹⁷ See above, page 54.

¹¹⁸ ‘super animae statu memini uestrae quaestiunculae, immo maximae ecclesiasticae quaestionis, utrum lapsa de caelo sit, ut pythagoras philosophus omnes que platonici et origenes putant, an ἀπόρροια dei substantiae, ut stoici, manicheus et hispana priscilliani heresis suspicantur, an in thesauro habeantur dei olim conditae, ut quidam ecclesiastici stulta persuasione confidunt, an cotidie a deo fiant et mittantur in corpora secundum illud, quod in euangelio scriptum est: pater meus usque modo operatur et ego operor, an certe ex traduce, ut tertullianus, apollinaris et maxima pars occidentalium autumat, ut, quomodo corpus ex corpore, sic anima nascatur ex anima et simili cum brutis animantibus condicione subsistat’: Jerome, *Epistulae*, Letter 126, CSEL 56, 143 and in Augustine, *Epistulae*, Letter 165, CSEL 44, 542; Augustine, *Letters 156-210*, Letter 165, trans. Teske, 74-75.

¹¹⁹ See above, pages 43-44.

heavily by Æthelwold and was probably used by Ælfric, but it was not Isidore's final statement on the subject. In his later *Sententiae*, Isidore seemingly changed his mind, stating:

The soul is not part of the divine substance or nature, nor did it exist before it was mingled with the body, but it was created at the same time as the body was created, with which it appears to have been mingled. The opinions of the philosophers say that the soul exists before it is born in the body. That this is true, however, is demonstrated by no proofs. For if we had existed beforehand, neither would we have known this, nor would we have any human being who would have told this. Therefore, it is not to be asked, because the more it is asked, all the more is it to be ridiculed.¹²⁰

We cannot prove that Æthelwold, Wulfstan the Cantor, or Ælfric knew of Isidore's *Sententiae*; they largely seemed much more familiar with his work *De ecclesiasticis officiis*. The *Sententiae* does appear in book lists from the Anglo-Saxon period, but they date largely too early or too late for the period of this study; however, two manuscripts, one moving to England from Tours in the mid-tenth century and one produced in Canterbury in the early eleventh century, might demonstrate a renewed interest in the text in theological circles.¹²¹ If there is any chance that this work represented the authoritative text on Creationism for Æthelwold and his students, we must question how they might have reconciled Isidore's divergent beliefs.

Another possible source for Creationism might instead have entered England from Ireland. Although de Paor has noted a number of early-medieval Irish texts which reiterated Augustine and Gregory's suspicions about choosing an answer, there are two Hiberno-Latin

¹²⁰ 'Animam non esse partem diuinae substantiae uel naturae, nec esse eam priusquam corpori misceatur, sed tunc eam creari quando et corpus creatur, cui admisci uidetur. Philosophorum sententiae dicunt esse animam priusquam nascatur in corpore. Quod uerum esse nullis adprobatur indiciis. Nam utrum antea fuissemus nec ipsi nouimus, nec quis hominum dicat habeamus. Non est ergo quaerendum, quod quaerendo magis, magis est irridendum.' Isidore, *Sententiae*, Book 1, ch. 12, CCSL 111, 42; Isidore, *Sententiarum libri tres*, trans. T. Knoebel (Mahwah, 2018), 56. This was quoted directly by Agobard of Lyon in the first half of the ninth century in *Contra obiectiones Fredegisi*, ch. 14, CCCM 52, 294.

¹²¹ Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*, 312.

texts known to have made it to England by the tenth century which endorsed Creationist doctrine.¹²² The first is the *Irish Reference Bible*, an eighth-century compendium of exegetical material which offered interpretations of biblical verses by piecing together different patristic sources. It would often name its source authors, though sometimes incorrectly, and MacGinty has found when editing this work that ‘there is a recurrent problem of a seemingly incomplete knowledge of one or other of the texts quoted [...] such incomplete knowledge is not confined to the works of the Fathers but is also true of the books of scripture, references to which can contain some extraordinary errors, difficult to explain always by corrupt texts.’¹²³ Accurate or not, extracts of the *Reference Bible* have been found in a late Anglo-Saxon manuscript and it has been listed as an analogue for a range of different motifs appearing in Old English homilies and potentially even *Beowulf*.¹²⁴ For Genesis 1:26, it quoted Jerome’s words against pre-existence found in his letter [126] to Augustine, and then it continued: ‘However, we believe that souls, just as Isidore and Ambrosius and Augustine said, we do not believe souls to be created before their bodies.’¹²⁵ The author of the *Reference Bible* collected a number of patristic authors’ names to verify this statement, some of whom actually had differing opinions on the soul’s origin from that written here, and attempted to create a historical consensus which up to that point did not exist.

¹²² J. de Paor, ‘Adam’s Grave, Adam’s Soul and Our Souls, the Doctrine of the Three Letters, and Clm 6235,’ in *The Scriptures and Early Medieval Ireland*, ed. T. O’Loughlin (Turnhout, 1999), 101-105.

¹²³ G. MacGinty, ‘The Pentateuch of the *Reference Bible*: the problem concerning its sources,’ in *The Scriptures and Early Medieval Ireland*, ed. T. O’Loughlin (Turnhout, 1999), 171.

¹²⁴ C. Wright, ‘Hiberno-Latin and Irish Influenced Biblical Commentaries, Florilegia, and Homiliary Collections,’ in *Sources of Anglo-Saxon Literary Culture: a Trial Version*, eds. F. Biggs, T. Hill, and P. Szarmach (Binghamton, 1990), 90-92; Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, 72-75.

¹²⁵ ‘tamen nos credimus animas, ut Isidorus et Ambrosius et Agustinus dicunt, / animas non credimus creari antequam corpus creatur’: *The Reference Bible, Das Bibelwerk: inter Pauca problesmata de enigmatibus ex tomis canonicis*, CCCM 173, 61-62. This appears in both the long and short recensions of the text.

The Pseudo-Isidorian *Liber de numeris*, another text of Irish origins, might also have been an available source for this belief that bespoke souls were created by God.¹²⁶ The author asked ‘What therefore is the soul?’ and after eliminating the ideas that the soul subsists of the same substance as the sky, water, and the earth, they wrote: ‘It does not come from the soul of the father or the mother, as many consider’ but instead the soul is given by God, made out of nothing, and is created by God.¹²⁷ The phrase denying that the soul comes from the father or the mother, ‘as many consider’ seems to parallel those statements made by Wulfstan and Ælfric found earlier in this chapter:

<i>Vita Æthelwoldi</i> Wulfstan the Cantor	Abridged <i>Vita Æthelwoldi</i> Ælfric	<i>Liber de numeris</i> Pseudo-Isidore
Animam procreati hominis non, ut quidam aestimant, a patre uel a matre existendi initium sumere, sed, ut uere et absque omni dubietate creditur, a solo creatore uitalem spiritum uiuificari et singillatim uniuersis dare ¹²⁸	animam hominis non a patre uel a matre uenire sed a solo creatore unicuique dari ¹²⁹	non de anima patris neque matris venit, ut multi aestimant [...] Unde ergo anima ex Deo data est, ex nihilo facta, et a Deo creata ¹³⁰

¹²⁶ On its Irish origin see R. McNally, *Der irische Liber de numeris: Eine Quellenanalyse des pseudo-isidorischen Liber de numeris*, unpublished dissertation (University of Munich, 1957), 1-2.

¹²⁷ ‘Quid ergo anima est? Coelum non est, neque terra, neque aer, neque ignis, non aqua, non Deus, non sidera, non de anima patris neque matris venit, ut multi aestimant. Non visus, non auditus, non odoratus, non gustus, vel alia caetera, quae memorare longum est, quae sunt in coelo, sive in terra, quod anima non est. Unde ergo anima ex Deo data est, ex nihilo facta, et a Deo creata’: Pseudo-Isidore, *De numeris*, ch. 5, PL 83:1296A.

¹²⁸ Wulfstan, *Life of Æthelwold*, ch. 4, 8.

¹²⁹ Ælfric, *Vita S. Æthelwoldi*, ch. 3, 71. See also the Old English parallels in *CH I*, Homily 1 below.

¹³⁰ Pseudo-Isidore, *De numeris*, ch. 5, PL 83:1296A.

This is the closest linguistic parallel I have found that casts doubt on the soul coming from the father and mother whilst also promoting Creationsim, and, oddly enough, Ælfric's abridged sentence resembles more a conglomeration of Wulfstan's and Pseudo-Isidore's works, particularly with the inclusion of the word *venire*, rather than just an abridged version of Wulfstan's work alone. Whatever the source, Wulfstan the Cantor and Ælfric of Eynsham made concerted efforts to cement Creationism as the orthodox opinion on the soul's origin probably out of concern, either their own or their mentor Æthelwold's, that other opinions on the matter still persisted. As Wulfstan wrote no further on the topic beyond the *Vita Æthelwoldi*, this section will focus on Ælfric's works which discussed this subject.¹³¹ To exhibit best the emphasis which Ælfric placed on the debates on the soul's origin, the final section of this chapter analyses his discussions on the topic across multiple genres – including homilies exegesis, and translation – assessing not just how he treated the origin of souls but also how he shaped his sources to make Creationist views available for the first time to a non-Latinate audience.

Ælfric first addressed the issue of the soul's origin in his first series of *Catholic Homilies* (989) in both his sermons on Creation and the Catholic faith. The former saw Ælfric promote Creationism over the Traducianism which 'some men' wonder about.¹³² In the latter, once Ælfric had listed a series of heretics including Arius, Sabellius and the Jews, he seemingly continued to a new topic, explaining that

The substance of a person's body is from the father and from the mother: but God shapes the body from that substance and sends the soul into the body. Nor is the soul dwelling anywhere before, but God shapes her immediately and sets her into the body.

¹³¹ For Wulfstan the Cantor's attack on Traducianism, see above, pages 49-50.

¹³² See above, pages 50-51.

Ðæs mannes lichaman antimber bið of þam fæder 7 of þære meder: ac god gescypð þone lichaman of þam antimbre 7 asent on þam lichaman sawle. Ne bið seo sawul nahwar wuniende æror ac god hi gescypð þærrihte. 7 beset on þam lichaman.¹³³

Juxtaposing descriptions of heretics and didactic lecturing on the soul's lack of pre-existence creates the effect of implied heresy for anyone who believes in the theory of pre-existence. Intriguingly, Ælfric deemed it necessary to include not one, but two moments of education concerning the soul's origin in his first circulated work: one attacking Traducianism, the other beliefs in pre-existence. The repetition of this matter might signify the presence of differing beliefs on the soul's origin as part of the *gedwyld* Ælfric condemned in his Old English preface to the work.

Ælfric's next work, the second series of *Catholic Homilies*, addressed the topic of the soul's origin in his homilies for Laetare Sunday and Palm Sunday. In the first, Ælfric included the creation of souls as part of an exegesis about the Lord's commandment to keep the Sabbath day holy.¹³⁴ While each other commandment described in this homily garnered two to eight lines of explanation from Ælfric, the exegesis for the commandment on the Sabbath remains an outlier with an entire forty lines to explain the correlation of Genesis 2:2 and John 5:17: how even after the end of Creation God continues his work every day to create new souls. In the second homily, Ælfric clarified that Jesus' expression of woe lamenting the birth of the man who would betray him found in Matthew 26:24 – paralleled in many anonymous 'soul and body' homilies¹³⁵ – saying 'it is not to be understood by anyone with reason as if he

¹³³ Ælfric, *CHI*, Homily 20, 344.

¹³⁴ Ælfric, *CH II*, Homily 12, 118.

¹³⁵ See above, pages 71-72, 76-77.

was somewhere before he was born: but it is simply saying that it would be better for him that he never was' ('Nis þæt na to understandenne ænigum gesceadwisum swilce he awar wære. ær ðan ðe he geboren wære; Ac hit is anfealdlice gecweden. þæt him betere wære. þæt he næfre nære').¹³⁶ Ælfric condemned the theory of pre-existent souls in a more subtle manner here than in his first series of *Catholic Homilies*, yet his words still branded any person who believed in the pre-existence of souls as someone lacking reason. For those hearing Ælfric's collection of homilies during the season of Lent, there would be no doubt of what Ælfric considered to be the orthodox opinion on the soul's origin.

Ælfric did not stop promoting the Creationist doctrine even after addressing it so completely in both series of *Catholic Homilies*. Within the period designated by Clemons between 992-1002, Ælfric furthered his Creationist approach in both his *Hexameron* and his homily on John 5:1-15 entitled 'Feria VI in prima ebdomada quadragesimæ' for the first Friday of Lent, both examined below. His abridged version of Wulfstan the Cantor's *Vita S. Æthelwoldi* would then be written later in his career around 1005-1006.¹³⁷ This continual reiteration throughout the years demonstrates a deep concern on Ælfric's part to correct those who believed in Traducianism or Pre-existence and a desire to spread an orthodox view concerning the soul's origin. Although never the focus of any single work, each reflection on the origin of the soul comes across as a teaching point in theology with clear, explanatory rhetoric and is often scheduled to be spoken on important dates in the religious calendar. Ælfric commonly contrasted the tenets of Creationism with those of Traducianism and pre-

¹³⁶ Ælfric, *CH* II, Homily 14, 139.

¹³⁷ P. Clemons, 'The Chronology of Ælfric's Works,' in *The Anglo-Saxons: Studies in some Aspects of their History and Culture presented to Bruce Dickins*, ed. P. Clemons, (London, 1959), 244-245.

existence but would also include discussions on the souls of animals or seemingly contradictory biblical passages. Whatever the type of work Ælfric was producing, he chose not to assume the audience's knowledge on the soul's origin and made concerted efforts to establish the orthodoxy of Creationism.

As Gatch has eloquently summarised, 'Ælfric desired, above all, that the doctrine transmitted in his lucid English prose should be absolutely orthodox and firmly based in the theological tradition. Thus, most of his work is translation or adaptation of the works of the most reputable ecclesiastical fathers.'¹³⁸ In some cases Ælfric would often cite his own sources, but if not, Gatch continued, 'the source is easily discoverable or the reliance on patristic sources is evident from the content.'¹³⁹ With such a large range of works addressing the topic of the soul's origin, extending from biblical exegesis to hagiography, one would expect Ælfric to name a source to explain his ardent beliefs on the subject, particularly when his views directly contrasted the cautious approach taken by Augustine, Cassiodorus, and Alcuin, and the pre-existence beliefs which held sway in the Alfredian translations.

Ælfric, however, did not specify to his audience any source for his Creationist beliefs until his homily on John 5:1-15, part of a series of five homilies for the Fridays in Lent, entitled 'Feria VI in prima ebdomada quadragesimæ.' Before reminding his audience – with the phrase now familiar to the reader – that 'your souls do not come from your father nor mother, but from the heavenly Father ('ure sawla ne cumað of fæder ne of meder, ac se heofonica Fæder'), Ælfric provided a citation for his Creationist beliefs, writing 'he creates anew souls every day, and upon the living body, just as we learn in books' ('he gescipð ælce

¹³⁸ Gatch, *Preaching and Theology*, 14.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 14.

dæge edniwe sawla, and on lichaman geliffæst, swa swa we leorniað on bocum’).¹⁴⁰ However, just as the ‘some men’ mentioned above in his sermon on Creation appeared to have been left intentionally vague, no more details emerged from Ælfric about these ‘books’ which dictated Creationism to be the correct doctrine. Indeed, Godden has suggested that ‘the source is in fact Ælfric’s own Second series homily no. xii, which is here, if anything, drawing on his first homily in the First Series and the passage *De sabbato*, which has just the brief but probably significant “omnis anima hominis a Deo datur”.’¹⁴¹ This circular approach of sourcing this homily through his own works underscores the problematic nature when attempting to assign a source for Ælfric’s Creationist beliefs.

What may be understood by looking at the other sources used by Ælfric in this homily? For this work, Pope wrote that ‘Ælfric’s chief guide for the interpretation of the gospel is Augustine [...] but many of Ælfric’s phrases and a few ideas that do not occur in Augustine are to be found in Alcuin’s exposition of the text in his *Commentaria in S. Ioannis Evangelium*.’¹⁴² Knowing Augustine’s hesitancy on the matter, we can rule out his influence on this section. For the lines including those above, Pope specifically cited Alcuin’s *Commentaria in S. Ioannis Evangelium* as the source. Here, Alcuin drew heavily on Bede’s *Homeliarum evangelii* 1.23 for his commentary on John 5:17, but whilst Bede did not mention souls when discussing this verse, ‘Alcuin wrote his own comment’ for the exposition of this verse which did, in fact, include them:¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰ Ælfric, *Supplementary*, volume 1, Homily 2, 240.

¹⁴¹ Godden, ‘Anglo-Saxons on the Mind,’ 285.

¹⁴² Pope, *Homilies of Ælfric*, 228.

¹⁴³ M. Gorman, ‘Rewriting Augustine: Alcuin’s Commentary on the Gospel of John,’ *Revue Bénédictine* 119 (2009), 62.

Therefore it is said in the psalm, ‘He who hath formed the hearts of them one by one’ [Psalm 32:15], [He] reshapes not the unknown kinds of souls, but the souls of the same substance which was placed in the first human being.

Ideo dictum est in Psalmo: *Qui finxit singillatim corda eorum* (Psal. XXXII, 15), non incognita animarum genera, sed ejusdem substantiae animas, quae in primo homine condita est, reformat.¹⁴⁴

If we consider once again Alcuin’s brief discussion on the topic in *De animae ratione* where he wrote that even if there is agreement that the soul comes from God, only God has the knowledge of its origin, the use of *reformat* instead of a verb such as *creat* allows for Alcuin to avoid committing to a single theory.¹⁴⁵ God might continually interact with human souls, but he does not specifically continually *create* them as Ælfric dictated in his homilies. Whilst we might attribute the inclusion of souls in this passage to Alcuin’s expansion of Bede, the steps made distinctly to endorse Creationist beliefs for the origin of the soul over any other doctrine appear to be those made by Ælfric. As for the immediate attack against Traducianism after these lines, Pope wrote that these ideas are ‘not in Ælfric’s immediate sources.’¹⁴⁶ Perhaps they came from something like the *Liber de numeris*, but Ælfric remained uncharacteristically quiet about his source. Knowing that Wulfstan’s *Vita Æthelwoldi* ‘enjoyed an enormously wide circulation,’ one might hope for the simple answer that Wulfstan’s discussion on the origin of the souls could be the source for Ælfric’s own beliefs.¹⁴⁷ However, Lapidge and Winterbottom have argued that Wulfstan’s work should be dated to 996, effectively placing the *vita* directly in the middle of this list of Ælfric’s works which address

¹⁴⁴ Alcuin, *Commentaria in sancti Iohannis Euangelium*, ch. 9, Verse 17, PL 100.808A. Many thanks to Maria Merino for her advice on the interpretation of this passage.

¹⁴⁵ Alcuin, *De animae ratione*, ch. 13, PL 101:645B; see above, page 45.

¹⁴⁶ Pope, *Homilies of Ælfric*, 240.

¹⁴⁷ Lapidge and Winterbottom, ‘Introduction,’ in Wulfstan of Winchester, *Life of Æthelwold*, cxii.

the origin of souls. Either series of *The Catholic Homilies* might have influenced Wulfstan's work, but both Wulfstan and Ælfric's shared experience as pupils of Æthelwold might, for now, consist of the best explanation for their unique didactic deliberations on the soul's origin.

A similar exercise, this time with *The Old English Hexameron*, produces comparable results. As Ælfric reached the end of Creation in his *Exameron Anglice*, a work of exegesis on the six days of Creation, he presented an explanation to reconcile the seemingly contradictory statements of Genesis 2:2 ('And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made: and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had done') and John 5:17 ('But Jesus answered them: My Father worketh until now; and I work') by including God's continued work in the creation of souls each day. After quoting the passage from John in both Latin and English, Ælfric wrote:

Each year cattle are born, and human beings are born as men, whom God creates even as he created the former, and he does not create a soul except in children only; and all the brutes have no soul.

Ælce geare byð orf acenned
and mennisce menn to mannum acennede
ða ðe God gewyrcð swa swa he geworhte ða ærran,
and he ne scypð nane sawle buton ðam cildum anum.
and ealle nytenu nabbað nane sawle.¹⁴⁸

Once again, the source given by Crawford here is Ælfric's own earlier work in his *Catholic Homilies* on Laetare Sunday mentioned above, but he also includes another work by Ælfric, albeit a translation, of Alcuin's *Interrogationes et responsiones in Genesin*.¹⁴⁹

Composed in a question-and-answer format for his friend and pupil Sigwulf, Alcuin in his *Interrogationes* 'summarised some of the many questions that Sigwulf, and no doubt

¹⁴⁸ Ælfric, *Exameron Anglice*, ed. and trans. Crawford, 60-61.

¹⁴⁹ Crawford, *Exameron Anglice*, 82.

others, used to ask him about Genesis to serve as an *aide memoire* to enable “the recreation of memory”.¹⁵⁰ The first question which Ælfric translates in the *Hexameron* similarly attempted to answer the coexistence of Genesis 2:2 and John 5:17:

How is it to be understood that the almighty God ceased from his work on the seventh day when he had created all things and Christ spoke in his gospel: ‘My father works up to now and I work’? Albinus answered to him: God ceased creating new creations at that time but he renews their likeness every day and directs his work until this world’s ending.’

Hu is to understandenne þæt se ælmihtiga god geswac his weorca on þam seofþan dæge þaþa he gesceop ealle ðing and Crist cwæð on his godspelle: ‘min fæder wyrð oððis and ic wyrce.’ Albinus him andwyrde: God geswac ða ðære niwan gesceapennysse, ac he geedniwað ða ylcan gecynd ælce dæge, 7 his weorce gewissað oð ðisse weorulde geendunge.¹⁵¹

Quomodo convenit quod in Genesi legitur: *Requievit Deus die septimo ab omnibus operibus suis* [Gen. II,2], et in Evangelio. *Pater meus usque modo operator et ego operor* [Joan. V, 17]? -- *Responsio*. Requievit a novarum conditione et creatione creaturarum, non a conditarum gubernatione. Et ideo Deus [tunc] creator in sex dierum creatione putandus est, nunc vero gubernator in totius mundi creaturis.¹⁵²

In this more nuanced adjustment to his source, Ælfric shaped his translation of Alcuin’s language here to better fit his own beliefs. While Alcuin stated that God only rested from constructing new creations, not from directing/ruling those he made, Ælfric added the small phrase that God ‘renews their likeness every day.’ Ælfric was a product of the Benedictine Reform, which Stanton has argued recognised that in translation ‘the overriding need was to maintain strict limits on interpretation.’¹⁵³ However, here we see a small but significant

¹⁵⁰ D. Dales, *Alcuin: Theology and Thought* (Cambridge, 2013), 155.

¹⁵¹ Ælfric’s *Anglo-Saxon version of Alcuini Interrogationes Sigeuulfi presbyteri in Genesin*, ed. G. Maclean, *Anglia* 7 (1884), 2-4.

¹⁵² Alcuin, *Interrogationes et responsiones in Genesin*, ch. 2, *Interrogatio* 1, PL 100.517B-C.

¹⁵³ R. Stanton, *The Culture of Translation in Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge, 2002), 175.

expansion from his source material which suited his own purposes. Gretsch has noted that the Winchester School's focus on philological training in grammar and translation 'produced in Ælfric a confidence in his secure mastery of the English language and in his superior ability to choose the most adequate translation technique for a given Latin text; a confidence (occasionally verging on arrogance) which shows up time and again in his prefaces.'¹⁵⁴ More than just producing adequate translations, however, it appears that, just like in the Alfredian translations, we see Ælfric making adjustments to his sources to turn them more favourably towards his own origin beliefs.

Discontinuities from source material create problems when attempting to cite the basis for Ælfric's strong beliefs in Creationism, beliefs that subvert readings in Augustine, Cassiodorus, and Alcuin. In his homily on Creation, for example, Ælfric disregarded the origin theories found in works he used as sources for this homily – including both Alcuin's *De animae ratione* and Cassiodorus' *De anima* which both argued the origin of the soul was unknown¹⁵⁵ – to promote Creationism. We also know he used the *Old English Boethius* as a source in his *Lives of Saints* including his entry On Auguries and the Nativity of Christ.¹⁵⁶ One would be hard pressed to argue that Ælfric was completely ignorant of both the arguments for accepted ignorance made by theologians he respected and the arguments for pre-existence he found in the Alfredian translations. Ælfric *was* aware, and Ælfric chose to be different.

As Lapidge and Winterbottom have suggested, this ardent support of Creationist doctrine could have stemmed from Ælfric and Wulfstan's common educational background

¹⁵⁴ M. Gretsch, 'Ælfric, Language and Winchester,' in *A Companion to Ælfric*, eds. H. Magennis and M. Swan (Boston, 2009), 113.

¹⁵⁵ M. Godden, 'The Sources of *CH* 1.1 (Cameron C.B.1.1.2),' 1999, *Fontes*.

¹⁵⁶ M. Godden, 'The Sources of the *LS* 1 and *LS* 17 (Cameron C.B.1.3.2 and C.B.1.3.18),' 2002, *Fontes*.

under Æthelwold. I would suggest further that the source for these beliefs might likely have come across from Ireland in books like the *Reference Bible* and *Liber de numeris* rather than directly through Jerome's own treatises. Whatever the source, however, in analysis of Ælfric's works we can observe that he chose to make didactic efforts across multiple genres to explain the origin of the soul throughout his writing career, never assuming the audience's knowledge on the topic in the way that the earlier 'undiagnosable' homilies and poetry did. The profoundly pedagogical framework of these references, made by both Wulfstan the Cantor and Ælfric, indicates a belief in their own orthodoxy and a desire to spread it to their contemporaries, who might or might not already have differing fixed answers to the question 'Whence the soul?'

Conclusion

On the historical impact of Jerome's beliefs about the origin of the soul, Jones argued in general terms that 'in the Middle Ages it was Jerome's confidence rather than Augustine's scepticism that was destined to win out.'¹⁵⁷ Jones' statement, however, masks the complex theological battle of ideas we see across the Early Middle Ages solely on this one subject. Although we may never determine the 'true' Anglo-Saxon beliefs on the origin of the soul, we can state with confidence that at least two competing theories existed in the long tenth century, both with their ardent supporters. The topic certainly was of interest to some of the most prominent writers of the late Anglo-Saxon period from King Alfred's Court to the School at Winchester. Although one can make the case that the most sizable patristic inheritance on the

¹⁵⁷ Jones, *Soul of the Embryo*, 105.

subject (made by Augustine and Cassiodorus) argued that the soul's origin was beyond human knowledge, little suggests that later Anglo-Saxon writers adopted the same stance. Instead, two of the three origin theories – the Neoplatonic doctrine of pre-existence and Creationism – gained support in the works of Alfred, Wulfstan the Cantor, and Ælfric. Alfred's translation of the *Consolatio* at the end of the ninth century kept and expanded upon Boethius' references to the pre-existent soul while his rendering of Augustine's *Soliloquia* approached the topic with a more straightforward attitude than the *Boethius*, stating outright that the soul 'ever is, and ever shall be.' Almost a century later, Wulfstan the Cantor and Ælfric attacked Traducianist and Neoplatonic theories in their works to promote the idea that all souls were individually created by God at the moment of the body's ensoulment. In the midst of these opposing Anglo-Saxon opinions on the soul's origin we have identified a body of anonymous homilies and poems that referenced the origin of the soul yet failed to provide a clear understanding of when and how the soul originated. With the knowledge that the competing theories of Creationism and pre-existence still persisted to some degree, we can only deduce that the homilists either presumed their audience's knowledge on the subject or chose to write sections which referred to the soul's origin in a way which did not conform to a single theory.

Discussions on the birth of individual souls were taking place both in the courts of kings and religious spaces, but if we step forward another one hundred years, these beliefs which took such a strong hold of the educated elite completely disappeared before Anselm of Canterbury's death. That should not distract from the significance of these findings. By analysing all the works from this chapter together, we can understand several things. First, little evidence exists to argue that Traducianist beliefs were held in late Anglo-Saxon England; this theory of progeneration could have never gained popularity in Anglo-Saxon England until Gilbert Crispin's promotion of it at the turn of the twelfth century. However, if this is the case,

we must ask ourselves why Ælfric and Wulfstan the Cantor both chose to censure Traducianist beliefs in their writings. Second, even if some of these works reflect irreconcilable viewpoints on the origin of the soul, each one promoted God's active role in the placement of souls into their bodies. The point at which in the body's development Anglo-Saxons believed the soul was 'fastened' into the body will be the question explored in the next chapter.

Chapter Two

Ensoulment

Here begins to tell about man's origins, how he becomes a man in his mother's womb. First the man's brain is formed in his mother's womb; then the brain is covered outside with a membrane in the sixth week.

In the second month the veins are formed; they are divided into three hundred and sixty-five shorter and longer ones, and the blood then flows into the feet and hands, and he is then divided into limbs, and grows together.

In the third month he is a man without soul.

In the fourth month he is firm in his limbs.

In the fifth month he is alive, and grows, and the mother lies witless; and then the ribs are formed. Then many a pain befalls her when the body of the foetus is stirring in the womb.

In the sixth month he gets a skin, and the bones are growing.

In the seventh month the toes and fingers are growing.

In the eighth month the organs in his chest are growing, and his heart and blood, and he is all firmly compacted.

In the ninth month it becomes known to women whether they can give birth.

In the tenth month the woman will not escape with her life if the child is not born, because it turns into a deadly disease in her belly, most often on a Tuesday night.

Her onginð secgan ymbe mannes gecynde hu he on his modor innoþe to men gewyrðeð. Ærest þæs mannes brægen bið geworden on his moder innoþe þonne biþ þæt brægen utan mid reaman bewefen on þære syxtan wucan. On oðrum monðe þa ædran beoð geworden. On lxxv. 7 þreo hundræd scyrtran 7 lengran hi beoð todælede 7 þæt blod þonne floweð on þa fet 7 uppan þa handa. 7 he þonne byþ on limum todæled. 7 tosomne geawað. On þam þridan monþe he biþ man butan sawle. On þam feorþan monþe he bið on limum stapolfæst. On þam fiftan monþe he biþ cwicu. 7 weaxeð. 7 seo modur liþ witleas. 7 þonne þa ribb beoð geworden. þonne gelimpð þæræ manigfeald sar þonne þæs byrþres lic on hire innoþe styrigende bið. On þam syxtan monþe he byþ gehyd. 7 ban beoð weaxende. On þam seofþan monþe þa tan. 7 þa fingras. Beoð weaxende. On þam eahtoþan monþe him beoð þa breostþing wexende. 7 heorte 7 blod. 7 he bið eall stapolfæstlice. Geseted. On þam nigþan monþe witodlice wifum bið cuð hwæder hi cennan magon. On þam teoþan monþe þæt wif hit ne gedigð hyre feore. Gif þæt bearn accenned ne biþ. Forþam þe hit in þam magan wyrð hire to feorhadle oftost on tiwesniht.¹

¹ *Anglo-Saxon Prognostics: an Edition and Translation of Texts from London, British Library, MS Cotton Tiberius A.iii*, ed. and trans. R. Liuzza (Cambridge, 2011), 200-201.

Straddling the line between the medical and prognostic genres, this mid-eleventh-century Old English text which Cockayne entitled *De generatione hominis* followed the monthly growth of a foetus in the womb before ending in an ominous warning for mothers who did not give birth by the tenth month.² If the pregnancy were to last past the typical nine months, the child who had been developing in the womb would then transform into a fatal disease ('feorhadle') for the mother. This development into a disease is not the first transformation to take place in the text: in the third month, the foetus became a 'man,' but intriguingly, the text characterised him as 'a man without a soul' ('man butan sawle'). Although *De generatione hominis* failed to describe the actual entry of the soul explicitly, two different assumptions for when initial ensoulment occurred could be made. First, mentioning that 'he is a man without a soul' only in the third month could have implied that every month afterwards a soul was present in the body. Alternatively, in the fifth month the text describes the foetus as 'alive' or 'quicken'd' ('cwicu') and moving in the mother's womb, which could constitute the fact that the soul had entered the body by then.

Whether or not the Anglo-Saxons believed that souls subsisted in a pre-existent state (Neoplatonism) or were individually created daily by God (Creationism), both doctrines allowed for a human to gain a soul at any point during one of the four potential theorised moments of ensoulment. The soul might have been present in the womb from the moment of conception, always in unity with its body; the soul could enter the body at some point after conception during foetal development; the soul might enter the body of a child when it is born, either at his first breath or the moment he was separated from his mother; or, a child could gain a soul at some point after birth in its infancy. Jones has reviewed how each of one of

² *Leechdoms, Wortcunning, and Starcraft of Early England*, volume 3, ed. T. Cockayne (London, 1864-1866), 146.

these beliefs held support in the classical and patristic eras in his book which surveys the history of Christian attitudes towards the unborn, but he did not address which one(s) might have been believed in pre-Conquest England.³ Jones instead skipped from the debates of Augustine to those of Thomas Aquinas, leaving a historic void in between the two scholars rather than looking for inconsistencies and continuities.

A search for historical literature which solely focuses on beliefs about ensoulment between the ninth and eleventh centuries provides few results. Lockett appears to have merged together the concept of a soul's origin with the moment of ensoulment in her book *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies*. She has written: 'several opinions about the manner and timing of the body's ensoulment have early Christian precedents: among Latin authors, some Neoplatonists claimed that pre-existent souls were implanted into bodies, while Creationists held that God created a new soul for every conception, and Traducianists claimed that soul and body were both generated by the parents at conception.'⁴ Indeed, theories about the origin of souls are so intrinsically linked with ensoulment beliefs that several sources from the previous chapter will appear again here, but we will be analysing their content from a different perspective to highlight the varying attitudes early English authors had when describing their ensoulment beliefs. While the two topics may influence one another, especially in respect to the Traducianist doctrine's connection with the belief in ensoulment from conception, the origin of the soul and ensoulment cannot be considered synonymous. While different origin beliefs might influence theological debates on the transmission of original sin and the immortality of the soul, beliefs concerning the moment of initial ensoulment would, among other things, hold

³ Jones, *The Soul of the Embryo*, 109-119.

⁴ Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies*, 20.

certain impact for the soteriology of mothers who suffered miscarriages or experienced abortions and the eschatological fate for those in the womb who are not carried to full term.

The topic of ensoulment in Anglo-Saxon England recently has most appeared attached to historical research on pregnancy and abortion. In a discussion of pregnancy and childbirth in Anglo-Saxon England, Marilyn Deegan interposed her archaeological and medical study of the many hazards and ailments that Anglo-Saxon women encountered during pregnancy and childbirth with a brief paragraph on the history of ensoulment debates. She discussed beliefs about ensoulment from Egyptian philosophies to an undefined time when ‘canon law decided that the fortieth day after conception was the day of animation.’⁵ Her summary, which ranged over two thousand years in a single paragraph, posed more questions concerning Anglo-Saxon theological views concerning ensoulment than it truly answered. Deegan concluded by stating that ‘clearly there is still much work to be done in this field,’ emphasising the hole in our research not just on the medical side but on the theological as well.

Elsackers touched upon Anglo-Saxon views towards ensoulment in her cross-cultural works focusing on early medieval attitudes towards abortion using classical and Late Antique sources, early medieval Germanic law codes, penitentials, and vernacular embryological texts including the Old English *De generatione hominis* to analyse the differing abortion criteria which these texts offered.⁶ Elsackers discussed ensoulment briefly, but only through the lens of abortion, as these texts sometimes listed ensoulment as one of the main criteria to determine if an abortion was early or late term. Her unpublished doctoral dissertation provided another

⁵ M. Deegan, ‘Pregnancy and Childbirth in the Anglo-Saxon Medical Texts: a Preliminary Survey,’ in *Medicine in Early Medieval England: Four Papers*, eds. M. Deegan and D. Scragg (Manchester, 1989), 24.

⁶ M. Elsackers, ‘The Early Medieval Latin and Vernacular Vocabulary of Abortion and Embryology,’ in *Science Translated: Latin and Vernacular Translations of Scientific Treatises in Medieval Europe*, eds. M. Goyens, P. De Leemans, A. Smets Leu (Leuven, 2008), 377-414.

wide-ranging study covering the Germanic tribes which emerged as Western powers in the early Middle Ages from the fall of Rome to the eleventh-century.⁷ Although this thesis largely focused on the differing factors affecting early medieval Germanic women's ability to perform abortions rather than beliefs in ensoulment, her unparalleled work on two- and three-tiered clauses on abortion in penitentials has underscored the important distinctions made in medieval attitudes between early- and late-term terminations of pregnancy. Even though her research has produced indispensable material about gender in the early medieval West, Elsackers' work only briefly discussed both ensoulment and the Anglo-Saxons, and the area of her research does not include any theological elements which could have held a certain amount of influence.

The closest a study has come to discussing Anglo-Saxon beliefs about ensoulment can be found in Okasha's little-known contribution to the *Festschrift* for Jennifer O'Reilly in an article on pregnancy in Anglo-Saxon England where she offered a translation of *De generatione hominis* and compared how the different stages of development noted in the text corresponded to modern medical embryology.⁸ Okasha speculated about the different sources which the informant of this text might have encountered to create this embryology including the work of physicians such as Vindicianus' *Gynaecia* or Hippocrates' *De mulierum affectibus* before briefly covering ensoulment. She drew attention to the case of ensoulment in the *Vita Æthelwoldi* before turning her attention solely to abortion. As her contribution to the

⁷ M. Elsackers, *Reading Between the Lines: Old Germanic and Early Christian Views on Abortion*, unpublished dissertation (Instituut voor Cultuur en Geschiedenis, 2010).

⁸ E. Okasha, 'From Conception to Birth in Anglo-Saxon England,' in *Listen, O Isles, unto Me: Studies in Medieval Word and Image in Honour of Jennifer O'Reilly*, eds. E. Mullins and D. Scully (Cork, 2011), 156-167.

Festschrift aimed to discuss the entirety of *De generatione hominis*, it did not probe further into the many depths and complexities which the topic of ensoulment demands.

To understand late Anglo-Saxon beliefs about initial ensoulment, we must study different types of sources – ranging from influential patristic sources, hagiographies, homilies, and poetry to penitential, prognostics and medical writings – which all lend themselves to a more complete understanding of when the Anglo-Saxons believed a soul to first enter its body. Surviving sources demonstrate a general trend towards the belief of ensoulment between conception and birth (often labelled by modern scholars as ‘delayed ensoulment’), but leaving it simply at that would ignore the further complexities which arise. This chapter analyses how several theories about ensoulment co-existed in the late Anglo-Saxon period: the first, which followed the precedent set by Adam’s ensoulment in the Bible, connected ensoulment with a degree of bodily formation; and the second, which associated ensoulment with the physical sensation of foetal movement. It also briefly discusses the further inconsistencies which appear throughout penitential literature from the period concerning abortion clauses and addresses the questions which arise when attempting to understand how the Anglo-Saxons might have reconciled a belief in ‘delayed ensoulment’ with the Incarnation of Christ.

An Important Note on Terminology

A certain amount of care must be taken when deciding what language to use when discussing Anglo-Saxon beliefs about ensoulment, for each word used to describe the unborn (and potentially un-ensouled) infant carries different weights and implications. While ‘embryo’ and ‘foetus’ each contain modern scientific classifications in their definitions potentially too technical to ascribe to the Anglo-Saxons, using ‘child’ or ‘human being,’ particularly in the

Christian sense where a human being is believed to consist of both body and soul, creates implications for discussing the unborn's pre-ensouled state and the amount of development they had achieved in the womb.

Anglo-Saxon writers would use a variety of terms to describe the as-yet unborn person. Quite often, they would discuss the prenatal state of a person with the foreknowledge of who that person would become, and thus the description would involve something of that person's existence 'in utero.'⁹ More often than not in homilies and penitentials, if there was still the potential for a pregnancy to be discontinued – either through miscarriage or abortion – the language used would be 'child,' but these instances often would not account for pregnancies which could not naturally last to full term. Bede, following Augustine's example, described the human body's first six days after conception to having 'a likeness to milk' before being 'changed into blood' in the next nine with no solidity in form until after that.¹⁰ At this point the foetal development seems to be described more as bodily fluids rather than a potential human. Furthermore, the embryological text that Cockayne entitled *De generatione hominis* discussed at the beginning of this chapter creates more difficulties. It announced itself as a text which describes how a 'man' develops in the womb, but it did not consider a foetus a 'man' until the third month, and even then, he is a 'man without a soul' ('man butan sawle').¹¹ What

⁹ In Latin we might see something like 'sensit animam pueri quem gerebat in utero uenisse': Wulfstan the Cantor, *Life of Æthelwold*, ch. 4, ed. and trans. Lapidge and Winterbottom, 6-7. And in Old English we would see something similar, such as when Ælfric discussed Christ in the womb, he would say 'our savior in Mary's womb' ('ure hælend on marian innoð'): *CH* 1, Homily 13, 286; or in a medical title from *Bald's Leechbook* for 'if a child becomes dead in a woman's womb' ('gif bearn weorþe dead on wifes innoþe'); *Bald's Leechbook*, Book II, Table of Contents in *Leechdoms, Wortcunning, and Starcraft of Early England*, volume 2, ed. T. Cockayne (London, 1865), 172.

¹⁰ 'uidelicet primis sex a conceptione diebus lactis habeat similitudinem sequentibus nouem conuertatur in sanguinem': Bede, *Homiliarum evangelii*, Book 2, Homily 1, 189; Bede, *Homilies on the Gospels*, Book Two, trans. L. Martin and D. Hurst (Kalamazoo: 1991), 8. See below on Bede, Augustine, and the Incarnation.

¹¹ See *De generatione hominis* above, page 98.

was being formed in the womb attracted an array of different descriptors to which we must remain alert. Drawing from this, it is also crucial to note the underlying connotations to the commonly used phrase ‘delayed ensoulment.’ The language implies the natural state of ensoulment to be immediately at conception and assumes that alternative views about ensoulment –such as from conception or at birth – were being considered. Instead, a better phrase to use in these situations would be ensoulment *in utero*, following our authors’ own descriptions of the process.

Even when discussing the Latin term *aborsus* we come across our own biases and subconscious associations with abortion in a modern context. Before beginning his work on abortion in the Early Middle Ages, Mistry reminded his audience that ‘Latin nouns like *aborsus* or *abortio* and verbs like *abortare* could mean either (in everyday speech) abortion or miscarriage; or (in medical language) therapeutic or spontaneous abortion. In other words, Latin did not have separate words for abortion and miscarriage.’¹² Pressing our own terms onto Anglo-Saxon theology must be done, simply because we are limited to expressing ourselves by the language we know, but we must understand the many modern implications our own language has when discussing historical discourses on ensoulment. For this chapter, I will attempt to use a diverse range of words to describe the unborn state of a human being, trying not to prioritise a single one, but using the closest term in translation for each individual text when appropriate.

¹² Z. Mistry, *Abortion in the Early Middle Ages c. 500-900* (York, 2015), xiii.

The Bible and Early Christian Authors

The only confirmable case in which the Bible describes a soul first entering a body occurs as God created the human race in his act of Creation. The Vulgate describes Adam's ensoulment by stating: 'and the Lord God formed man of the slime of the earth: and breathed into his face the breath of life, and man became a living soul.'¹³ The ensoulment of a divinely formed full-grown man, however, might not function as the best example to understand the ensoulment of everyday people. A verse in the book of Job could have also held some influence as it said 'the spirit of God made me, and the breath of the Almighty gave me life.' Whilst this verse did not specifically mention a soul, it does hold some similarities to Adam's ensoulment: it described God first as constructing ('fecit') Elihu before vivification ('vivificavit') happened through God's breath.¹⁴ Two verses later, the resemblance to Genesis continued when Elihu reminded Job that 'God hath made me as well as thee, and of the same clay I also was formed.'¹⁵ Whilst vague, it would appear that when the Bible discussed ensoulment or vivification, a literary order was established where the body's formation would be described before God bestowed it with life. However, the ambiguity found in Job offered little more help than that found in Genesis for those concerned with when the soul could first be described as present in the body. It is possible, therefore, that the Anglo-Saxons might have turned to other religious texts written by patristic authors to understand when a soul could be said to have entered a body.

¹³ Genesis 2:7.

¹⁴ Job 33:4.

¹⁵ Job 33:6.

Although the origin of the soul was hotly debated amongst patristic and early medieval theologians, theories concerning the moment when a body first gained its soul attracted less of their attention. From the four possible ensoulment theories they split into two camps – those who believed the soul to exist with the body from conception and those who believed that a soul entered the body at a later point while it developed in the womb. To create an entire review covering patristic thought on the subject is beyond the scope of this thesis.¹⁶ Instead, this chapter highlights those patristic sources discussing ensoulment which might have been available in late Anglo-Saxon England. Tertullian and Gregory of Nyssa – the main advocates of Traducianism – and alongside them Maximus the Confessor each argued that a body, even one still being formed, could not exist without a soul. However, no evidence survives to suggest that the belief in ensoulment at conception which characterised their works made it to the libraries of Anglo-Saxon England.¹⁷

One patristic author whose works are often believed to have held sway over Anglo-Saxon theological thought, Augustine of Hippo, did discuss the question of ensoulment in several of his works. In particular, Augustine displayed concern for the degree to which *abortivi* would take part in the resurrection in several works available in this time. Augustine devoted a chapter to the subject of pregnancy loss in *De civitate Dei*, a work known to authors including Lantfred of Fleury, Ælfric, and Byrhtferth.¹⁸ On this topic he concluded: ‘in regard

¹⁶ For an introduction to classical and patristic thoughts on ensoulment, see Jones, *Soul of the Embryo*, 109-119. Although geared towards abortion debates, Mistry, *Abortion in the Middle Ages*, 23-55, 262-295 and Elsackers ‘Vocabulary of Abortion,’ 379-386 also discuss early beliefs in ensoulment.

¹⁷ On Maximus the Confessor’s view on ensoulment, see M. Congourdeau, ‘L’Animation de l’embryon humain chez Maxime le Confesseur,’ *Nouvelle revue théologique* 111 (1989), 693-709; J. Saward, *Redeemer in the Womb: Jesus Living in Mary* (San Francisco, 1993), 9-13. For more information on Tertullian and Gregory of Nyssa and their belief in Traducianism (that the soul was generated through the parents), see above, pages 46-49.

¹⁸ Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*, 284; *Fontes*, Search query: *De civitate Dei*.

to aborted fetuses that had life in their mother's womb and then died, I neither dare to deny that they will share in the resurrection, nor do I dare to affirm this. I can only say that I do not see how the resurrection of the dead should not apply to them, seeing that they are not excluded from the number of dead.'¹⁹ Here, at least, Augustine would not offer his audience anything decisive on the matter of the eschatological fate, and thus the existence of souls, for those who never lived outside the womb.

Two other lesser-known works by Augustine might have offered more precise information about the process of ensoulment. The *Enchiridion*, a short manual on Christian doctrines and how best to serve God, asked similar questions to *De civitate Dei* but answered them to a greater extent. Augustine filled the section explaining the resurrection with questions, demonstrating an anxiety about the souls of the unborn at Judgement Day, but decided that 'if we say that there is a resurrection for them [*abortivi*], then we can agree that at least as much is true of fetuses that are fully formed. But, with regard to undeveloped fetuses, who would not more readily think that they perish, like seeds that did not germinate?'²⁰ In this work, known to Bede, Asser, and Ælfric and extant in eight surviving manuscripts of tenth and eleventh century English provenance, Augustine used a simple comparison to plants to question if those unformed fetuses lost in pregnancy could even be argued to have had the potential to gain a soul.²¹

¹⁹ 'abortiuos fetus, qui, cum iam uixissent in utero, ibi sunt mortui, resurrecturos ut adfirmare, ita negare non audeo; quamuis non uideam quo modo ad eos non pertineat resurrectio mortuorum, si non eximuntur de numero mortuorum': Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, Book 22, ch. 13, CCSL 48, 833; Augustine, *City of God*, Books XVII-XXII, trans. G. Walsh and D. Honan (Washington, D.C., 1954), 460.

²⁰ 'si enim resurrecturos eos dixerimus, de his qui iam formati sunt tolerari potest utcumque quod dicitur. informes uero abortus quis non procliuius perire arbitretur, sicut semina quae concepta non fuerint?': Augustine, *Enchiridion de fide, spe et caritate*, ch. 23, CCSL 46, 96; Augustine, *Enchiridion: on Faith, Hope, and Love*, trans. A. Outler (Grand Rapids, MI, 1955), 25.

²¹ Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*, 288-289; *Fontes*, Search query: *Enchiridion*.

The most defined theology Augustine gave on ensoulment appears in his *Quaestiones in Heptateuchum* in his question addressing Exodus 21:22-23 where he attempted to clarify the differing penalties for the occasion when fighting men caused a miscarriage.²² If the woman lived but miscarried, a payment decided by the husband had to be given; however, if she died the offender must ‘render life for life.’ Augustine here engaged with the *Vetus Latina* Bible which made a further distinction for penalties if that which was expelled was ‘formed’ (‘formatum’) or ‘not yet formed’ (‘necdum formatum’), something not found in the Vulgate translation more commonly used by the Anglo-Saxons.²³ Augustine provided further explanation for this passage, clarifying that if what was expelled from the womb was ‘unformed childbirth [...] the law does not constitute this as homicide because it cannot be said to have a living soul if it lacks senses.’²⁴ Augustine here made a distinction between an unformed and formed foetus to differentiate between a miscarriage which caused a foetus with a soul to perish and one where no soul was at jeopardy. Without a form and without senses, Augustine argued, a foetus could not be determined to have a soul. This particular work was known to have been in circulation during the later Anglo-Saxon period. Not only was it known to Lantfred of Fleury, but Doane has suggested that the poet of ‘Genesis A’ knew it directly or through ‘some comment directly derived from it’ along with the late-tenth and early-eleventh-century translators of the *Old English Heptateuch*.²⁵ For those with questions on when a body

²² Exodus 21:22-23: ‘If men quarrel, and one strike a woman with child, and she miscarry indeed, but live herself: he shall be answerable for so much damage as the woman’s husband shall require, and as arbiters shall award. But if her death ensue thereupon, he shall render life for life.’

²³ ‘Exodus 21:22-23’ from the *Vetus Latina Database* < <http://apps.brepolis.net/vld/>>(2015).

²⁴ ‘informe puerperium [...] ideo lex noluit ad homicidium pertinere, quia nondum dici potest anima uiua in eo corpore quod sensu caret’: Augustine, *Quaestionum in heptateuchum libri septem*, Book 2, Exodus, Question 80, CCSL 33, 111.

²⁵ Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*, 290; *Genesis A: A New Edition, Revised*, ed. A. Doane (Tempe, 2013), 338, *Fontes*, Search query: *Quaestiones in Heptateuchum*.

first gained a soul, Augustine's thoughts on the subject might have offered some answers. For him, the soul did not enter a body until after it was formed in the womb.

Cassiodorus took a slightly different approach from Augustine for deciding when a human being gained a soul in his *De anima* which is known to be a source for Ælfric's first sermon in his *Catholic Homilies*.²⁶ He conceded that some theologians, 'have said that as soon as human seed has been coagulated into a living substance, then and there created souls, discrete and perfect, are given to bodies,' but clarified his own position by writing that 'physicians, however, say that the human and mortal animal receives a soul on the fortieth day when it has begun to move in its mother's womb.'²⁷ Beyond the biblical number symbolism, one must wonder how Cassiodorus (or his physician source) selected forty days as the time when foetal movement began, when movement in a typical pregnancy first occurs after three times that amount of time.²⁸ The 'movements' felt at forty days, or about six weeks, could potentially have referred to the start of abdominal pains which occur as the uterus expands, often towards the end of the second month of pregnancy. Rather than decide ensoulment based on an unformed/formed status as Augustine did, Cassiodorus chose to associate ensoulment with some form of physical sensation.

²⁶ M. Godden, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies*, 9; see above, page 43.

²⁷ 'hoc nonnulli secuti dixerunt, mox ut semen humanum coagulatum fuerit in uitalem substantiam, ilico creatas animas corporibus dari discretas atque perfectas. Medendi autem artifices quadragesimo die humanum ac mortale pecus animam dicunt accipere, cum se in utero matris coeperit commouere': Cassiodorus, *De anima*, ch. 9, CCSL 96, 552; trans. Halporn, 260.

²⁸ 'The period of forty days or years is an important one in Scripture and in Jewish tradition. As the church fathers observed, it is most often associated with hardship, affliction and punishment [...] The flood of judgement in Noah's day lasts forty days (Gen 7:4). So does the fasting of Moses (Ex 24:18; Deut 9:9) and Elijah (1 Kings 19:8). The generation in the wilderness wanders for forty years (Ex 16:35; Ps 95:10). Israel is in the hand of the Philistines for forty years (Judg 13:1). Forty days is the length of time Ezekiel lies on his side to symbolise the punishment of Judah (Ezek 4:6). Jonah prophesies that Nineveh will be destroyed in forty days [...] In Matthew 4:2 Jesus' experience of "forty days and forty nights" recapitulates Israel's forty years in the wilderness.' Forty also constituted the number of days between Christ's resurrection and ascension; *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, eds. L. Rykan, J. Wilhoit, T. Longman, et al. (Leicester, 1998), 305-306.

It is worth noting that some influential texts would not discuss the process of ensoulment even where we might expect it. For example, in the chapter describing the human being in his popular *Etymologiae*, Isidore of Seville assessed the language of the soul (*anima*), stating that it

takes its name from the pagans, on the assumption that it is wind [...] because we seem to stay alive by drawing air into the mouth. But this is quite clearly untrue, since the soul is generated much earlier than air can be taken into the mouth, because it is already alive in the mother's womb.²⁹

Isidore used the belief that a soul was present in the womb to contradict any beliefs that the soul could be associated with either breathing or air, but he did not describe at what point the soul actually entered the body. His small embryology later in the chapter did not include ensoulment – only discussions on the formation of the heart and the head.³⁰ Could he have associated the soul with the sensation of knowing it is ‘alive’ in the womb, or was he saying here that the soul was present from conception, vivifying the earliest of growth? Isidore’s elusiveness on the subject could have lent its support to any of the range of ensoulment beliefs available to Anglo-Saxon writers. We certainly see the two presentations of ensoulment as described by Augustine and Cassiodorus – the first associated with bodily autonomy and the other with foetal movement – reflected in the surviving sources from the Anglo-Saxon period, but there was little evidence to suggest a single theory prevailed over the other.

²⁹ ‘*Anima* autem gentilibus nomen accepit, eo quod ventus sit [...] quod ore trahentes aerem vivere videamur. Sed apertissime falsum est, quia multo prius gignitur anima quam concipi ore aer possit, quia jam in genitricis utero vivit.’: Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, Book 11, ch. 1, Item 7, PL 82:398B-398C; Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies*, trans. S. Barney et al. (Cambridge, 2005), 231. On the popularity of this text in early medieval England, see Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*, 311 and *Fontes*, Search query: Isidore of Seville and *Etymologiae*.

³⁰ Isidore, *Etymologia*, Book 11, ch. 1, Item 143, PL 82:414C.

Bodily Autonomy

Perhaps unsurprisingly, some Anglo-Saxon writers chose to follow Augustine and the example of Adam's ensoulment – where some quantity of the body existed before God fastened a soul to it – to describe the initial ensoulment of ordinary people. These instances in Ælfric's homilies and in Old English poetry would first describe the body's creation before the soul's fastening to it without giving any further detailed information on the process. Ælfric used this method most overtly in his sermon on Creation in his first series of *Catholic Homilies*. For his first description of ensoulment, Ælfric turned to the creation of Adam after recounting the creation of angels and the fall of Lucifer:

God then formed a man from clay, and blew spirit into him, and endowed him with life, and he became a man formed in soul and in body.

god þa geworhte ænne mannan of lame. 7 him on ableow gast. 7 hine geliffæste. 7 he wearð þa man gesceapen on saule 7 on lichaman.³¹

Ælfric's description of God breathing a soul into Adam's body here resembles the moment of Adam's creation in the Vulgate. His portrayal of Adam's ensoulment would then set the tone for later in this sermon, narratively between the death of Adam and the Great Flood, when he provided a description of the ensoulment process for the post-Adamite. Ælfric wrote:

The same God who formed Adam with his hands, he forms every man's body in his mother's womb; and the same who blew into Adam's body, and gave him a soul, the same gives a soul and life to children in their mother's womb when they are given shape.

se ylca god þe gesceop adam mid his handum he gescypð ælces mannes lichaman on his moder innoðe; 7 se ilca se ðe ableow on adames lichaman 7 him forgeaf saule. se ylca forgyfð cildum saule 7 lyf on hyra moder innoðe. þonne hy gesceapene beoð.³²

³¹ Ælfric, *CH I*, Homily 1, 181.

³² *Ibid.*, 184.

By describing the formation, or shaping, of the body first before using respiratory imagery for the implantation of the soul, Ælfric likened each person's ensoulment with that of Adam. His theology appears to have developed from scriptural sources found in Genesis and Job where the formation of the body preceded the placement of the soul, but he gave no precise timing for when ensoulment in the womb actually occurred beyond that.

Although Ælfric took great care to provide his audiences with the proper theology for the origin of souls, he seemed to have held less concern for correcting any misconceptions about the ensoulment process itself. Descriptions of the soul's first entrance into the body would more often than not appear alongside a refutation of different origin myths. However, certain information may still be gleaned from them. For example, later in this same series of homilies, Ælfric wrote in his homily on the Catholic faith:

The matter of a man's body is from the father and from the mother, but God creates the body from the matter, and sends a soul into the body. The soul is nowhere existing previously, but God creates it forthwith, and sets it in the body.

Ðæs mannes lichaman antimber bið of þam fæder 7 of þære meder: ac god gescypð þone lichaman of þam antimbre 7 asent on þam lichaman sawle; Ne bið seo sawul nahwar wuniende æror ac god hi gescypð þærrihte. 7 beset on þam lichaman³³

In a similar passage for Mid-Lent from his second series of homilies, Ælfric wrote: 'He forms every man's body in his mother's womb, and afterwards sets in him a soul' ('he gescypð ælces mannes lichaman on his moder innoðe. and him sawle siððan on besett').³⁴ The use of the word *siððan*, or afterwards, here gives us clear insight into Ælfric's beliefs about human development. Ælfric would not describe God setting the soul into the body until after the

³³ *Ibid.*, Homily 20, 344.

³⁴ Ælfric, *CH II*, Homily 12, 118.

body, whose matter was supplied by both the father and the mother, was formed by God. These homiletic examples might be vague on the timing of the ensoulment process, but we can ascertain that Ælfric believed and preached there to be a set order for prenatal development to occur which involved the soul first entering the body sometime after conception and initial formation. Ælfric's description of ensoulment appears more hypothetical than concrete in his homilies, following the biblical examples which would have been available to him, and studying his phrasing allows us to establish his belief that ensoulment occurred after the formation of the body. For him, the soul's placement in the body – however briefly described – needed to follow the precedent of the Bible.

When searching for ensoulment in Old English poetry, the first thought which comes to mind would be to find the placement of Adam's soul in the early eleventh-century Junius Manuscript's 'Genesis A'. Unfortunately, due to manuscript damage, Adam's creation may no longer be read in the remaining leaves which contain the poem. A brief account of Adam's creation does appear, nonetheless, in 'Guthlac B' of the Exeter Book, but the entry of the soul is not specified – the poet only wrote that Adam lived in paradise with 'limbs, body, and the soul of life together' ('leomu lic somud ond lifes gæst,' l. 838). The description of Eve's ensoulment, even though it does not appear in the Bible, still remains intact in 'Genesis A' and specifically describes the placement of the soul in her body: 'from that God created glorious woman. Put in spirit, eternal soul. These two were like the angels. Then was Adam's bride equipped with spirit' ('of þam worhte god/ freolice fæmnan, feorh in gedyde,/ ece saula. heo wæron englum gelice./ þa wæs adames bryd gaste gegearwod,' ll. 183b-187a).³⁵ The use of both *saula* and *gaste* in apposition here serves to emphasise the importance of Eve's

³⁵ For more discussion about Eve's ensoulment, see above, pages 51-53.

ensoulment within these lines after her body is created, and we can only imagine that the missing leaves of ‘Genesis A’ might contain something similar to this in its lost description of the ensoulment of Adam. Although informative, particularly because Eve’s ensoulment happens only after her body has been formed, we must count this case of ensoulment as atypical in part because the soul entered a fully formed adult body.

Other examples of the initial ensoulment of ordinary people in Old English verse reflect the biblical ensoulment of Adam even more clearly than the previous examples given. During ‘Christ III’s’ portrayal of Judgement Day in the Exeter Book, the Lord addressed the wicked stating that it was with ‘my hands’ (‘minum hondum,’ l. 1379b) that ‘I set your limbs from clay, I gave you living spirit’ (‘Of lame ic þe leoþo gesette, geaf ic ðe lifgendne gæst,’ l. 1381). The description of ensoulment in the Vercelli Book’s ‘Soul and Body I’ resonates with the divine intervention in the process of ensoulment found in ‘Christ III.’ The first soul castigated its former body for its base decisions during life which damned them both before describing how an ‘angel from Heaven above sent a soul into you through his own hand, the almighty Creator’ (‘engel ufan of roderum sawle onsende þurh his sylfes hand meotod ælmihtig,’ ll. 27-29).³⁶ This time, a divine hand sent (*onsende*) the soul into the vessel of the body, but we cannot determine from the information given as to what degree of formation had already taken place, only that it had been existing for a certain time before the soul entered it. The resemblances of both these passages to the creation of Adam makes one wonder if Old English poets turned to the Bible, and the most accessible description of ensoulment within it, to produce their own interpretations of the ensoulment of everyday people.

³⁶ See above, pages 79-80, discussing these lines and the role of divine involvement in the creation of souls.

Specific instances in poetry where the soul enters the body of a foetus which do not parallel Genesis portray the body as already formed through metaphoric imagery. These occur infrequently in the corpus of Old English poetry, and the ensoulment of Enoch, the great-grandfather of Noah, further along in ‘Genesis A’ survives as the most prominent poetic description of ensoulment. The poet described how Enoch’s body existed as ‘the clothes which his spirit received before his mother brought him forth to men’ (‘þam gearwum þe his gast onfeng/ ær hine to monnum modor brohte,’ ll. 1212-1213). This poetic imagery portrayed Enoch’s body as a type of garment (‘gearwum’) in which his spirit (‘gast’) clothed itself whilst he was still in his mother’s womb. ‘Genesis A’ might not designate the specific timing of when ensoulment occurred, but the metaphor of the spirit robing itself in the body implies some degree of corporeal formation already existent in the womb before the soul had any presence. Indeed, the portrayal of a soul shrouding itself in the clothing of the body here appears similar to the opening lines of ‘Riddle 43’ of the Exeter Book, copied about a half-century before, which imagined the soul as the guest of a house who cannot be harmed by any type of physical injuries:

I know a distinguished, noble man, a guest in habitation, whom savage hunger,
old age, and sickness cannot injure nor heat make thirsty.

Ic wat indryhtne æþelum deorne
giest in geardum, þam se grimma ne mæg
hungor sceððan ne se hata þurst,
yldo ne adle (ll. 1-4a).

Harbus has explained how in this riddle ‘the metaphysical/physical binary of the person is mirrored by the guest/host binary,’ but, more so than that, the guest represents a visitor to a physical location which already exists.³⁷ Read together, the metaphors used to describe the

³⁷ Harbus, *Cognitive Approaches*, 64.

soul occupying a body create the illusion that these Anglo-Saxon poets believed a degree of the body's formation needed to have taken place in the womb before the soul could join with it. Although these poems do not specify exactly when ensoulment occurred, together they create a consistent pattern with Ælfric's vernacular homilies which portrayed a soul as being sent into the womb not at conception but at some point later when a body had some form of autonomy.

The Sensation of Quickening

Expectant parents now use the modern English noun 'quickening,' derived from the Old English *cwic* and *cwician*, to describe a child's first movements in the womb, but an argument may be made that the Anglo-Saxons also might have used this root word for similar purposes to include not just foetal movement but also ensoulment. Beyond ensoulment descriptions that allude to the Bible and formation, certain information about ensoulment beliefs may be found when Anglo-Saxons addressed pregnancy loss. The majority of the anonymous Old English homily 'De infantibus non baptizandis' counselled its audience on the many risks if one delayed a child's baptism, but the final six lines, added on seemingly as an afterthought, warned pregnant women of the repercussions for a child's soul if an infant were lost through miscarriage.

A mother should also take caution when she advances with child that she does not injure it through means of heedlessness, nor with weight, nor with exercise, riding, or folly because it will arise from death on Domesday if it already was quick in the mother and it will experience torture in hell if it was killed a heathen.

Warnige eac seo modor þonne heo mid cilde gæð þæt heo mid nanre higeleaste hit neamyrre, ne mid nanum hefe ne mid nanum plegan oððe mid rade oððe mid unge rade for þam þe hit sceall eft of deaþe arisan on domes dæg gif hit

ær cwicu wæs innan þære moder 7 hæfð þonne helle wite gif hit hæpen
acwylð.³⁸

The homilist gave instructions to avoid miscarriage which are uncannily similar to modern medical advice to expectant mothers. He told the women of his audience to avoid heavy weight lifting, strenuous physical activity, and travelling by horseback during pregnancy for risk of losing their child because, if a mother did miscarry, the child's soul would arise once again on Domesday to be damned to hell. However, this would *only* happen after it could be labelled as 'quick' ('cwicu') in the womb. Before that moment when a child was defined as quick, miscarriage would not jeopardise a soul. However, the homilist did not specify what precisely indicated when a child could be considered quick.

We most commonly translate the adjective *cwic* as 'quick' or 'alive,' but in this context, simply interpreting this word to represent 'alive' does not accurately portray what should be understood from the homily. From just this occasion in 'De infantibus' the context for defining *cwic* appears more complex than simply 'alive': for the homilist, this was when a person's religious existence began. The associated verb *cwician* – 'to quicken, to create, to come to life'³⁹ – describes a single moment where one may be classified as alive. What were the full connotations of *cwic* and *cwician* when used in the context of pregnancy? Descriptions of pregnancy are quite rare from Anglo-Saxon England, but through analysis of these two

³⁸ 'De infantibus non baptizandis,' in A. Napier, 'Ein altenglisches leben des heiligen Chad,' *Anglia* 10 (1888), 155; found in both Bodleian MS Hatton 115 and 116. This homily has been traditionally attributed to Ælfric: A. Kleist, 'Assembling Ælfric: Reconstructing the Rationale behind Eleventh- and Twelfth-Century Compilations,' in *A Companion to Ælfric*, eds. H. Magennis and M. Swan (Boston, 2009), 384. However, the attribution is far from certain given the text's style and content. If an Ælfrician authorship can be proved, then we must address in the future how this homily appears to be aimed at a considerably different audience from his usual works.

³⁹ Hall, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, 78.

words across different genres, both describing foetal development and not, we might gain a more complete understanding of what the Anglo-Saxons believed ‘quickening’ to entail.

When not describing a state of pregnancy, *cwic* and *cwician* would often have religious undertones. For example, we find ‘quick’ in the interlinear Old English gloss of the Cambridge Psalter’s ‘Hymnvs Athanasii’. The last item of the psalter, following the Athanasian Creed, described how on Judgement day Christ would come to judge the ‘uiuos et mortuos,’ translated into Old English as the ‘quick and dead’ (‘cwice 7 deade’), marking the distinction between those alive and those dead.⁴⁰ In other contexts, these words would be used for those who came back to life, particularly when the soul reunited with the body. The Old English *Life of Machutus* recounted the tale of Lazurus who ‘rose up quick’ (‘cwice up aras’) after ‘the soul came out of misery and thence the body joined to her’ (‘seo sawle of wite com, 7 hie to þon lichoma geþeodde’).⁴¹ Similarly, ‘Christ III’ of the Exeter Book described how on Judgement Day every person will ‘arise quick on account of Christ’s coming, receive limbs and body’ (‘fore Cristes cyme cwic arisan, leoðum onfon ond lichoman,’ ll. 1030-1031), and each ‘will have both together, body and soul’ (‘hafað ætgædre bu, lic ond sawle,’ ll. 1035b-1036a). Across different genres, *cwic* and *cwician* would be used to either distinguish between the living and the dead or to describe those who came back to life once their bodies and souls had re-joined.

The fullest statement of the Anglo-Saxon understanding of the Old English word appears in Bishop Wærferth’s late-ninth-century translation of Gregory the Great’s *Dialogues* commissioned by Alfred the Great and copied multiple times through the tenth and eleventh

⁴⁰ *Der Cambridger Psalter*, ed. K. Wildhagen (Hamburg, 1910; repr. 1964), 407.

⁴¹ *The Old English Life of Machutus*, ed. D. Yerkes (Toronto, 1984), 19.

centuries. Wærferth's close rendering of Book Four included a discourse on the word 'quick' when Gregory's interlocutor Peter expressed his doubts about the soul's continued existence once it left the body. Peter said: 'I easily can consider the existence of the soul dwelling in the body and understand (this) from the stirring of the body; because if the soul never was in the body, (it) could not be stirring the limbs of the body.' ('ic mæg geþencan eaðe þære sawle lif wuniendre in þam lichaman 7 ongytan of þam stiringum þæs lichaman; forþon gif seo sawl nære æt þam lichaman, ne mihton na beon onstyrede þa leomu þæs lichaman').⁴² The soul's presence, Peter surmised, was evidenced by the body's movements. Once a body died, he found greater difficulty in guaranteeing the soul's continued existence. Gregory's reply reiterated Peter's understanding of how one knew that the soul resided in the body: through the movement of the limbs. Wærferth used the verb *cwician* to have Gregory explain how 'just as the strength of the soul quickens and stirs the body, so the strength of the Godhead fills all creation which he shaped' ('forþon swa swa þære sawle mægn cwicaþ 7 onstyreð þone lichaman, swa þæt godcunde mægn gefylleþ ealle gesceafta, þe he gescop').⁴³ Furthermore, the text continued:

He quickens some with breath, he gives [a soul] to others so that they may live, and likewise he alone in all respects bestows [souls] to others so that they will exist without end.

Sume he gecwicað mid oroðe, sumum he syleþ, þæt hi lifiað, sumum eac þæt an eallum gemete he forgifeþ, þæt hi wuniað butan ende.⁴⁴

⁴² Gregory the Great, *Bischofs Waerferths von Worcester Übersetzung der Dialoge Gregors des Grossen über das Leben und die Wunderthaten italienischer Väter und über die Unsterblichkeit der Seelen*, Book 4, ch. 6, ed. H. Hecht (Leipzig, 1900-1907; repr. 1965), 268. Along with this translation, Gregory's *Dialogues* were cited by Anglo-Saxon authors including Aldhelm, Bede, the Old English Martyrologist, Asser, Ælfric and Byrhtferth: Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*, 304.

⁴³ Gregory the Great, *Bischofs Waerferths von Worcester Übersetzung*, 268.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 268.

This sentence seems to explain the different times when God placed souls into bodies. The first, where he quickens with breath, likely refers to the initial ensoulment of all people including Adam. The second, whilst vague, might refer to those who, like Lazarus, are brought back to life. The third case scenario would be Judgement Day, where all souls would be reconnected with their bodies. Quickening, for Wærferth, was not a synonym for ensoulment, but rather a result of the soul entering the body. Wærferth's rendering of the text, whilst informative for the subject, did not explicitly refer to pregnancy or foetal development, only that any type of movement signified the presence of a soul in a living body. Although pregnancy is not specifically mentioned here, this translation implies enough that we can deduce that this text understood two things to happen when the body gave its first movements: first, a soul had entered it; and second, that person was alive.

Turning to texts which deal with pregnancy, we see similar associations of quickening with physical sensation and religion. The *Lacnunga*'s charm for 'a woman who cannot produce a child' ('se wifman, se hire cild afedan ne mæg,' l. 1) instructed a woman to do several things if she could not bring a child to full term, including stepping over a grave three times, selling a piece from the grave of her child to merchants, and putting the milk of a single-coloured cow in her mouth before spitting it out in running water.⁴⁵ The metrical charm used two variant definitions of the word 'quick.' The mother would use the first in a command

⁴⁵ 'For Delayed Birth,' in *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, ed. E. Van Kirk Dobbie, ASPR volume 6 (New York, 1942), 123-124. This charm has been described by Dobbie as 'for delayed birth,' likely interpreting *afedan* as 'to bring forth,' but I would suggest that this charm is more likely for a woman who cannot bring a pregnancy to full term. The word *afedan* in this text – which follows the pregnancy from before conception and through the quickening and refers to the woman's own failed pregnancies (she must sell a piece of the grave 'of her own child' ('hyre agenes cildes')) – actually should be understood as one of Hall's other translations: 'maintain' or 'produce'. A further note on the study of this poem: Weston has argued that this charm, often presented in editions as a single work, was actually the conflation of three related medical remedies. It is worth keeping this hypothesis in mind, but at this time I will be treating the text as a single unit with linguistic groupings which follow the progress of pregnancy: L. Weston, 'Women's Medicine, Women's Magic: the Old English Metrical Childbirth Charms,' *Modern Philology* 92 (1995), 282.

once she knew she was pregnant, saying she was ‘with a quick child’ (‘mid cwican cilde,’ l. 10) instead of one which brought death (‘cwellendum’ l. 10). The usage of ‘quick’ here in opposition to death – similar to that found in the Athanasian Creed – holds a separate significance than the second instance of ‘quick’ in the section of the charm immediately after, where the author described what actions a mother should take when she finally felt that her child was alive:

And when the mother feels that the child is quick, (she must) go then to church, and when she comes beside the altar, then say: I said this is made known to Christ!

And þonne seo modor gefele þæt þæt bearn si cwic, ga þonne to cyrican, and þonne heo toforan þan weofode cume, cweþe þonne: Criste, ic sæde, þis gecyþed! (ll. 12-15)

This physical sensation which the mother feels when her child is ‘quick’ signifies something different from the initial use of the word. This constituted a single moment in foetal development when the mother could confirm that what grew in her had life. Although no soul was mentioned here specifically, the association of foetal movement and rushing to a church could signify the belief that at first movement, the soul had finally entered the body. Importantly, a religious element only occurred in this charm when the mother feels that the child is ‘quick.’

The author did not specify when the actual moment occurred in a pregnancy when the child might be considered ‘quick,’ but the use of this word in the text might offer some clues. The charm itself consists of five groupings of instructions in interchanging prose and verse forms for the woman having difficulties with her pregnancy to enact. These instructions seemingly are meant to be followed in chronological order, with the first meant to be done before conception, the second ‘when that woman is with child’ (‘þonne þæt wif seo mid bearne,’ l. 7), the third when she feels the child has quickened, the fourth if she cannot bring it

to full term, and the fifth to instigate labour.⁴⁶ If this metrical charm indeed followed the sequential stages of pregnancy, then quickening, and the religious elements associated with it, would happen sometime after a woman knew she was pregnant and before the later stages of pregnancy and labour.

We encounter the adjective *cwic* in another vernacular text that we addressed at the beginning of this chapter, the prognostic *De generatione hominis*. The text described the foetus as ‘a man without a soul’ (‘man butan sawle’) in the third month of pregnancy, implying that it had the form of a man even if he did not entirely exist as a human in the Christian sense without his soul. He was ‘quick’ (‘cwicu’) in the fifth month, the same month where he caused pain for the mother because he was ‘stirring in her womb’ (‘on hire innoþe styrigende bið’).⁴⁷ Elsackers has suggested that this digression in terminology might be a cunning approach by the translator when rendering the ‘notoriously ambiguous word *anima*’: ‘the Old English translator was well aware of the ambiguity of the word *anima*, and it almost seems as if he took the easy way out by rendering both meanings, instead of choosing between “ensouled” and “alive”.’⁴⁸ This interpretation might be correct, however, it would dismiss the more complex definition of *cwic* and *cwician* we have encountered across different genres of texts from the period. The author of *De generatione hominis* might not have been craftily

⁴⁶ The fourth and fifth groupings each contain variations of the phrase ‘who cannot maintain/bring forth the child’ (‘se ne mæge bearn afedan,’ ll. 16, 21) to diagnose that stage of pregnancy. However, from the contextual evidence I agree with Bjork’s translation that the fourth grouping is for one ‘who cannot bring her baby to full term’ and the fifth for ‘the woman who cannot bring forth her baby’: ‘For Delayed Birth,’ in *Old English Shorter Poems: Wisdom and Lyric*, trans. Bjork, 210-213.

⁴⁷ *Anglo-Saxon Prognostics*, ed. and trans. Liuzza, 200-201.

⁴⁸ Elsackers, ‘Early Medieval,’ 404.

circumscribing the ambiguous *anima* but instead using another word which implied ensoulment that he would have expected his audience to recognise immediately.

When we look for the potential source of this text, a different understanding of the use of ‘quick’ from that which Elsackers postulated becomes apparent. Although Cameron has stated that he knows of no source for this text, more recent studies have made some progress.⁴⁹ Chardonens has argued that this text most likely derived from Vindicianus’ anatomical tract *Gynaecia*, but there are several noteworthy exceptions which *De Generatione* has including ‘the absence of the soul in the third month.’⁵⁰ However, an even more likely antecedent to this unique text has been found by Bremmer in the St Gall Booklet of Leiden (Vossianus Lat. Q. 69). This text was copied at the St Gall scriptorium around the year 800, ‘from [two] different exemplars [...] both with an (ultimately) Anglo-Saxon provenance.’⁵¹ This text, which gave short monthly descriptions of foetal development, is so similar, in fact, that Liuzza has speculated that *De Generatione* ‘is largely a translation of the Leiden text’ apart from the prognostic sentence at the end.⁵² Indeed, if we inspect the text which Bremmer claims ‘to be (more or less) the source’ of *De Generatione hominis* with ‘similarities [...] too abundant to be ignored,’ we find that the ambiguity of ensoulment completely disappears.⁵³

Although it is the fourth month, rather than the third, that the text says the foetus exists as ‘a man without a soul,’ this could be attributed to the Latin text’s use of lunar rather than

⁴⁹ M. Cameron, *Anglo-Saxon Medicine* (Cambridge, 1993), 184.

⁵⁰ L. Chardonens, *Anglo-Saxon Prognostics 900-1100* (Leiden, 2007), 228.

⁵¹ R. Bremmer, ‘Leiden, Vossianus Lat. Q. 69 (Part 2): Schoolbook or Proto-Encyclopaedic Miscellany?’ in *Practice in Learning: the Transfer of Encyclopaedic Knowledge in the Early Middle Ages*, eds. R. Bremmer and K. Dekker (Leuven, 2010), 53.

⁵² Liuzza, *Anglo-Saxon Prognostics*, 57-58.

⁵³ Bremmer, ‘Leiden, Vossianus,’ 33.

solar months as the Old English used.⁵⁴ Both the Latin and Old English texts, however, agreed that formation occurred before the month when movement and living, and probably ensoulment, occurred. The Leiden text stated that ‘in the fifth month, it is made alive in the soul in the maternal warmth and then are made the ribs (so called for guarding) stretch out. Then the maternal pains come because the body is moved.’⁵⁵ With both *animatur* and *anima* used for the fifth month, there is no question that ensoulment, and a foetus being deemed ‘alive’ in the womb, were connected to foetal movement. If this is indeed the actual source (or very close antecedent) of *De Generatione*, then I would suggest that the Old English translator likely was not skirting around a textual ambiguity but instead was simplifying the language of the text with a single word, *cwic*, which encompassed ensoulment, life, and movement.

One further example associating sensation and ensoulment appears in the most vivid account of ensoulment from the late Anglo-Saxon period to be found at the beginning of Wulfstan the Cantor’s *Vita Æthelwoldi*, and Ælfric’s shortened version of the saint’s life, in the fourth chapter entitled ‘How his mother felt that the soul of her unborn son had come.’⁵⁶ Wulfstan recounted the tale imparted to him by Æthelwold himself of how, when his pregnant mother attended holy mass, ‘she felt that the soul of the child whom she bore in her womb had come and entered him at the will of God who rules all.’⁵⁷ Wulfstan then reminded his readers that this indeed signified ‘that [Æthelwold] was elect of God even before his birth,’ and that

⁵⁴ ‘homo sine anima’: ‘Leiden, Vossianus,’ ed. and trans. Bremmer, 34.

⁵⁵ ‘In iii. mense agendum idem, homo sine anima. In .u. mense animatur in anima in calore materno et tunc fiunt coste custodiendo dicte. Tunc ueniunt dolores matri quod mouetur corpus’: *ibid.*, 33.

⁵⁶ ‘Quomodo mater sensit uenisse animam pueri nascituri’: Wulfstan of Winchester, *Life of Æthelwold*, ch. 4, eds. and trans. Lapidge and Winterbottom, 6-7.

⁵⁷ ‘sensit animam pueri quem gerebat in utero uenisse et in eum Dei nutu cuncta moderantis intrasse’: *ibid.*, 6-7.

this evidenced how a soul ‘does not, as some suppose, take its rise from his father or mother; instead, as we believe in truth and without any doubt, the vital spirit is quickened by our Creator and none other, and is given individually to each man.’⁵⁸ While there might have been an ulterior motive for including this miracle to promote Creationism as the correct doctrine for the origin of the soul, Wulfstan’s inclusion of this ensoulment miracle allowed those familiar with the Old Testament to make a direct comparison between Æthelwold and the prophet Jeremiah who, at the time of his calling, was told by God: ‘Before I formed thee in the bowels of thy mother, I knew thee: and before thou camest forth out of the womb, I sanctified thee, and made thee a prophet unto the nations.’⁵⁹

Okasha has lamented how we cannot know when ensoulment took place here because ‘neither Wulfstan nor Ælfric tell us what stage of pregnancy Æthelwold’s mother had then reached,’ but a closer reading beyond these few lines in the *Vita Æthelwoldi* gives a clearer picture as to how far Æthelwold’s mother was through this pregnancy.⁶⁰ The chapters which occur immediately before this ensoulment miracle narrate the visions of banners and eagles which Æthelwold’s mother saw in her dreams ‘while pregnant with him.’⁶¹ Waking up confused, she sought out the elderly Æthelthryth, nurse of the virgins at Winchester, to help her interpret what her dreams might signify. Wulfstan invited his readers to interpret the dreams as well, and concludes that ‘the holy man, then in his mother’s womb, was one day to

⁵⁸ ‘Ex quo ostenditur eum Deo electum extitisse etiam antequam nasceretur’: *ibid.*, 6-9. For more on the origin of the soul and attempts to establish orthodoxy, see Chapter One.

⁵⁹ Jeremiah 1:5.

⁶⁰ Okasha, ‘From Conception to Birth,’ 164.

⁶¹ ‘cum eum in utero conceptum gereret’: Wulfstan, *Life of Æthelwold*, ch. 2, ed. and trans Lapidge and Winterbottom, 4-5. The inclusion of Æthelwold’s mother’s pregnancy dream follows another hagiographical trope: see I. Moreira, ‘Dreams and Divination in Early Medieval Canonical and Narrative Sources: the Question of Clerical Control,’ *The Catholic Historical Review* 89 (2003), 634-641.

be standard-bearer in the army of God.’⁶² Wulfstan twice repeated that Æthelwold’s mother was pregnant with him, and Æthelthryth’s interpretation of the dreams signifies some knowledge on both her and his mother’s part of the pregnancy’s existence. Potentially several weeks, if not months, of this pregnancy had already taken place. This sequence, placed immediately before his ensoulment in the womb in the narrative, tells us that the body of Æthelwold had developed for some time in the womb before his ensoulment took place. God knew Æthelwold, it would seem, before a soul had even entered his body.

It is worth considering what is specifically miraculous about this miracle. That Æthelwold’s mother could sense the soul entering Æthelwold’s body or that this occurred during the Eucharist? It would seem that Æthelwold did not disclose any further information about this to Wulfstan. If ensoulment had connections to first movements, as other texts from the period seem to suggest, then that sensation would not be unique for only Æthelwold’s mother, but if his first movements happened in a church that could quantify as the miracle which took place. Whether movement or not, this miracle is connected with ‘sensation,’ the Latin word used here is *sensit*, like the vernacular texts which use the word ‘feel’ (‘gefele’) to understand when a child was ‘quick’ in the womb.

Hagiographers would often emphasise the divine providence of a saint through retellings of the miracles which occurred at a saint’s early age, but even considering those tales, this account of Æthelwold’s ensoulment appears abnormal. Whilst pregnancy miracles connected to unborn saints have been described as a ‘hagiographical commonplace,’ descriptions of the actual ensoulment of saints do not appear as widely in Anglo-Saxon saints’

⁶² ‘sanctum uirum, qui tunc in utero portabatur, quandoque futurum militia Dei signiferum’: Wulfstan of Winchester, *Life of Æthelwold*, ch. 3, 6-7.

lives.⁶³ Miracles associated with a saint's birth cannot be considered rare: Felix told his audience that as Saint Guthlac's mother gave birth to him, a golden human hand stretched down from the heavens towards the home where Guthlac's mother was giving birth to him to portend his future greatness.⁶⁴ Bishop Wilfrid's house allegedly became engulfed in holy flame when his mother went into labour.⁶⁵ However, in my own efforts to find more parallels to the ensoulment of Æthelwold, I have been unable to encounter any similar accounts in other Anglo-Saxon hagiographies. The closest parallel to any Anglo-Saxon saint's life may be located in Adelard of Ghent's *Lectiones in Depositione S. Dunstani*, where Adelard described how the candles all flickered out before miraculously blazing again in the church which Dunstan's mother attended, portending the holiness of the child to whom she would soon give birth.⁶⁶ Nonetheless, no mention of ensoulment occurred in the passage, and the account of Æthelwold's ensoulment remains unique.⁶⁷ The distinctiveness of this passage in Anglo-Saxon

⁶³ M. Lapidge and M. Winterbottom, eds., *The Early Lives of St Dunstan* (Oxford, 2012), 115, footnote 13.

⁶⁴ Felix, *Life of St Guthlac*, ch. 4-7, ed. and trans., B. Colgrave (Cambridge, 1956), 74-77.

⁶⁵ Eddius Stephanus, *The Life of Bishop Wilfrid*, ch. 1, ed. and trans. B. Colgrave (Cambridge, 1927), 4-5. Colgrave noted that this birthing miracle associated with fire is similar to other portents connected to infancy of Celtic Saints: *ibid.*, 151.

⁶⁶ Adelard of Ghent, *Lectiones in Depositione S. Dunstani*, ch. 1, in *The Early Lives of St Dunstan*, eds. and trans. M. Winterbottom and M. Lapidge (Oxford, 2012), 114-115. No pregnancy miracle occurs in B.'s *Vita S. Dunstani*, Adelard's main source for this text, which makes one speculate if Adelard's decision to add this miracle was influenced by Æthelwold's ensoulment miracle in the *Vita S. Æthelwoldi* written arguably a decade beforehand.

⁶⁷ Callan has studied the hagiographies of fifth and sixth century Irish 'abortionist saints' who would perform miracles on consecrated virgins – who, by certain means, had become pregnant – by pressing upon their wombs and making the foetus vanish. These saints appear to have cared more about restoring the religious purity of the women in their care rather than about the fate of the foetus that miraculously disappeared from the womb. Perhaps this is the case because no soul was believed to have existed at the stages of pregnancy when these miracles occurred? If so, these would be the closest hagiographical examples to Æthelwold's which would promote ensoulment *in utero*. M. Callan, 'Of Vanishing Fetuses and Maidens Made-Again: Abortion, Restored Virginity, and Similar Scenarios in Medieval Irish Hagiography and Penitentials,' *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 21 (May 2012), 289-291. See also Z. Mistry, 'The Sexual Shame of the Chaste: "Abortion Miracles" in Early Medieval Saints' Lives,' *Gender & History* 25 (2013), 607-620.

hagiography stresses the importance of looking across further genres to improve our understanding of their beliefs about ensoulment.

By establishing the Old English words *cwic* and *cwician* to encompass not just life but also movement and ensoulment in the context of pregnancy we can gain new insight into not just pregnancy beliefs but also any theology about the unborn in this time. For example, it allows us to interpret Ælfric's homily 'De sancta Trinitate et de festis diebus per annum' in a new light. Whenever Domesday happened, Ælfric described that 'every man who previously was quickened in his mother's womb' ('ælc mann ðe ær cucu wæs on his moder innoðe') would be dealt their earned punishment or reward.⁶⁸ Perhaps this meant that Ælfric actually had a more clearly defined embryology than previously assumed, and he thus believed that no soul was present in a body until movement could be felt in the womb.

Penitentials

Penitential handbooks – manuals for clerics spelling out the appropriate penances to be prescribed for each type of confessed sin – would sometimes discuss ensoulment in clauses on abortion, but overall, such passages often generate more questions than answers.⁶⁹ The tenth century saw a reintroduction of penitentials around the time of the Benedictine Reform, and 'both the theory and the practice of penance in the late Anglo-Saxon period were derived from continental texts of the ninth century.'⁷⁰ A mixture of penitential traditions crossed the

⁶⁸ Ælfric, *Supplementary*, volume 1, Homily 11a, 470.

⁶⁹ For more on the history of penitentials in Anglo-Saxon England, see A. Frantzen, *The Literature of Penance in Anglo-Saxon England* (New Brunswick, 1983); for information on penitential practice on the continent from 900-1050, see S. Hamilton, *The Practice of Penance, 900-1050* (Woodbridge, 2001).

⁷⁰ Frantzen, *Literature of Penance*, 122.

Channel back to England, and from a small collection of texts we can see that they offered little consistency concerning abortion and ensoulment. Green has noted that when it came to abortion in the early Middle Ages ‘neither the penitentials nor the episcopal collections represented official Catholic doctrine; however, nor was [there] a coherent body of canon law to be drawn up until the twelfth century.’⁷¹ Inspecting every penitential with a late Anglo-Saxon origin or provenance is outside the reach of this thesis, but I would like to offer a brief analysis of several penitentials compiled and/or translated in the late Anglo-Saxon period which demonstrate the difficulty one would have encountered during this period if one had turned to these handbooks in order to understand a single theology of ensoulment.

Many early medieval Latin penitentials addressed the subject of women deliberately terminating their own pregnancies and prescribed some type of penance which usually consisted of an allocated amount of fasting. Exploring these can allow a fascinating view into early medieval attitudes towards pregnancy and foetal development alongside a few limited (and often inconsistent) insights into ensoulment beliefs. Elsackers has studied this material exhaustively, and her most important conclusions pertaining to this work are as follows. The majority of these early Latin penitentials made no distinction between early and late term abortions: so-called ‘one-tier’ clauses on abortion including the Irish, Ancyrian, and Frankish traditions.⁷² But some, such as the Umbrense version of the *Penitentials of Theodore*, assigned two different grades of penance for abortion, stipulating that a priest should give a lesser penance if the foetus was expelled before forty days after conception. Most of these ‘two-

⁷¹ M. Green, ‘Constantinus Africanus and the conflict between religion and science,’ in *The Human Embryo: Aristotle and the Arabic and European Traditions*, ed. G. Dunstan (Exeter, 1990), 51.

⁷² Elsackers, *Reading between the Lines*, 444.

tiered' canons on abortion would 'use the criteria *ante XL dies – post XL dies*,' while a very select few would 'choose the abortion criteria with *antequam animam habeat* – before it has a soul – in the first stage.'⁷³ Penitentials with 'three-tier' canons on abortion, although even rarer, would distinguish 'the stages *ante XL dies*, *post XL dies* and *postquam animatus*.'⁷⁴ Adding more confusion to the mix, these penitentials would sometimes define ensoulment as happening at a different time from the forty days marker. The Anglo-Saxons inherited a penitential system which, in the majority of cases, would offer no fixed or consistent information about foetal development or ensoulment. When these penitentials did distinguish different grades of penances for early and late term abortions, consistency would not always occur concerning what those tiers signified or even if ensoulment was a factor in deciding them.⁷⁵

Dating from the early years of the eleventh century, Recension A of *Wulfstan's Canon Law Collection* contained a three-tier canon on abortion which the compiler probably drew from the *Paenitentiale Pseudo-Theodori*.⁷⁶ This work, most often associated with Archbishop Wulfstan of York, was meticulously compiled from a variety of sources, and under the section entitled 'On Homicide,' it stated 'a woman deliberately aborting her foetus before forty days is to do a year's penance; if indeed after forty days, three years; if indeed it lived afterwards, she

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 444.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 446.

⁷⁵ On the significance of the number forty, see above, page 110, footnote 28.

⁷⁶ *Wulfstan's Canon Law Collection*, Recension A, Canon 102, eds. and trans. J. Cross and A. Hamer (Cambridge, 1999), 108-111. The two recensions of Wulfstan's *Canon Law Collection*, named Recension A and Recension B by Cross and Hamer, stem from a common source evidenced by their many verbal equivalences. Recension A exists as the shorter version of the text with 105 items; Recension B has 167. For more on the two recensions, see Cross and Hamer, 'Introduction,' in *Wulfstan's Canon Law Collection*, 6-12.

should do penance as a homicide.’⁷⁷ The translation of ‘postquam animatus fuerit’ could mean ‘if it lived afterwards’ as translated by Cross and Hamer, but I would argue that it could also mean ‘after it was animated’ or ‘after it was ensouled,’ making this one of the three-tier clauses on abortion which did not correlate forty days with ensoulment. Although the compiler chose a clause which comprised three separate grades of severity to be included in this collection of canon laws, this does not denote that all Anglo-Saxon penitentials followed the same criteria when it came to abortion and ensoulment.

For example, just as with the Latin penitentials studied by Elsackers, when we turn to vernacular handbooks of penance different measures for abortion penance appear. Frantzen has stressed the importance of studying the vernacular penitentials because ‘the variations in the form and function of these three texts suggest that the Anglo-Saxons modified and adapted the penitential and did not merely translate or transcribe material from continental centres.’⁷⁸ The *Old English Penitential*, the *Old English Handbook*, the *Scriftboc* and the translation of the Latin *Canons of Theodore* each contain a clause on abortion. Along with the *Old English Introduction* – a guide for the priest before the process of confession began – these vernacular penitentials survive in seven manuscripts from the eleventh century, with some, such as the *Scriftboc* and *Canons of Theodore*, arguably originating from the mid-tenth century.⁷⁹

The *Old English Penitential* and *Old English Handbook* did not distinguish between early and late term abortions, only stating:

⁷⁷ ‘Mulier partum suum ante dies quadraginta sponte perdens, annum unum peniteat. Si uero post quadraginta dies, tres annos. Si uero postquam animatus fuerit quasi homicida’: *ibid*, Recension A, Canon 102, ed. and trans. Cross and Hamer, 109-111.

⁷⁸ Frantzen, *Literature of Penance*, 133.

⁷⁹ A. Frantzen, ‘Sin and Sense: Editing and Translating Anglo-Saxon Handbooks of Penance,’ in *Making Sense: Constructing Meaning in Early English*, eds. A. DiPaolo Healey and K. Kiernan (Toronto, 2007), 40-41.

If a woman destroys her child inside her with drink or with other various things, or murders it after it comes forth, she is to fast 10 years, 3 on bread and water and 7 as her confessor mercifully wishes to instruct her.

Gif wif hire cild amýrð innan hire mid drence. oððe mid oðrum mislicum þingum. oððe formýð þred sýððan hit forð cýmð. fæste .x. ger. þa .iii. on hlafe. & on wætere. & þa .vii. swa hire scrift hire mildheortlice tæcean wýlle⁸⁰

This canon from the *Old English Penitential*, but also appearing in *The Old English Handbook*, recognised no difference in the penance if a woman committed an abortion earlier or later in a pregnancy, or even after she had given birth to the child. This certainly could have signified a belief that a soul was considered to exist from conception, but more likely it indicated that certain Anglo-Saxons believed that the potential of human existence, even if no soul was present yet, carried the same importance as any child's life. Indeed, this canon holds some similarities to Ælfric's condemnation of abortion and infanticide in his homily 'On Auguries' in the *Lives of Saints*:

Some of them kill their children before they are born, or after birth, so that they may not be made known. Nor their evil adultery be made known. But their evil is dreadful, and [their] punishment endless.

Sume hi acwellað heora cild ærðam þe hi acennede beon . oððe æfter acennednyse. Þæt hi cuðe ne beon. Ne heora manfulla forligr ameldod ne wurðe. Ac heora yfel is egeslic, and endeleslic morð.⁸¹

We know from Ælfric's other homilies and his rendering of the *Vita Æthelwoldi* that he would often portray ensoulment as happening between conception and birth, but just because he might have believed that ensoulment happened as the body developed in the womb does not mean that he did not place any value on the potential for human life. Similarly, if a penitential

⁸⁰ *Old English Penitential*, Y42.02.01 (Oxford, Bodleian Library, Laud Misc. 482) ed. and trans. A. Frantzen, *Anglo-Saxon Penitentals: A Cultural Database* <<http://www.anglo-saxon.net/penance/>> (2008); This canon also appears in *The Old English Handbook*, D54.10.01 (Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, 201) ed. and trans. Frantzen, *Anglo-Saxon Penitentals: A Cultural Database* <<http://www.anglo-saxon.net/>> (2008).

⁸¹ Ælfric, *LoS*, Homily 17, 374.

prescribed the same penance for all abortions, that did not necessarily signify that it was making any statement about when ensoulment occurred.

The *Scriftboc*, also known as the *Confessionale Pseudo-Egberti*, differed from these other two vernacular penitentials in that it offered a two-tier clause on abortion. It follows the Theodorian tradition of making the distinction based on whether the foetus was expelled from the womb before or after forty-days once conception took place, but, most importantly, it described the forty-day mark as ‘before it was ensouled’ (‘ærðon hit gesawlad wære’), a clarification not made in most penitentials with the forty-day mark clause.⁸² However, some translation or scribal errors in this clause might have caused more confusion than understanding for the handler of this penitential. The scribe wrote the phrase about ensoulment ‘in the wrong place and left out the translation of the crucial phrase *ante XL dies*,’ so it appears as if the usual penance for late-term abortions was to be prescribed for abortions which happened before the foetus had a soul.⁸³ Although this corruption makes us question how much the scribe understood about what he was copying, the inclusion of the explanation for the importance of forty days offers crucial insight into one of the moments when the Anglo-Saxons believed ensoulment to occur.

The Old English translation of the *Canons of Theodore* had a similar defining mark to the *Scriftboc* in its canon on abortion. This handbook of penance differed from other vernacular penitentials because it drew from a single penitential tradition ‘representing the

⁸² *Scriftboc*, X14.09.01 (Oxford, Bodleian Library, Junius 121) ed. Frantzen, *Anglo-Saxon Penitentials: A Cultural Database* <<http://www.anglo-saxon.net>> (2008). Elsackers has argued that based on similar textual corruptions, this article on abortion was likely translated from the *Paenitentiale Martenianum* (c.850-900): Elsackers, ‘Vocabulary of Abortion and Embryology,’ 408-409.

⁸³ Elsackers ‘Vocabulary of Abortion and Embryology,’ 409.

penitential teachings of Theodore of Tarsus, Archbishop of Canterbury (d. 690).⁸⁴ It does not contain the same textual errors as the *Scriftboc*, though, and might offer some interesting clues about ensoulment:

If a woman effects an abortion of her child, the same measures are assessed before the child has life. And then (if it is) after that (time) – that is, around 40 nights from the seed’s reception – she is to be accused as a homicide and must then fast for three years every Wednesday and Friday and the three fasting periods.

Đa wif ðe doð aworpennýsse hýra bearna. þa ýlcan gemete sýn hý gedemde ærðon þa bearn cwice sýn. And þonne æfter ðonne þes is ymbe .xl. nihta ðæs sædes onfengnysse syn hi, geteald to mannyðrum. & fæston. þonne. .iii. .gear. ealc wodnesdæge. & frigidæge. & þa ðry æfæstenu.⁸⁵

This canon, like the ones found in the Latin penitentials of Theodore examined by Elsackers, did not mention ensoulment, but it did specify that before forty days the child was not ‘alive’ or ‘quick’ (‘cwice’), a word which arguably signified the combination of ensoulment, life, and movement to the Anglo-Saxons.⁸⁶ Indeed, the version of the *Penitential of Theodore* which Fulk and Jurasinski have argued is the Latin source for this translation uses the term ‘antequam animam habeat,’ or ‘before it has a soul,’ to describe the foetus before the forty day mark.⁸⁷ Similar to the *Scriftboc*, this translation of the *Canons of Theodore* into the vernacular offers us yet another example of the Anglo-Saxon use of the forty-day marker to describe when initial ensoulment occurred.

⁸⁴ *The Old English Canons of Theodore*, ed. R. Fulk and S. Jurasinski (Oxford, 2012), xiii.

⁸⁵ *Canons of Theodore*, B66.05.02 (Brussels, Bibliothèque royale, 8558-63) ed. and trans. A. Frantzen, *Anglo-Saxon Penitentials: A Cultural Database* <<http://www.anglo-saxon.net>> (2008).

⁸⁶ On quickening, see above, pages 117-129.

⁸⁷ *Old English Canons of Theodore*, 34; *Die Canones Theodori Cantuariensis und ihre Überlieferungsformen*, ed. P. Finsterwalder (Weimar, 1929), 309.

Certain difficulties emerge when searching for ensoulment beliefs in canons relating to abortion in the penitential tradition. Inconsistencies, seemingly inherited from their continental sources, appear across even this small collection of penitential handbooks collected and translated into Old English. The practice of using the forty-day mark to assert when ensoulment occurred did appear to exist in England at this time, such as in the *Scriftboc* and the vernacular translation of the *Canons of Theodore*. However, we also find other clauses on abortion, such as in Recension A of the *Wulfstan's Canon Law Collection*, which seemingly stated ensoulment did not occur forty days after conception but at some point afterwards. Furthermore, penitentials like the *Old English Handbook* and *Old English Penitential* did not factor in aspects such as ensoulment, maintaining that all abortions deserved the same penance. Although the variances between them make it difficult to form any conclusions, articles on abortion found in penitentials further illuminate the fluidity of ensoulment beliefs which appear across many genres of texts from this time.

Imagining Christ in the Womb

It would be difficult to consider ensoulment beliefs without bringing in the most prominent portrayal of foetal existence in the Middle Ages, that of Christ, to the discussion. Writing about the Late Middle Ages, Tasioulas has noted that ‘medieval engagement with the holy body does not begin with the birth of Christ at the Nativity, it begins with the Annunciation, and with the theologically and artistically difficult concept of God as man in embryo.’⁸⁸ Many

⁸⁸ J. Tasioulas, ‘Heaven and Earth in Little Space: the Foetal Existence of Christ in Medieval Literature and Thought,’ *Medium Ævum* 76 (2007), 24.

later medieval theologians, writers, and artists found difficulties portraying Christ in an unformed foetal state. Tasioulas has analysed how some texts, such as the *Legenda aurea*, would counter this problem by presenting Mary as ‘instantly pregnant with a fully formed and perfect Christ.’⁸⁹ Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274), who ‘believed in late human ensoulment’ could not apply this same belief for Christ, arguing ‘the animation of Christ could not be accomplished in the first instant of his conception.’⁹⁰ We must consider how the Anglo-Saxons dealt with imagining Christ in the womb, particularly if possessing a belief in ensoulment *in utero* could be reconciled with imagining the foetal existence of Christ. Could they have believed Christ entered the womb without a soul? Whilst depictions of Christ in the womb from the late Middle Ages would stress his exceptional status, a different trend might have existed in the Anglo-Saxon period, one that emphasised his humanity.

We encounter a number of theological difficulties when attempting to understand the hominization of Christ, particularly in representing him as existing at any point without a soul. Discourse on Christ’s immediate ensoulment at conception took root in seventh- and eighth-century Byzantium in the *Ambigua* of Maximus the Confessor (d. 662) and *De fide orthodoxa* of John of Damascus (d. 749), but whether or not their works made any impact on the late Anglo-Saxon period remains doubtful. Maximus the Confessor, who wrote most prominently on the subject, attempted to settle any debate about the moment of initial ensoulment for all human beings by arguing that the Incarnation served as a crucial piece of evidence supporting

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁹⁰ J. Haldane and P. Lee, ‘Aquinas on Human Ensoulment, Abortion and the Value of Life,’ *Philosophy* 78 (2003), 258-259; ‘Ergo non potuit animatio Christi perfici in primo instanti suae conceptionis’: Thomas Aquinas, *Summae theologiae*, volume 52, Book 3, Question 33, Article 2, ed. and trans. R. Potter (Manchester, 1972), 62-63.

the doctrine that bodies could not pre-exist souls.⁹¹ On the subject of ensoulment at conception, he argued that from conception Christ ‘ineffably united to Himself, according to hypostasis, a perfect human nature lacking nothing, consisting of a rational soul and body. And this is why, before everything else, I espouse the doctrine of coexistence.’⁹² Although John Scottus Eriugena (d. 877) attempted to introduce Maximus the Confessor’s works into Western theology in the ninth century, Kavanagh has noted that Maximus’ theology made little impact until the twelfth century.⁹³

On the historic belief that a soul was present in Jesus from the moment of conception, Jones has stated that:

the premise of this argument, that Jesus received his soul at conception, is implied in the scriptural scene of the visitation (Luke 1: 39-56) and, more fundamentally, in the doctrine of the incarnation. It was accepted by all orthodox Fathers of East and West, and is either implicit or explicit in the teaching of several ecumenical councils (most notable at Chalcedon). Thus, if a Christian wishes to deny that all human beings receive their soul at conception, this can only be done by suggesting that the humanity of the embryonic Christ was in some way *exceptional*.⁹⁴

With the range of extant texts featuring ensoulment *in utero* from the late Anglo-Saxon period, we would face a conundrum if the above statement by Jones was true for all cases. How can we correlate a historical belief of ensoulment *in utero* with the foetal existence of Christ? Could there have been a belief that at any point in his development, Jesus did not have a so-

⁹¹ Seward, *Redeemer in the Womb*, 10; see also Congourdeau, ‘L’Animation de l’embryon,’ 699.

⁹² Maximus the Confessor, *On Difficulties in the Church Fathers: the Ambigua*, volume 2, Ambiguum 42, Digression 3, ed. and trans. N. Constat (Cambridge, MA, 2014), 171.

⁹³ C. Kavanagh, ‘The Impact of Maximus the Confessor on John Scottus Eriugena,’ in *The Oxford Handbook of Maximus the Confessor*, eds. P. Allen and B. Neil (Oxford, 2015), 493. Kavanagh attributed this to ‘the political instability of the period [which] did not lend itself to the establishment of a consistent intellectual discourse,’ but we have already seen evidence for a consistent intellectual discourse in pre-Conquest England in Chapter One.

⁹⁴ Jones, *Soul of the Embryo*, 132.

called ‘complete’ human nature, containing both body and soul? This section will first determine what the Anglo-Saxons believed about the nature of Christ’s humanity before turning to possible influential texts on the embryotic Christ that the late Anglo-Saxons might have accessed and finally discussing some potential evidence for beliefs on the subject from Ælfric’s homily ‘Sermon on the Sacrifice on Easter-Day.’

Our first task is to ascertain what people in this period would have understood from trinitarian doctrine concerning the soul of Christ. As one learned the Apostle’s Creed, he would know that Jesus ‘was conceived from the Holy Ghost, and born from the maiden Mary’ (‘wæs geeacnod of ðam Halgan Gaste, and acenned of Marian þam mædene’), but he would have to search slightly further for more information on Christ’s dual nature.⁹⁵ From the tenth century onwards, the Athanasian Creed would have been available following the collection of canticles in psalters designed for liturgical use to explain how Christ existed as both fully divine and fully human.⁹⁶ Ælfric did not specify the Athanasian Creed alongside the Pater noster and Apostle’s Creed as something that ‘every Christian man should by right know’ (‘ælc cristen man sceal æfter rihte cunnan ægþer ge his *pater noster* ge his credan.’).⁹⁷ However, Raw has argued that ‘the importance of understanding the Athanasian Creed in eleventh-century England can be inferred from the fact that the copies of it in BL, Harley 863,

⁹⁵ ‘Se læssa creda,’ in *The Sermones Catholici or Homilies of Ælfric*, volume 2, ed. B. Thorpe (London, 1846), 596.

⁹⁶ ‘We still have thirty-seven psalter manuscripts from Anglo-Saxon England. Of these, eight are minor fragments, twenty-nine complete (or almost complete) psalters; twenty-seven of the twenty-nine complete psalters were arguably used for liturgical purposes. A liturgical use is traditionally assumed if a manuscript, in addition to the psalter, contains the ten canticles from the Old and the New Testament (to be sung at Lauds, Vespers and Compline in the monastic and secular Office, and (from the tenth century onwards) the Gloria in excelsis, the Credo in Deum patrem (or ‘Apostles’ Creed’) and the Quicumque uult (Or ‘Athanasian Creed’), texts also chanted in the liturgy’: M. Gretsch, *The Intellectual Foundations of the English Benedictine Reform* (Cambridge, 1999), 6.

⁹⁷ Ælfric, *CH I*, Homily 20, 335.

107r-v, and Cotton Vespasian A. I, 155r-156r, have been given an Old English gloss.⁹⁸

Furthermore, the Salisbury Psalter contains a Latin text with a later interlinear Old English translation all from the late eleventh century with one exception. The very last entry of the psalter, the Athanasian Creed, ‘was the only part glossed by the scribe of the Latin (c. 975), presumably at Shaftesbury.’⁹⁹ Someone had taken great efforts so that their audience, whether they could read Latin or not, would understand all that the Athanasian Creed, more so than any other psalm or hymn in the psalter, taught about belief in the trinity.¹⁰⁰

This creed offered a detailed account of trinitarian doctrine, with the second half devoted to describing the dual nature of Christ who ‘is perfect God, perfect man, subsisting of reasonable soul and human flesh’ (‘fulfremed god fulfremed he is man of gesceadwislicre sawle 7 of menniscum flæsce wuniende’).¹⁰¹ A few lines later, the reader would be reminded again of what defined someone as human: ‘the reasonable soul and body alone is man’ (‘sawl gesceadwislice 7 flæsc an is man’).¹⁰² But the Athanasian creed did not offer further information about what moment Christ gained a soul in the womb. If it was from conception, when ‘The Word was made flesh,’ that would cause difficulties in consistency for Anglo-Saxon texts portraying beliefs in ensoulment *in utero*.¹⁰³ However, an argument could be made

⁹⁸ B. Raw, *Trinity and Incarnation in Anglo-Saxon Art and Thought* (Cambridge, 1997), 32.

⁹⁹ *The Salisbury Psalter*, eds. C. Sisam and K. Sisam (Oxford, 1959), 12.

¹⁰⁰ For more on the growing use of the Athanasian Creed in late Anglo-Saxon England and its connection to the Benedictine Reform, see Gretsch, *Intellectual Foundations*, 273-280.

¹⁰¹ *Der Cambridger Psalter*, 406; translating ‘perfectus deus. Perfectus homo ex anima rationali et humana carne subsistens.’

¹⁰² *Ibid.*; translating ‘anima rationali et caro unus est homo.’

¹⁰³ John 1:14.

that the Anglo-Saxons took a different approach to Christ's ensoulment, a tradition which presented Christ's foetal existence as similar to the experience of all postlapsarian humans.

The *Epistulae* of Pope Leo the Great (d. 461) might have offered a separate avenue for how one could have imagined Christ's status in the womb. This collection of letters known to Bede and possibly to Alcuin, but not proven to be known by any later Anglo-Saxon authors, contained a letter written by Leo to Bishop Julian of Cos in 449 on the nature of Christ.¹⁰⁴ Writing against the heresies of Eutyches, Leo wrote that 'the Lord, on coming from heaven, brought with Him nothing belonging to our state. He did not take a soul which had existed beforehand or flesh which was not part of His Mother's body.'¹⁰⁵ Christ's soul did not exist in any pre-existent state, and when he was conceived at the Incarnation, that process did not include him bringing a soul. Leo even augmented this statement by reminding Julian of the condemnation of Origen's beliefs on the pre-existence of souls.¹⁰⁶ Not only did a soul not come as part of the Lord from heaven at the Incarnation, but, more significantly, 'his flesh was not of a nature different from ours; and a soul was breathed into Him as into the rest of men, not from a different source, not superior because of a difference in kind but in the greatness of its excellence.'¹⁰⁷ Leo might not have specified when exactly Christ's soul was placed into his body, but he held utmost importance in emphasizing Christ's humanity. This letter, whilst not directly alluded to by later Anglo-Saxon scholars, still allows us to perceive an alternative

¹⁰⁴ Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*, 319.

¹⁰⁵ 'quia nihil secum Dominus de coelo veniens nostrae conditionis exhibuit; nec animam enim quae anterior exstisset, nec carnem quae non materni corporis esset, accepit': Leo I, *Epistulae*, Letter 35, ch. 3, *PL* 54:807C; Leo I, *Letters*, trans. E. Hunt (New York, 1957), 114.

¹⁰⁶ On Origen and the pre-existence of souls, see above, pages 56-57.

¹⁰⁷ 'non alterius tamen naturae erat ejus caro quam nostrae; nec alio illi quam caeteris hominibus anima est inspirata principio, quae excelleret, non diversitate generis, sed sublimitate virtutis': Leo I, *Epistulae*, Letter 35, ch. 3, *PL* 54:809A; Leo I, *Letters*, trans. Hunt, 115.

view to that of Maximus the Confessor's Christology: Leo argued that, just as with any other man or woman, God breathed a soul into Christ.

Few texts depicting an embryology of Christ were available in the late Anglo-Saxon period, but several did exist which depicted Christ's foetal development from its earliest stages as being like any other human's development in the womb. Augustine of Hippo gave an embryology of Christ in his *De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus* in the fifth century to explain how the number of years required to make the temple in Jerusalem corresponded to the same number of days that it took to complete Jesus' body.¹⁰⁸ In his homily on John 2:12-22, Bede followed Augustine's Embryology almost verbatim:

This number of years is also most apt for the perfecting of our Lord's body. Writers on natural history tell us that the form of the human body is completed within this number of days. During the first six days after conception it has a likeness to milk; during the following nine days it is changed into blood; next, in twelve it becomes solid; during the remaining eighteen it is formed into the perfect features of all its members; and after this, during the time remaining until birth, it increases in size. Six plus nine plus twelve plus eighteen make forty-five. If to this we add one, that is the day on which the body, divided into its separate members, begins to grow, we find the same number of days in the building up of our Lord's body as there were in the construction of the temple.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ Augustine, *De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus*, Question 56, CCSL 44(A), 95-96. The *Laterculus Malalianus* – which Stevenson has argued to be the work of Archbishop Theodore in the seventh century – repeated Augustine's arithmetic for the embryology of Christ: *Laterculus Malalianus*, ch. 13, ed. and trans. J. Stevenson in J. Stevenson, *The 'Laterculus Malalianus' and the School of Archbishop Theodore* (Cambridge, 1995), 138-139. Stevenson's commentary on this chapter (196-200) demonstrates the close connection between this work and Augustine's *De diversis quaestionibus* and the additional Greek influences on the text.

¹⁰⁹ 'Qui etiam numerus annorum perfectioni dominici corporis aptissime congruit. Tradunt etenim naturalium scriptores rerum formam corporis humani tot dierum spatio perfici quia uidelicet primis sex a conceptione diebus lactis habeat similitudinem sequentibus nouem conuertatur in sanguinem deinde duodecim solidetur reliquis decem et octo formetur usque ad perfecta liniamenta omnium membrorum et hinc iam reliquo tempore usque ad tempus partus magnitudine augeatur. Sex autem et nouem et duodecim et decem et octo quadraginta quinque faciunt; quibus si unum adiecerimus, id est ipsum diem quo discretum per membra corpus crementum sumere incipit, tot nimirum dies in aedificationem corporis domini quot in fabrica templi annos inuenimus.' Bede, *Homeliarum evangelii*, Book 2, Homily 1, 189; trans. Martin and Hurst, Book 2, 8.

Berschin has noted a key element in the next sentence where Bede departed from his Augustinian source: ‘Not only the body of man, but also his soul is formed in forty-six days.’¹¹⁰ Alcuin quoted this embryology from Bede, including the phrase ‘corpus, animamque designabat’ in his *Commentaria in sancti Iohannis Euangelium*.¹¹¹ The existence and use of these works in the late Anglo-Saxon period is demonstrated in the works of Ælfric, who used Alcuin’s commentary on John the Evangelist quite extensively for several of his homilies, and, although he did not use this work by Bede as a source, he had access to and used a certain number of Bede’s homilies.¹¹²

Anglo-Saxon homilists usually did not describe the development of Christ in the womb. Wulfstan of York would bypass describing the foetal stage of Christ’s life and shied away from discussing any more than how Christ held ‘human nature’ (‘menniscnesse’) through his incarnation.¹¹³ Bethurum wrote that this particular treatment of Christ’s hominization might be because ‘as is typical of his lack of interest in theology, [Wulfstan] has nothing to say of the Trinity and turns the force of its statement to moral teaching.’¹¹⁴ Ælfric would write further on the subject, but, more often than not, he would keep it brief, saying that at the Nativity he was ‘truly man born in soul and in body’ (‘soð man acenned on sawle and on lichaman’) or some

¹¹⁰ ‘Corpus animamque designabat’: Bede, *Homiliarum evangelii*, Book 2, Homily 1, 189; W. Berschin, ‘Opus deliberatum ac perfectum: Why Did the Venerable Bede Write a Second Prose Life of St Cuthbert?’ in *St. Cuthbert: His Cult and his Community to AD 1200*, eds. G. Bonner, D. Rollason, and C. Stancliffe (Woodbridge, 1989), 101.

¹¹¹ Alcuin, *Commentaria in Sancti Iohannis Euangelium*, Book 2, ch. 4, PL 100:776C-777A.

¹¹² Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*, 251, 255; *Fontes*, Search query: Bede; a full edition of Bede’s *Homilae* (Lincoln, Cathedral Library, 182 (C.2.8)[s. x/xi, Abingdon, (prov. Lincoln)]) demonstrates that Bede’s homily on John 2:12-22 was available in the late Anglo-Saxon period as well as being widely disseminated on the Continent.

¹¹³ Wulfstan, *Homilies*, Homily 7, 159.

¹¹⁴ Bethurum, ‘Notes,’ in *The Homilies of Wulfstan*, 301.

variant of this.¹¹⁵ Yet Ælfric did not leave us without any homiletic material on the subject. In the second volume of his *Catholic Homilies*, we finally encounter a more definite picture of how Ælfric envisioned Christ in the womb. His sermon for Easter attempted to present a clear understanding of the Eucharist, and Ælfric explained here the difference between the human body of Christ and the spiritual one received at mass:

Great [is the difference] between the body in which Christ suffered and the body which is hallowed for housel. The body in which Christ truly suffered was born of the flesh of Mary, with blood and with bones, with skin and with sinews, with human limbs, [all] given life with a rational soul; and his ghostly body, which we call housel, is gathered from many grains, without blood and bone, limbless and soulless, and there is not, consequently, anything therein to be understood bodily, but all is to be understood spiritually.

Micel is betwux þam lichaman þe crist on ðrowade. and ðam lichaman þe to husle bið gehalgod; Se lichama soðlice ðe crist on ðrowode wæs geboren of Marian flæsce. mid blode. and mid banum. mid felle. and mid sinum. on menniscum limum. mid gesceadwisre sawle geliffæst. and his gastlica lichama ðe we husel hatað is of manegum cornum gegaderod buton blode. and bane. limleas. and sawulleas. and nis for ði nan ðing þæron to understandenne lichamlice. ac is eall gastlice to understandenne.¹¹⁶

Although not as descriptive as Bede and Augustine's embryology, Ælfric illustrates here the many traits of Christ's human body – such as his blood, his bones, and his limbs – were 'given life' or 'quickened' ('geliffæst') by the soul. It would appear that Ælfric believed that Jesus did not acquire a soul at conception, when the word was made flesh, but sometime after certain body parts had already been formed. He made a clear distinction between the human body of Jesus Christ, which followed other descriptions of ensoulment theology found from this period, and his ghostly body following his source for this homily, Rattramus of Corbie's

¹¹⁵ Ælfric, *Supplementary*, volume 1, Homily 1, 213. Other examples include: Ælfric, *CH II*, Homily 1, 3: 'mid lichaman. and mid sawle' and Ælfric, *LoS*, Homily 16, 344: 'on sawle and on lichaman, soð God and soð man.'

¹¹⁶ Ælfric, *CH II*, Homily 15, 154.

De Corpore et Sanguine Domine.¹¹⁷ Godden has noted that ‘Ratramnus’s secondary argument, that the body represented by the eucharist is to be distinguished from the body in which Christ was born, crucified and buried, is one that Ælfric appears happy to follow.’¹¹⁸ By having the soul animate the many features of Christ’s body in the womb, Ælfric would have been emphasizing Christ’s humanity, which, although always completely God, developed in the womb in the same manner as any other human body.

It is possible that the Anglo-Saxons did not consider a belief of ensoulment *in utero* to be irreconcilable with a belief in the Incarnation. It is also possible that the Anglo-Saxons were not too concerned about the exact moment of Christ’s ensoulment, only that he was born with both body and soul. Homilists such as Ælfric and Wulfstan appear to have placed greater importance in preaching the human nature of Christ rather than precisely how that nature developed. Although sources on the subject are limited, an argument could be made that the Anglo-Saxons portrayed the development of Christ’s body in the womb, including its ensoulment, as similar to the experience of all other humans; the later Anglo-Saxons could have believed that after Christ’s conception at the Incarnation, his body slowly developed and was eventually quickened by a soul. By taking this path in theology, they would have held a belief in Christ’s ensoulment which did not contradict their own belief system concerning the soul’s first entrance into the body.

¹¹⁷ Godden, *Ælfric’s Catholic Homilies*, 487.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 489.

Conclusion

No single authoritative text survives from the late Anglo-Saxon period which explained when one should believe the soul first entered a body. A diversity of beliefs on ensoulment appears to have circulated, and if any particular attempts were made to establish a single official doctrine on the subject during this period, they did not last the test of time. From homilies to prognostics, when someone addressed ensoulment they generally did so casually, without an attempt to create a didactic lesson on the subject as found in the previous chapter when those such as the Alfredian translators or Ælfric wrote on the origin of souls. Almost all evidence we have encountered on ensoulment beliefs from the late Anglo-Saxon period points to a general belief in ensoulment *in utero* where the soul was described as entering the body sometime between conception and birth. When looking for a more specific timing of ensoulment, the depictions we encounter become more varied. Anglo-Saxon poems such as ‘Genesis A’ would describe a person as having some type of bodily autonomy in the womb before a soul could robe itself with the body, seemingly following the descriptions of Adam from the Bible. At the same time, another trend emerged which associated quickening – or the child’s first movements – as the moment of ensoulment in the womb.

Bodily autonomy and quickening are not necessarily incompatible when considering the timing of ensoulment, for often these texts would not describe the precise stage in development when the body finally could gain a soul. Incompatibility does occur, however, when we try to reconcile the timing of ensoulment found in *De generatione hominis* – which stated that in the third month the growth is a ‘man without a soul’ and who in the fifth month is ‘quick’ – with that of the *Scriftboc*, which explained that forty days marked when a foetus was ‘ensouled’ (‘gesawlad’). Forty days would place ensoulment directly in the second month

of a pregnancy, long before *De generatione hominis* directly specified that the foetus existed without a soul. Furthermore, clauses on abortion in penitentials, such as Recension A of Wulfstan's *Canon Law Collection*, dismissed the idea that ensoulment occurred at forty days by giving three separate penances for abortion depending on the timing which the expulsion took place – before forty days, after forty days, and after ensoulment. All of these inconsistencies add further difficulty to an already problematic discourse dominated by male authors writing on female bodies, which might, in fact, explain the many irregularities. Nevertheless, just because the evidence is subjective does not mean it is meaningless as it helps us gain insight into the only accessible beliefs on ensoulment from this time.

The late Anglo-Saxon period appears to have been a time when doctrine and beliefs concerning ensoulment were still being considered. It is impossible to quantify how many people truly believed that initial ensoulment occurred alongside the first movements in the womb, just as it is impossible to determine from surviving sources how many believed that ensoulment occurred at forty days or at bodily formation. However, studying ensoulment theology holds certain import in understanding the anxieties both men and women felt about pregnancy in this era. Some, such as Okasha, have suggested that the belief in ensoulment *in utero* was sustained in the Anglo-Saxon age 'to accommodate the problems of female patients who might, or might not, have induced an abortion,' but I would argue that additional reasons for this belief must also be considered.¹¹⁹ A belief in ensoulment *in utero* could have reflected the physical realities of high miscarriage rates from which Deegan suggested the Anglo-Saxons suffered in her preliminary survey of pregnancy and childbirth in Anglo-Saxon England: 'the early medieval diet for all but a privileged few contained inadequate amounts of

¹¹⁹ Okasha, 'From conception to birth,' 164.

protein and iron' and diseases including anaemia, caused by poor iron intake, and rickets which 'could lead to deformities of the pelvis' amounted to greater risks of miscarriage in this period.¹²⁰ By having ensoulment occur sometime between forty days and the first sensation of movement, this could have been a theology which allowed for early term pregnancy loss, alleviating the minds of those who lost their foetus in the highest-risked months of a pregnancy. For once the child in the womb was considered to have a soul, he and his mother would then be held accountable for anything which could condemn that infant soul, the topic of our next chapter.

¹²⁰ Deegan, 'Pregnancy and Childbirth,' 18.

Chapter Three

An Infant's Unbaptized Soul

In the immediate years after his appointment to the archbishopric of York, Wulfstan (d. 1023) sent a letter to abbot Ælfric of Eynsham with a list of questions covering a range of theological matters which included asking what actions one should take if a pregnant woman died. Although Wulfstan's letter does not survive, Ælfric's response appears to have echoed Wulfstan's concern for those children who had not yet been born before their mother's untimely death. As a model by which one might save the souls of those trapped within the womb, Ælfric gave the example of Julius Caesar, who allegedly had been cut from his mother's body, together with another account of an anonymous man with whom he was acquainted who had been born under similar circumstances. He advised that a child needed to be 'deliberately and cautiously' cut out of the womb in order to be baptized so that he might escape the eternal torments of hell and inhabit the kingdom of heaven.¹ One hundred years later, a monk at Ely Abbey wrote 'concerning [Wulfstan], the marvellous fact was related that it was through cutting of his mother's womb that he had been brought into the light of this

¹ 'De pregnantē muliere mortua nusquam legi utrum secari debeat an non. Ferunt tamen primum Caesarem sectum fuisse de utero matris sue et ideo Caesarem appellatum fuisse; et nos audiimus quosdam infantes similiter sectos de mortuis matribus et baptizatos fuisse. Et, quod uerius est, nos uidimus et nouimus hominem uixisse usque senectutem, qui sectus erat de mortua matre. Et ideo consultius et cautius abscondantur, ut baptizati possint euadere infernum et possidere regnum caeleste': Ælfric, *Die Hirtenbriefe Ælfrics in altenglischer und lateinischer Fassung*, ed. B. Fehr (Hamburg, 1914; repr. 1966), 222.

world.’² Perhaps Ælfric was alluding to Wulfstan himself in his discussion for the necessity of *sectiones in mortua*. Nonetheless, this early-eleventh-century letter demonstrates an anxiety for the souls of those who had not yet taken their first breath. Only baptism could guarantee salvation for a prenatal child’s soul.

This same anxiety for the souls of unborn children may also be seen in an anonymous Old English homily given the title ‘De infantibus non baptizandis’ by its editor Napier.³ Surviving alongside several of Ælfric’s works in two separate manuscripts – one from the eleventh century and one from the twelfth – this homily warned of the repercussions if parents did not immediately seek baptism for their child and ended with a further note of caution. If a mother miscarried a child who was already quickened, or ensouled, it would ‘arise from death on Domesday’ (‘of deaþe arisan on domes dæg’) to ‘experience torture in hell if it was killed a heathen’ (‘hæfð þonne helle wite gif hit hæþen acwylð’).⁴ A belief persisted in pre-Conquest England that from the moment a foetus gained a soul in the womb, its soul would be condemned to hell immediately if it died before baptism.

In the written record we find a prevalent belief that infants who passed away without receiving the sacrament of baptism could not enter heaven. Why did they believe this was the case? One could make the assumption that this can be attributed to a widespread belief imagining original sin as staining the soul, a doctrine popularised by Augustine of Hippo in

² ‘De quo id mirabile ferebatur, quod secto matris utero in hanc lucem productus fuerat’: Thomas of Ely, *Liber Eliensis*, Book 2, ch. 87, ed. E. Blake (London, 1962), 156; *Liber Eliensis: a History of the Isle of Ely from the Seventh to Twelfth century*, trans. J. Fairweather (Woodbridge, 2005), 18.

³ Oxford, Bodleian Library, Hatton 115 and Oxford, Bodleian Library, Hatton 116 respectively.

⁴ ‘De infantibus non baptizandis,’ 155. For more on this homily, see W. Rudolf, ‘Anglo-Saxon Preaching on Children,’ in *Childhood and Adolescence*, 50-55; on ensoulment beliefs in this homily and its questionable authorship, see above, pages 117-118.

the fifth century. However, in the context of beliefs about infant souls, the doctrine of original sin appears to have coexisted with two separate narratives when preached to Anglo-Saxon audiences. The first visualised the child as controlled by the devil before baptism occurred, and the second enforced the idea that an unbaptized child died a heathen, even if his parents were both Christian. If other factors had to be brought in to explain the condemned state of infant souls, we must consider the degree to which the Anglo-Saxons understood that an inherited condition of sin condemned unbaptized children to eternal damnation. To ascertain pre-Conquest beliefs about the souls of the unbaptized, this chapter first determines how far we can establish Augustine's doctrine of original sin to have affected Anglo-Saxon theology and beliefs about young souls. It then turns to the two other competing discourses – devil possession and heathenism – prevalent during this time which gave alternative explanations as to why parents should hurriedly seek baptism for their children.

The Later Anglo-Saxons and Original Sin

Through a modern theological lens, a belief in the condemned state of the soul at – or, most notably here, before – birth may often be attributed to the doctrine of original sin. Original sin (*peccatum originale originatum*), as opposed to the first account of sin attributed to Adam and Eve in Genesis (*peccatum originale originantis*), refers to a belief that all of Adam's progeny inherited a condition of sin.⁵ Most famously developed by Augustine of Hippo, who formed the doctrine in response to the British monk Pelagius' teachings on the soul and its free will,

⁵ 'Original Sin,' in *The New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. J. Komonchak, M. Collins, and D. Lane (Dublin, 1987), 728; J. Couenhoven differentiates from these Latin terms slightly between the event of original sin, or 'primal sin' (*peccatum originis originans*) and the condition of original sin (*peccatum originatum*) in *Stricken by Sin, Cured by Christ: Agency, Necessity, and Culpability in Augustinian Theology* (Oxford, 2013), 23.

the doctrine taught that all humans bore both the physical and spiritual consequences of Adam and Eve's act of eating from the tree of knowledge in the garden of Eden.⁶ Augustine took verses such as Romans 5:12 – 'Wherefore as by one man sin entered into this world, and by sin death; and so death passed upon all men, in whom all have sinned'⁷ – and 1 Corinthians 15:22 – 'and as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive' – and shaped them into a doctrine of inherited sin. The physical costs for the human race encompassed, but were not limited to, the 'dispossession from a naturally perfect environment, the loss of natural immortality, and the acquisition of susceptibility to physical pain, fatigue, disease, aging, and rebellious bodily disorders, especially sexual lust.'⁸ The spiritual penalty of Adam and Eve's sin included an inherent taint in the souls of all their offspring through the process of concupiscence, so that even infants who had never sinned themselves needed to receive baptism to cleanse their souls from original sin and gain admittance into the Christian community.

In assessing the degree to which we encounter an understanding of this spiritual penalty on young souls in pre-Conquest England, we shall first consider the literary inheritance of original sin before addressing the difficulties in finding an Old English term for the concept. On the basis of that understanding I turn to the teaching in late Anglo-Saxon

⁶ Augustine is famous for the development of the doctrine of original sin as we know it today but not fully launching the concept: see J. González, *A History of Christian Thought*, volume 2 (New York City, 1971), 42; C. Harrison, *Augustine: Christian Truth and Fractured Humanity* (Oxford, 2000), 89; P. Beatrice, *The Transmission of Sin: Augustine and the Pre-Augustinian Sources*, trans. A. Kamesar (Oxford, 2013); J. Toews, *The Story of Original Sin* (Cambridge, 2013).

⁷ It is important to note here that Augustine shaped this doctrine 'based on a faulty translation of the Greek. Ambrosiaster's translation of Romans 5:12d is as follows: "*in whom all sinned*" [...] Augustine quoted this passage, mistranslation, mis-exegesis, and all. As nearly all modern Protestant and most Catholic commentators have pointed out, Ambrosiaster relied on a Latin version which rendered *eph ho as in quo*, "in whom," rather than "on account of" or "because of"; Toews, *The Story*, 69-70.

⁸ W. Mann, 'Augustine on Evil and Original Sin,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, 2nd edition, eds. D. Meconi and E. Stump (Cambridge, 2014), 106.

homilies about the doctrine and the transmission of an inherent defect to each soul. I shall then explore how the Old English Genesis poems portrayed the consequences of the first sin before finally discussing early English portrayals of biblical figures considered to be free of original sin in the medieval period.

Literary inheritance

In the second decade of the fifth century, Augustine of Hippo began a literary war against different disciples of Pelagianism (most notably Caelestius and Julian of Eclanum), a battle which would occupy his attention for the rest of his life and shape the doctrine of original sin. Pelagian theology, here summarised by Augustine in his work *De gestis Pelagii*, included the beliefs ‘that Adam was created mortal, and, whether he had sinned or not, he would have been going to die. That the sin of Adam injured only himself and not the human race [...] that before the coming of Christ there were men without sin. That new-born infants are in the same condition in which Adam was before his transgression.’⁹ Augustine found these beliefs unacceptable. Brown has argued that for Augustine, ‘the Catholic church existed to redeem a helpless humanity; and once the essential grace was given, he could accept with ease in his congregation the slow and erratic process of healing [...] The Pelagians, with their optimistic view on human nature, seemed to Augustine to blur the distinction between the Catholic

⁹ ‘Adam mortalem factum, qui sive peccaret, sive non peccaret, moriturus esset. Quoniam peccatum Adae ipsum solum laeserit et non genus humanum [...]. Quoniam ante adventum Christi fuerunt homines sine peccato. Quoniam infantes nuper nati in illo statu sunt, in quo Adam fuit ante praevaricationem’: Augustine, *De gestis Pelagii*, Book 1, ch. 11, PL 44: 333-334; Augustine, *Proceedings of Pelagius in Four Anti-Pelagian Writings*, trans. J. Mourant and W. Collinge (Washington, D.C., 1992), 134.

Church and the good pagans.’¹⁰ Consequently, Augustine created a large body of works censuring Pelagianism and refining the doctrine of original sin.¹¹ However, it is important to note here that apart from Bede, no major Anglo-Saxon author showed evidence of first-hand knowledge of these specific works.¹² Nonetheless, texts such as *De civitate Dei*, arguably one of Augustine’s better-known works in early medieval England, might have provided an opportunity for scholars to encounter Augustine’s concept of original sin and its transmission:¹³

but man, corrupt by choice and condemned by justice, has produced a progeny that is both corrupt and condemned. For, we all existed in that one man, since, taken together, we were the one man who fell into sin through the woman who was made out of him before sin existed. Although the specific form by which each of us was to live was not yet created and assigned, our nature was already present in the seed from which we were to spring. And because this nature has been soiled by sin and doomed to death and justly condemned, no man was to be born of man in any other condition.¹⁴

Couenhoven writes, ‘in speaking this way, [Augustine] relies on the solidarity thesis, claiming that since we all were in Adam when Adam sinned, the guilt for his sin is ours from the moment of birth. The guilt of Adam’s sin remains in us as a stain, until and unless it is

¹⁰ P. Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: a Biography* (New York, 1967), 350. For Brown’s full account of Augustine, Pelagius and Pelagianism, see pages 340-352. See also P. Brown, *The Body and Society* (London, 1990), 408-427; Harrison, *Augustine*, 101-114. It is worth noting Bonner’s argument that in the historical narrative presented here we are dealing with a Pelagianism which ‘was a composite fiction created for polemical purposes’: A. Bonner, *The Myth of Pelagianism* (Oxford, 2018), xiii.

¹¹ For a list of each of these works and their historical context, see P. Bright, ‘Augustine,’ in *Reading Romans through the Centuries*, eds. J. Greenman and T. Larsen (Grand Rapids, 2005), 75.

¹² *Fontes*, Search query: Augustine; Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*, 282-291.

¹³ Known to at least Aldhelm, Bede, Lantfred, Ælfric and Byrhtferth: Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*, 284.

¹⁴ ‘sed sponte deprauatus iusteque damnatus deprauatos damnatosque generauit. Omnes enim fuimus in illo uno, quando omnes fuimus ille unus, qui per feminam lapsus est in peccatum, quae de illo facta est ante peccatum. Nondum erat nobis singillatim creata et distributa forma, in qua singuli uiueremus; sed iam erat natura seminalis, ex qua propagaremur: qua scilicet propter peccatum uitiatata, et uinculo mortis obstricta iusteque damnata, non alterius conditionis homo ex homine nasceretur’: Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, Book 13, ch. 14, CCSL 48, 395; trans. Walsh and Monahan, 317.

forgiven in baptism, even when the one who personally committed the sin – Adam – has died.’¹⁵ Furthermore, Toews has added that ‘the change of human nature effected by Adam’s sin is so fundamental that the washing and cleansing of baptism does nothing to change the human nature of the parents and thus benefit the children born to regenerate parents.’¹⁶

Augustine could not fully explain the transmission of original sin, however, because of his indecision over the origin of souls. He refused to defend the Neoplatonic theory of the pre-existence of souls – where souls might have retained certain sins from their previous state – but he could not decide between Traducianism – where all souls stem from the first soul of Adam and thus inherit the sinful state of his soul – and Creationism – where all souls are created by God *ex nihilo*, and presumably clean, for each new human being.¹⁷ Even though he could not resolve these issues with the doctrine – indeed, uncertainty about the origin of the soul seems to be a characteristic of its tradition – Augustine still argued for the necessity of the

¹⁵ J. Couenhoven, ‘St. Augustine’s Doctrine of Original Sin,’ *Augustinian Studies* 36 (2005), 379. Couenhoven has produced the most extensive modern review of Augustine’s doctrine of original sin, noting that ‘one would expect Augustine’s view of original sin to be especially well studied. Oddly, however, there are no definitive treatments of Augustine’s views on this matter. In fact, the last century saw only a handful of anything approaching comprehensive discussions of Augustine on original sin,’ *ibid.*, 359. Couenhoven further addressed this lacuna in Augustinian studies to explain the many complexities of Augustine’s doctrine(s) of original sin a decade later with his book Couenhoven, *Stricken by Sin*, 19-106. Further from this, Toews has produced a study of the historic interpretations of the Fall up to Augustine (Toews, *The Story*). Wiley has also produced a more historical-theological and modern account of the doctrine in T. Wiley, *Original Sin: Origins, Developments, Contemporary Meaning* (New York, 2002). See also M. Russell’s unpublished dissertation *Original Sin: its Origin, Nuances and Theological Debates* (Regent University, 2012) as another starting point for studies on the doctrine of original sin.

¹⁶ Toews, *The Story*, 82.

¹⁷ For more on competing theories for the origin of souls and Augustine’s stance on the subject, see Chapter One; more specifically on Augustine’s difficulties linking a doctrine of original sin with one on the origin of souls, see Harrison, *Augustine*, 109-110; J. Rist, *Augustine: Ancient Thought Baptized* (Cambridge, 1994), 121-129; 317-320.

practice of infant baptism to ensure the salvation of their souls because of an inherited guilt from Adam.¹⁸

A century after his death, the Second Council of Orange (529) formally acknowledged the Western Church's stance on original sin in an attempt to eradicate those remaining Christians who endorsed any form of Pelagianism. Those at the council confirmed Augustine's argument that Adam's transgression affected all his progeny not only in body but also in soul, stating in the first article that 'if any one denies that the whole of human nature, *i.e.*, in body and soul, was changed for the worse by the offence of Adam's transgressions, but believes that while the liberty of the soul remained uninjured, the body only became liable to corruption, he is deceived by the error of Pelagius.'¹⁹ After this confirmation that Adam's actions did not have consequences solely on the physical body, the second article affirmed Augustine's argument that Adam passed the punishment for his sin to his offspring.²⁰ Two years later in 531, Pope Boniface II confirmed the rulings made by the Council, and Kleist has argued that 'the church's official position was set.'²¹ A papal ruling, however, does not necessarily signify immediate widespread belief in any doctrine. To measure this, one must assess the degree to which that doctrine of belief was fully implemented through a range of sources aimed at different audiences for the centuries afterwards. A comprehensive study of

¹⁸ For more on the development of Augustine's arguments for infant baptism, see D. Wright, 'Augustine and the Transformation of Baptism,' in *The Origins of Christendom in the West*, ed. A. Kreider (Edinburgh, 2001), 287-310.

¹⁹ 'Si quis per offensam praeuocationis adae non totum, id est secundum corpus et animam, in deterius dicit hominem commutatum, sed animae libertate inlaesa durante corpus tantummodo corruptioni credit obnoxium, pelagii errore deceptus': *Canons of the Second Council of Orange*, ed. and trans. F. Woods (Oxford, 1882), 16-17.

²⁰ 'Quod peccatum Adæ non ipsi solum nocuit, sed ad posteros quoque transit': *ibid.*, 18-19.

²¹ A. Kleist, *Striving for Grace: Views of Free Will in Anglo-Saxon England* (Toronto, 2008), 8. For Boniface's declaration, see Boniface II, 'Epistola Bonifatii II papae ad Caesarium,' CCSL 148A, 66-69.

the doctrine of original sin through the Early Middle Ages is beyond the scope of this work, but a limited number of case studies demonstrates some fascinating aspects worthy of note.

Modern understanding of the history of the doctrine of original sin between Augustine of Hippo's death and the time of Anselm of Canterbury is still in its infancy. In his historical study of original sin from the apostolic theologians to the modern era, Rondet wrote that after Augustine the doctrine of original sin 'was the norm in the West for many centuries,' leaving the time between Isidore of Seville and Anselm of Canterbury largely untouched.²² In a more recent study, Wiley attempted to cover the history of the doctrine from the apostolic tradition to the Council of Trent (1545-1563), but, for the period between the second council of Orange and Anselm of Canterbury, only stated: 'Medieval theologians exhibited no particular difficulties with original sin. The idea was assumed as a core component of the divine truths revealed to the church.'²³ I hope to demonstrate in this chapter that ideas about original sin were much more fluid in this in-between period than initially presumed. Through the following sample-study we can see that there are evidently large gaps in our collective knowledge.

In the centuries after the Second Council of Orange, we find less and less written about Augustine's doctrine of original sin. Indeed, Resnick has found no known treatise on the subject after Augustine until Odo of Tournai composed his little-known work *De peccato originali* at the end of the eleventh century.²⁴ A simple search of Augustine's coined phrase

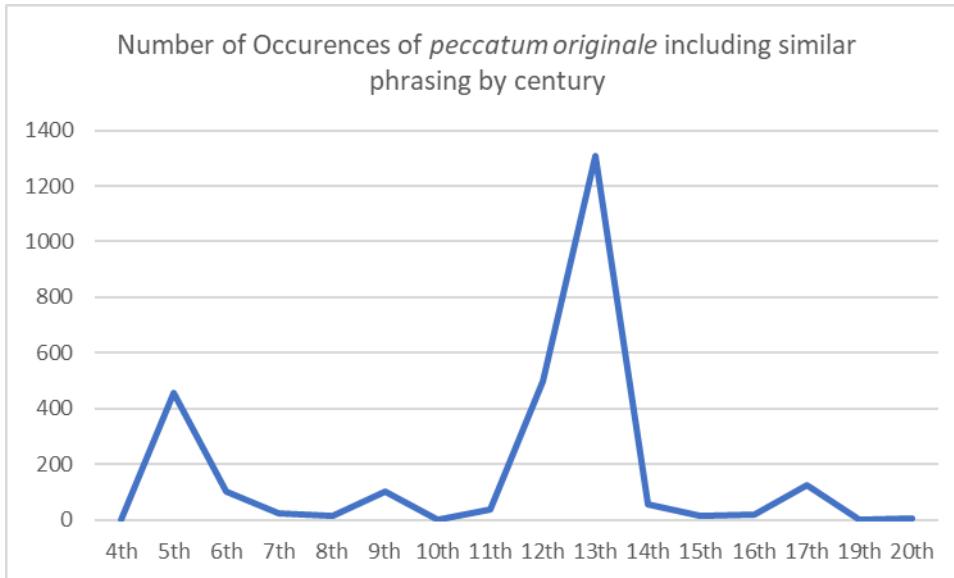
²² H. Rondet, *Original Sin: the Patristic and Theological Background*, trans. C. Finegan (Paris, 1967; Shannon, 1972), 133.

²³ Wiley, *Original Sin: Origins*, 77.

²⁴ I. Resnick, 'Introduction,' in Odo of Tournai, *On Original Sin and A Disputation with the Jew, Leo, Concerning the Advent of Christ, the Son of God*, trans. and intro. I. Resnick (Philadelphia, 1994), 25.

‘peccatum originale’ (including similar phrasing) in the *Latin Series A* database has also indicated a declining use of the term after the fifth century until it gained popularity once again in the works of Anselm of Canterbury and Thomas Aquinas in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The Carolingian renaissance may have instigated a brief resurgence of interest partially in response to Gottschalk of Orbais and the controversy surrounding his doctrine of predestination, but a sharp fall follows afterwards in the tenth century, where the phrase appears only twice in the work of Rather of Verona.²⁵ The term then occurred once in the eleventh century before the Norman conquest in the anonymous *Expositiones Pauli epistularum ad Romanos, Galathas et Ephesios e codice Sancti Michaelis in periculo Maris* found in a mid-eleventh century manuscript originating from the abbey of Mont Saint Michel. Although this data is by no means all-inclusive as many individual Latin works must still be added to the database, it allows us a small glimpse into sharp decline and later resurgence of the use of Augustine’s specific term for the doctrine.

²⁵ Gottschalk’s doctrine on predestination –which ‘claimed that God had irrevocably and immutably divided humanity before the establishment of the world into the elect (those granted eternal life through freely-given divine grace)’: Gillis, *Heresy and Dissent*, 7 – provoked bitter controversy in the mid-ninth century, particularly among the theologians such as Hrabanus Maurus, archbishop Hincmar of Reims, Ratramnus of Corbie, and John Scottus Eriugena. Chazelle has summarised how Gottschalk incorporated Augustine’s doctrine of original sin for his theory of predestination, writing: ‘Every human being possesses what Gottschalk defines as free will, yet since Adam the will has been so corrupted by original sin that no mortal, on his own, can desire the good’: C. Chazelle, *The Crucified God in the Carolingian Era: Theology and Art of Christ’s Passion* (Cambridge, 2001), 173. Perhaps the heretical nature of Gottschalk’s writings and his strict use of Augustine’s works including the doctrine of original sin in defence of his interpretation of predestination led others to avoid discussing original sin in the future. For more on Gottschalk and original sin, see J. Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: a History of the Development of Doctrine*, volume 3 (Chicago, 1978), 93.



Century	Number of Occurrences
4th	2
5th	455
6th	102
7th	26
8th	15
9th	102
10th	2
11th	39
12th	497

Image 3: ‘peccatum originale’ in
*The Library of Latin Texts –
Series A*

When researching particular authors whose works were influential in the late Anglo-Saxon era, discussion of original sin also appears to wane. Authors such as Pope Gregory the Great mentioned original sin in such places as his exegesis on the Book of Job, *Moralia*, primarily to elucidate the damned fate of unbaptized infants.²⁶ However, Dudden has noted that ‘in his

²⁶ For example, discussing Job 9:17, Gregory wrote that children who die without baptism ‘have one wound, viz. to be born in corruption, and another, to die in the flesh. But forasmuch as after death there also follows death eternal, by a secret and righteous judgment “wounds are multiplied to them without cause.” For they even receive everlasting torments, who never sinned by their own will’; ‘Quibus unum uulnus est corruptibiliter nasci, aliud carnaliter emori. Sed quia post mortem quoque aeterna mors sequitur, occulto eis iusto que iudicio etiam sine causa uulnera multiplicantur. Perpetua quippe tormenta percipiunt et qui nihil ex propria uoluntate peccauerunt’: Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Iob*, Book 9, ch. 21, CCSL 143, 479; Gregory the Great, *Morals on the Book of Job*, trans. Members of the English Church (Oxford, 1844-1850), 518.

doctrine of original sin Gregory does little more than repeat the Augustinian formulas. In accordance with these, original sin is conceived as the innate corruption of the soul, out of which all actual sins afterwards proceed.²⁷ Demacopoulos has even observed that ‘whereas Augustine employed the phrase *peccatum originale* (a phrase that he coined) more than five hundred times, Gregory used it on only five occasions.’²⁸ Several centuries later Alcuin used the term for original sin in his influential *De fide sanctae et individuae trinitatis*, but through this whole work Cavadini has found that ‘there is no reference to original sin as an inherited defect, passed from generation to generation.’²⁹ Alcuin also chose not to discuss the issue in his *De animae ratione* either, only saying that souls ‘are not able to be freed from the charge of the first transgression except through the grace and mystery of the mediator of God and men, our Lord Jesus Christ.’³⁰ After Augustine’s death and the century following it, the doctrine of an inherent taint on the soul began to disappear in the works of theologians.

Those reading Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History* in Latin, however, would have encountered a detailed narrative of the continuance of the Pelagian controversy in the British Isles and a reminder that no ordinary human could be conceived without original sin. In Book Two of this work, Bede preserved the letter written by Pope Honorius I in 634 to the Irish concerning the news he had received that the Pelagian heresy had re-emerged. In the epistle,

²⁷ F. Dudden, *Gregory the Great: his Place in History and Thought* (London 1905), 387.

²⁸ G. Demacopoulos, *Gregory the Great: Ascetic, Pastor, and First Man of Rome* (Notre Dame, Indiana, 2015), 33.

²⁹ J. Cavadini, ‘The Sources and Theology of Alcuin’s *De fide sanctae et individuae trinitatis*,’ *Traditio* 46 (1991), 142.

³⁰ ‘nec a reatu primae praevaricationis liberari posse, nisi per gratiam et mysterium mediatoris Dei et hominum Domini nostri Jesu Christi’: Alcuin, *De animae ratione*, ch. 13, PL 101:645D.

the pope reminded his addressees that the Pelagian heresy had been denounced for two hundred years and was anathematised every day. The letter read:

For who can fail to execrate the proud and impious attempt for those who say that a man can live without sin and that, not by the grace of God, but by his own will? In the first place it is foolish and blasphemous to say that any man is without sin: it is impossible except for that one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who was conceived and brought forth without sin. For all other men were born with original sin and are known to bear the mark of Adam's transgression, even though they are without actual sin.³¹

This letter condemning those who did not believe in the doctrine of original sin was not, however, included in the anonymous late-ninth/early-tenth century Old English translation of Bede's *History*. Not only did the translator completely eliminate Pope Honorius' letter discussing Pelagianism and its emphasis placed on original sin, but he also 'entirely remove[d] Bede's account of the Pelagian heresy' from this translation.³² Rather than provide a faithful translation of the *Ecclesiastical History*, the translator meticulously edited out references to Pelagianism alongside several other topics, leading Molyneaux to suggest that the translator could have believed that 'discussing theological error at length might even have risked

³¹ 'Nam quis non execretur / superbum eorum conamen et impium, dicentium posse sine peccato hominem existere ex propria uoluntate et non ex gratia Dei? Et primum quidem blasphemiae stultiloquium est dicere esse hominem sine peccato; quod omnino non potest nisi unus mediator Dei et hominum homo Christus Iesus, qui sine peccato est conceptus et partus. Nam ceteri homines cum peccato originali nascentes testimonium praeuaricationis Adae, etiam sine actuali peccato existentes, portare noscuntur': Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, Book 2, ch. 19, ed. and trans. Colgrave and Mynors, 200-203. Bede's inclusion of this letter – which is probably carefully edited 'excerpts from the later (640) letter of the pope-elect, John IV, which perhaps included material from Pope Honorius' – in the *Ecclesiastical History* has been categorised as abnormal in regards to the rest of the work. See J. Wallace-Hadrall, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People: a Historical Commentary* (Oxford, 1988; repr. 1991), 82-83 and 224-225. Williams has noted Bede's repeated commentary on Pelagianism in the *Ecclesiastical History* and how 'Regularly and deliberately, Bede marks the progress of his narrative with illustrations of the vulnerability of the British Church to this'; as part of this narrative, 'it is possible that Bede or his source suspected that the British rite [of baptism] (whatever it was) was insufficiently clear about deliverance from original sin, and that the reference to British "heresy" here is a tacit glance in the direction of Pelagianism': R. Williams, 'Theology and the Paschal Controversy: Bede's Case against the British Church,' in *Prayer and Thought in Monastic Tradition: Essays in Honour of Benedicta Ward SLG* (London, 2014), 34-35.

³² S. Rowley, *The Old English Version of Bede's Historia Ecclesiastica* (Cambridge, 2011), 72.

inducing unorthodox beliefs through confusion.’³³ Whether or not this was the case, it is important to remember that it ‘was likely that the *Old English Bede* was more widely known than the *Historia Ecclesiastica* in England during the first half of the tenth century.’³⁴ We must acknowledge that those who only had access to the Old English translation of the *Ecclesiastical History* would be lacking an important point of access for the doctrine of original sin which explained both its transmission and the paradox of how an infant can be described as sinful.

Although we should not fully discredit the impact of Augustine’s work on original sin in pre-Conquest England, a brief glimpse into works produced between his death and the late Anglo-Saxon period demonstrates the decline in the attention paid to this particular doctrine. We must question how readily accessible information explaining the full doctrine of original sin and its effects on infant souls was along with how much interest in the doctrine itself still existed. Remarkably, when looking for discussion of original sin in the later Anglo-Saxon period, a strong emphasis placed on the doctrine – so carefully laid out and supported in Augustine’s treatises – either never appears, or, as in the case of the *Old English Bede*, sometimes disappears. Although Anglo-Saxon literature did emphasise the effects of Adam and Eve’s fall and their role in salvation history, only echoes of Augustine’s doctrine of original sin filter through the works of the later Anglo-Saxon period. Discussion of how a soul acquired a transmitted condition of sin is minimal, if found at all.

³³ G. Molyneux, ‘The Old English Bede: English Ideology or Christian Instruction?’ *The English Historical Review* 124 (2009), 1311.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 1316.

The Old English term for peccatum originale

The first task when researching beliefs in original sin would seemingly be to locate the Old English phrase translating or adapting the phrase *peccatum originale*. In a time where ‘most English texts were translated or adapted from Latin models’ for the better understanding of non-Latinate speaking audience, it might make sense if this term, so prominent in Augustine’s works and assumed to exist in this time period by many scholars, might have made it into the Old English lexicon.³⁵ However, certain difficulties appear when attempting to find the Old English term for *peccatum originale*. ‘Frumscyld’, the compound word which Hall defined as ‘original sin,’ occurs as a hapax legomenon in the poem ‘Solomon and Saturn’ in the line ‘father and mother of every original sin’ (‘frumscylda gehwæs fæder and modor,’ l. 268).³⁶ This seems promising at first, until one recognises what this line describes: ‘wyrð’ (l. 265) the Old English word for fate and destiny. ‘Wyrð,’ rather than the first man, existed as ‘the origin of all sins, mother of hostility, root of misfortunes, head of lamentation, father and mother of every original sin, death’s daughter’ (‘eallra fyrena fruma, fæhðo modor, weana wyrtwela, wopes heafod, frumscylda gehwæs fæder and modor, deaðes dohtor?’ ll. 266-269). ‘First sin’ rather than ‘original sin’ constitutes a better translation here. The phrase ‘fyrnlican synne’ – used most commonly by Ælfric – comes the closest to an Old English adaption the term, but further analysis of the use of this phrase, together with Old English glosses for Latin texts, highlights a range of inconsistencies.

³⁵ R. Stanton, *The Culture of Translation in Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge, 2002), 1. See Chapter One on the soul’s origin for the discussion of King Alfred’s preface to the translation of Gregory the Great’s *Pastoral Care* (page 60) and Ælfric’s justification of writing homilies in the vernacular in his preface to his first series of *Catholic Homilies* (page 72).

³⁶ The Old English lines from Solomon and Saturn are taken from ‘Solomon and Saturn II,’ in *The Old English Dialogues of Solomon and Saturn*, ed. D. Anlezark (Cambridge, 2009), 78-95.

In his ‘Sermo ad Populum, In octavis pentecosten dicendus,’ Ælfric addressed ‘subjects on which a lay congregation in particular might not be adequately informed’ including tackling the question as to why an ‘unconscious child’ (‘unwittigum cildum’) with no sins of his own needed baptism.³⁷ He wrote that a child was sinless ‘apart from the one which Adam perpetrated, and through that one all mankind was brought into ruin’ (‘buton þære anre ðe Adam þurhteah, and ðurh ða ane wæs eall mancynn fordon’) but through the sacrifice made by Christ ‘we arise baptized from the wicked/ancient sin’ (‘wurdon gefullode fram ðære fyrnlican synne’).³⁸ Ælfric used the phrase ‘fyrnlicere synne’ again in his sermon for Palm Sunday where the water flowing from Christ’s wound on the cross descended as the water which would cleanse people ‘from the wicked/ancient sin of the first-created man’ (‘menigu fram fyrnlicere synne ðæs frumsceapenan mannes’).³⁹ These two references unquestionably refer to the first sin of Adam, but Ælfric did not use this phrase solely to designate an inherited sin. More often than not, he used this phrase in the plural, describing the past, wicked deeds of soon to be converted saints – the phrase ‘baptized from previous/wicked sins’ (‘gefullode fram fyrnlicum synnum’) may be found multiple times in works such as in his lives of Saint Dennis, Saint Cecilia, and Saint Thomas.⁴⁰ Said in the plural, this phrase cannot refer only to the condition of original sin. Indeed, further study into the meaning of ‘fyrnlic’ causes additional complications during translation – we can equally translate it as both ‘ancient’ and ‘wicked’. DiPaolo Healey has noted that ‘in the *DOE* we found the

³⁷ Pope, ‘Introduction to Sermo ad populum, in octavis pentecosten dicendus,’ in Ælfric, *Supplementary*, volume 1, 407.

³⁸ Ælfric, *Supplementary*, volume 1, Homily 11, 443.

³⁹ Ælfric, *CH II*, Homily 14, 148.

⁴⁰ Ælfric, *LoS*, Homily 7, Homily 17, Homily 18, 172, 370, 410; see further ‘fyrnlic’ in *The Dictionary of Old English: A to H* <<http://tapor.library.utoronto.ca/doe>>.

orthographic and semantic convergence of *firenlic* with *fyrnlic*, for example, so complete – both adjectives being used attributively of sins and deeds – that we had difficulty distinguishing whether the acts/actions were ‘sinful, wicked’ (*firenlic*) or were ‘committed in the past’ (*fyrnlic*).⁴¹

This phrase is not used again in homilies to refer to Adam’s sin – and no one used it apart from Ælfric in this context – so our next resource becomes interlinear and marginal Old English glosses to Latin texts which use the term *peccatum originale*.⁴² However, the Latin term (and similar phrasing) only appears glossed for three occasions.⁴³ The search starts off promisingly, with the Old English ‘fernlican’ used in relation to a brief mention of original sin in the text of Aldhelm’s prose *De laudibus virginitatis* found in a tenth century English manuscript (MS. Brussels, Royal Library, 1650) containing marginal and interlinear glosses in both Latin and Old English made by several different hands. The word appears in Aldhelm’s discussion of pope Clement’s regard for the celibate life even before he was ‘purged of original sin.’⁴⁴ The phrase being glossed – ‘ab originali piaculo’ – had four different glosses, potentially provided as a learning tool ‘to elucidate the meaning of individual words.’⁴⁵ The

⁴¹ A. diPaolo Healey, ‘Straining Words and Striving Voices: Polysemy and Ambiguity and the Importance of Context in the Disclosure of Meaning,’ in *Inside Old English: Essays in Honour of Bruce Mitchell*, ed. J. Walmsley (Oxford, 2006), 87.

⁴² On the significance of Anglo-Saxon glosses of Latin texts, see H. Gneuss, ‘*Anglicae linguae interpretatio*: Language Contact, Lexical Borrowing and Glossing in Anglo-Saxon England,’ *Proceedings of the British Academy* 82 (1993), 145-148.

⁴³ *Dictionary of Old English Web Corpus*, eds. A. diPaolo Healey with J. Wilkin and Xin Xiang <<https://www.doe.utoronto.ca>>(2019). The Latin and Old English ‘Word Wheel’ features have been particularly valuable in this research.

⁴⁴ ‘ab originali piaculo purgaretur’; Aldhelm, *Prosa de virginitate*, ch. 25, CCSL 124A, 297.

⁴⁵ *The Old English Glosses of MS. Brussels, Royal Library, 1650 (Aldhelm’s De laudibus virginitatis)*, ed. intr., notes, and indexes L. Goossens (Brussels, 1974), 28.

first hand wrote the Latin gloss ‘*principali uitio*’ while another wrote ‘*peccato*’ to clarify the meaning for ‘*piaculo*.’ For even further clarification, someone else gave an Old English gloss for the entire phrase as ‘*on þære fernlican mandæde*’ with the word ‘*fullum*’ written superscript over ‘*fernlican*’ to indicate that ‘*fernfullum*’ constituted an acceptable alternative option.⁴⁶ While the glossator might have used the same adjective – ‘*fernlican*’ – as Ælfric to refer to original sin, we find that they used a different noun – ‘*mandæd*’, meaning sin or crime – as the translation for ‘*piaculo*’ and/or ‘*peccato*’ instead of ‘*synne*’.

In the grand scheme of things, this small difference could just be a minor alteration which should not preoccupy us unduly. However, in the Old English glosses we do have of *peccatum originali*, we find no consistency. ‘*Fernlican*’ appears only for this gloss in Aldhelm’s work, and the two other glosses for the term, although both attested in the *Durham Ritual*, do not match. In the first instance, the glossator for the *Durham Ritual* incorrectly translated ‘*originalis peccati*’ in a nuptial blessing as part of a list of sufferings which cannot be taken away when one is alone into ‘*endebredlices synne*’, or ‘*ordinal sin*’, most likely ‘*led astray by giendebredado (ordinata)*’ of the preceding line.⁴⁷ This would suggest that the glossator did not fully comprehend the text which they were glossing. The second instance may be found as part of a list counting the saving acts of Christ intended to be invoked over a water vessel for an ordeal employed to detect the guilty party of a theft (said guilty person would *hypothetically* cause the water to boil when they dipped their hand in it).⁴⁸ On this

⁴⁶ *Old English Glosses*, ed. Goosens, 276. Goosens (276) noted that these glosses appear identical in another glossed version of Aldhelm’s *De laudibus virginitatis* in MS Oxford, Bodleian Library, Digby 146; see *Old English Glosses: Chiefly Unpublished*, ed. A. Napier (Oxford, 1900), 54, entries 2005 and 2006.

⁴⁷ *Rituale Ecclesiae Dunelmensis*, ed. U. Lindelöf, intr. A. Thompson (London, 1927), 109; U. Lindelöf ‘Introduction,’ in *Rituale Ecclesiae Dunelmensis*, lxvi.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 101-102. On trial by ordeal in the early medieval period, see R. Bartlett, *Trial by Fire and Water* (Oxford, 1986; repr. 1988), 6-33.

occasion, ‘frymðelicum synne,’ or ‘the first sin’ glosses ‘originali peccato,’ probably referring more to Adam’s act of sin than the condition of it. On repeated occasions, we can struggle to find a single phrase used across multiple sources by different authors aimed at addressing this seemingly important doctrine. A lack of a single consistent term in the vernacular does not exclude the doctrine of original sin’s presence in the late Anglo-Saxon period, but the fact that there is no clear term in common usage tells us a great amount about attitudes towards Augustine’s specific doctrine in this period.

Preaching about original sin

A range of Old English homilies addressed the condition of the soul as it entered the body, and, when they did, they expressly mentioned to the soul’s pre-corporal purity without explaining anything about the transmission of a damned status. In the portrayal of Judgement Day in a homily preserved in the Vercelli Book, Christ demanded that each person ‘return your soul to me as pure as I gave it to you’ (‘Agif me þine sawle swa clæne swa ic hy ðe sealde’).⁴⁹ This would lead one to suspect that the homilist perceived the condition of souls before entering the body as clean from any sin, opposing the Traducianist theory on the origin of souls which argued that all souls, and their sin-stained conditioned, stemmed from Adam.⁵⁰ A similar reference to the soul’s pre-corporal cleanliness may be found in the concluding remarks of the Blickling Homily for Rogation Monday where the homilist reminded his audience that God ‘asks of us no other recompense but that we should return our bodies and

⁴⁹ *Vercelli Homilies*, Homily 8, 146.

⁵⁰ For more on Traducianism and the origin of souls, see above, pages 46-54.

souls to Him on Doomsday as undefiled as He had previously created them and entrusted [fastened] them to us' ('Ond ne bideþ he æt us nænig oþor edlean, buton þæt we urne lichoman ond ure saule swa unwemme him ageofan on Domesdæg, swa he hie ær gesceop ond us æt fæste').⁵¹ These passages suggest a belief that the soul came to the body unblemished, and we find that Ælfric and Wulfstan the Cantor also both agreed that God shaped new, and presumably undefiled, souls for each created person.⁵² Multiple homilists and theologians insisted that the soul was unblemished and/or new when it was given to the body, but we become hard pressed to find sources which act as a middleman explaining to their audience *how* the soul then acquired Adam's guilt.

Ælfric came closest to preaching Augustine's theology of an inherited condition of sin, alluding to Adam's sin and its effects on humanity more than any other late Anglo-Saxon homilist. Whilst he would refer to Adam's transgression in the context of baptism, however, he would also omit certain aspects of Augustine's developed theological doctrine. Grundy's analysis of Ælfric's theology unearthed some significant deductions about Ælfric's treatment of original sin; she found that 'whilst Augustine devotes much attention to the interpretation of Romans 5.12, reaching the conclusion that all have sinned in Adam, Ælfric never discusses this verse or even refers to it.'⁵³ Furthermore, she commented that when Ælfric wrote that children were sinful 'through Adam's transgression' ('þurh Adames forgægednesse'), 'that simple preposition "þurh" is the closest Ælfric comes to explaining Romans 5.12. Birth implies the transmission of original sin, but Ælfric does not explain how.'⁵⁴ Grundy supposed

⁵¹ *Blickling Homilies*, Homily 8, ed. and trans. Kelly, 72-73.

⁵² For more on Creationism, see above, pages 81-95.

⁵³ L. Grundy, *Books and Grace: Ælfric's Theology* (London, 1991), 87.

⁵⁴ Ælfric, *Supplementary*, volume 1, Homily 12, 484-485; Grundy, *Books and Grace*, 98.

that by the Anglo-Saxon period, ‘apparently the doctrine no longer require[d] proof or justification,’ but we must ask if any doctrine, particularly one as complex as original sin, could become so ingrained in society that it required no clarification.⁵⁵

There are moments in Ælfric’s homiletic collections where there could be a perceived assumption that his intended audience thoroughly believed in original sin’s stain on the soul. In his sermon explaining the many complexities of the Eucharist, he used the process that a soul experiences through the act of baptism as an analogy to explain the hallowing of bread and wine at communion:

A heathen child is baptized, but it does not transform his outside appearance, although it will be changed within. It is brought sinful through Adam’s transgression to the baptismal font, but it is cleansed from all sins within, although it does not transform his outside appearance [...] but the Holy Ghost’s might draws near to the corruptible water, through the blessing of priests, and it can hereafter cleanse body and soul from all sins through ghostly might.

Hæðen cild bið gefullod. ac hit ne Bret na his hiw wiðutan. ðeah ðe hit beo wiðinnan awend; Hit bið gebroht synfull þurh adames forgægednysse to ðam fantfæte. ac hit bið aðwogen fram eallum synnum wiðinnan. þeah ðe hit wiðutan his hiw ne awende [...] ac þæs halgan gastes miht genealæhð þam brosnienlicum wætere. ðurh sacerda bletsunge. and hit mæg siððan lichaman and sawle aðwean fram eallum synnum. ðurh gastlicere mihte.⁵⁶

In using this example to help teach how bread and wine could spiritually become Christ’s body and blood, it is possible that Ælfric assumed that his audience understood the process of the cleansing of the soul from sin better than the process of hallowing the housel. However, even though he specified that a child was being baptized, Ælfric still referred to the elimination ‘of all sins’ (‘fram eallum synnum’) here – closer to the ‘remission of all sins’

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 98.

⁵⁶ Ælfric, *CH II*, Homily 15, 153.

referred to in the Nicene Creed and Latin baptismal liturgical texts from this period – rather than ‘original sin’ or even ‘Adam’s sin.’⁵⁷

Another homily in this collection compared the salvation of infants through the belief of their godparents with their guilty state through the actions of others: ‘now this ordinance exists in God’s congregation that one baptizes speechless children, and they will be preserved through other men’s belief just as they were condemned through the sins of other men’ (‘Nu stent ðeos gesetnys on godes gelaðunge. þæt man ða unsprecendan cild fullige. and hi beoð gehealdene þurh oðra manna geleafan. swa swa hi wæron þurh oðra manna synna geniðerade’).⁵⁸ Interestingly, Ælfric again used the plural form – ‘manna’ – here to designate those held responsible for a child’s innate guilt. Perhaps he referred to both Adam and Eve here – the Old English word ‘mann’ could refer to both genders – but he did not clarify that in this homily even though later in the same homily he would give full explanatory translations of the Latin statements expected to be made by godparents in baptismal ceremonies. Ælfric preached that an infant was not guilty through its own faults, and it is possible that his intended audience could immediately pinpoint to whom he alluded in this statement.

Ælfric came closest to a full explanation of original sin and its penalty on the soul in his homily on the Lord’s nativity. He discussed how each person was born twice – once, bodily, through his parents and second, spiritually, through baptism:

Each person is begotten and born with sins, through the transgression of Adam, but he is born a second time to Christ in the holy assembly, that is, in God’s church, through baptism. The water washes the body and the Holy Ghost washes the soul from all sins; and the baptized person is then God’s child.

⁵⁷ ‘remissionem omnium peccatorum’: *The Missal of Robert of Jumièges*, ed. H. Wilson (London, 1896), 99; for more on Anglo-Saxon baptismal liturgy, see below.

⁵⁸ Ælfric, *CH II*, Homily 3, 26.

Ælc man bið mid synnum gestryned and geboren ðurh adames forgægednyse. ac he bið eft criste acenned on ðære halgan gelaðunge. þæt is on godes cyrcan þurh fulluht; Þæt wæter aðwehð þone lichaman. and se halga gast aðwehð ða sawle fram eallum synnum. and se gefulloda man bið þonne godes bearn.⁵⁹

Ælfric emphasised Adam's role in the guilt each person began life with, using verbs which followed the process of pregnancy – from 'beget' to 'born' – perhaps implying the physical transmission of sin inherited through the parents. However, he did not describe baptism next as providing remission specifically from original sin, once again writing the phrase 'all sins' ('eallum synnum') instead. Kleist has observed on another occasion how 'Ælfric may imply that the Fall has corrupted human nature in that – as he says in his rogation homily – all people sin, but he does not present the Fall as the cause of human bondage [...] Ælfric attributes bondage not so much to Adam's choice as to people's personal and habitual sin.'⁶⁰ On occasions where Ælfric did address Adam's role in a child's sin-stained nature, the explanation of original sin is incomplete – he never fully realises the process of original sin's transmission for his audience.

Interestingly, Ælfric could avoid mentioning original sin when the source he was following directly discussed it. His homily on the Octave of the nativity and the Lord's circumcision for the first of January drew parallels between the covenant made with God through circumcision and that made through baptism following his source for this section of the homily, Bede's homily for the eighth day of Christmas.⁶¹ In a study of this homily, Zacher has argued that 'Ælfric does not simply dumb down his homily; ever the clever exegete, Ælfric uses his imported scriptural material from Genesis to flesh out a carefully schemed

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, Homily 1, 6.

⁶⁰ Kleist, *Striving with Grace*, 187.

⁶¹ Godden, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies*, 48.

discussion of the typology associated with circumcision in the Old Testament.⁶² In this carefully planned homily, Ælfric followed Bede's comparison closely contrasting the fact that in Christianity, without baptism one 'will not be able to go into the kingdom of heaven' ('ne mæg he faran into heofenan rice') while the 'old law' ('ealdan æ') had taught that without circumcision, 'his soul will perish' ('his sawul losað').⁶³ For further clarification, he wrote 'and that symbol [circumcision] was as great then among believing people as that holy baptism is great now' ('7 þæt tacen wæs ða swa micel on geleafullum mannum. swa micel swa nu is þæt halige fulluht').⁶⁴ Ælfric next turned to the topic of spiritual circumcision, skirting Bede's further exegesis on original sin and his comparison of baptism and circumcision that gave additional explanation on what both rituals achieved. Bede had written 'circumcision offered the same help of a health-giving treatment against the wound of original sin that now, in the time of revealed grace, baptism is wont to do.'⁶⁵ Bede even took this opportunity to explain the origin and transmission of original sin:

because Adam by this transgression went against the pact of life given to human beings in paradise, and in him all sinned, [a person] will vanish from the society of the saints if he is not aided by a saving remedy. Both purifications,

⁶² S. Zacher, 'Views on Circumcision in Old English Literature,' in *Old English Literature and the Old Testament*, 102.

⁶³ Ælfric, *CH I*, Homily 6, 226; translating 'nisi quis renatus fuerit ex aqua et spiritu, non potest introire in regnum dei, ipse dudum per legem suam clamabat, Masculus cuius praeputii caro circumcisa non fuerit peribit anima': Bede, *Homeliarum evangelii*, Book 1, Homily 11, CCSL 122, 74.

⁶⁴ Ælfric, *CH I*, Homily 6, 225-226.

⁶⁵ 'Idem salutiferae curationis auxilium circumcisio in lege contra originalis peccati vulnus agebat, quod nunc baptismata agere revelatae gratiae tempore consuevit': Bede, *Homeliarum evangelii*, Book 1, Homily 11, CCSL 122, 74; trans. Martin and Hurst, Book 1, 104.

namely that of circumcision under the law and that of baptism under the gospel, were provided as graces for taking away the first transgression.⁶⁶

Rather than seize the occasion to explain how Adam and Eve's actions necessitated juvenile spiritual purification, Ælfric deviated from his source and turned to a comparison between spiritual and bodily circumcisions, both of which, in his understanding, involved decreasing 'lustas 7 galnysse' – wantonness and lust.⁶⁷ Ælfric had access to and made use of a range of sources from Augustine to Bede which discussed original sin in detail, but here, at least, he chose not to transmit Bede's exegesis for those critical passages in Romans to explain the transmission of original sin. Although Ælfric provided comprehensive explanations for other theologically complex doctrines such as Creationism to clarify how souls originated, even countering it against other origin theories, the soul's inheritance of original sin did not warrant such attention to detail.⁶⁸

Turning to the anonymous homilies, we receive even less discussion of original sin's effects on the soul. One of the Blickling homilies, this time for the fifth Sunday in Lent, addressed 'the bodily pains and miseries into which a person is born' ('þa sar ond þa brocu þe se man to gesceapen is') and how 'he is conceived in sin' ('On synne he bið geeacnod').⁶⁹

This could be a reference to Augustine's theory about concupiscence's connection with the

⁶⁶ 'quia pactum uitae in paradiso hominibus datum adam praeuaricante transgressus est in quo omnes peccauerunt peribit de coetu sanctorum, si non ei fuerit remedio salutari subuentum. Vtraque ergo purificatio et circumcissionis uidelicet in lege et in euangelio baptismatis tollendae praeuaricationis primae gratia posita est': Bede, *Homeliarum euangelii*, Book 1, Homily 11, CCSL 122, 74; trans. Martin and Hurst, Book 1, 105. For further study of Bede's theology relating circumcision and original sin, see C. O'Brien, 'Bede's Theology of Circumcision, its Sources and Significance,' *The Journal of Theological Studies* 67 (2016), 594-613. On later Anglo-Saxon attitudes towards circumcision, see Zacher, 'Views on Circumcision,' 89-118.

⁶⁷ Ælfric, *CH I*, Homily 6, 227.

⁶⁸ See above, pages 85-95.

⁶⁹ *Blickling Homilies*, Homily 5, 40. Kelly translates (41) 'synne' as 'original sin,' but I do not believe that this translation is true to the source.

transmission of original sin, but certain doctrinal difficulties would appear with this interpretation.⁷⁰ It would assign sin to a person from conception onwards even though source evidence from this time period suggests that the Anglo-Saxons believed that the soul did not enter a body until several months into a pregnancy.⁷¹ Quite possibly, the Anglo-Saxons believed that the taint of original sin could have existed in the body from conception, transferred onto the soul once the two joined together sometime before birth, but this is not explained here, or, in fact, anywhere within the corpus. Without further instruction or clarification, one could interpret this passage as simply referring to the sexual act as inherently sinful, emphasizing how even the beginning of a person's life started with sin. With this passage, we have a hint – albeit not a very clear one – that the idea that a transmitted condition of sin through the sexual act surfaced in this period.

The closest any of the anonymous vernacular homilies came to discussing the spiritual penalty of original sin appears in the homily for the Lord's Epiphany in the Vercelli Book in its portrayal of the pre-baptismal conversation between John the Baptist and Jesus in Matthew 3:13-17. In the gospel, Jesus approached John to be baptized, but John told him: 'I ought to be baptized by thee, and comest thou to me?' Jesus answered 'suffer it to be so now. For so it becometh us to fulfil all justice' (Matthew 3:14-15). Vercelli Homily 16 presented an expanded version of this conversation, where Jesus also replied: 'I am a person subject to death and perishable, and through Adam's crime/sin I am bound, and therefore I have the need for the bath of baptism and the cleansing' ('Ic eom deadlic mann 7 gehrorenlice, 7 þurh

⁷⁰ See Augustine, *De Genesi ad Litteram*, Book 10, ch. 18, CSEL 28(1), 319-321 for Augustine's explanation as to how Jesus avoided a conception with original sin. See also Couenhoven, *Stricken by Sin*, 35-39, 42-45.

⁷¹ See Chapter Two for Anglo-Saxon ensoulment beliefs.

Adames scylde ice om gebunden, 7 ic for ðan hæbbe þæs fulwihtes bæð 7 þære clænsunge þearfe’).⁷² John replied that Jesus required neither the baptismal bath nor the cleansing, telling him ‘you are clean and unblemished’ (‘þu eart clæne 7 unwemme’), but ‘every person must become clean and unblemished and holy through you’ (‘ac ælc man sceal [þurh þe] bion clæne 7 unwemme, 7 halig geweorðan’).⁷³ Here, Szarmach has argued that ‘the homilist makes John the self-conscious representative of corrupt humanity who expresses the great distance between the mortal and the divine.’⁷⁴ This paraphrasing has no known source, but the addition to this gospel story explaining humanity’s unclean state, and in particular Jesus’s unconventional account that he was bound to Adam’s sin, constitutes an acknowledgment of Adam’s role in the requirement for cleansing at baptism.

Various Old English homilies portray the soul as pure before entering the body or, alternatively, state that before baptism a child is sinful or bound by Adam’s transgressions, but no intermediary survives that fully explained how this process happened. One could assume that Anglo-Saxon audiences were more comfortable with the transmission of original sin than the many theologians who debated it before and after this period, but given how many other, easier doctrines required explanation in vernacular homilies, this seems improbable. In this genre of literature explicitly created to teach theology, we find no discussion of the transmission of original sin apart from in the use of the preposition ‘þurh’ by Ælfric. Perhaps the doctrine of original sin did not exist with as much strength in the early Middle Ages as modern scholars initially believed.

⁷² *Vercelli Homilies*, Homily 16, 268.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 268.

⁷⁴ P. Szarmach, ‘The Vercelli Homilies: Style and Structure,’ in *Old English Homily and its Background*, eds. P. Szarmach and B. Huppé (Albany, 1978), 254.

Old English Genesis poems

The first sin of Adam and Eve, and importantly for this discussion the repercussions for that sin, appeared versified in the vernacular in the tenth-century Junius Manuscript Genesis poems; together they might offer more insight into early English views on original sin. Although presented as a single composite work following the biblical narrative, ‘Genesis A’ and ‘Genesis B’ constitute two separate poetic traditions. ‘Genesis A’ had a longer transmission history associated with the Anglo-Saxons while ‘Genesis B’ drew from a mid-ninth century Old Saxon ‘Genesis’ before it became ‘transliterated into early West-Saxon and interpolated into ‘Genesis A’, along with the pictures’ around the year 900 after which both underwent a process of adaption into a later West-Saxon form.⁷⁵ As it now survives, ‘Genesis B’ – lines 235-851 of the entire poem – starts mid-sentence with God instructing Adam and Eve to not eat from the tree of death before turning to Satan’s plans for vengeance in Hell and the act of the Fall itself. ‘Genesis A’ picks up again as God directed the punishments for disobedience to the snake, Eve, and Adam. Together, both allow the modern reader another insight into late Anglo-Saxon interpretations of repercussions for the fall and potentially for their views of original sin.

‘Genesis A’ adhered closely to the biblical text, particularly when listing the judgements for eating the forbidden fruit.⁷⁶ McKill has even noted that ‘the curse upon the serpent and Adam and Eve’s banishment from Paradise occupy approximately the same

⁷⁵ A. Doane, ‘Introduction,’ in *The Saxon Genesis*, ed. A. Doane (Madison, 1991), 53-54.

⁷⁶ C. Wright, ‘*Genesis A ad litteram*,’ in *Old English Literature and the Old Testament*, eds. M. Fox and M. Sharma (Toronto, 2012), 169.

number of lines in the OE poem as in the biblical account.⁷⁷ The serpent must crawl forever on its stomach eating dust and exist in enmity with woman (ll. 903-917; Genesis 3:14-15); Eve and all women now must be subordinate to men and give birth in pain (ll. 918-924; Genesis 3:16); Adam and all humanity became exiled from Paradise, forced to work the soil for food and to endure death (ll. 925-938; Genesis 3:17-19). No mention of further repercussions such as inherited sin exists in these lines.⁷⁸ In a rare narratorial interjection, the poet alluded to the effects on all humanity, addressing the audience, saying ‘Listen, now we have heard [of] where grievous sorrows and earthly wretchedness awakened for us’ (‘Hwæt, we nu gehyrað hwær us hearmstafas/ wraðe onwocan and woruldyrmðo’, ll. 939-940). Later, when discussing if there could ever be a return to paradise, the poet of ‘Genesis A’ stated that ‘no malicious [person] may go there, no person guilty of sin’ (‘ne mæg þær inwitfull ænigge feran / womscyldig mon,’ ll. 948-949). This verse could be alluding to all people, stained with sin, but with no further evidence – and ‘inwitfull’ likely chosen to appear in apposition to the word ‘womscyldig’ here – it would be difficult to conclude that the poet was referring to Augustine’s doctrine of original sin here. Potentially due to its close parity with the book of Genesis, ‘Genesis A’ provides no support for existent beliefs in an inherent condition of sin during the later Anglo-Saxon period.

‘Genesis B’ differed in style from the extant portions of ‘Genesis A,’ deviating from the biblical narrative whilst also offering more foreshadowing and ‘moralizing glosses.’⁷⁹

⁷⁷ L. McKill, ‘Patterns of the Fall: Adam and Eve in the Old English *Genesis A*,’ *Florilegium* 14 (1995-1996), 35.

⁷⁸ For a more detailed comparison between the biblical and poetic accounts of the Fall, see McKill, ‘Patterns of the Fall,’ 33-38.

⁷⁹ Doane, ‘Introduction,’ in *The Saxon Genesis*, 147. See also P. Remley, *Old English Biblical Verse: Studies in Genesis, Exodus and Daniel* (Cambridge, 1996), 95-96.

When juxtaposing ‘Genesis B’ with the twelfth century Anglo-Norman play the *Mystère d’Adam*, Woolf noted that ‘from the literary point of view the important point of comparison between the two works is that both authors are alike in their concern, not with the theological implications of the Fall, but with the manner in which this almost unimaginable event might have taken place, a problem of course peculiar to the writer of literature.’⁸⁰ Furthermore, Remley has found that ‘there are few, if any, lines in *Genesis B* that would connect the poem unambiguously with any single strand of doctrinal tradition.’⁸¹ It is important to note, however, that the poet of ‘Genesis B’ still did choose to emphasise certain theological effects of the Fall in his moralizing glosses. When the serpent first spoke to Eve, the poet reminded his audience that this act would bring ‘the greatest of injuries to all of her descendants’ (‘sceaðena mæst / eallum heora eaforum æfter siððan,’ ll. 549-550), and as she took the fruit, the narrator lamented ‘no worse deed has been marked for man’ (‘ne wearð wyrse dæd monnum gemearcod,’ ll. 594-595).⁸² The poet did not leave his audience in the dark as to how the first sin affected humanity, interlacing three distinctive repercussions throughout the structure of the poem: Adam and Eve’s loss of heaven’s realm, the loss of the Lord’s grace, and the loss of eternal life through damnation in death.

At the start of ‘Genesis B,’ Satan addressed his followers about his plans to take vengeance on God for casting him out of heaven by corrupting his new creation, humanity. He told the hordes of hell that his objective was to take away ‘the kingdom of heaven’

⁸⁰ R. Woolf, ‘The Fall of Man in ‘*Genesis B*’ and the *Mystère d’Adam*,’ in *Studies in Old English Literature in Honor of Arthur G. Brodeur*, ed. S. Greenfield (Eugene, 1963), 197-198.

⁸¹ Remley, *Old English Biblical Verse*, 152.

⁸² Similar foreshadowing exists in ll. 708-710.

(‘heofonrice,’ l. 401) from ‘the children of men’ (‘monna bearnum,’ l. 400).⁸³ Later on, once the fruit had been tasted by both Adam and Eve, Satan immediately exclaimed what the first created humans had brought among themselves: ‘both here are done: that the sons of man, people, must relinquish the kingdom of heaven, and (must) turn to you in the hot flame. Also, a harm, a mind-sorrow, is made to God’ (‘her synt butu gedon:/ ge þæt hæleða bearn heofonrice sculon,/ leode, forlætan and on þæt lig to þe / hate hweorfan. Eac is hearm gode,/ modsorg gemacod,’ ll. 751-755). Not only had they lost the kingdom of heaven, as planned, but Satan told Adam and Eve that they must also now join him in hell. Furthermore, they had wounded God with their actions.

This harm made to God which the poet had Satan mention also withdrew God’s grace from humankind: ‘to him is appointed the disfavour of the Lord’ (‘Him is unhyldo waldendes witod’, ll. 729-730). Further exegesis accounting the full consequences of what losing God’s grace entailed appeared in more detail a hundred lines earlier in the poem: ‘this is the way her sons will have to live afterwards when they do evil: they will have to work to gain love, amend malicious speech towards their Lord and keep his favour from that time forward’ (‘swa hire eaforan sculon æfter lybban/ þonne hie lað gedoð: hie sculon lufe wyrcean, / betan heora hearran hearmcwide ond habban his hyldo forð,’ ll. 623-625).⁸⁴ Instead of occurring naturally, the poet, straying further from the book of Genesis, told his audience that salvation had now become a difficult process centred around works and good living.

⁸³ God also tells Adam and Eve that they will have heaven’s kingdom and will never suffer death if they do not eat from the Tree of Death (ll. 640-645).

⁸⁴ Doane, ‘Introduction,’ in *The Saxon Genesis*, 147.

The poem introduced a new idea also not found in Genesis that two trees existed from which Adam and Eve might take fruit, emphasizing the introduction of damnation after death for humanity.⁸⁵ One, the tree of life, allowed one to live for eternity, never suffering from old age or sickness (ll. 467-476) and the other, the tree of death, forced those who ate from it to live a shortened life ‘with sweat and with sorrow’ (‘mid swate and mid sorgum,’ l. 482) until death came when he must descend to Hell to serve devils (ll. 481-490). Death and damnation became even more exemplified in the list of metaphors the poet gave to describe the fruit that Adam ate: ‘It was nevertheless the sleep of death and the devil’s artifice, hell and death and the destruction of man, the death/murder/damnation of mankind’ (‘hit wæs þeah deaðes swefn and deofles gespon,/ hell and hinnsið and hæleða forlor,/ menniscra morð,’ ll. 720-722). Death and the devil are intrinsically linked in these lines, leaving no question of where the poet believed humanity would find themselves after death – Adam’s actions guaranteed a damned existence for humankind once they died. Doane has questioned if ‘menniscra morð’ might be understood as ‘original sin,’ but it more plausibly represents a generic term which accommodates both sides of the two lines above it, syntactically paralleling both the death and destruction of humankind.⁸⁶

While ‘Genesis A’ focused on reproducing the repercussions listed in Genesis 3:14-19, ‘Genesis B’ interwove the effects of eating from the tree of death throughout its 600 lines, returning to what it considered to be the three main consequences – humanity’s loss of heaven’s realm and God’s grace alongside the introduction of death followed by damnation – several times and using repetition which created a didactic effect. Read together or separately,

⁸⁵ For a case study on the two trees, see Remley, *Old English Biblical Verse*, 162-165.

⁸⁶ Doane, ‘Commentary to ‘Genesis B’,’ in *The Saxon Genesis*, 295.

they would have left the audience with little doubt about Adam and Eve's role in salvation history, as we also find in poems such as 'The Dream of the Rood.'⁸⁷ These poems both referred in detail to the many things the human race inherited from Adam and Eve, but they did not specify anything about a transmitted condition of sin. They portray human souls as damned, but not as stained. Without further evidence, should we understand damnation here to equate a doctrine which teaches that all are born with a sinful essence? Does a corrupted nature which is prone to sin equate inherited guilt? Without a full explanation or reference to these complex theological questions in the surviving lines of both Genesis poems, we cannot say for certain. We can say, however, that these two poems, which do not shy away from discussing the consequences of the fall, do not suggest that Adam and Eve passed an inherited condition of sin on to their descendants, as Augustine had taught.

The outliers

Inspecting Anglo-Saxon attitudes towards certain biblical figures supposedly immune or cleansed from original sin before birth might inform our discussion of inherited sin. Ælfric preached that Jesus was 'produced without sins' ('buton synnum acenned') and 'obtained human nature without sins' ('underfeng ða menniscnysse buton synnum'), but in both instances we encounter the plural form of the Old English 'synne'.⁸⁸ Could original sin exist in the plural or is there another explanation for this peculiarity? Ælfric gave his audience more explanation for Christ's sinless nature in his homily for the feast of the Annunciation: 'Truly

⁸⁷ 'Dream of the Rood,' ll. 95-102.

⁸⁸ Ælfric, *CH I*, Homily 1, 187; Ælfric, *CH II*, Homily 45, 301.

all men are, just as the prophet said, with iniquity conceived, and with sins brought forth, but only our Saviour was conceived without iniquity and brought forth without sins' ('Witodlice ealle men beoð swa swa se witega cwæð mid unrihtwisnyse geeacnode 7 mid synnum acennede ac ure hælend ana wæs geeacnod butan unrihtwisnyse 7 buton synnum acenned').⁸⁹ Ælfric undoubtedly referred here to Psalm 50:7 – 'For behold I was conceived in iniquities; and in sins did my mother conceive me' – equating the fleshly concupiscence of the parents as the sins in which a child is conceived. Jesus, conceived by the Holy Ghost in the womb of a virgin, was the only human immune from such sins at conception. Ælfric's use of Psalm 50 here might be depicting an inherited condition of sin, but we cannot for certain say that these sins – again mentioned in the plural – can refer to a single inherited sin instead of those performed by the parents.⁹⁰

Next, the idea of the immaculate conception, which focused on the preservation of the Virgin Mary from original sin, does not appear to have had any currency in early medieval England. Clayton, who has undertaken an extensive study covering Anglo-Saxon perceptions of the Virgin Mary, has concluded that 'there is no suggestion in any pre-Conquest text that Mary was preserved free of original sin; this idea was formulated for the first time by Eadmer in the twelfth century.'⁹¹ Mills has also found that 'unlike their Anglo-Norman successors, the

⁸⁹ Ælfric, *CH I*, Homily 13, 285-286.

⁹⁰ Analysing the adjective 'sinless' ('synleas') brings no further understandings of Anglo-Saxon beliefs about original sin. Christ is described later in his life as 'suffering sinless for us' ('Crist ðrowode deaþ for us synleas' – Anonymous, 'Homily 7,' in *Eleven Old English Rogationtide Homilies*, eds. J. Bazire and J. Cross (Toronto, 1982; repr. London, 1989), 95 – but Juliana was also 'without sin' ('synna lease,' 'Juliana,' l. 614), and the word could describe the ability of performing an action 'without sin' ('synleas,' 'The Seasons for Fasting,' l. 218). The word does not seem to appear in the context of birth and inherited sin.

⁹¹ M. Clayton, 'Ælfric and the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary,' *Anglia* 104 (1986), 288. For more on Eadmer of Canterbury's work on the Immaculate Conception, see M. Mills, *Behold Your Mother: the Virgin Mary in English Monasticism, c. 1050-c. 1200*, unpublished dissertation (University of Oxford, 2016), 48-52.

Anglo-Saxon monks did not think of Mary's conception in terms of her freedom from original sin.⁹² An outlier could exist for this in a Latin poem by Dunstan, Abbot of Glastonbury (d. 988), where he addressed Mary stating 'you were born without stain [alternatively translated as blemish, or defect].'⁹³ Clayton has acknowledged that although this statement is 'particularly interesting [...] it is difficult to know how rigorously it should be interpreted. Such pictorial language was often applied to Mary, and this insistence on her unblemished birth may not have been intended as a theological statement of her freedom from original sin.'⁹⁴

Although Mary's immaculate conception did not find definition until the twelfth century, we do find a different person deemed to be cleansed from original sin in the womb in the works of Bede: John the Baptist. In his homily for the Vigil of the Nativity of John the Baptist, Bede excepted John from those humans born with sin:

what virtue could be lacking to one living among other human beings and keeping company with them, who, although as a human being he was conceived in iniquity, yet, contrary to what is usual in the human condition, was given birth to by his mother not in the moral fault of sin, but in the gift of pardon? We must not doubt that the Holy Spirit, with whom he was filled, absolved him from all sin.⁹⁵

⁹² Mills, *Behold Your Mother*, 17.

⁹³ 'Explois neuis nata es': Lapidge's syntactical rearrangement of Dunstan, 'O Pater omnipotens' in M. Lapidge, ed. and trans. 'The Hermeneutic Style in the Tenth-Century Anglo-Latin Literature,' *Anglo-Saxon England* 4 (1975), 108-111. The *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources* does not give the option of 'stain' for the word *naevus*, so I have added two of the *DMLBS*'s translations for the word, which suggest the use of *naevus* here reflects more on her 'moral behaviour' rather than her physical appearance or lack of original sin.

⁹⁴ Clayton, *Cult of the Virgin Mary*, 105.

⁹⁵ 'Quid enim uiuenti inter homines poterat et conuersanti deesse uirtutis qui etsi ut homo in iniquitatibus conceptus est contra morem tamen humanae conditionis non in delictis eum praeuaricationis sed in gratia remissionis mater sua peperit? Neque enim dubitandum est quod spiritus sanctus qui eum repleuit etiam a peccatis omnibus absoluit': Bede, *Homiliarum evangelii*, Book 2, Homily 19, 325; trans. Martin and Hurst, Book 2, 198. I have edited Martin and Hurst's translation of 'non in delictis eum praeuaricationis' from 'not in the moral fault of original sin' to 'not in the moral fault of sin' as the Latin itself does not explicitly say 'original sin.'

A search for later Anglo-Saxon references to the cleansing of John the Baptist from original sin *in utero* produces little in terms of results. Whilst the Blickling Homily on the birth of John the Baptist does discuss how John ‘was filled with the power of the Holy Spirit while he was dwelling in his mother’s womb’ (‘wæs mid þæs Halgan Gastes mægenum gefylled, þa gen þa he on hs modor bosme wunigende wæs’), the homilist made no reference to the cleansing of any sin through this process.⁹⁶ Attempting to find later Anglo-Saxon understandings of belief in original sin by hunting out the exceptions yields little evidence supporting beliefs in Augustine’s doctrine during this period.

If one looked solely at the strong literary inheritance of Augustine’s work through the entirety of the Middle Ages, it would be easy to presume that the Anglo-Saxons advocated early baptism outside the Paschal season in the belief that the soul contracted original sin from the body some time before birth. Laws and canons recommended that infants be baptized in haste, differing from other Christian initiation rituals on the continent up until the twelfth century – conceivably due to a particularly strong concern for a child’s soul.⁹⁷ But while homilies and poetry do allude to Adam, the effects of the first sin, and his role in the fall of humanity and salvation history, we do not find the transmission of an inherent taint of sin explained within them. Other explanations for the necessity of early baptism, encompassing both devil possession and heathenism, resonated instead through the works from this time – sometimes even appearing without a single reference to sin, let alone a condition of inherited

⁹⁶ *Blickling Homilies*, Homily 14, trans. Kelly, 116-117; Clayton has addressed the Virgin Mary’s similar process of being ‘sanctified’ in the womb in some Latin texts prayers, and writes that ‘Mary was sanctified by her name before being born of human frailty, but again it seems that this did not involve a preservation from original sin’: Clayton, *Cult of the Virgin Mary*, 87.

⁹⁷ J. Fisher, *Christian Initiation: Baptism in the Medieval West* (London, 1965), 109-110.

sin – suggesting that the drive for infant baptism cannot be attributed exclusively to a strong belief among the wider populace in original sin’s tarnishing of the soul.

The Devil in the Discourse

As he listed out the many roles a priest had to perform in his first Old English letter for Wulfstan of York, Ælfric described the religious significance of the baptismal act. Rather than illustrate how the act in itself cleansed the catechumen from any type of sin, however, he wrote: ‘he who baptizes a child puts to flight devils and works wonders’ (‘Se þe cild gefullað se afligeð deoflu 7 he wyrceð wundra’).⁹⁸ Although, as Foot has noted, ‘by the end of the Anglo-Saxon period lay society was committed to receiving baptism; parents themselves sought out priests to administer the sacrament in haste to ailing infants,’ that does not necessarily signify a widespread belief in original sin’s stain on the soul.⁹⁹ Law codes might have required the populace to seek speedy baptisms for their new-born children, but they did not describe why such haste was necessary. If, following Ælfric’s repeated teachings on Creationism, the congregation believed that God created a brand-new soul for each human body, why would that soul immediately exist in a state that demanded the cleansing waters of baptism? Perhaps belief in the doctrine of original sin was so widespread by this point that mentioning it in the context of baptism would be superfluous, but homiletic writing addressing baptism often promoted alternative reasons – potentially to motivate idle parents – to baptize

⁹⁸ Ælfric, ‘First Old English Letter for Wulfstan c. 1006,’ # 46 in *Councils and Synods* I.i, eds. and trans. D. Whitelock, M. Brett, and C. Brooke, 288.

⁹⁹ S. Foot, “‘By Water in the Spirit’: the Administration of Baptism in Early Anglo-Saxon England,” in *Pastoral Care before the Parish*, eds. J. Blair and R. Sharpe (Leicester, 1992), 192.

infants. This rhetoric often did not include Augustine's theorised transmission of original sin as the incentive for speedy baptism but rather the devil's control over a child until the sacrament took place. This section first studies the foundations for placing the devil in the context of baptism before turning to what a congregation might have experienced witnessing the baptismal ritual as portrayed in extant Anglo-Saxon liturgies and finally analysing how homilists approached this concept in the vernacular.

Foundations

Discussing different theories of atonement, TeSelle has argued that 'the view prevalent among the Church fathers was the so-called "ransom" theory, according to which the death and resurrection of Christ represent some kind of transaction with, or deception of and conquest over, the devil.'¹⁰⁰ Early theologians, including Ambrosiaster and Augustine, held that:

the *chirographum*, the sentence decreed against the descendants of Adam, is taken to be bodily death, the punishment for Adam's sin. The devil has power over man's mortal body, and he is free to use its fears and desires for the purposes of temptation. But what the devil has gained in Adam and in all those who succumb in temptation is lost in Christ.¹⁰¹

As a consequence of the Fall, the devil gained certain rights over all humanity, and Christ's sacrifice reversed that effect. However, until an individual became initiated into the Church through the process of baptism, a belief existed that the devil still held possession over his or her soul. This conception of salvation history, older than Augustine's doctrine of original sin, echoed through the liturgy for baptism, where the exorcism of the devil dominated the pre-

¹⁰⁰ TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian*, 165.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 166.

baptismal rituals preparing the candidate for baptism. This tradition began in the first centuries of the church, where a priest had to expel the devil from the soul of the catechumen, making way for the entrance of the Holy Spirit. The inclusion of an act of exorcism before the rite of baptism has been traced as far back as the third century. The *Apostolic Tradition* ascribed to Hippolytus of Rome called for the bishop to exorcise the catechumens ‘of every foreign spirit and they shall flee away from them and shall not return to them’ before the full initiation into the Christian church could take place.¹⁰² Hippolytus’ contemporary Tertullian, who argued ardently against infant baptism, might not have included an exorcism in his discussion of the sacrament in *De Baptismo*, but he did describe the action of renouncing the devil within the ceremony.¹⁰³ Although, against Tertullian’s wishes, infant baptism seems to have become the norm by the eleventh century, both the exorcism and the renunciation of the devil became core aspects of the baptismal liturgy through the Carolingian and Anglo-Saxon periods.¹⁰⁴

Augustine interwove his argument for original sin with the existent diabolic dimensions of the pre-baptismal ritual; for him, ‘those born of the union of bodies are under the power of the Devil before they are reborn through the spirit’ because ‘they are born through that concupiscence by which the flesh lusts against the spirit and forces the spirit to

¹⁰² ‘Exorcizet omnes spiritus alienos ut fugiant ex eis et non revertantur iam in eos’: Hippolytus, *La Tradition Apostolique de Saint Hippolyte*, ed. B. Botte (Münster, 1963), 42; Hippolytus, *On the Apostolic Tradition*, trans. A. Stewart-Sykes (Crestwood, 2001), 106.

¹⁰³ E. Whitaker and M. Johnson, *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy* (Collegeville, 2003), 11.

¹⁰⁴ For more on the Carolingian baptismal reforms, see S. Keefe, *Water and the Word: Baptism and the Education of the Clergy in the Carolingian Empire* (Notre Dame, IN, 2002). On the inclusion of exorcism in Alcuin’s outline for baptism in *Primo paganus*, see O. Phelan, *The Formation of Christian Europe: the Carolingians, Baptism, and the imperium Christianum* (Oxford, 2014), 121-125.

lust against the flesh.’¹⁰⁵ Those who had not been cleansed from original sin would not be possessed or infused with the devil but rather, more vaguely, be under ‘the power of the devil’ or ‘subject to the unclean spirit.’¹⁰⁶ Kelly has argued, though, that even with a consistent stylistic use of the devil, ‘we may conclude that Augustine considered the pre-baptismal exorcism to be not a real eviction of demons from the bodies of the candidates but a dramatic metaphor for the redemption of souls from their diabolical oppressor.’¹⁰⁷ For Augustine, baptism provided an exorcism not of the devil but rather original and, in the case of adult baptism, personal sins. Whether or not those reading his works centuries after his death came to the same conclusions remains to be seen. Writing on the developments of Christian baptism in its first millennium, Cramer has noted that ‘exorcism itself could often mean one thing or another in this manner. Was it moral exorcism, or demonic? The line between the two became even harder to discern with time.’¹⁰⁸ Without clear, didactic teaching, it would be difficult for a reader or congregation to discern between a literal or metaphorical approach of the devil’s power over the catechumen.

By the seventh and eighth centuries, theologians began relating the pre-baptismal exorcism with the exorcisms of those possessed by demons. Isidore of Seville would go so far as to equate the two in his definition for exorcism in his work *De ecclesiasticis officiis*:

‘exorcism is a rebuke against the unclean spirit, delivered over those who are possessed and

¹⁰⁵ ‘Sed ideo sub diabolo sunt, qui de corporum commixtione nascuntur, antequam per spiritum renascantur; quia per illam nascuntur concupiscentiam, qua caro concupiscit adversus spiritum, et adversum se cogit concupiscere spiritum (Galat. V, 17)’: Augustine, *Contra Julianum*, Book 4, ch. 4, PL 44:756; Augustine, *Against Julian*, trans. M. Schumacher (New York, 1957), 199.

¹⁰⁶ ‘potestate diaboli’ and ‘spiritu immundo esse cogatur’: Augustine, *Contra Julianum*, Book 3, ch. 3, and Book 2, ch. 1, PL 44:705 and PL 44:673; Augustine, *Against Julian*, trans. Schumacher, 112, 57.

¹⁰⁷ H. Kelly, *The Devil at Baptism: Ritual, Theology, and Drama* (Ithaca, 1985), 113.

¹⁰⁸ P. Cramer, *Baptism and Change in the Early Middle Ages c. 200 – c. 1150* (Cambridge, 1993), 14.

over catechumens, by means of which the abominable power of the devil, his age long malice and violent assault, may be cast out of them and put to flight.’¹⁰⁹ The association between baptism and exorcism continued in the writings of Bede in his original allegorical exegesis for a portion of the Book of Tobit, where the angel Raphael freed Sarah from the demon Asmodeus, who had slain seven of her previous husbands before any of their marriages could be consummated.¹¹⁰ Bede interpreted this part of the Book figuratively in the context of salvation history, writing: ‘the angel caught and bound the demon, because after one renounces the devil and confesses the true faith, forgiveness of sins follows as the water of baptism drives out the devil.’¹¹¹ The onslaught of Asmodeus might best be understood allegorically to Bede, but the flight of the devil at baptism accompanying the cleansing of sins would not be interpreted in the same way. By the end of the ninth century, the Anglo-Saxons had inherited a literary tradition which presented the devil’s control over the unbaptized soul as more than just a metaphor.

Anglo-Saxon liturgy

Baptism, as ‘the fundamental service which many local churches were discharging by c.1100,’ provides us with one of the few points of access for taught beliefs on the state of the soul at the

¹⁰⁹ ‘Exorcismus autem sermo increpationis est contra inmundum spiritum inerguminis siue caticuminis factus, per quod ab illis diabuli nequissima uirtus et inueterata malitia uel uiolenta incursio expulsa fugetur.’: Isidore of Seville, *De ecclesiasticis officiis*, Book 2, ch. 21, CCSL 113, 96; translation from E. Whitaker and M. Johnson, *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy* (Collegeville, 2003), 158.

¹¹⁰ *Bede: A Biblical Miscellany*, trans., intr., and notes W. Foley and A. Holder (Liverpool, 1999), 54.

¹¹¹ ‘Quibus actis angelus apprehendens daemonem ligauit, quia post abrenuntiationem diaboli, post confessionem rectae fidei, sequitur remissio peccatorum expulso daemone per aquam baptismi’: Bede, *In librum beati patris Tobiae*, Book 3, ch. 8, CCSL 119B, 11; Bede, *On Tobias* in *Bede: A Biblical Miscellany*, trans. W. Foley and A. Holder (Liverpool, 1999), 69.

beginning of life.¹¹² Through the study of baptismal liturgy, we might better understand what the Anglo-Saxons would have experienced as they witnessed the baptisms of their community's infants.¹¹³ The performance of baptism was believed to be a point in life where an individual's soul would be released from the stain of all sins; however, no mention of original sin occurred in the liturgy itself. Baptism would have been an opportune moment to explain why an unspeaking infant needed remission of all sins, but instead we find the emphasis of the liturgy placed on the struggle between the catechumen's soul and the devil. The pre-baptismal rituals preparing the candidate for baptism dominated the performance of the entire sacrament which included several rites meant to exorcise the devil from the catechumen.

The *Ordo baptizandi* of the early-eleventh-century *Missal of Robert of Jumièges*, along with the three other surviving Anglo-Saxon sacramentaries containing the baptismal rite, drew from earlier exorcism formulae set by the Gregorian and Gelasian sacramentaries produced on the continent, albeit in a more condensed version.¹¹⁴ Although their sources portrayed this endeavour as a 'structured, month-long process' associated with Easter, no such careful

¹¹² Blair, *Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, 459.

¹¹³ In any discussion of Anglo-Saxon liturgy, it is important to remember that 'early medieval liturgy was not uniform and unchanging [...] there was no such thing as *the* liturgy of the period. Instead, we have a smattering of imperfect and unrepresentative evidence about what actually went on inside some pre-Conquest churches': H. Gittos, 'Introduction,' in *The Liturgy of the Late Anglo-Saxon Church*, eds. H. Gittos and M. Bradford Bedingfield (London, 2005), 2. Nevertheless, a study of surviving liturgical material on baptism plays an important role in refining our understanding of Anglo-Saxon beliefs about the unbaptized soul.

¹¹⁴ For more on the four Anglo-Saxon manuscripts containing baptismal liturgy, see S. Keefer, 'Manuals,' in *The Liturgical Books of Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. R. Pfaff (Kalamazoo, 1995), 100-102. Although the missal has been named after Robert of Jumièges, archbishop of Canterbury from 1051 to 1052, the manuscript (Rouen, Bibliothèque municipale, 274 [Y.6]) dates back to Canterbury in the first quarter of the century: *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts*, 666. the 'overall structure and contents show the book to be fundamentally a late Gregorian sacramentary with many Young Gelasian traces,' as demonstrated by the main order of baptism drawing from the Gregorian Sacramentary and the form of the clinical baptism drawing from the Gelasian: R. Pfaff, *The Liturgy in Medieval England* (Cambridge, 2009), 90; *Missal of Robert of Jumièges*, xlvi.

rubrics occurred in the Anglo-Saxon liturgies, making baptism have ‘the feel of a single ceremony, closer to the quick ceremonies for the infirm.’¹¹⁵ With little evidence that the making of the catechumen and the sacrament of baptism took place at different times, we must consider if the entire ritual, from the exorcism of the catechumen to the closing prayer, took place in a single session.

Before the child could be blessed in the font vessel, the liturgy called for the orator to command the devil, whom the liturgy presumed to be present through the use of the second person imperative *recede*, to withdraw from the catechumen to make room for the Holy Spirit.¹¹⁶ Once the exorcism of the salt had been completed, the priest would then stand over the child and recite ‘I exorcise you, unclean spirit, by means of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.’¹¹⁷ This ‘unclean spirit’ or *inmundus* [alternative spelling *immunde*] *spiritus*, which the text referred to might initially sound like a reference to a soul stained by original sin; however, the same term occurred in the first chapter of the gospel of Mark. As Jesus returned to Galilee after forty days and nights in the Judean desert, he entered the synagogue where ‘a man with an unclean spirit [*spiritu immundo*]’ confronted him, saying: ‘What have we to do with thee, Jesus of Nazareth? Art thou come to destroy us? I know who thou art, the Holy One of God.’ Jesus commanded the spirit to ‘speak no more, and go out of the man’ and ‘the unclean spirit [*spiritus immundus*] tearing him, and crying out with a loud voice, went out

¹¹⁵ M. Bedingfield, *The Dramatic Liturgy of Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge, 2002), 176.

¹¹⁶ ‘Recede diabole ab hac imagine dei increpatus ab eo et da locum spiritui sancto’: *Missal of Robert of Jumiéges*, 93.

¹¹⁷ ‘Exorcizo te inmundus spiritus per patrem et filium et spiritum sanctum’: *ibid.*, 95, 96. The exorcism of the *inmundus spiritus* appears in between the renunciation of Satan and the affirmation of belief in the *Leofric Missal*, volume 2, ed. N. Orchard (London, 2002), 443.

of him.¹¹⁸ Isidore of Seville similarly labelled the demon possessing humans at baptism or later in life as *inmundum spiritum*.¹¹⁹ Once the priest declared that the devil had been put to flight, he would call on the catechumen, or godparents if the child were too young, to renounce Satan, his works, and his pomp. Finally, the act of baptism could take place where the child, immersed in the baptismal font three times, could gain ‘remission of all sins’ before being wrapped in clean garments.¹²⁰ Original sin might have been included in this overall term, but the liturgical book certainly did not instruct the priest to mention or discuss it specifically in the ceremony.

A curtailed baptismal *ordo* available to the infirm followed this entry in the missal. Even in this extraordinarily shortened version of the rite, most of the text given for the priest to speak concerns itself with the ‘eradicating and driving away’ of any ‘phantom,’ ‘power of the enemy’ or ‘incursion of the devil’ if they lay in the baptismal candidate before the quick ritual took place.¹²¹ Both of these ceremonies might have taught that baptism brought the remission of all sins, but actual discussion of original sin did not take place in the ceremonies here. The emphasis placed on exorcism within the performance of this rite could have left more of an impact on the congregation than the few mentions of sin. Kelly has argued that ‘in spite of the efforts of the authors of the ritual to avoid the implication of actual corporeal possession, the combination of blowing into the candidates’ faces and a prayer to repel evil spirits would seem to make the conclusion of actual demonic inhabitation a natural one unless

¹¹⁸ Mark 1:23-26.

¹¹⁹ See above, page 189.

¹²⁰ ‘remissionem omnium peccatorum’: *Missal of Robert of Jumiéges*, 99.

¹²¹ ‘si quod phantasma, si qua uirtus inimici, si qua incursion diaboli eradicare et effugare ab hac creatura aquae’: *ibid.*, 100.

the candidates were to be carefully instructed in the symbolism of the ceremony.’¹²² For those witnessing, a baptism could ‘reinforce vividly the conception that anyone not yet baptized is still under the devil’s dominion.’¹²³

Theoretically, a congregation would have experienced this ritual of exorcism each time a child of the community was baptized; however, we must ask how much of the sacrament in itself a lay person could have understood. Certain parts of the service called for the godparents to respond in Latin – the renouncement of the devil and his pomp and the statement of belief – but these responses only encompassed one word in Latin for each occasion, *abrenuntio* and *credo* respectively.¹²⁴ Each of the four surviving service books which contain the rites of baptism instructed the priest to perform the ritual in Latin rather than in the vernacular, so the possibility exists that the ceremony itself, including the exorcisms, might only have been partially understood by those witnessing it.¹²⁵ Furthermore, the liturgical handbook in The Red Book of Darley (Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, MS 422), compiled in the eleventh century, contains Old English guidelines between the Latin prayers meant to be said over the

¹²² Kelly, *Devil at Baptism*, 267.

¹²³ P. Dendle, *Demon Possession in Anglo-Saxon England* (Kalamazoo, 2014), 108-109; for further analysis on liturgical exorcisms, see *ibid.*, 104-119.

¹²⁴ Adan Jones has brought to attention an eighth-century continental baptismal piece called the Utrecht baptismal promise (with words-to-be-spoken in Old Saxon and instructions in Latin) which asked candidates to renounce not only the devil but also pagan sacrifices and specific pagan gods including Thunar and Woden. These renouncements, meant to be spoken in the vernacular, highlight a different perspective on the candidate’s knowledge and participation as the rite took place. Arguments have been made that this text may be linked with an Old English exemplar, so we must continue to question our knowledge about how the baptismal rite was performed and understood through the entire Anglo-Saxon period: M. Adan Jones, ‘The Language of Baptism in Early Anglo-Saxon England: the Case for Old English,’ *Studies in Church History* 53 (2017), 43-44.

¹²⁵ Foxhall Forbes has argued that ‘the majority of the [baptismal] liturgy itself took place in Latin’ during the late Anglo-Saxon period: Foxhall Forbes, *Heaven and Earth*, 104; however, Adan Jones has contended a tradition might have existed during the earlier Anglo-Saxon period that the baptismal rite took place in the vernacular even if continuance of this tradition into the later period is questionable: Adan Jones, ‘The Language of baptism,’ 39-50.

child, suggesting that even the priest performing the rite might not know enough Latin to follow instructions written in it. It is entirely conceivable that when certain priests read the instructions to ‘blow three times on the child and say’ (‘blawe seo preost .iii. on þæt cild and cweðe’) ‘Exi ab eo spiritus inmunde et da locum spiritui sancto’ he, and probably the audience, would not have understood what the command in Latin conveyed.¹²⁶

We also must question if each of these particular manuscripts that survive today were used for day-to-day rituals such as baptism. For example, the baptismal *ordo* of *Leofric A*, transcribed at the end of the ninth century, has such unusually disarranged components that Orchard has wondered if ‘the scribe had never been present at a baptism [...] the resulting *ordo* is not, from a practical point of view, impossible to use, but life would not be easy for the man who had to baptize regularly.’¹²⁷ The Anglo-Saxon liturgical books that still survive to this day ‘tend to be those few which were richly illustrated, or sufficiently grand to have been sent abroad as gifts.’¹²⁸ Analysing how a local priest would have performed this relatively fluid ceremony could produce significantly different results from what we have observed here. Although these sacramentaries provide a fascinating insight into the emphasis placed on the exorcism of the devil in the baptismal ritual, we cannot for certain deduce to what degree the lay congregation would have comprehended the entire performance.

¹²⁶ R. Page, ‘Old English Liturgical Rubrics in Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, MS 422,’ *Anglia* 96 (1978), 150; T. Graham, ‘The Old English Liturgical Directions in Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, MS 422,’ *Anglia* 111 (1993), 442-443.

¹²⁷ N. Orchard, *The Leofric Missal*, volume 1 (London, 2002), 117.

¹²⁸ H. Gittos, ‘Is there any Evidence for the Liturgy of Parish Churches in Late Anglo-Saxon England? The Red Book of Darley and the Status of Old English,’ in *Pastoral Care in Late Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. F. Tinti (Woodbridge, 2005), 64.

Old English and Latin homilies

This alternative approach to salvation history and the devil's subsequent possession of unbaptized souls took hold of homiletic portrayals of baptism in a way which Augustine's original sin did not. In one case, Archbishop Wulfstan of York took it upon himself to explain the significance of several of the ceremonies in the baptismal procedure, including the exsufflation, the blessing of the baptismal font, and the anointing of oil, in two vernacular homilies.¹²⁹ Following the order of the Latin baptismal liturgy, his homilies attempted to elucidate the many invisible activities which took place during the sacrament. Wulfstan described how the priest spiritually released the catechumen from the devil, opening up a place for the Holy Ghost to fill the soul. Unlike the liturgy, however, Wulfstan incorporated the role of Adam into his explanation of the need for exorcism:

When the priest christens, he breathes on the person, when it so befits, *in modum crucis*, and then it will happen that, through God's might, immediately the devil exceedingly turns coward, and with the priest's exorcism the devil is made to flee from the human creature who earlier was condemned through Adam, and a habitation to the Holy Ghost is opened up immediately in the person.

Ponne se sacerd cristnað, þonne orðað he on þone man, þonne hit swa gebyrað, *in modum crucis*, 7 ðonne wyrð þurh Godes mihte sona deofol swyðe geyrged, 7 mid þæs sacerdes halsunge se deofol wyrð aflymed fram þare menniscan gesceafte þe ær ðurh Adam forworht wæs, 7 ðam halgum gaste byð sona eardungstow on þam men gerymed.¹³⁰

Without Adam and Eve's first sin in the Garden of Eden, their offspring would not be under the devil's control until baptism took place, but Wulfstan did not give his audience further

¹²⁹ Wulfstan, *Homilies*, Homilies 8b and 8c, 172-184.

¹³⁰ Wulfstan, *Homilies*, Homily 8c, 176-177.

exegesis on this cause-and-effect relationship. Instead, his homilies on baptism kept their focus on the expulsion of the devil to purify the soul before the entry of the Holy Ghost. Dendle has explained that ‘Wulfstan sees baptism principally in terms of a black-and-white change of state, from the domain of darkness to that of light, and so naturally he emphasises the demonological dimension of baptismal ceremonies.’¹³¹ We cannot say whether or not Wulfstan meant for the exorcism of the devil in his homilies on baptism to be interpreted literally or symbolically representing original sin, as Dendle later argues, for no discussion of the spiritual effects of original sin took place.¹³² While Wulfstan might have used these homilies to clarify the more confusing aspects of the rite to his non-Latinate audience, he did not take the opportunity to give any other reason besides devil possession, the consequence of Adam’s transgressions, as to why an infant might need baptism.

Ælfric might have discussed Adam’s role in the explanation for the sinful state of infants in several of his homilies studied earlier, but he could also neglect the topic entirely when discussing baptism, instead solely focusing on the diabolic elements of the process. Allusions to the effects of baptism would appear interlaced within homilies not specifically focused on the sacrament itself, and, in cases such as these, Ælfric would often not introduce Adam’s transgressions into the sermon, let alone the transmission of original sin. Ælfric addressed the devil’s control over all humanity in his homily for Palm Sunday in his first series of *Catholic Homilies*; using a bait-and-hook metaphor, he explained that by instigating the crucifixion of Christ, the devil was tricked into becoming ‘robbed of all mankind who

¹³¹ Dendle, *Demon Possession*, 112.

¹³² Ælfric translated the renunciation and statement of belief in his second series of *Catholic Homilies* in his sermon on the Epiphany, but he did not provide further elucidation of the sacrament in the way that Wulfstan does.

believe in God’ (‘benæmed ealles mancynnes þara þe on god belyfað’).¹³³ He appears to have subscribed here to the same ransom theory of atonement as earlier patristic theologians. For Ælfric, the redemption of humankind through the process of baptism could be compared to the salvation of the Israelites in their exodus from Egypt: ‘now is his Passion and his Resurrection our Eastertide, because he released us from the slavery of the devil, and our persecutors are drowned through the holy baptism, just as Pharaoh was with his men in the Red Sea’ (‘Nu is his þrowung 7 his ærist ure eastertid: for þan ðe he us alysde fram deofles þeowdome. 7 ure ehteras beoð besencte þurh þæt halige fulluht. swa swa wæs pharao mid his leode on þære readan sæ.’).¹³⁴ Until baptism, Ælfric taught that mankind fell under the service of the devil.

In his sermon on the Lord’s Ascension in the first series of *Catholic Homilies*, Ælfric gave exegesis on Mark 16:17-18, where the arisen Christ commanded his disciples to preach the gospel to the world and declared the miracles which they would produce: ‘In my name they shall cast out devils: they shall speak with new tongues. They shall take up serpents; and if they shall drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them: they shall lay their hands upon the sick, and they shall recover.’ God would show these miracles through the apostles to incline the unbelieving to faith, but, Ælfric stressed, ‘the church of God even now daily works the same miracles that the apostles then performed bodily’ (‘godes gelaðung wyrcoð gyt dæghwomlice þa ylcan wundru gastlice þe ða apostoli ða worhton lichamlice’).¹³⁵ Ælfric continued by explaining: ‘when the priest christens the child, then he drives out the devil from the child’ (‘Ðonne se preost cristnað þæt cild. þonne adræfoð he þone deofol of þam cilde’).¹³⁶

¹³³ Ælfric, *CHI*, Homily 14, 296.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, Homily 22, 355.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, Homily 21, 351.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, Homily 21, 351.

Although Ælfric drew from both Gregory the Great and Haymo for this section of the homily, Godden has noted that when providing exegesis for this verse of Mark, ‘both Haymo and Gregory relate the casting out of devils to exorcism where Ælfric relates it to baptism’ in a similar style to Bede in his exegesis on the book of Tobit.¹³⁷ Perhaps Ælfric understood that his audience would relate more to the exorcism process before baptism than any other type of exorcism to which his sources referred.

Ælfric found it important to explain how even though these contemporary inward miracles were not as extravagant as those outward ones listed by Mark, they still held important significance. He even argued that ‘the spiritual miracles are mightier than the bodily were, because these miracles heal the man’s soul, which is eternal, but the earlier miracles healed the mortal body’ (Ðas gastlican wundra sind maran þonne ða lichamlice wæron: for þan ðe ðas wundra gehælað ðæs mannes sawle þe is ece. 7 þa ærran tacna gehældon ðone deadlican lichaman’).¹³⁸ Although Ælfric explained the wondrous aspects of baptism and its effects on the soul extensively, the cleansing of original sin did not play a focal role or, in fact, any role at all here. In these homilies, he highlighted instead the devil’s control over the soul before baptism and his expulsion and the connected healing of the soul as a result of it.

The Anglo-Saxons appear to have sustained the tradition of ‘ransom theory’ handed down to them which portrayed the unbaptized as either possessed or under direct control of the devil, only occasionally explaining this as a direct consequence of Adam and Eve’s sin. This portrayal permeated through homilies that alluded to baptism and extant baptismal liturgy, where the priest commanded the devil to leave the catechumen to make room in the soul for

¹³⁷ Godden, *Ælfric’s Catholic Homilies*, 173.

¹³⁸ Ælfric, *CHI*, Homily 21, 351.

the Holy Spirit. Latin liturgy from the period explained how baptism brought ‘remission of all sins’ (*remissionem omnium peccatorum*) in the service but never specifically mentioned original sin. Foxhall Forbes has suggested that ‘complex and abstract concepts such as “original sin” may have been more difficult to grasp than the idea of spiritual agents of good and evil which were not always visible, but which could be (and were) represented pictorially and visually.’¹³⁹ Certainly, when homilists chose to emphasise the aspect of devil exorcism in baptism, they might have considered this as a topic easier for their congregation to conceptualise and comprehend instead of the more intricate doctrine of original sin, particularly if the congregation had plenty of first-hand experience witnessing the prominence of the exorcism rituals in the baptismal service. With a relatively limited number of references in the available manuscripts to Adam’s role in the transmission of a sinful state to each child, we must ask if the devil in the discourse, rather than a widespread belief that original sin stained the soul, factored more into inciting parents to baptize their children in haste.

Heathenism

An article in the Northumbrian Priests’ Law (1008 x 1023), which shares some correspondences with Wulfstan of York’s works, distinguished penalties for cases where a child died a ‘heathen’ (‘hæþen’) based on its age at death: if it died before living nine days, atonement could be made through God alone; after those nine days, an additional material fine had to be made of ‘twelve ore’ (‘XII or’).¹⁴⁰ Calling a new-born a heathen might initially

¹³⁹ Foxhall Forbes, *Heaven and Earth*, 101.

¹⁴⁰ ‘The Northumbrian Priests’ Law c. 1008x1023,’ #63 in *Councils and Synods* I.i, eds. and trans. D. Whitelock, M. Brett, and C. Brooke, 455. On background for this text, see *ibid.*, 450-452.

seem disconcerting to the modern reader even if Thompson has suggested that in the case of unbaptized infants, ‘paganism (heathenism) could also be defined entirely passively.’¹⁴¹ Anglo-Saxon authors were not concerned that several-day-old children were practicing witchcraft or worshipping Woden and Frige; when used to describe children, the label ‘heathen’ sometimes served as a substitute for ‘not Christian’ or ‘unbaptized.’ However, we must question the degree of weight the term ‘heathen’ truly held in the context of unbaptized children when we encounter it in laws, homilies and letters from this time. Would calling an infant right after birth, or even still in the womb, a ‘heathen’ – and thus condemned to hell – have also shocked an Anglo-Saxon audience? Instead of original sin, could a heathen status have been another tool, much like devil possession, intended to spur people on to seek speedy baptism for their infants?

Appearances of heathenism or paganism in a religious context have been studied on a more general level to define authorial intentions in the use of these terms. Lees has argued that Anglo-Saxon ‘vernacular discourses of the other – the Jew, heathen, or heretic – are largely symbolic and ideological methods of educating a Christian society.’¹⁴² By ‘maintaining its fixed boundaries by reference to the abject figures of Jew, pagan, or leper,’ Anglo-Saxon homilists could better define what it meant to be part of a Christian community.¹⁴³ Palmer has noted a similar process where the Carolingians ‘employed readings and arguments about paganism with predominantly moralizing intent, seeking to illuminate those qualities within Christendom they wished to promote and those they wished to reject [...] the principal target

¹⁴¹ Thompson, *Dying and Death*, 36.

¹⁴² C. Lees, *Tradition and Belief: Religious Writing in Late Anglo-Saxon England* (Minneapolis, 1999), 120.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 124.

of description is not paganism in any form, but rather the imaginative *mundus* of strict forms of Christianity.’¹⁴⁴ The term ‘heathen’ should be seen here as a tool created to define the Christian community rather than a pagan one, but it should not necessarily be recognised as intended to be understood as passively as Thompson has argued. The term by itself could have been used to incite more immediate action for those parents and clergy who held responsibility for the salvation of infant souls. This section will analyse heathenism in the discourse of baptism as an alternative motivating factor to original sin employed by authors to hasten parents to take their infants to baptism. It first analyses the more passive usages in Ælfric’s letters and then move to the potentially more provocative handling of the term encountered in homilies.

Before our period we see several noteworthy pieces associating heathenism with baptism on the Continent and in Ireland. Alcuin’s treatise on baptism found in two letters from 798 – its title deriving from the opening words *Primo paganus* – explained the order of the baptismal rite and the spiritual significance of each event in the ceremony; it quickly became ‘the most copied and cited commentary on baptism under the Carolingians.’¹⁴⁵ Probably inspired by Charlemagne’s program of forced conversion of the Saxon people, ‘Alcuin emphasized the education he demanded through the liturgy of baptism [...] he wrote that each catechumen ought to understand what was happening to him.’¹⁴⁶ The fame of this work centred around a conversion narrative might have influenced the Anglo-Saxon inclusion

¹⁴⁴ J. Palmer, ‘Defining Paganism in the Carolingian World,’ *Early Medieval Europe* 15 (2007), 425.

¹⁴⁵ O. Phelan, ‘Textual Transmission and Authorship in Carolingian Europe: *Primo Paganus*, Baptism, and Alcuin of York,’ *Revue Bénédictine* 118 (2008), 262-263; *Primo paganus* appears in two separate letters by Alcuin in 798: Alcuin, *Epistolae*, letters 134 and 137, MGH *Epistolarum tomus II*, 202-203 and 210-216.

¹⁴⁶ Phelan, *The Formation of Christian Europe*, 124.

of heathenism in the baptismal context. Copied around the same time that Alcuin wrote *Primo paganus*, the *Irish Stowe Missal* began its baptismal *ordo* with a call to God, asking him to ‘drive out the devil and heathenism from this person.’¹⁴⁷ Although devil possession had a strong presence in baptismal liturgy by this point, the expulsion of heathendom might seem unusual several centuries past Ireland’s initial conversion. This line including both devil possession and heathenism, however, draws similar parallels when we turn to Anglo-Saxon homilies written two hundred years later.

In both his Latin and Old English letters, Ælfric used the term ‘heathen’ to discuss unbaptized children and the role of priests in rectifying that situation. In his most apparent ‘passive’ use of the term, he stated in his second Latin letter to Wulfstan that a child should not remain ‘pagan’ for more than seven days.¹⁴⁸ One could easily substitute ‘unbaptized’ here without much issue. However, we see a bit more depth added to the term in Ælfric’s pastoral letter to Wulfsig III which gave instructions on the many responsibilities of a priest. Concerning what should be done if a priest happened upon a child who had not been christened, he wrote: ‘if an unbaptized infant is unexpectedly brought to the mass-priest, he is compelled to baptize it immediately with haste so that it does not die a heathen’ (‘gif ungefullod cild færllice bið gebroht to þam mæssepreoste, þæt he hit mot fullian sona mid ofste, þæt hit ne swelte hæðen’).¹⁴⁹ As this letter illustrates, Anglo-Saxon authors had a choice to make when discussing those who had not yet been baptized. ‘Ungefullod,’ which translates

¹⁴⁷ ‘expelle diabolium et gentilitatem ab homine isto’: *The Stowe Missal*, volume 2, ed. G. Warner (London, 1915), 24. The extra ‘li’ in gentilitatem appears to be a duplication mistake.

¹⁴⁸ ‘In baptizando infantes ut non sint pagani ultra septem dies’: Ælfric ‘Second Latin Letter to Wulfstan,’ in *Ælfric: The Letters Project*, eds. M. Elliot and T. Major < <http://groups.chass.utoronto.ca/aelfric/>>.

¹⁴⁹ Ælfric, ‘Pastoral Letter for Wulfsig III, Bishop of Sherborne c. 993x995,’ #71 in *Councils and Synods I.i*, 210.

most directly to the modern English ‘unbaptized,’ would appear the immediate choice, but this word occurs less frequently in this context than the word ‘heathen.’¹⁵⁰ Using both the Old English word for ‘unbaptized’ – ‘ungefullod’ – and ‘heathen’ side by side here, we see that the term ‘heathen’ is more than just a synonym for unbaptized, but the damning consequence of it. Furthermore, both the cleansing of original sin and freedom from devil possession do not appear in this letter; Ælfric chose instead to emphasise the removal of a heathen status as the only motivating factor for a speedy baptism.

Ælfric supplemented his homiletic discussions of unbaptized, heathen children with more powerful language and themes than his letters. He would sometimes mix the discourse of heathenism with Adam’s transgressions and/or devil possession, creating a stronger argument for infant baptism. In a homily for the Feast of the Ascension, Ælfric made a case for the relationship between heathenism, the devil, and unbaptized children. He wrote: ‘when the priest christens the child, then he drives out the devil from the child; because every heathen man is the devil’s, but through the holy baptism he is God’s, if he preserves it’ (‘Ðonne se preost cristnað þæt cild. þonne adræfð he þone deofol of þam cilde: for þan ðe ælc hæpen man bið deofles: ac þurh ðæt halige fulluht he bið godes gif he hit gehylt’).¹⁵¹ The encompassing term ‘ælc’ confirmed Ælfric’s belief in the inclusion of these infants with *all* heathens. A special, distinct class of ‘heathen’ had not been made for the unbaptized – Ælfric preached that their status equalled those who had either never accepted God’s grace or had forfeited it.

¹⁵⁰ Outside of Ælfric’s works, ‘ungefullod’ is used in the Blickling account of St Martin’s first miracle, where Martin brought back to life an ‘unbaptized’ (‘ungefullad’) man; *Blickling Homilies*, 150; ‘Ungefullod’ and similar spellings searched through the *Dictionary of Old English Web Corpus*.

¹⁵¹ Ælfric, *CHI*, Homily 21, 351.

Ælfric also turned to the subject of baptism in his homily for the first Sunday after Pentecost, straying from his sources to warn his audience not ‘to hold dangerously your child too long a heathen, because they will not have admission into heaven if they die a heathen’ (‘ge healdan eowre cild to plihte to lange hæþene, for ðan þe hi nabbað innfær to heofonum, gif hi hæþene acwelað’).¹⁵² When Domesday finally came, he continued, ‘the heathen children will continuously inhabit hell, and the baptized will go to heaven in body and in soul’ (‘And þa hæðenan cild on helle a wuniað, and þa gefulledon farað to heofenum, on lichaman and on sawle, and libbað a syððan, ge þa ane ge þa oðre, butan geendunge’).¹⁵³ There is no telling the exact effect which repeating the word ‘heathen’ here would have created in Ælfric’s audience, but coupled with the language of eternal damnation, we can speculate that this term would have incited a degree of eschatological fear. Furthermore, Ælfric placed heathen and baptized souls in opposition to one another, providing an easy comparison of their two very different fates for his audience. Ælfric next returned to his source (Bede’s Homily II.18) to combine the fear of a child dying a heathen with Adam’s role in the sinful state of children: ‘the child is immersed sinful into the font, and is lifted up cleansed from sins through that holy baptism. Through Adam’s transgression, which broke God’s commandment, that child is sinful, but through God’s own grace their sins are destroyed’ (þæt cild bið synnful bedyped into þam fante, and biþ up abroden fram synnum aðwogen, þurh þæt halige fulluht. þurh Adames forgægednesse, þe godes bebod tobræc, beoð þa cild synfulle; ac þurh Godes sylfes gyfe heora synna beoð adylegode’).¹⁵⁴ Whether intended for a lay audience or addressed to those clergy

¹⁵² Ælfric, *Supplementary*, volume 1, Homily 12, 483-484.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 484.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 484-485.

responsible for baptizing infants, this homily could have brought certain anxieties about the audience's role in the fate of unspeaking children. The prospect of a child dying both heathen and sinful – whether or not the transmission of those sins was fully explained – because someone delayed his or her baptism would now lie on his audience's conscience.

Although Wulfstan was familiar with Ælfric's homilies which labelled unbaptized children as heathens and received at least one letter from Ælfric where an unbaptized infant was called a 'pagan,' he did not appear to follow Ælfric's terminology quite as readily. Meaney has noted the oddity that Wulfstan did not use the word heathen to describe unbaptized children, wondering if 'perhaps Wulfstan did not wish to be too specific about the fate of the unbaptized after death, especially if they were innocent babies.'¹⁵⁵ Whilst he did not use this specific terminology, Wulfstan's homilies on baptism are not empty of references to heathenism. In the same homily where he explained the exsufflation of the devil in the baptismal ceremony, Wulfstan stressed the importance of teaching the lay community 'how he from heathendom may come to Christianity through righteous faith and through baptism' ('hu he of hæpendome mæge to cristendome þurh rihtne geleafan 7 þurh fulluht cuman').¹⁵⁶ Additionally, in his Latin sermon on baptism, Wulfstan did refer to the actions a 'pagan catechumen' ('paganus caticuminus') first needed to take in order to join the Christian community.¹⁵⁷ Bethurum, presumably to alleviate any concerns for modern readers, made an editorial note that 'this is the usual term for an unbaptized person, whether infant or adult,' but

¹⁵⁵ A. Meaney, "'And we forbeodað eornostlice ælcne hæðenscipe": Wulfstan and Late Anglo-Saxon and Norse 'Heathenism,' in *Wulfstan, Archbishop of York: The Proceedings of the Second Alcuin Conference*, ed. M. Townend (Turnhout, 2004), 472.

¹⁵⁶ Wulfstan, *Homilies*, Homily 8c, 175.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, Homily 8a, 169.

it is becoming more difficult to say that this term should only be interpreted as ‘passive.’¹⁵⁸

Although Wulfstan’s rhetoric is not as inflammatory as that used by Ælfric, he still could not manage to avoid the association of heathenism and the unbaptized all together.

Whilst Wulfstan might have purposefully avoided the term in this context, the anonymous author of ‘De infantibus non baptizandis,’ discussed at the beginning of this chapter, began by addressing his audience ‘concerning your heathen children’ (‘ymbe eowre hæþenan cild’), ordering them to baptize their infants as soon as possible after birth so that ‘many souls are not lost to God’ (‘fela sawla gode ne losian’).¹⁵⁹ The homilist then described how those infant souls would never enter the kingdom of heaven, forced to dwell ‘in hell’ (‘on helle’) with ‘all the devils’ (‘mid eallum deoflum’) for eternity.¹⁶⁰ Immediately after this grim reminder, the homilist turned to the issue of those parents who delayed baptism in hopes of finding the most favourable godparents who could enhance their social standing. This does not seem to have been an uncommon practice for the Anglo-Saxons; Lynch has found that when it came to choosing a spiritual guardian, ‘wise parents sought for their child and for themselves the most useful sponsor to whom they had access.’¹⁶¹ The homilist of ‘De infantibus’ criticised this custom, however, ‘because the holy gospel tells us that God’s rage dwells over the heathen, and it is better that the heathen child receives a beggar [as a godparent] than it never have eternal joy and [instead] have eternal punishment’ (‘for þan þe us sægð þæt halig godspell . þæt godes grama wunað ofer þone hæþenan . 7 betere bið þam hæþenan cilde . þæt

¹⁵⁸ Bethurum, *Homilies of Wulfstan*, 311.

¹⁵⁹ ‘De infantibus,’ 154.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 154.

¹⁶¹ J. Lynch, *Christianizing Kinship: Ritual Sponsorship in Anglo-Saxon England* (Ithaca, 1998), 200.

hit nime an ælmes man þonne hit næbbe þa ecan myrhðe . 7 hæbbe þa ecan witu’).¹⁶² The rest of the homily listed the many dangers which could unexpectedly kill an infant – such as a mother breast feeding while asleep and suffocating the child – and ended cautioning pregnant women against performing those tasks which could induce a miscarriage so as not to damn the child if it was already quickened in the womb.¹⁶³

Imagery of damnation and hell weigh heavily across this short homily, and the text does not leave the reader in doubt as to why unbaptized infants deserved that damned fate – from the first line that reason is that they are ‘heathen children.’ While this first instance in the homily could be interpreted as Thompson’s ‘passive’ usage of the word heathen for unbaptized children, the next accounts of the term leave less doubts concerning the homilists’ stance towards these non-Christian infants. To the homilist, ‘God’s rage’ dwelled over every heathen *including* these children. He probably referred here to John 3:36 – ‘He that believeth in the Son, hath life everlasting; but he that believeth not the Son, shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him’ – adding unbaptized, heathen children to the list of those who incur God’s wrath. No mention of a child’s sin, let alone original sin, can be found in this homily, and whilst the unbaptized soul of a diseased child was believed to spend eternity with devils, those devils are not described as ever possessing the child’s soul before baptism, as some other homilies studied in this chapter have stated. The only reason the homilist gave for an unbaptized child’s damned state was its heathen status.

Whilst we do see occasions where ‘heathen’ could have simply substituted ‘unbaptized,’ other occurrences, especially in vernacular homilies, necessitate adding more

¹⁶² ‘De infantibus,’ 154.

¹⁶³ For more on this text and Anglo-Saxon beliefs concerning the moment of ensoulment, see above, pages 117-118.

weight to the term. The rhetoric used, strewn with harrowing depictions of hell, emphasised the precarious situation in which an unbaptized child found itself. It is also worth bearing in mind that the last decades of the eleventh century – when many of these works were being composed – saw a renewal of Viking attacks and ‘from 991 to 1005, the English suffered the worst and most sustained Viking onslaught in over a hundred years.’¹⁶⁴ Semple has noted that ‘perhaps stimulated in part by anxiety at the approach of the millennium, both Ælfric and Wulfstan (archbishop of York, 1002-23) show an overt concern with the continuation of paganism and the evil deeds of mankind in their sermons and homilies. Their works stress the terrible judgement that awaited sinners and heathens and the infernal torment to follow.’¹⁶⁵ As we have observed, these fervent words dictating the fate of heathens were not limited to adults who knowingly strayed away from Christianity – unbaptized infants, as heathens, also warranted the same fate. Juxtaposed with other homiletic lessons about the fate of heathens and more frequent Viking invasions, bringing heathenism into the discourse might best be interpreted as a rhetorical technique intended to invoke an immediate fear in the audience similar to the inclusion of devil possession. These homilies cast an unbaptized infant as part of the abject ‘other,’ consigning them to remain outside the Christian community, potentially for eternity, unless action took place. More often than not, late Anglo-Saxon homilists chose to persuade audiences to baptize their children by instilling a fear of condemnation to hell, either through devil possession or heathendom, rather than a belief in inherent sin.

¹⁶⁴ S. Keynes, ‘An Abbot, an Archbishop, and the Viking Raids of 1006-7 and 1009-12,’ *Anglo-Saxon England* 36 (2007), 153.

¹⁶⁵ S. Semple, ‘Illustrations of Damnation in late Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts,’ *Anglo-Saxon England* 32 (2003), 231.

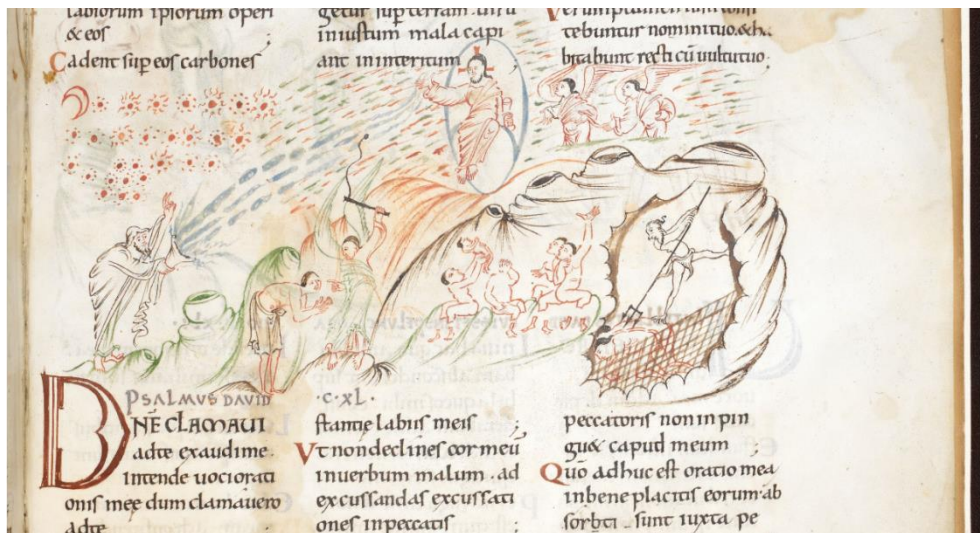
Conclusion

Image 4: London, British Library, Harley MS 603, f. 72r

The Harley Psalter, copied from the Utrecht Psalter in the first decades of the eleventh century, contains only a few illustrations that ‘are entirely innovative, bearing no relation to the relevant Utrecht folios, and all three may incorporate elements of late Anglo-Saxon secular practice and popular belief.’¹⁶⁶ One of these original images portrays Psalm 140: the left-hand side features the incense ‘as evening sacrifice’ (140:1) and an angel, or ‘the just’ (140:5), reprimanding the Psalmist with Christ and angels observing from above. The right-hand side depicts the second half of the psalm, where bodies with perceivably amputated limbs lie under a mound with vents— ‘Our bones are scattered by the side of hell’ (140:7) – next to a deeper hole with a net where a devil jabs at two further individuals – ‘the wicked shall fall in his net’ (140:10). Looking closer, one of the bodies on the side of hell has lifted up an infant, small

¹⁶⁶ Semple, ‘Illustrations of Damnation,’ 237-238.

and swaddled in cloth, to one of the vents; however, the psalm itself mentioned no children. In the process of creating this manuscript, somebody made the decision that a baby should be included on the outskirts of hell.

Two different theories have been advanced to explain the amputees and infant encased within this mound. Semple has argued that ‘by depicting hell as holes, pits or clefts beneath mounds, [artist] F was developing the motifs found in the Utrecht Psalter representing hell and hell’s mouth, creating illustrations that conveyed the contemporary practice of interring criminals, suicides, unbaptized and other sinners in prehistoric and later barrows.’¹⁶⁷ Foxhall Forbes has taken a different stance, suggesting that this could be a rare depiction of ‘some kind of purgatorial place rather than in hell.’¹⁶⁸ She has explained the existence of the infant by saying ‘one of the men who is “next to” hell seems to be lifting his soul, represented as a child, up to one of the vents in the mound, echoing the Psalmist’s cry, “because my eyes are to you Lord, in you I have hoped, do not take away my soul”, and perhaps suggesting that these souls are not damned like those in the nets next to them, since they can ultimately be released and join God.’¹⁶⁹ We might never know the intended interpretation of this illustration; however, from this study about Anglo-Saxon beliefs concerning the state of unbaptized children’s souls, we should not be surprised by the presence of a seemingly innocent infant so close to hell.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 240.

¹⁶⁸ Foxhall Forbes, *Heaven and Earth*, 96; see also H. Foxhall Forbes, ‘*O Domine libera animam meam!* Visualizing Purgatory in Anglo-Saxon England,’ in *Anglo-Saxon England and the Visual Imagination*, eds. J. Niles, S. Klein, and J. Wilcox (Tempe, 2016), 131-132.

¹⁶⁹ Foxhall Forbes, *Heaven and Earth*, 96.

We encounter a different picture, however, when we turn to archaeological excavations of late Anglo-Saxon church cemeteries. In a recent study, Crawford has found that even though an unbaptized infant ‘should not, according to canon law, have been included in a consecrated burial ground,’ archaeological evidence points to ‘a relatively higher numbers of babies, many of whom cannot ever have been baptized, [who] were included in church and community cemeteries in the later Anglo-Saxon period.’¹⁷⁰ Perhaps, at the pastoral level, a more forgiving approach was taken for those children who died before baptism than those approaches taken by the written works produced in religious settings studied here. With this new perspective, we must recognise that we have only just scratched the surface of early English attitudes towards the souls of the unbaptized.

Although Anglo-Saxon homilists preached about the damned state of unbaptized infant souls, emphasizing their eternal existence in hell, the reasoning behind those ideas rarely, if ever, centred around a belief that a child’s soul inherited the condition of original sin. Adam’s role in salvation history was not ignored in poetry and prose – his and Eve’s actions were still taught to have effects which cursed mankind – but no surviving evidence fully explained the doctrine of inherited sin and its transmission. A single Anglo-Saxon term does not appear to have translated Augustine’s *peccatum originale* into the vernacular, and whilst homilies might have discussed cleansing souls from sin at baptism, that sin, even when discussing infants, appeared in the plural echoing the Latin liturgy’s ‘remissionem omnium peccatorum.’ Multiple sources discussed how bodies received clean souls from God, but nowhere do we find a late Anglo-Saxon text explaining the process through which those souls subsequently became damned.

¹⁷⁰ S. Crawford, ‘Baptism and Infant Burial in Anglo-Saxon England,’ in *Medieval Life Cycles: Continuity and Change*, eds. E. Cochelin and K. Smyth (Turnhout, 2013), 72, 74.

Nonetheless, Anglo-Saxon authors were not short of reasons to condemn the unbaptized; a confrontational approach seems to have been the preferred method to induce fear into parents who had not taken their children to receive the first sacrament. Already present in the baptismal process from an early stage, the pre-Augustinian Christian tradition of placing the soul of the unbaptized in the devil's grasp in both their baptismal liturgy and homilies was continued by the later Anglo-Saxons. We also see unbaptized infants classified as heathens and incorporated with all other types of heathens who were condemned to a vividly imagined hell, a discourse possibly influenced by the Carolingian conversion narrative or the continual threat of invading Vikings. We find these reasons for seeking a speedy baptism combined all together in homilies but we also find each incentive appearing separately as well. The exact rationale as to why a child's soul was condemned might not have been as important to Anglo-Saxon authors as the task of instilling in their audiences a sense of fear or guilt if their deceased children went to hell. For once a child received baptism, the soul's fate could reside in innocence for a short time before the responsibility for sin and good works began.

Chapter Four

The Coming of Age of the Soul

Many borders are invisible unless marked by a sign or a man-made barrier.¹

There are three spiritual births [...] That is the first spiritual birth when we receive baptism from the service of our mass-priest. Then is the next spiritual birth after the person is aged and it has been granted that he may acknowledge his penance for all his sins, thereupon he is called God's servant because true confession is at the foundation of all spiritual healing. Then is the third birth after true confession as soon as the person is aged and advances himself through true confession and through his confessor's support that he will receive the Lord's own body and his blood when he has fully all of the means which lead him to eternal life.

Þreo accennednyssa beoð gaslice [...] Þæt is seo forme accennednyss gastlicu þonne we onfoð fullwihte æt ure massepreosta þenunge. Þonne is seo æftre accennednyss gastlicu syððan se mann gewintrod bið and þæt geseald hafað þæt he andette his scrifte ealle his synna syððan he bið godes þeowa geciged for þan ðe se soða anddetnyss æt frymðe eallra gastlicra læcedoma. Þonne is seo þridde accennednyss æfter þam soðan andetnyssa syððan se mann gewintrad bið and he hine sylfne gemedmað þurh þa soðan anddetnyss and þurh his scrites fultum þæt he bið andfenge drihtenes sylfes lichaman and his blode þonne he hafað fullice ealle þa hadas þe hine to þan ece life gelædað.²

This passage from an anonymous Old English homily preserved solely in an early twelfth-century manuscript included a person's baptism, first act of confession, and first communion as moments of spiritual renewal. Bazire and Cross traced the first two spiritual births discussed by this Rogationtide homily to an analogous passage in the Hiberno-Latin *Liber de*

¹ E. Treharne, 'Borders,' in *A Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Studies*, eds. J. Stodnick and R. Trilling (Chichester, 2012), 18.

² Anonymous, 'Homily 5,' in *Eleven Old English Homilies*, 72.

numeris; as for the third ‘somewhat excessive’ birth, the editors could only speculate that ‘in view of our composer’s lack of concern for accuracy elsewhere one wonders whether his division of the three births is a normal sequence.’³ The inclusion of a second, and even third, spiritual birth which charted the advancement and needs of the soul once it had become ‘aged’ (‘gewintrod’) in this homily regrettably appears to be an anomaly in Old English literature; no further evidence from the period exists to support a belief in any spiritual rebirth between baptism and death. Ælfric did indeed discuss three separate births in his homily for the nativity of Saint Paul, but those encompassed bodily birth, spiritual birth at baptism, and rebirth at Judgement Day.⁴ Although some have questioned the theological accuracy of the author of this Rogationtide homily, this passage does raise certain questions about Anglo-Saxon beliefs concerning the souls of those too young to understand many of the key aspects of Christianity.⁵

A discussion in the *Old English Penitential* of the importance of unction includes the statement: ‘(concerning) each of those men who has the last rites (offices), it is written that his soul is as clean after his death as the soul of a child who dies soon after baptism’ (‘forþam hit is awriten þæt ælc þæra manna þe þas gerihto hæfð. þæt his sawl bið gelice clæne æfter his forðsiðe ealswa þæt cild bið þe æfter fulwihte sona- gewit’).⁶ This simile comparing the state of two souls near the beginning and the end of the life course appears not just on this occasion

³ Bazire and Cross, *Eleven Old English Homilies*, 68.

⁴ Ælfric, *CHI*, Homily 27, 405.

⁵ Bazire and Cross have also noted that the composer of this homily ‘lacked firm integrity and care, as indicated by two false ascriptions to Scripture’: *Eleven Old English Homilies*, 67.

⁶ *The Old English Penitential*, Y41.15.02, ed. and trans. Frantzen.

but also later in the same penitential as Thompson has shown.⁷ The Anglo-Saxons believed that a child's soul was pure immediately ('sona') after baptism, but at some point that purity must have ended. After seeing such emphasis placed on the jeopardy in which an unbaptized infant found itself across a range of sources in the previous chapter, we must now look for when that concern for an individual's spiritual well-being began again after the sacrament of baptism took place.

When did the Anglo-Saxons believe that a child's soul lost its perceived purity? Some of the difficulty in answering this question comes from the failure of early medieval writers to mark a clear distinction between childhood and adulthood, something which later medieval theologians achieved by postponing the sacrament of confirmation until puberty, a sacrament which remained linked with baptism for the later Anglo-Saxons.⁸ Further, no surviving text from the early medieval period stipulated precisely when individuals needed to begin making confession to atone for their sins.⁹ We must look through a range of sources instead to find when children's wrongful actions became sins which could affect the soul rather than just the simple misdemeanours and mischief of childhood, and these sources notably were produced by a literary culture which had questionable amounts of interaction with children.

⁷ Thompson, *Dying and Death*, 72; *The Old English Penitential*, Y89.03.01, ed. and trans. Frantzen.

⁸ N. Orme, 'Children and the Church in Medieval England,' *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 45 (1994), 575. Although the sacrament of confirmation has a long history of being deferred for a number of years after baptism, that postponement had more to do with the lack of accessible bishops available to perform the sacrament rather than for any theological reasons: Cramer, *Baptism and Change*, 179-184. On the gradual disuse of infant confirmation and scholastic debates on the correct age to receive the rite, see Fisher, *Christian Initiation*, 120-140. Furthermore, doubts about the inclusion of infants and children in the act of communion only started to gain strength in the late eleventh and twelfth centuries, and it was not until the Council of Trent in the sixteenth century that a consensus was passed that a child must reach an age of discretion before receiving the eucharist: Fisher, *Christian Initiation*, 101-108.

⁹ There is little consensus on how frequently even adults made confession. See R. Meens, 'The Frequency and Nature of Early Medieval Penance,' in *Handling Sin: Confession in the Middle Ages*, eds. P. Biller and A. Minnis (York, 1998), 35-62.

McLaughlin's reminder about researching medieval childhood still holds true today: because of the ecclesiastical origin of most of our sources, a huge limitation 'lies in that fact that in more detailed accounts of childhood and in briefer references to it, we see children and childhood through the eyes of those who had, obviously, been children but very rarely parents.'¹⁰

Anglo-Saxon beliefs about the boundary between childhood and adulthood have received far too little attention. Archaeological evidence, at least from the early Anglo-Saxon period, pointed to the transitional period from childhood to adulthood beginning somewhere between the ages of ten and twelve as Crawford has found, but this evidence relies on the inclusion of (often gender-marking) grave-goods, a tradition which did not last to the same extent into the later Anglo-Saxon period.¹¹ In law codes, the boundary between childhood and adulthood remained blurred, with the age of majority fluctuating anywhere between the ages of ten and fifteen.¹² On the religious level, Meens has started the process of researching the spiritual status of children and their relation to a theology of sin, focusing on a more general outlook from the early Middle Ages. He specifically has studied when children began to make their own confessions – a point when the balancing of sins with good works might arguably begin – and found that within the language used in penitentials, infants (*infantes*) were never

¹⁰ M. McLaughlin, 'Survivors and Surrogates: Children and parents from the Ninth to the Thirteenth Centuries,' in *The History of Childhood*, ed. L. DeMause (London, 1976), 109-110.

¹¹ Crawford, *Childhood in Anglo-Saxon*, 47.

¹² A. Rabin, "'Sharper than a Serpent's Tooth': Parent-Child Litigation in Anglo-Saxon England,' in *Childhood and Adolescence*, 275-278.

listed as sinners but children (*pueri*) were.¹³ However, these labels offer fairly little specific information about where the spiritual boundary was thought to fall.

Terminology for age groups in both Latin and Old English was not a matter of precision for the Anglo-Saxons. In his study of different age schemes encountered at different stages of the medieval period, Burrow has found at least five different models dividing life into separate ages based on growth: the most popular ranging from three ages of man to seven. For the later Anglo-Saxon period, however, he argued that the most prominent scheme, founded by Augustine and fostered to popularity by Isidore of Seville, was that of the six ages of man which corresponded to the six ages of the world.¹⁴ Isidore's *Etymologiae*, often regarded as one of the most popular works of the early Middle Ages, set each age group with a precise amount of years.¹⁵ The first, *infantia*, lasted from birth to the age of seven. *Pueritia*, or childhood, covered the ages of seven to fourteen. Adolescence (*adolescentia*) lasted until the age of twenty-eight, youth (*juventus*) until fifty, maturity (*gravitas*) until seventy, and then finally limitless old age (*senectus*).¹⁶ Importantly, however, in actual usage medieval authors

¹³ R. Meens, 'Children and Confession in the Early Middle Ages,' in *The Church and Childhood*, 55, 61. Abraham has continued research on this topic using evidence from penitentials composed in Western Europe before the ninth century to discuss the transitions from infancy to adulthood: E. Abraham, *Anticipating Sin in Medieval Society* (Amsterdam, 2017), 47-90.

¹⁴ J. Burrow, *The Ages of Man: a Study in Medieval Writing and Thought* (Oxford, 1988), 80-82.

¹⁵ Isidore's *Etymologies* was a work known to a number of named Anglo-Saxon authors including Bede, Willibald, Alfred, Ælfric, and Wulfstan the Cantor but also several anonymous Latin and Old English authors: *Fontes*, Search query: *Etymologiae*. See above, page 111, footnote 29.

¹⁶ Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, Book 11, ch. 2, items 1-7, PL 82:415B-415C.

applied each of these terms more liberally than Isidore's systematic approach originally classified.¹⁷

When turning to the Old English lexicon of childhood, the language appears even less methodical, lacking the strict – or even loose – boundaries which Isidore helped to form. Crawford, who has written most extensively on Anglo-Saxon childhood, has found that of the many Old English terms which defined childhood, 'by far the most common is *bearn* or *cild*: both terms can be used of girls too, but more often a male child is assumed. Occasionally boys and girls are distinguished by the use of a gendered compound – *waepcild* (weapon child) for boys and *wifcild* (weaving child) for girls.'¹⁸ Crawford has noted that none of these terms marked a definite distinction between childhood and adulthood, instead stating that they were 'loosely associated with age bands and appropriate context, rather than with rigid age categories.'¹⁹ Indeed, when Anglo-Saxon authors attempted to translate the more precise Latin terms of infancy, childhood, adolescence, and youth into the vernacular, they encountered certain difficulties because of a lack of available philological distinctions.²⁰ The Old English language treated age groups loosely, offering no clues to someone attempting to find a spiritual boundary – or any type of boundary – between childhood and adulthood.

Homilists from the Anglo-Saxon period taught that an infant's soul was only safe after it had received the sacrament of baptism; our enquiry of the life journey of the soul must

¹⁷ On the indiscriminate use of these terms in the early Middle Ages, see R. Meens, 'Children and Confession,' 54; S. Irvine and W. Rudolf, 'Introduction,' in *Childhood and Adolescence*, 5. Abraham has found that this same fluid usage of the Latin terms for childhood existed in the early medieval penitentials composed up until the ninth century: Abraham, *Anticipating Sin*, 50. A notable exception to this has been suggested by Hill who contends that Isidore's age scheme was 'broadly' kept in the lives of Anglo-Saxon male saints: J. Hill, 'Childhood in the Lives of Anglo-Saxon Saints,' in *Childhood and Adolescence*, 151.

¹⁸ Crawford, *Childhood in Anglo-Saxon*, 50.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 51.

²⁰ Burrow, *The Ages of Man*, 62.

continue by addressing when the late Anglo-Saxons believed an individual's soul lost that reassurance of immediate entry into heaven after death. At a certain point, the balance book of the soul began, weighing and measuring the sins and good works of each soul during its corporal life. When did the Anglo-Saxons believe this accountability of the soul to begin? Understanding Anglo-Saxon beliefs about the souls of children requires an exploration into a large range of texts addressing childhood, sins, purity, and death. This chapter follows the three conflicting beliefs present in the late Anglo-Saxon period about when the purity, immunity, and/or innocence of a child's soul concluded. The earliest point at which, the acquisition of speech, may be found in a story from the *Dialogues* of Gregory the Great which gained certain popularity within Anglo-Saxon homilies. Next, following the arguments by Augustine, another tradition appears to have emerged arguing that children had immunity until an age of reason had been reached. Finally, some ideas – particularly emphasised by Isidore of Seville in his *Etymologiae* – floated around drawing the line between the soul's purity and its potential sexual pollution at puberty.

Gaining Speech

The youngest stage of development which potentially marked the transition from childhood innocence to spiritual maturity might have been the moment a child acquired speech. Sources from the late-ninth to the mid-eleventh century portrayed a child's newfound ability to speak in two ways: as something which could either damn a child's soul or redeem it. The representation of speech as the potential end point for the pure status of a child's soul in the late Anglo-Saxon period may be traced to the treatment of a story in Gregory the Great's *Dialogues* which addressed the issue of sin and children's souls in specific detail. After

considering the many immoralities of humanity, Gregory's interlocuter Peter supposed that 'since the human race is subject to countless vices, I am inclined to think that the heavenly Jerusalem is filled mostly with infants and children.'²¹ Although Gregory assured him that 'we must believe that all baptized children who die in their infancy go to heaven,' he specified that 'we should not suppose that all children, once they have learned how to speak, will enter the kingdom of heaven; sometimes parents close the gates of heaven against their own children by not giving them a proper upbringing.'²²

To stress the potentially damning connection between poor parenting and a child's capacity to speak, Gregory recounted the tale of a five-year-old child in Rome who used to curse the Lord's name whenever things did not go his way. His father failed to correct his son's behaviour, and when the child lay dying from a sudden plague which had spread across Rome, he cried out that he saw evil spirits ready to take him away before uttering another blasphemy and immediately dying. Gregory gave the moral of the tale afterwards: 'in neglecting the soul of his little son he [the father] had made of him [the son] a sinner worthy of the fires of hell.'²³ Gregory here timed the first damages to the soul with the power of speech – he allocated all unspeaking infants who died immediate entrance into heaven. By placing the child's age at five, still comfortably in the *infantia* range, he highlighted the idea that not all individuals categorised as infants could be considered free from sin.

²¹ 'Cum humanum genus multis atque innumeris uitiiis sit subiectum, hierusalem caelestis maximam partem ex paruulis uel infantibus arbitror posse conpleri'; Grégoire le Grand, *Dialogues*, Book 4, ch. 18, 72; trans. Zimmerman, 212.

²² 'Etsi omnes baptizatos infantes atque in eadem infantia morientes ingredi regnum caeleste credendum est, omnes tamen paruulos, qui scilicet iam loqui possunt, regna caelestia ingredi credendum non est, quia nonnullis paruulis eiusdem regni caelestis aditus a parentibus clauditur, si male nutriantur'; Grégoire le Grand, *Dialogues*, Book 4, ch. 19, 72; trans. Zimmerman, 212.

²³ 'qui paruuli filii animam neglegens, non paruulum peccatorem gehennae ignibus nutrisset'; Grégoire le Grand, *Dialogues*, Book 4, ch. 19, 74; trans. Zimmerman, 213.

This story appears to have gained a certain popularity in the late Anglo-Saxon period, translated not only in Wærferth's late ninth-century rendition of the *Dialogues* but also in a homily by Ælfric and an anonymous eleventh-century Rogationtide homily. Wærferth kept his translation close to his source, not changing any details; he emphasised the strong sense of tragic pathos found in Gregory's original whilst also underscoring the vulnerability of young children's souls to poor parenting.²⁴ This same cautionary tale about a young child's ability to end up in hell appeared again in homiletic form in Ælfric's late-tenth-century homily about the Greater Litany which incorporated the tale into a lesson on the obedience of children, quoting both the fourth commandment – 'Honour thy father and thy mother' (Exodus 20:12) – and Proverbs 23:13-14 – 'thou shalt beat him [your child] with the rod and deliver his soul from hell' before explaining how:

Children have need of severe guidance and good care to good customs, that wisdom – which will not dwell in a malevolent soul nor also in the body which lies among sins – may be residing in them.

Cildru behofiað. swiðlicere steore. and godre gymene. to godum ðeawum. þæt se wisdom mage. on him wunigende beon. se ðe nele wunian. on yfelwyllende sawle. ne eac on ðam lichaman. ðe lið under synnum.²⁵

Before Ælfric recounted the story from the *Dialogues*, he had already established the souls of children as the chief concern of this part of the homily. Ælfric then retold the tale narrated by Gregory and translated by Wærferth of the little boy who blasphemed, but rather than provide a direct translation, Ælfric's version eliminated many of the details which had set the tale in Gregory's Rome. Further, in introducing the tale he did not provide Gregory's reassurance that all unspeaking infants who passed away were saved. Instead, he told his audience that he had

²⁴ Gregory the Great, *Bischofs Waerferths von Worcester Übersetzung*, 288-290. For more on Wærferth's translation of the *Dialogues*, see above, pages 119-121.

²⁵ Ælfric, *CH II*, Homily 19, 186.

read about a ‘child’ (‘cilde’) who was ‘carelessly brought up’ (‘reccleaslice afedd’) and how ‘it would blaspheme the Lord cruelly’ (‘Hit wolde wyrian wælhreawlice Drihten’) while its father did nothing to condemn its actions.²⁶ Rather than a sickness killing the child – as described in Gregory’s version – Ælfric told how ‘then, at last, came blood-thirsty devils, clearly seen, in dark form, into the child, and it immediately cried out’ (‘Þa æt nextan comon cwelmbære deoflu. swutellice gesewene. on sweartum hiwe. into ðam cilde. and hit sona hrymde’).²⁷ After telling the father that devils had come to take it away and blaspheming one last time, the child ‘departed immediately with the dark devils, condemned to hell’ (‘swa gewat sona mid þam sweartum deoflum, forscyldgod to helle.’).²⁸ Another version of this tale survives in an anonymous eleventh-century Rogationtide homily. It abstracted Ælfric’s version up until this point but minimised the biblical commentary to only include the fourth commandment.²⁹ Noticeably, both versions removed the child’s age, location, and gender from this tale, and rather than having an untimely death due to illness, the child’s soul was actively taken away by devils who could clearly be seen. By making these changes, these homilies transformed Gregory’s tale into a more universal account, stressing how parents should not wait until sickness overtook their children to start demonstrating concern for their children’s souls.

The anonymous Rogationtide homily stopped discussing children’s souls once it finished Gregory’s tale, but Ælfric continued with a conclusion about childhood obedience, moralising that ‘those children who are purely brought up and directed entirely against sins,

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 186.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 186.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 186.

²⁹ Anonymous, ‘Homily 7,’ in *Eleven Old English Homilies*, 99.

they commit to God, just as God himself said, when he blessed the brought child, and said to his disciples, “such is the kingdom of God” (‘Ða cild ðe beoð syferlice afedde. and wið unðeawum eallunge gestyrede. hi geðeoð gode. swa swa god sylf gecwæð. ða ða he bletsode. ða gebrohtan cild. and sæde his gyngrum. swilcra is godes rice’).³⁰ Ælfric avoided the possible interpretation of the passage from Matthew that all children were innocent and thus inhabiting the kingdom of heaven. Instead, it was *good* children, properly brought up by their parents, who were said to inhabit God’s kingdom. All three of these vernacular accounts of the blaspheming child available to the later Anglo-Saxons stressed how the ability to speak could cause a child’s soul to be sent to hell, but as the tenth century progressed the story transformed into a more universal, frightening tale which could have occurred in any time or location and at any age.

The Old English poem ‘Precepts’ portrayed a similar preoccupation with childhood, speech, and sin. This poem from the Exeter Book consists of ten different groupings of advice from father to son in verse form. Generally classified with other poems under the label of ‘wisdom poetry,’ it has been argued to be best understood as either a subgenre of this category entitled ‘parental instruction’ or as ‘a wisdom poem written for monastic instructional purposes.’³¹ No matter the interpretation, we see in this poem both a concern for the well-being of the child’s soul – the final lines state ‘thus, my son, remember the wise teaching of your father and always hold yourself against sins’ (‘Swa þu, min bearn, gemyne / frode fæder lare ond þec a wið firenum geheald,’ ll. 93-94) – and an emphasis placed on the association

³⁰ Ælfric, *CH* II, Homily 19, 186.

³¹ E. Hansen, ‘Precepts: an Old English Instruction,’ *Speculum* 56 (1981), 1-16; S. McEntire, ‘The Monastic Context of the Old English “Precepts”,’ *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 91 (1990), 248.

between speech and sin.³² Ralby has noted that ‘when one examines the nature of the advice given in ‘Precepts’, one finds that silence and speech are subjects in six of the ten addresses of the father [...] The poem is in many ways concerned with language.’³³ McEntire also found that ‘one tone repeatedly sounds throughout the whole: a concern about language.’³⁴ The father directly associates bad speech with sin on multiple occasions, telling in his fifth piece of advice to ‘fortify yourself against drunkenness and foolish words, sin in the heart and lies in the mouth’ (‘Druncen beorg þe ond dollic word, / man on mode ond his muþe lyge,’ ll. 34-35). The father also tells his son another piece of wisdom associating the soul’s health with bad speech:

He uses wisdom well who for the love of his soul
 guards himself against sins of words and of deeds
 always in his heart and promotes the truth;
 each of his gifts will be increased by God;
 he will be prosperous in strength when he flees sin.

Snyttra bruceþ þe fore sawle lufan
 warnað him wommas worda ond dæda
 on sefan symle ond soþ fremed;
 bið him geofona gehwylc gode geyced,
 meahum spedig, þonne he mon flyhð. (ll. 78-82).

The exact age of the silent child in this poem is unknown; the father refers to it as a ‘bearn’ (ll. 1, 22, 33, 43, 93) and a ‘young one’ (‘geongum’, l. 53), both words vague enough to place the listener anywhere from infancy to adolescence.

The association between speech, sin, and the child’s soul emphasised in the poem reflects the same concerns found in Gregory’s tale repeated by Wærferth and the vernacular

³² The translations of ‘Precepts’ here are taken from: ‘Precepts’ in *Old English Shorter Poems: Wisdom and Lyric*, trans. Bjork, 20-27.

³³ A. Ralby, ‘The Pænitentiale Pseudo-Ecgberti and the Old English Precepts,’ *Notes and Queries* 57 (2010), 7.

³⁴ McEntire, ‘The Monastic Context,’ 246.

homilists. However, even though each of these works related the condemning power of speech with concern for children's souls, I have yet to find the connection of children and blasphemy appearing in other genres of texts such as the penitentials. Without further evidence, we must ask to what degree the Anglo-Saxons truly believed that the acquisition of speech marked the moment when a child's soul was first imperilled by sin. Nevertheless, the homiletic use of Gregory's story and the fatherly advice found in 'Precepts' might still tell us important details about the pastoral context of the late Anglo-Saxon period. Rudolf has argued that these old English homilies transfer the responsibility of Gregory's tale more directly onto the parents, and in 'Precepts' we see that responsibility realised in poetic form.³⁵ At least until a certain age, the process of teaching children the faith, and thus the care of their souls, could very well have been a domestic one. Garver has proposed that the Carolingians held a similar model for a child's Christian upbringing, leaving the teaching of creeds, morals, and psalms as the responsibility of parents and godparents.³⁶ However, if children's souls were mostly left under the responsibility of their parents, some questions might have arisen when deciding the fate of a child's soul after death or at the approaching Judgement Day. This would be the point when the domestic was brought into the church. Thus, when a Blickling homily compelled its audience to change its behaviour before Domesday occurred, it instructed: 'let those that have children instruct them in proper discipline, teaching them the way of life and the correct path to heaven.' ('Ond þa men þe bearn habban læran hie þam rihtne þeodscipe, ond him tæcean lifes weg ond rihtne gang to heofonum).³⁷ Napier Homily 24 similarly instructed godparents

³⁵ W. Rudolf, 'Anglo-Saxon Preaching on Children,' 67.

³⁶ V. Garver, 'The Influence of Monastic Ideals upon Carolingian Conceptions of Childhood,' in *Childhood in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: the Results of a Paradigm Shift in the History of Mentality*, ed. A. Classen (Berlin, 2005), 72-76.

³⁷ *Blickling Homilies*, Homily 10, ed. and trans. Kelly, 76-77.

about the correct upbringing of the child they had sponsored: they must teach ‘true belief’ (‘rihtan geleafan’), ‘good morality’ (‘godan þeawan’), ‘necessary deeds’ (‘þearflican dædan’), and help lead the child under their responsibility towards heaven.³⁸

Although different accounts portrayed speech as something which could condemn a child, Anglo-Saxon homilists also taught that speech could play an important role in a child’s salvation. Wilcox has argued that ‘Anglo-Saxon Christians believed that confessing or professing the *recta fides* or *riht geleafa* (right faith) was necessary to receive salvation [...] Confessing correct belief qualified a Christian for meriting eternal life after death as well as for receiving sacramental grace, through which a Christian is sanctified and united with Christ on earth.’³⁹ In his sermon explaining baptism, Wulfstan of York emphasised the necessity for children to express their faith as soon as they gained the ability to speak whilst also stressing the continued responsibilities that parents had in ensuring their children’s future salvation. After explaining the different rituals which took place during the sacrament, Wulfstan addressed the things that each Christian person should do, including ‘having a righteous belief in one God’ and ‘understanding the reason of his baptism.’⁴⁰ Further, he explained that ‘as soon as the child is able to speak anything, a person should immediately teach him, before all things, the Pater Noster and the Creed.’ (Cristenra manna gehwylc ah swyðe mycle þearfe þæt he rihtne geleafan on ænne Godd æfre habbe, 7 þæt he his fulluhtes gescad wite 7 þæt symle rihtlice healde 7 his gingran georne tihte to ðam ylcan. And æfre swa þæt cild raðost ænig ðing

³⁸ ‘Homily 24,’ in *Wulfstan: Sammlung der ihm zugeschriebenen Homilien*, 120-121. For more on the religious responsibilities of godparents in Anglo-Saxon England, see Lynch, *Christianizing Kinship*, 180-188.

³⁹ M. Wilcox, ‘Confessing the Faith in Anglo-Saxon England,’ *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 113 (2014), 308.

⁴⁰ For more about Wulfstan’s homilies on baptism, see above, pages 195-196.

specan mæge, tæce man him sona ealra þinga ærest pater noster 7 credan).⁴¹ Wulfstan's use of the word 'sona', or 'immediately', here highlights the urgency in which he placed the need to teach children how to speak the staples of the faith at the first opportunity. Instead of a condemning force, speech, when properly shaped, could allow a child to take its next steps into a proper Christian lifestyle.

Without the ability to speak, however, an infant's soul might be considered vulnerable, and Ælfric addressed this issue in his homilies concerning baptism where he described how unspeaking infants were saved through the spoken belief of their parents. In his sermon for the Lord's Epiphany, he gave the foundations for infant baptism, explaining how in the 'old institutions ('ealdum gesetnyssum'):

They baptized the unspeaking children through the belief of the father and of the mother, and the godfather was the advocate of the child and pledge with God that it should hold fast to Christianity in conformity with the doctrine of God.

Pa unsprecendan cild hi fullodon ðurh geleafan þæs fæder. and ðære meder. and se godfæder wæs þæs cildes forspreca. and borh wið god þæt hit heolde þone cristendom be godes tæcunge.⁴²

Ælfric used the same term – 'unspeaking children' ('unsprecendan cild') – again in the context of baptism for his homily for the second Sunday in Lent.⁴³ By juxtaposing the vulnerability of the child due to its inability to speak next to the spoken belief of its parents and godparents in the ceremony, Ælfric could have implied in his homilies discussing the first sacrament that speech marked the point when a child could gain merit and salvation for its own soul.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Wulfstan, *Homilies*, Homily 8c, 182.

⁴² Ælfric, *CH II*, Homily 3, 26.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, Homily 8, 71.

⁴⁴ These homilies notably do not address the means of salvation for those who grow into adulthood without the ability to speak the faith.

However, as one continues to read Ælfric's sermon for Epiphany, this interpretation becomes muddled. Before Ælfric described the renunciation of the devil and parental confirmation of belief in the baptismal process, he explained again how the belief that the faith of the parents could save the souls of their children continued in the Anglo-Saxon Christian community, but this time he used the term 'without reason' ('ungewittigan') instead of 'unspeaking' to describe the child.⁴⁵ This seemingly placed more attention on the child's lack of understanding instead of its inability to speak. Ælfric described 'in a section of apparently original commentary' afterwards how the child 'grows, and moves onwards, and does not know anything of this belief' ('hit wexð, and gæð forð, and ne cann þyses geleafan nan ðing') and stressed how it 'is now, therefore, of critical need to everyone that he learn from his teacher how he should maintain his Christianity, with the true belief, and how he may avoid the devil and the punishment of hell and earn the eternal life and the eternal joy with God' ('Is nu for ði micel neod gehwam þæt he leornige æt his lareowe hu he his cristendom healdan sceole. mid þam soðan geleafan. and hu he mage deofol forbugan. and helle wite. and geearnian þæt ece lif. and ða ecan myrhðe mid gode').⁴⁶ Here we see that Ælfric recognised a span of years in a child's development when it could not comprehend the religion and faith in which it was baptized. Furthermore, in contrast to Gregory's statement in the *Dialogues*, Ælfric's theory here stipulated that children were not automatically guaranteed immunity before gaining speech or rationality; instead they required parents and godparents to act as guarantors for the soul.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, Homily 3, 27.

⁴⁶ Kleist, *Striving with Grace*, 173; Ælfric, *CH II*, Homily 3, 27.

Ælfric then extended the message to include how everyone, not just growing children, should learn the ‘true belief’. Whilst Ælfric emphasised a child’s inability to speak when he addressed the subject of infant baptism, contrasting the child’s vulnerability without speech with the surety of its parents’ confirmation of belief, he also used language centred around knowledge in relation to the child’s vulnerability: a child is ‘without reason’, it ‘knows nothing’ of the belief it is saved with, everyone must then ‘learn’ true belief. Unlike in his retelling of Gregory’s tale, Ælfric did not make a differentiation here of the precise moment when a child’s soul was not considered to immediately enter heaven if it passed away; one could interpret either speech or reason as the supposed boundary in this homily. Furthermore, additional homilies by Ælfric which addressed childhood most commonly placed an emphasis on reason and intellect when discussing juvenile growth. In his first homily in the *Lives of Saints*, he preached against a materialist conception of the soul by explaining how it was not the soul that grows within children, but reason (‘Gescead wexð on cildrum na seo sawul’).⁴⁷ When translating Gregory the Great’s multiple interpretations of the parable of the vineyard in his second series of *Catholic Homilies*, he compared the hours of the day with the ages of man, describing ‘our understanding’s morning’ as ‘our childhood’ (ures andgites merigen. is ure cildhad’).⁴⁸ As the related hours of a human’s life progressed, that growth in understanding advanced as well. Ælfric taught that the development of reason was a gradual process in these homilies, but did not draw a precise line between childhood and adulthood based on this attribute. For Ælfric, at least, both speech and reason played key roles in the process of

⁴⁷ Ælfric, *LoS*, Homily 1, 16. On this passage, see Godden, ‘Anglo-Saxons on the Mind,’ 282; Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies*, 412, footnote 119.

⁴⁸ Ælfric, *CH II*, Homily 5, 44. On this passage, see Godden, *Ælfric’s Catholic Homilies*, 383-384; J. Sánchez-Martí, ‘Age Matters in Old English Literature,’ in *Youth and Age in the Medieval North*, ed. S. Lewis-Simpson (Brill, 2008), 206-208.

growing up, but he seemingly did not construct a boundary between adult and childhood spirituality using either trait.

The Anglo-Saxons appear to have believed that the acquisition of speech represented one of the critical points in a child's religious life – writers during this time presented the newfound ability to speak in childhood as both a condemning and redeeming power. The popularity of Gregory's tale about the blaspheming boy, in all three vernacular renditions, gives evidence that a belief could have persisted through this period that speech marked the boundary where a child's soul no longer held immunity. Speaking the faith, however, could provide a child with the opportunity to save itself, rather than leaning on the belief of its parents. What little evidence that survives seems to underscore that the care of young souls, certainly at the time when children gained the ability to speak, was kept in the domestic sphere, with parents and godparents holding responsibility for the Christian upbringing of their children with limited involvement from the church. A case could be made that some theologians in the later Anglo-Saxon period believed that the ability to speak marked the spiritual difference between childhood and adulthood, but even in the evidence used to make that argument we see echoes of the next boundary to be analysed, an age of reason, where the later Anglo-Saxons also might have perceived spiritual innocence or immunity to end.

An Age of Reason

After the acquisition of speech, the next potential boundary marking when an individual's behaviour became sinful, with their soul deserving either punishment or merit, was at an age of reason. Indeed, at the beginning of the thirteenth century the Fourth Lateran Council took this position, decreeing that each Christian person should confess their sins once a year 'after

they have reached the age of discernment.⁴⁹ The council noticeably did not give a specific age for when confession should start, instead focusing its attention on the less quantifiable ability to distinguish between right and wrong. Writing about religious developments concerning children in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Orme has argued that children's 'sins were regarded as less serious, and their baptisms sufficient to atone for any they committed [...] Only after that age [of discernment] was there a balance sheet, as it were, by which sins had to be paid for by penances or works of merit in this world and, if not in this world, by pain in the next.'⁵⁰ We cannot measure this so easily for the late Anglo-Saxon period where we see significance placed on the acquisition of reason as the boundary for a child to reach spiritual maturity, but we never see this concept fully realised in the same ways in which the works of Augustine and the Fourth Lateran Council treated it. We see an acknowledgment of the idea that immunity for the soul existed until a child reached an age of reason, but the variation we see between sources attempting to pin down this fluid concept – along with the competing boundaries of the ability to speak and the onset of sexual desire still existing – leaves us with the impression that the Anglo-Saxons had difficulty defining their theology about when children's souls began to receive the penalties of sin. This section first studies the foundations laid by Augustine and the Benedictine Rule before turning to the handling of children's discernment in hagiography and finally examining prescriptive literature for clues about the treatment of children and those believed to be the youngest sinners.

Before Augustine developed his doctrine of original sin, he explored the moral conditions of infancy and childhood in the first book of his self-reflective *Confessions*. Not

⁴⁹ 'postquam ad annos discretionis pervenerit': 'Fourth Lateran Council – 1215, Canon 21,' in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, volume 1, ed. and trans. N. Tanner (London, 1990), 245.

⁵⁰ Orme, *Medieval Children*, 123.

remembering his own earliest years, Augustine observed babies to reach his conclusions about sin in infancy. After watching how children, young enough to be incapable of speech, experienced envy when their mother or wet nurse drew a different child to their breast, Augustine concluded: ‘so the weakness of infant limbs compasses innocence, but the minds of infants is not so.’⁵¹ Although an English translation of *innocens* here becomes ‘innocent’, the term Augustine used has been recognised to represent several more dimensions than that specific word. Clark has noted that Augustine ‘regards children as innocent only in the etymological sense: a child is *in/nocens*, harmless in that he is unable to harm, not in that he has no harmful desires.’⁵² After discussing the sins against his parents and teachers in his childhood more in depth – ‘so small a boy, yet so great a sinner!’⁵³ – Augustine concluded the first book by stating: ‘so much for the innocence of youth. There is no such thing, Lord, truly there is no such thing! My God I entreat you – human failings are the same from the childhood time of slaves and teachers, trivia and ball games and birds as in the adult transition to magistrates and monarchs, gold and estates and property: they are exactly the same.’⁵⁴ With the acquisition of speech and reason, a person’s accountability and guilt increased, but even before a child could acquire personal sin, Stortz has argued, Augustine found infants to be ridden with some type of evil.⁵⁵ Augustine’s *Confessions* presented the actions of both infants

⁵¹ ‘ita inbecillitas membrorum infantium innocens est, non animus infantium’: Augustine, *Confessions*, Book 1, ch. 7, ed. and trans. C. Hammond (Cambridge, MA, 2014), 20-21.

⁵² G. Clark, ‘The Fathers and the Children,’ in *Christianity and Society: the Social World of Early Christianity*, ed. E. Ferguson (New York, 1999), 259.

⁵³ ‘tantillus puer et tantus peccator’: Augustine, *Confessions*, Book 1, ch. 12, ed. and trans. Hammond, 34-35.

⁵⁴ ‘Istane est innocentia puerilis? non est, domine, non est. oro te, deus meus: nam haec ipsa sunt quae a paedagogis et magistris, a nucibus et pilulis et passeribus, ad praefectos et reges, aurum, praedia, mancipia, haec ipsa’: *ibid.*, Book 1, ch. 19, 54-55.

⁵⁵ M. Stortz, “‘Where or When was your Servant Innocent?’: Augustine on Childhood,’ in *Child in Christian Thought*, 97.

and children as driven by sinful desires, but he did not address when children's souls began to become accountable for their misbehaviours in this work.

Another Augustinian text better known to the later Anglo-Saxons, *De civitate Dei*, more thoroughly addressed the status of children's souls and the age at which their souls began to be weighed down by their actions.⁵⁶ Augustine wrote about the never-ending battle between the spirit and the lusts of the flesh, but took a small digression to comment on the immunity held by children's souls:

Nevertheless, this domination [of passion] is inevitable in infancy and childhood, and such is the mercy of God in relation to the 'vessels of mercy' which He has fashioned for glory that in that first period of life, which passively submits to the rule of the flesh, and even in the second, in which speech is possible and infancy is passed and in which reason has not yet begun to fight but yields to practically all pleasures, however defective, because the weakness of the will makes obedience to precepts impossible, all that is necessary is the reception of the Mediator's sacraments. For, if in these years life on earth is ended, the soul is translated from the power of darkness into the kingdom of Christ free of all liability, not only to eternal pains but even to any purgatorial sufferings after death.⁵⁷

Augustine argued that although infants and children were not innocent of misdeeds caused by bodily desires, a soul did not become marked by these sins until an individual reached a certain age of reason and understanding; a soul's immunity ended when 'a boy reaches the age

⁵⁶ A known source for at least Bede, Alfred, the poet of 'Genesis A', and Ælfric: *Fontes*, Search query: *Civitate Dei*; Lapidge has also found that it was also known to Aldhelm, Lantfred, and Byrhtferth: Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*, 284. See above, page 107.

⁵⁷ 'Verum tanta est dei misericordia in uasa misericordiae, quae praeparauit in gloriam, ut etiam prima hominis aetas, id est infantia, quae sine ullo renisu subiacet carni, et secunda, quae pueritia nuncupatur, ubi nondum ratio suscepit hanc pugnam et fere sub omnibus uitiosis delectationibus iacet, quia, licet fari iam ualeat et ideo infantiam transisse uideatur, nondum in ea est praecepti capax infirmitas mentis, si sacramenta mediatoris acceperit, etiamsi hanc in eis annis uitam finiat, translata scilicet a potestate tenebrarum in regnum christi non solum poenis non praeparetur aeternis, sed ne ulla quidem post mortem purgatoria tormenta patiatur': Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, Book 21, ch. 16, CCSL 48, 782; trans. Walsh and Honan, 376. See also Augustine's reiteration of this in his commentary on Genesis particularly where he disagreed with those who argued that sin only began with the onset of sexual desire: Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram*, Book 10, ch. 13, CSEL 28.1, 311.

when it is possible to impose precepts on him and to bring him under the authority of law.’⁵⁸

Until that point in a child’s life where he was conscious of his responsibilities, Augustine argued that a child only needed rebirth through baptism to attain eternal salvation.

On the other hand, the sixth-century *Rule of St Benedict* – which ‘became established as the supreme and exclusive rule governing the monasteries of England’ after the tenth-century Benedictine reform movement led by Dunstan, Æthelwold, and Oswald⁵⁹ – called for the special treatment of boys in need of correction in monasteries even if they did not fully understand the consequences of their actions. Those giving out punishments were advised to consider, when prescribing fasting and beatings for ‘healing’ (‘sanentur’), that ‘every age and level of intelligence should be treated in its own way.’⁶⁰ This was particularly necessary in the case of those young boys and adolescents ‘who cannot fully understand how serious a punishment excommunication is.’⁶¹ What we see here in the *Rule of St Benedict* is a concern for the spiritual health of boys from the moment they entered a monastery; they were considered young enough to not fully understand the ramifications of being barred from partaking in the sacraments and mass, but old enough that their souls could be at stake.

Following Augustine’s theology more closely, Bede emphasised the important shift in a child’s understanding and its connection to the transition from childhood immunity to

⁵⁸ ‘cum autem uentum fuerit ad aetatem, quae praeceptum iam capit et subdi potest legis imperio’: Augustine, *De ciuitate Dei*, Book 21, ch. 16, CCSL 48, 782; trans. Walsh and Honan, 376.

⁵⁹ R. Jayatilaka, ‘The Old English Benedictine Rule: Writing for Women and Men,’ *Anglo-Saxon England* 32 (2003), 147.

⁶⁰ ‘Omnis aetas vel intellectus proprias debet habere mensuras’: *The Rule of Saint Benedict*, ch. 30, ed. and trans. B. Venarde (Cambridge, MA, 2011), 114-115.

⁶¹ ‘qui minus intelligere possunt quanta poena sit excommunicationis’: *ibid.*, 114-115.

spiritual maturity in his prose life of Saint Cuthbert. In an early miracle where a three-year-old child rebuked Cuthbert for his juvenile play, Bede explained how:

in order that he [Cuthbert] might be able to do these things in his later years, the heavenly grace had urged him little by little into the way of truth, from the earliest years of his boyhood. For up to the eighth year of his age, which is the end of infancy and the beginning of boyhood, he could devote his mind to nothing but the games and wantonness of children.⁶²

In one of the few recorded instances of Anglo-Saxon children at play, we see Bede accepting that infancy, for him up until the age of eight, was an age of play, distraction, and ignorance. As Cuthbert reached the next stage of maturity, he could ‘little by little’ learn the tenets of the faith. However, in his infancy, his actions were deemed acceptable, even for a future saint, because ‘Cuthbert did not yet know the Lord, neither was the word of the Lord yet revealed unto him.’⁶³ Bede stressed this same point about knowledge and understanding when he quoted Paul’s first epistle to the Corinthians later in this passage to describe the different phases of Cuthbert’s growth: ‘For when he was a child he understood as a child, he thought as a child; but after he became a man, he put away childish things entirely.’⁶⁴ Bede took this opportunity not just to demonstrate Cuthbert’s elect status from a young age, but also to teach through the use of biblical scripture about the different ages of man and the spiritual expectations of them. In a way which the anonymous *vita* did not do, Bede took issue here

⁶² ‘Sed ut haec in maiori aetate posset, superna illum gratia ad uiam ueritatis paulatim a primis iam puericiae incitauerat annis. Siquidem usque ad octauum aetatis annum, qui post infantiam puericiae primus est, solis paruulorum ludis et lasciuiae mentem dare nouerat’: Bede, *Life of St Cuthbert* in *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert*, ed. and trans. B. Colgrave (Cambridge, 1940), 154-155.

⁶³ ‘Cuthbertus necdum sciebat Dominum, neque reuelatus fuerat ei sermo Domini’: *ibid.*, 154-155. Quoting 1 Samuel 3:7.

⁶⁴ ‘Cum enim esset paruulus, ut paruulus sapiebat, ut paruulus cogitabit, qui postmodum factus uir, plenissime ea quae paruuli errant desposuit’: *ibid.*, 156-157. Quoting 1 Corinthians 13:11.

with creating a teaching point about the status of all children.⁶⁵ Infants, which for Bede meant those under the age of eight, could not be expected to act in an impeccable manner, but at the age of eight, when one transitioned into boyhood, a gradual process of learning what it meant to be a Christian could begin.

This tale of Cuthbert's childhood survived into the late Anglo-Saxon period, not just in its original Latin but also rendered into the vernacular by Ælfric in a sermon about the saint's deposition. Although Ælfric produced a much shorter version of this passage which eliminated many of Bede's biblical allusions, he kept the language reproving Cuthbert's childish ways centred around the lack of understanding expected from a child: Cuthbert, as a 'child of eight years, ran, just as his ignorant age enticed him ('eahtawintre cild. arn swa swa him his nytenlice yld tihte'); 'the Almighty God would correct the ignorance of his chosen Cuthbert' (se ælmihtiga God wolde styran þære nytennyse his gecorenan cuðberhtes'); the three-year-old child intended to reprove Cuthbert's 'foolish/stupid play' ('dyslican plegan').⁶⁶ Ælfric, like Bede, did not admonish infants for their play and misbehaviours here, but marked that Cuthbert, at eight years old, could now be considered of an age when he should be developing from spiritual ignorance to religious understanding. As with Gregory's blaspheming child, we see Ælfric interacting with and altering his sources, but he did not choose to provide a consistent theology about when a child's soul might not be granted automatic entry into heaven.

The miracles describing Cuthbert's childhood accentuated his divinely elected status and the transition from childhood innocence to spiritual maturity, but what of those Anglo-

⁶⁵ *Anonymous Life of St Cuthbert in Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert*, ed. and trans. B. Colgrave (Cambridge, 1940), 64-67.

⁶⁶ Ælfric, *CH II*, Homily 10, 81.

Saxon child saints who did not survive past Bede's boundary set at eight years old? The Anglo-Saxon hagiographical accounts of Saints Rumwold and Cyricus, two saints who both died in their infancies, reveal some of the features which could make a child distinctively holy and marked for heaven. They both differ from the more typical hagiographical portrayals of children where Hill has found that 'the infant is generally a passive figure, the object of portents.'⁶⁷ We may regard the Anglo-Saxon Saint Rumwold – described as the seventh-century son of an unnamed daughter of King Penda of Mercia and an equally nameless King of Northumbria – as one of the shortest-lived saints celebrated in Anglo-Saxon England.⁶⁸ Born prematurely in a meadow as his parents travelled to Mercia, the baby 'immediately cried out with a loud voice: 'I am a Christian, I am a Christian, I am a Christian.'⁶⁹ He then proceeded to confess his faith in the Holy Trinity and to sing the 'Te Deum laudamus' before demanding baptism and the eucharist. Rumwold then preached to those surrounding him, 'teaching them about the Catholic faith, about the true religion and also every grace of goodness, about the precepts of divine law and especially about love of God and one's neighbour' and gave instructions for the burial and translation of his remains before dying at

⁶⁷ J. Hill, 'Childhood in the Lives,' 151. Other cases where Anglo-Saxons used infants as objects to reveal divine portents include the miraculously young child reprimanding Cuthbert: Bede, *Vita Sancti Cuthberti*, 156-159; Æthelwold's foetal and infancy miracles: Wulfstan of Winchester, *Life of Æthelwold*, 4-9; furthermore, while Dunstan was still in the womb, a miracle occurred in the church his mother was attending where the candles blew out all at once and then began to burn again, demonstrating his divine election: Adelard of Ghent, *Lectiones in Depositione S. Dunstani* in *The Early Lives of St Dunstan*, eds. and trans. M. Winterbottom and M. Lapidge (Oxford, 2012), 114-115.

⁶⁸ Although the earliest surviving source for the *vita* (CCCC 9, pp. 53-8) has been dated to the last quarter of the eleventh century, Love has argued that 'we may reasonably infer that the cult was known in some form before the end of the tenth century. Rumwold is to be found not only in the calendar in the Winchester Psalter, London, BL, Arundel 60 (fos. 2-7), but also as the seventeenth of the confessors in the litany in that manuscript': R. Love, 'St Rumwold of Buckingham and *Vita Sancti Rumwoldi*,' in *Three Eleventh-Century Anglo-Latin Saints' Lives: Vita S. Birini, Vita et miracula S. Kenelmi and Vita S. Rumwoldi*, ed. and trans. R. Love (Oxford, 1996), cxl-cxli.

⁶⁹ 'Cumque infans natus fuisset, statim clara uoce clamauit dicens: Christianus sum, christianus sum, christianus sum': 'Vita Sancti Rumwoldi' in *Three Eleventh-Century Anglo-Latin Saints' Lives*, ed. and trans. Love, 98-99.

the age of three days old.⁷⁰ The hagiographical account had Rumwold address the peculiarity of his abilities at such a young age at the onset of his recorded sermon, stating that ‘it should not seem surprising to you that God, contrary to the laws of nature, has granted me knowledge or power of speech, because His judgements are inscrutable and His ways untraceable.’⁷¹ The tale certainly presents the infant Rumwold’s ability to speak as extraordinary, but it is his knowledge, the *scientia* he mentioned, and understanding of Christianity demonstrated through his oration which marked him apart from the majority of other Anglo-Saxon saints described in their infancies.

We encounter a similar emphasis placed on the religious understanding of an infant saint described in hagiographical accounts in the entry for the fifteenth of July in the *Old English Martyrology* which celebrated the feast day for Saint Cyricus and his mother Julitta, two early fourth-century Christians martyred in Tarsus.⁷² Although the day commemorated both mother and child, the story focused its attention on the faith, eloquence, and grasp of Christianity demonstrated by Cyricus, who, at ‘less than three months away from his third birthday’ (‘ðæt cild hæfde læsse þonne þry monðas þæs þridan geares’) would have been at an age where he might have been able to speak in short phrases but not much else. In the Old English account, when Cyricus recognised that those torturing his mother would soon kill him, he asked the Lord in an expressive speech (which took up the majority of this day’s entry) that

⁷⁰ ‘docens illos de catholica fide deque uera religione necnon de omni honestate bonitatis et de preceptis diuine legis et maxime de dilectione Dei et proximi’: *ibid.*, ed. and trans. Love, 104-105.

⁷¹ ‘Non ergo mirum uobis uideatur quod contra morem nature mihi scientia uel possibilitas data est fandi a Deo, quia inscrutabilia sunt iudicia eius, et inuestigabiles uie illius’: *ibid.*, ed. and trans. Love, 104-105. Quoting Romans 11:33.

⁷² Rauer has argued that the *Old English Martyrology* was ‘probably composed sometime between c. 800 and c. 900’, and the two texts which contain this entry (London, BL Cotton Julius A.x and CCCC 196) come from the tenth or eleventh century and the eleventh century respectively; C. Rauer, ‘Introduction,’ in *The Old English Martyrology*, ed. and trans. C. Rauer (Cambridge, 2013), 12-15.

those in the future who invoked his name in a number of different circumstances be rewarded by God including building a house of prayer for him, weeping for his martyrdom, and confessing their sins in his name.⁷³ After this petition to God ‘a voice came from heaven speaking thus: “I will give my help to all those who call on me in your name”’ (‘com stefn on heofonum ðus cweþende: “Ic selle minne fultum eallum þæm þe me gecegað þorh ðinne noman”’).⁷⁴ In both the tales of Cyricus and Rumwold, we see spiritual wisdom as the attribute which made each of these infants more than just passive objects or narrative tools signifying divine grace. Although their ability to speak was considered miraculous, it was their understanding of the Christian faith which made them saintly.

Whilst different accounts from hagiographical sources promoted the significance of the ability to understand as a boundary between childhood innocence and spiritual maturity, their accounts were still full of stories of exceptional individuals gaining automatic entry into heaven at their deaths. Penitentials, on the other hand, allow us insight into the earliest instances when an ordinary person might be expected to confess their sins and cleanse their souls whilst also providing some information about those considered too young to confess. In a study of early medieval Latin penitentials, Meens has found that within the ‘texts children are mentioned in two ways. Either they are affected, in one way or another, by someone else’s misdeed, or they confess their own offences. Children who sin are never called *infantes*; mostly they are labelled *pueri*.’⁷⁵ Additionally, after the passive phase of infancy ‘the sins

⁷³ *The Old English Martyrology*, ed. and trans. Rauer, 136-139.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, ed. and trans. Rauer, 138-139.

⁷⁵ R. Meens, ‘Children and Confession,’ 53. Abraham has agreed with this assessment, further stating that ‘the usages of *infans* in particular emphasize victimhood’: Abraham, *Anticipating Sin*, 51.

most generally mentioned with regard to children concern sexual offences and theft.’⁷⁶

Frantzen made further distinctions for Meens’ *infantes* category when examining Anglo-Saxon vernacular penitentials: for infant-victim sins he differentiated ‘between canons that mention children only as the consequence of sexual intercourse and those that concern the death of children (with or without baptism). Neither the first nor the second category concerns the actions of children themselves. The sins in the first category are adult sexual acts that are given greater penances if children are born as a result; those in the second category are the spiritual responsibilities of those adults who raise children.’⁷⁷ From these two studies, we see a pattern emerging in both Latin and Old English handbooks for confessors which appears to promote a period in an individual’s life where they are too young to have sins stain the soul. We must then ask at what point a child stopped existing as an object in the penitentials – something which parents must care for if they themselves did not wish to sin – and became responsible for its own soul. With the act of confession, we have a meeting point of our three potential boundaries: confession implies a speech act; when making confession, an individual would need to know the difference between good and bad actions in order to confess them with proper penitence; and finally, as Meens and Frantzen have both found, many of the canons referring to children and young people as the malefactors are sexual in nature and could imply that puberty played an important role in defining the moment when misdemeanour became sin.

Perhaps the youngest sinner described to need atonement for his sins found in a late Anglo-Saxon penitential may be found in the *Scrifiboc*, a tenth-century vernacular penitential.

⁷⁶ Meens, ‘Children and Confession,’ 64.

⁷⁷ A. Frantzen, ‘Where the Boys Are: Children and Sex in the Anglo-Saxon Penitentials,’ in *Becoming Male in the Middle Ages*, eds. J. Cohen and B. Wheeler (New York, 2000), 49.

This confessional contained a canon for a little boy forced into sex by an older one: ‘if a small boy has been forced by a larger one into intercourse, he (is to fast) 5 nights. If he consents to it, he is to fast 15 nights’ (‘Lytel cniht gif he byð fram maran ofðryced in hæmede v fif niht gif he him geðafige fæste xv nihta’).⁷⁸ The handbook suggested that the attending priest give a relatively small penance of fasting for either five or fifteen nights to the little boy depending on whether or not the act was consensual. Either way, the boy’s soul was apparently stained based on the actions performed on his body by another person. This canon, which Frantzen has suggested may originate from the Penitential of Cummean, demonstrates a concern for the souls of the young prepubescent, but we cannot definitively tell how young.⁷⁹ We could guess that if a child ever did make confession and spoke about being forced into sex, they might know some difference between what the Church found to be right and wrong and how the acquisition of sin and cleansing through fasting worked, but that is not necessarily the case. Too many assumptions must be made with this canon due to its ambiguity, particularly about the exact age of the penitent and the degree of agency in which they had when choosing to confess this particular act, to make firm conclusions about an age of reason.

We do, however, find a specific distinction of penances made surrounding beliefs in a person’s ability to understand in the *Old English Penitential*, but it appears at a later age than the previously analysed works:

The man who soils himself with an animal or the male who (fornicates) with another male in an irrational way, if he is twenty years old, so that he can understand that shameful and evil thing, he is to desist and confess and fast fifteen years; and if he has a mate (wife), and he is forty years old and does such a thing, he is to desist and fast for the rest of his life, and should not presume to receive God’s body until his dying day.

⁷⁸ *Scriftboc*, X04.01.01, ed. and trans. Frantzen.

⁷⁹ Frantzen, ‘Where the Boys Are,’ 53.

Se man þe hine wið nytenu besmitedð oððe wæpnedman wið oðerne mid ungesceadelicum þinge. Gif he bið XX wintra eald man þæt he understandan mæg þæt he þa sceandlican þing 7 þa manfullan begæð. Geswice 7 andette. 7 fæste XV ger 7 gif se man his gemæccan hæbbe. 7 he beo XL wintra 7 swylce þing be gæð. Geswice 7 fæste þa hwile þe his lif beo 7 ne gedyrstlæce þæt he drihtnes lichaman underfo ær his endedæge.⁸⁰

The penitential did not exclude those younger than twenty; it further clarified that ‘young and ignorant men are to be severely beaten if they do such a thing’ (‘geonge men 7 andgitlease man sceal þearle swingan ðe swylce ðing begað’).⁸¹ This established different levels of penance based on varying degrees of understanding with the expectation that those of any age (presumably past the onset of sexual desire) would confess this act. The canon considered those of twenty years of age to be capable of fully understanding the specified moral wrongdoing of bestiality and sexual acts between men. Furthermore, this canon correlated the prescription of beatings with those who had an inability – either because of their age or a mental disability – to fully understand why their actions might be considered wrong.⁸² This could be an attempt to follow the advice given by Proverbs 23:13: ‘withhold not correction from a child: for if thou strike him with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod and deliver his soul from hell.’

When one reached an age of reason, here at the age of twenty, the prescription of beatings would turn into more self-inflicted forms of penance such as fasting. Interestingly, a

⁸⁰ *Old English Penitential*, Y42.02.01, ed. and trans. Frantzen.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, Y42.06.02; *The Old English Handbook* has a similar provision (D54.14.01 and D54.14.02) including the different age groups, but it eliminates the clause about twenty being an age of understanding and uses the term ‘andgitlease’ instead of ‘angilease’. For more on this canon from the *Penitential* and its sources, see Frantzen, ‘Where the Boys Are,’ 53.

⁸² Garver has noted the connection between the administration of physical discipline and an age of reason made by Carolingian authors including Jonas of Orleans in his *De institutione laicali*: Garver, ‘The Influence of Monastic Ideals,’ 82.

canon in Recension B of *Wulfstan's Canon Law Collection* gave an earlier age for when the corporal punishment given to youths should change into acts of penance: 'a boy is to be chastised with corporal punishment for misdemeanours until fifteen years old. After that age, however, he is to make recompense for whatever he has done wrong or if he steals, or make restitution according to the law.'⁸³ Unlike the canon from the *Old English Penitential*, however, the author gave no specific reason why fifteen was the boundary age. The *Rule of Saint Benedict*, translated by Bishop Æthelwold of Winchester in the mid-tenth century, might have influenced the choice of this age. In a chapter restricting the use of physical punishment, the Rule made for an exception in that 'there should be supervision and diligent discipline of children up to the age of fifteen on everyone's part, but this with all moderation and reason.'⁸⁴ Different recorded ages for when beatings were meant to stop – potentially because an age of understanding had been reached – could suggest that different ideas about children, corporal punishment, and understanding were competing in this period.⁸⁵

The given age boundary in *Wulfstan's Canon Law Collection* also appears similar to the specific ages of majority given in other vernacular penitentials. For instance, the *Scriftboc*

⁸³ 'Paruulus usque annos quindecim pro delicto corporali disciplina castigetur. Post hanc uero etatem quicquid deliquerit uel si furatur, retribuatur seu etiam secundum legem exsoluat': *Wulfstan's Canon Law Collection*, Recension B, Canon 104, ed. and trans. Cross and Hamer, 139-140.

⁸⁴ 'Infantum uero usque quindecim annorum aetates disciplinae diligentia ab omnibus et custodia sit; sed et hoc cum omni mensura et ratione': *Rule of Saint Benedict*, ch. 70, ed. and trans. B. Venarde (Cambridge, MA, 2011), 222-223. Æthelwold's translation did not stray from his source: 'Cildgeongum mannum eal geferræden unþeawas styre, and hyra mycele gymene hæbben oð þæt fifteoþe ger hyra ylde; þæt þær sy gedon mid eallum gemete and mid eallum gesceade': *Die Angelsächsische Prosabearbeitungen der Benediktinerregel*, ed. H. Schröer (Kassel, 1885), 130. It is worth noting that the Latin *Rule* referred to children under the age of fifteen as *infantum* here.

⁸⁵ Both of these canons seem to also follow the advice given by Gregory the Great's *Pastoral Care*; 'Young people are to be admonished in one way, old people in another, because the former are for the most part guided to make progress by severe admonition, while the latter are disposed to better deeds by gentle remonstrance': 'Aliter admonendi sunt iuuenes, atque aliter senes, quia illos plerumque severitas admonitionis ad profectum dirigit; istos uero ad meliora opera deprecatio blanda componit. Scriptum quippe est: Seniore[m] ne increpaueris, sed obsecra ut patrem': Gregory the Great, *Liber regulae pastoralis*, Book 3, ch. 1, PL 77:0052A; Gregory the Great, *Pastoral Care*, trans. H. Davis (Westminster, MD, 1950), 92.

contains a section entitled ‘concerning the ages of a boy or girl, when they have authority over themselves’ (‘de etate pueri uel puelle quomodo sibi dominantur’); although it gave specific ages for when boys and girls had ‘power/command’ (‘gewealdum’) over themselves – fifteen for boys, thirteen or fourteen for girls – it did not explain if that age signified when individuals gained authority over their own souls or even if it described when they should begin seeking confession.⁸⁶ Although penitentials promoted many different ages and boundaries in relation to childhood and sin, there does appear to be an agreement that children up until a certain age were not expected to confess their sins. There is, however, no consistency as to when that period ended.

Taking note of what age Anglo-Saxon law codes considered the end of childhood might shed some light where religious texts remained ambiguous. Nelson has written that ‘the notion of childhood purity, of innocence, appears in early medieval contexts. In all legal systems there has to be some determination of the age of responsibility, of consent.’⁸⁷ Before this given age, the law might take softer measures for transgressions or even leave punishments up to the domestic sphere. An early law from Æthelstan’s reign placed this age of majority at twelve; however, at a later point in his reign, he seems to have changed his mind. Æthelstan ‘thought [it] too wretched’ (‘him to hreowlic þuhte’) to call for capital punishment of someone ‘so young’ (‘swa geongne’) for something ‘so little’ (‘swa lytlan’) as theft and revised the age of execution to fifteen.⁸⁸ We can only imagine what discussions and council took place which influenced Æthelstan to raise the age of legal authority to fifteen from his

⁸⁶ *Scriftboc*, X13.01.00-X13.02.01, ed. and trans. Frantzen.

⁸⁷ J. Nelson, ‘Parents, Children, and the Church,’ 86.

⁸⁸ All Anglo-Saxon laws are taken from *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, volume 1, ed. F. Liebermann (Halle, 1898); II *Æthelstan* 1, VI *Æthelstan* 12.1.

original twelve; Kuefler has suggested that ‘a rising age of majority gives eloquent testimony to a growing consideration for children’s psychological needs’ whilst Foot has considered the involvement of the church in this change.⁸⁹ Lambert, alternatively, has argued that this adjustment in the law code was instead a response to objections made to Æthelstan’s earlier, harsher laws for theft.⁹⁰ Whatever the reason, it was not persuasive enough to sway Cnut from returning the age of majority back to twelve in his second law code.⁹¹ Cnut, however, did dissolve what he considered to be an Anglo-Saxon custom which treated a child of the ‘cradle’ (‘cradele’) – arguably a rhetorical rather than literal use of the word – as if ‘it were sinful and conscious’ (‘scyldig 7 hit gewittig wære’).⁹² With this instance and several others in mind, Rabin has argued that Anglo-Saxon ‘royal legislation appears to establish two principal conditions by which childhood is characterized: first, the inability to administer property, and second, an inadequate sense of ethical responsibility.’⁹³ The law codes appear to have placed certain importance on children obtaining an age of discernment and understanding of morality before capital punishment could take place.

Potentially not just focused on capital punishment, the age of majority found in Anglo-Saxon law codes might help us answer when an individual was expected to begin making confession. Seemingly concerned about the health of living souls as well, a law by Æthelred

⁸⁹ Kuefler, ‘A Wryed Existence,’ 826; S. Foot, *Æthelstan: The First King of England* (New Haven, 2011), 148. For more on the age of majority’s potential connection to canon law, see Foxhall Forbes, *Heaven and Earth*, 147-150.

⁹⁰ T. Lambert, *Law and Order in Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 2017), 177.

⁹¹ *II Cnut* 20; Kuefler has suggested that Cnut’s choice to lower the age of majority ‘might have reflected a different, Danish tradition’: Kuefler, ‘A Wryed Existence,’ 826.

⁹² *II Cnut* 76.2.

⁹³ A. Rabin, ‘Sharper than a Serpent’s Tooth,’ 276.

required that ‘every Christian person’ (‘æghwylc Cristen man’) should frequently attend confession, freely confess their sins, and eagerly atone as they are instructed (‘gewunige gelomlice to scrifte 7 unforwandodlice his synna gecyðe 7 geornlice bete, swa swa him man tæce’).⁹⁴ The inclusion of clauses about confession appears to be a later Anglo-Saxon development: Hough has argued that ‘during the late tenth and early eleventh centuries, regulations concerning penance were incorporated into secular law, apparently due to the influence of Archbishop Wulfstan.’⁹⁵ Whether or not Anglo-Saxon kings actually enforced this, the possibility exists that once someone reached a legal age of adulthood, this was the same age when the Church and secular authorities expected an individual to begin making individual confession for the salvation of his or her soul.

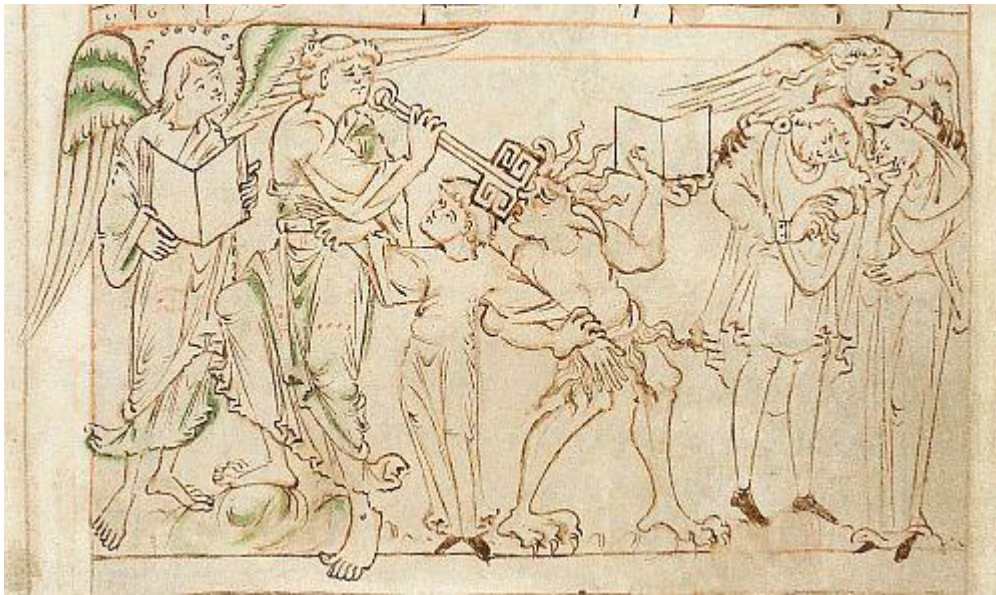


Image 5: London, British Library, Stowe MS 944, f. 7

⁹⁴ *V Æthelred 22.*

⁹⁵ C. Hough, ‘Penitential Literature and Secular Law in Anglo-Saxon England,’ in *“An Ald Reht”: Essays on Anglo-Saxon Law* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2014), 45.

In the opening pages of the New Minster *Liber Vitae*, illustrated here, we find several depictions of Judgement Day, one of which includes Saint Peter and a devil fighting over the soul of a young boy. Karkov has discussed two potential interpretations of this image:

The way in which Peter and the devil each grasp one of the child's hands indicates that they are vying for possession of his soul, while the blank books reinforce the idea that the final judgement has not yet been written. On the other hand, the way in which Peter wields his key as a weapon against the devil, and the fact that the child looks toward him, suggest that this soul will ultimately be saved.⁹⁶

The child's soul might be in peril, but there could be some hope for its salvation based on the child's ability to discern and choose between good and evil. Some later Anglo-Saxon sources do appear to have put emphasis on a child's capacity to reason before counting their misbehaviours as sinful and believing their souls to need cleansing through penance. However, there is no evidence to suggest that the late Anglo-Saxons believed that religious understanding unquestionably marked the boundary between a soul's childhood immunity and its jeopardy in adulthood. We find appearances of this theology promoted by Augustine most notably in Anglo-Saxon hagiography and penitentials, but we also find no evidence that authors preferred his reading over others and certainly no agreement regarding what constituted an age of reason. Further, it is worth considering how the evidence discussing religious understanding as the important marker of spiritual maturity is dominated by stories and accounts of the actions of young boys and men. This could possibly result from the transmission and creation of many of these texts within the monastic sphere, but it will be worth bearing in mind when we turn to the final boundary.

⁹⁶ C. Karkov, *The Ruler Portraits of Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge, 2004), 142.

Sexual Desire

The last potential boundary between childhood innocence/immunity and adult spirituality could lie in the first signs of sexual maturity or the manifestation of sexual desire during puberty, the span of years when an individual develops the many physical traits the body requires to procreate.⁹⁷ However, it is important to remember that the timing of this process has always been highly irregular from one person to another; van Gennep wrote on the onset of puberty that ‘the variations are so great that one cannot conceive of any institution being founded on an element as undeterminable and as irregular as puberty.’⁹⁸ He then made the important distinction between the start of ‘physical puberty,’ sometimes unnoticed or hidden from the community, and ‘social puberty,’ when society marks the outward signs (breast development, facial hair, pubic hair) of an individual reaching adolescence.⁹⁹ When Anglo-Saxon penitentials mentioned younger penitents – often when advising priests to prescribe

⁹⁷ The conceived relationship between sexual desire and sin took root from both Old and New Testament lore. For example, above all other types of sin, sexual sin could be most intrinsically linked with the Fall. As Adam and Eve covered their genitals in Genesis 3:7 after eating from the tree of knowledge, they recognised that the body took on a new sexual quality and that nudity, now nakedness, became associated with shame. Psalm 50:7, where the Psalmist described how he was ‘conceived in iniquities; and in sins did my mother conceive me,’ further promotes this emphasis on sexual desire, no matter if one related it to Augustine’s original sin or not (See Chapter Three on Original Sin). Although the apostle Paul did not write about the incipit of sexual desire, he cast the inability to control lust as counter to Christian spirituality. In a letter to the Thessalonians he wrote: ‘For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that you should abstain from fornication; That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour: Not in the passion of lust, like the Gentiles that know not God’ (1 Thessalonians 4.3-5; see also 1 Corinthians 6.18). For Paul, those who fell to sexual desire could only be likened to non-believers. As Christianity progressed in the patristic era and early Middle Ages, there remained a certain dualism between Christian spirituality and sexual desire. For this section, understanding the spiritual weight which sexual desire held in relation to its biblical history is necessary, but the focus still remains upon the incipit of sexual desire rather than the theology of sexual desire throughout a person’s life. For a brief introduction to the historic dualism between sexual desire and spirituality, see M. Hayes, ‘Sexuality and Spirituality: Embattled Enemies or Kissing Cousins?’, in *Religion and Sexuality*, eds. M. Hayes, W. Porter and D. Tombs (Sheffield, 1998), 240-247. See also the edited volume *Sex and Sexuality in Anglo-Saxon England: Essays in Memory of Daniel Gillmore Calder*, eds. C. Pasternack and L. Weston (Tempe, 2004).

⁹⁸ A van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, trans. M. Vizedom and G. Caffee (Paris, 1909; repr., 1960, 2004), 65, 67.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 68.

smaller penances based on youth and first-time offenses – the sins listed, often sexual in nature, implied that the penitent had begun at least the first stages of sexual maturation.¹⁰⁰ The onset of sexual desire might have existed as a prerequisite for many different offences listed in penitentials and homilies, but outright discussion of the specifics of puberty and its effects on the soul does not appear in surviving late Anglo-Saxon sources with any frequency. Different genres of texts from this period do, however, appear to have presented the manifestation of sexual desire as a crucial moment for an individual to make choices which affected their soul, but they did not present any point in puberty specifically as the boundary separating childhood from spiritual maturity. This section studies some different sources where the late Anglo-Saxons might have encountered the concept of a pubertal spiritual boundary before addressing the difficulties in searching the records for discussions of physical puberty and finally analysing how homiletic, canonical, and hagiographical accounts presented this stage of human development.

Jerome held a different perspective on the status of children from that of his contemporary and correspondent Augustine, who argued that the souls of children held a special immunity from their misbehaviours until they reached an age of reason.¹⁰¹ In his exegesis of the initial verses of the eighteenth chapter of Matthew, Jerome gave children a truly elevated status based on what he argued to be their lack of desire to pursue certain vices into which adults often fell. For Matthew 18:4 – ‘Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as

¹⁰⁰ See Frantzen ‘Where the Boys Are,’ 57. Examples include *Scriftboc*, X04.03.01 and X04.04.01, ed. and trans. Frantzen. For examples of the increase of penances for the sexual acts of male youths in earlier penitentials, see Abraham, *Anticipating Sin*, 72-77.

¹⁰¹ On Augustine’s theology, see above, pages 231-234.

this little child, he is the greater in the kingdom of heaven’ – Jerome interpreted the verse to denote that:

just as this little child, whose example I offer to you, does not persist in wrath, does not remember injuries, is not enticed when it looks upon a beautiful woman, does not think one thing and say something else, so also you. For unless you have such innocence and purity of heart, you will not be able to enter the kingdom of heaven.¹⁰²

Lett has noted that Jerome presented children as a model for adult behaviour sent from God; they represented a purity of the soul which gained them immediate entrance into heaven up until the age where they succumbed to sexual urges, anger, and spite.¹⁰³ Whilst Augustine preached a theology of childhood promoting non-innocence but immune souls, Jerome presented children as carrying an innocence in spirit and mind – partially rooted in their inability to feel sexual desire – meriting emulation. However, we should remember that when Ælfric chose to explain this same passage from Matthew, he elected not to present the same interpretation as Jerome, preferring instead to teach how only *good* children were allowed into heaven.¹⁰⁴

Isidore of Seville further constructed this concept of childhood innocence and purity in his *Etymologiae*. He found the origin of the Latin word for childhood to originate from the Latin for clean or pure. After describing the six different ages of man, Isidore wrote that ‘the second age is childhood (*pueritia*), that is, a pure (*purus*) age, during which a child is not yet

¹⁰² ‘sicut iste paruulus cuius uobis exemplum tribuo non perseuerat in iracundia, non laesus meminit, non uidens pulchram mulierem delectatur, non aliud cogitat et aliud loquitur, sic et uos nisi talem habueritis innocentiam et animi puritatem, regna caelorum non poteritis intrare’: Jerome, *Commentariorum in Matheum*, Book 3, Matthew 18:4, CCSL 77, 157; Jerome, *Commentary on Matthew*, trans. T. Scheck (Washington D.C., 2008), 207.

¹⁰³ D. Lett, ‘The Child in Christendom: Fifth-Thirteenth Centuries’ in D. Alexandre-Bidon and D. Lett, *Children in the Middle Ages: Fifth-Fifteenth Centuries*, trans. J. Gladding (Notre Dame, IN, 1999), 21.

¹⁰⁴ See above, page 223.

suited for procreating; it lasts until the fourteenth year.¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, ‘a boy (*puer*) is so called from purity (*puritas*), because he is pure and still retains, without the hint of a beard, the bloom of the cheeks.’¹⁰⁶ For the next stage in life, Isidore, whilst also noting the variable nature of puberty, defined that ‘an adolescent (*adolescens*) is so called because he is ‘old enough’ (*adultus*, ppl. of *adolescere*) to procreate.’¹⁰⁷ Isidore held that the ability to procreate marked the boundary between innocent childhood and adolescence, but the different ages of humanity’s growth that Isidore gave focused explicitly on men. The distinct categorizations for women he gave in this chapter focused more on their virginal or married status rather than age boundaries and puberty. Whilst Isidore did discuss menstruation in the chapter before, he lent his focus to the disastrous effects of menstrual blood if it ever came into contact with certain objects and did not associate it directly with female puberty. Nevertheless, those reading the *Etymologiae* in Anglo-Saxon England would find a straightforward definition of what childhood, and more particularly boyhood, denoted and would also encounter the idea that the purity of a child largely drew from his (and maybe even her) pre-pubescent lack of interest in sexual acts.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ ‘Secunda aetas, pueritia, id est, pura, et necdum ad generandum apta, tendens usque ad decimum quartum annum’: Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, Book 11, ch. 2, item 3, PL 82:415B-C; trans. Barney et al., 241. We know that this belief continued on at least into the Carolingian empire where Hrabanus Maurus (c. 780-856) repeated Isidore’s correlation of *puer* and *pura* in his work *De universo* Book 7, ch. 1, PL 111: 179C.

¹⁰⁶ ‘*Puer*, a *puritate* vocatus, quia purus est, et necdum lanuginem floremque genarum habens.’: Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, Book 11, ch. 2, item 10, PL 82:416A; trans. Barney et al., 241.

¹⁰⁷ ‘*Adolescens* dictus, eo quod sit ad gignendum *adultus*’: *ibid.*, PL 82: 417A; trans. Barney et al., 242.

¹⁰⁸ Scholars have noted the problematic nature of applying Isidore’s definite labels to the thought processes and beliefs of early medieval authors. Most recently, Irvine and Rudolf have written that ‘clear-cut as Isidore’s definitions may seem, they did not find unanimous acceptance among medieval scholars, who may vary their usage according to their individual experience’: Irvine and Rudolf, ‘Introduction,’ in *Childhood and Adolescence*, 5-6. Lewis-Simpson has also found that Isidore’s ‘partitioned classical paradigm is of limited assistance to elucidate northern attitudes towards the life cycle since northern texts appear to define the “ages of man” differently than elsewhere in Europe, generally having only two defined stages of child and adult, and an intermediate stage between 12 to 16 years of age, where one met certain criteria to enter into adulthood’: S. Lewis-Simpson, ‘The Challenges of Quantifying Youth and Age in the Medieval North’ in *Youth and Age*, 3.

This belief might have been further formed by those with access to Bede's *Letter to Ecgbert*. While listing those pure enough to partake in the Eucharist, Bede contrasted children with sinful adults, saying 'although there are countless innocent people who live the purest of lives, boys and girls and men and women both young and old, who are perfectly fit to share in the mysteries of heaven every Sunday.'¹⁰⁹ Meens has noted that to Bede, innocent children and the pure-living elderly counted as the 'people who are not tainted by sin and thus may receive the holy sacrament.'¹¹⁰ Nelson has taken this a step further, reasoning that 'the assumption here clearly being that the old and the young – interestingly, females as well as males – are uncontaminated by sexual pollution.'¹¹¹ Whilst Bede did not explicitly state his reasoning, he expounded the idea that children needed no cleansing from confession or penance to receive the holy housel, possibly because sexual desire had not polluted their souls.

Although we see a correlation between the end of childhood purity with the onset of sexual desire in these sources, especially in the case of Isidore's *Etymologiae*, such an outright connection does not exist in the surviving sources from the late Anglo-Saxon period.

Searching for discussions of puberty yields little results, and those few are weighed down by speculation. The *Scriftboc*'s canon giving two different ages of authority, mentioned earlier in this chapter, included a hard-set boundary of fifteen for boys and a choice between thirteen or fourteen for girls. It did not state why it gave this difference in ages between boys and girls,

¹⁰⁹ 'cum sint innumeri innocentes et castissimae conuersationis pueri ac puellae, iuuenes et uirgines, senes et anus, qui absque ullo scrupulo controuersiae, omni die dominico': Bede, 'Epistola Bede ad Ecgbertum episcopum,' ch. 15, in *Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow*, ed. and trans. C. Grocock and I. Wood (Oxford, 2013), 154-155.

¹¹⁰ R. Meens, 'Children and Confession,' 65.

¹¹¹ J. Nelson, 'Parents, Children, and the Church,' 87.

why girls were given multiple possibilities, or what an age of authority actually entailed.¹¹²

Whilst the age of fifteen for boys could have some roots in the Benedictine tradition, the variable age for girls given here might be connected with menarche and its association with perceived fertility.¹¹³ The ages given certainly match Muinck Keizer-Schrama and Mul's hypothesised average age for the onset of menstruation for females in the Middle Ages.¹¹⁴

Unfortunately, lack of evidence means that we can only speculate; as Crawford has noted, 'for girls, the transition from childhood to adulthood took place without great impact on the documentary sources.'¹¹⁵ Indeed, analysis on spiritual age boundaries so far, both with speech and an age of reason, has been weighed down by examples pertaining only to boys.

When turning to Anglo-Saxon discussions about the onset of social puberty, little information can be found for either sex. Frantzen has argued that the Anglo-Saxon church adopted a 'boys will be boys' approach, prescribing lighter sentences for a boy's first (often sexual) offense; however, beyond this the texts remained quiet about male physical developments through puberty.¹¹⁶ Likewise, menarche receives no attention.¹¹⁷ When not in medical texts, references to menstruation in Old English most often appear in the context of

¹¹² *Scriftboc*, X13.01.00-X13.02.01, ed. and trans. Frantzen. Inconsistencies across different manuscripts of the *Penitential of Theodore* tradition stated that a girl had authority over her body anywhere from the ages of thirteen to eighteen might have influenced the inclusion of two different ages for girls supplied by the *Scriftboc*. See Abraham, *Anticipating Sin*, 85. See above, page 244.

¹¹³ For the connection between the age of fifteen and the Benedictine tradition, see above, pages 243.

¹¹⁴ S. de Muinck Keizer-Schrama and D. Mul, 'Trends in Pubertal Developments in Europe,' *Human Reproduction Update* 7 (2001), 288; see also V. Bullough and C. Campbell, 'Female Longevity and Diet in the Middle Ages,' *Speculum* 55 (1980), 323.

¹¹⁵ Crawford, *Childhood in Anglo-Saxon England*, 167.

¹¹⁶ Frantzen, 'Where the Boys Are,' 57.

¹¹⁷ Abraham, *Anticipating Sin*, 82.

women (and men) abstaining from certain acts whilst a woman was ‘month-sick.’¹¹⁸ Most notably for the topic, Bede copied the questions of Augustine of Canterbury addressing church attendance and menstruation and Gregory the Great’s answers from the *Libellus Responsionum* into his *Ecclesiastical History* which was translated into Old English sometime in the late ninth or early tenth century. In these, Gregory rebuked the idea that women should not enter the church during this time, saying that ‘the natural overflow may not be counted as her sin’ (‘forðon seo oferflownis þæs gecyndes hire ne mæg in synne geteled beon’) and explained how, unfortunately, ‘it is the habit of good minds and men, that at times they imagine sin where there is no sin’ (‘Forðon þara godra mooda 7 monna þeaw bið, þæt heo þær hwilum synne ongeotað, þær þe syn ne bið’).¹¹⁹ The text, available in Latin and in Old English, specified that menstruation, whilst a consequence of the original sin, was not actually a sin itself (negating some of the menstrual impurity verses of Leviticus 15:19-33). Hollis and Meens have both noted, however, that a belief in a woman’s impurity persisted in Anglo-Saxon England for centuries afterwards thanks to the penitential tradition ascribed to Theodore

¹¹⁸ ‘monaðadle’ in the *Scriftboc*, X.05.01.01, ed. and trans. Frantzen; ‘monaðaðle’ in Bede, *Old English Version of Bede’s Ecclesiastical History*, Book 1, ch. 27, 78.

¹¹⁹ Bede, *Old English Version of Bede’s Ecclesiastical History*, Book 1, ch. 27, ed. and trans. Miller, 78-79.

of Tarsus.¹²⁰ We can determine that ideas surrounding menstruation, spiritual impurity, and sin existed in early medieval England but we cannot determine to what degree they were fully believed and implemented. Furthermore, menarche in itself does not specifically appear documented in the surviving sources, potentially suggesting that the Church did not define this central perceptible moment of female puberty as the point when sins began to affect the soul.

References to the transition from childhood to adulthood in the context of physical puberty from late Anglo-Saxon sources might be rare, but we do see instances where Anglo-Saxon authors stressed the importance of choosing a lifestyle, either virginity or marriage, that was pleasing to God to avoid sexual pollution of the soul. In a sermon from his first series of *Catholic Homilies*, Ælfric addressed how there ‘are three conditions which declare testimony to Christ; that is virginity (maidenhood), and widowhood, and lawful/proper marriage’ (‘Þry hadas syndon. þe cyðdon gecyðnesse be criste. þæt is mægðhad 7 wydewanhad. 7 riht sinscype’).¹²¹ In a seemingly original commentary relating these historic three orders to the

¹²⁰ S. Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women and the Church* (Woodbridge, 1992), 25,36; R. Meens, ‘Questioning Ritual Purity: The influence of Gregory the Great’s Answers to Augustine’s Queries about Childbirth, Menstruation and Sexuality’ in *St Augustine and the Conversion of England*, ed. R. Gameson (Stroud, 1999), 177-179. The early medieval Church’s discriminatory practices against women due to a conceived notion of ritual impurity involved a belief in the polluting powers of menstrual blood which had persisted from the Classical Period (see Elliott’s historical summary of this belief in *Fallen Bodies: Pollution, Sexuality, and Demonology in the Middle Ages* [Philadelphia, 1999], 2-7). Coon has noted that many of these ideas promoted in Isidore’s *Etymologies* continued to influence medieval writers, particularly in the Carolingian period. (L. Coon, ‘Gender and the Body,’ in *The Cambridge History of Christianity, Volume 3: Early Medieval Christianities, c. 600-c.1100* [eds.] T. Noble and J. Smith [Cambridge, 2008], 446). Furthermore, Wemple has argued that anxieties concerning women obstructing ritual purity appear to have increased in eighth- and ninth-century Francia, producing the canon law shift which took away women’s access to the altar and holy objects (S. Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society: Marriage and the Cloister 500 to 900* [Philadelphia, 1985], 141-147, 167). In Anglo-Saxon England, Foot has also noted this shift, but argued that ‘the zeal for reform was not felt in England in the early ninth century in quite the same way as in Francia’ (S. Foot, *Veiled Women*, volume 1 [Farnham, 2000], 69). Further studies on early medieval beliefs explicitly about menstruation and secular women often centre around the sins which could be committed during marriage or after childbirth (see J. Schulenburg, *Forgetful of their Sex* [Chicago, 1998], 215; P. Payer, *Sex and the Penitentials* [Toronto, 1984], 25-26), but there appears to be a gap in research on the female onset of puberty within these discussions, most likely because the sources are silent on the topic.

¹²¹ Ælfric, *CHI*, Homily 9, 255. These three states were also discussed in his letter to Sigefyrth: Ælfric, ‘Letter to Sigefyrth,’ in *Angelsächsische Homilien und Heiligenleben*, ed. B. Assmann (Kassel, 1889), 19.

gospel story narrating the purification of Mary, Ælfric continued to describe each state of existence, listing their spiritual rewards in the afterlife starting first with virginity:¹²²

Virginity (maidenhood) is both in men as well as in women. Those have proper virginity who from childhood remain in purity/chastity: and reject all lust in themselves both in mind and in body through the support of God. Then they will have a hundred-fold reward from God in the eternal life.

Mæigðhad is ægðer ge on wæpmannum ge on wimmanum. Ða habbað rihtne mæigðhad. þa ðe fram cyldhade wuniað on clænnyse: 7 ealle galnyssa on him sylfum forseoð. æigðer ge modes ge lichaman. þurh godes fultum. Þonne habbað hi æt gode hundfealde męde. on þam ęcan life.¹²³

Ælfric emphasised here that the most pleasing human state to God, virginity, was a choice made as one transitioned from childhood to adulthood, and, importantly, this state of being was inclusive of both sexes: men as well as women were able to live in maidenhood. He went on to praise widows for their choice of chastity after marriage and commended those who lived in a married state who had intercourse for the procreation of children at the church's authorised times. Anyone who lived outside these parameters, performing sex solely for pleasure and without restraint, could not, in Ælfric's eyes, gain everlasting rewards in the kingdom of heaven. He wrote: 'he who wishes to satisfy his lust as often as he desires: then he is to be likened to beasts and not men' ('Se þe wile his galnysse gefyllan swa oft swa hine lyst: þonne bið he wiðmæten nytenum 7 na mannum').¹²⁴ It is important to note here that repeatedly through his works, Ælfric reminded his audience that animals were 'soulless.'¹²⁵ In this

¹²² Godden, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies*, 76. Godden has written that these discussions of virginity, widowhood, and proper marriage receiving three different rewards in heaven are 'something of a commonplace [...] and hardly controversial'; Pseudo-Augustine, Jerome, and Bede all refer to this system: *ibid.*, 392. Aldhelm also commented on this threefold harvest in heaven, but notably replaced widowhood with 'chastity' ('castitas'): Aldhelm, *Prosa de virginitate*, ch. 19, CCSL 124A, 217; Aldhelm, *The Prose Works*, trans. M. Lapidge and M. Herren (Cambridge, 1979), 75.

¹²³ Ælfric, *CHI*, Homily 9, 255.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 255-256.

¹²⁵ On the 'soulless,' see above, pages 9-16.

homily, then, Ælfric relegated those humans unable to restrain their sexual desire to the same status as those without souls, whilst men and women who chose to continue their state of virginity from childhood had souls which would receive the greatest benefits after death.

The compiler of *Wulfstan's Canon Law Collection* amplified the emphasis that Ælfric placed on one's sexual status by stating that the choice between marriage and chastity must be made immediately as puberty hit. In perhaps the most overt reference to reaching sexual maturity from this time period, both recensions of the collection marked puberty distinctly as the age where an individual must make a crucial decision. It said: 'when young men have come to the years of adolescence [*annos pubertatis*], they are to be urged either to marry or publicly to vow chastity; in the same way, young women at the same age should observe the same law.'¹²⁶ The canon, which Cross and Hamer argued derived from the Hiberno-Latin *Collectio canonum Hibernensis* of the eighth century, gives the impression of being concerned with the effects that newly acquired sexual lust could have on a young person's soul.¹²⁷ However, it is notably vague about the details of what 'annos pubertatis' entails. Although it is impossible to tell how much the Church enforced this law, we do see this as a well-defined instance which marked some point of puberty as the moment when the Church required both young men and women to choose either to marry or to publicly declare a life of chastity seemingly to guarantee the safety of their souls.

The possibility of identifying a unified Anglo-Saxon doctrine regarding sexual maturity and the soul's immunity from sin is complicated further when one examines

¹²⁶ 'Fili, cum ad annos pubertatis uenerint, cogantur aut uxores ducere aut continentiam profiteri; sic et filie eadem etate debent eandem legem seruare': *Wulfstan's Canon Law Collection*, Recension A, Canon 99; Recension B: Canon 124, ed. and trans. Cross and Hamer, 107-108.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 107.

hagiographical accounts following the childhoods of female saints through the lense of puberty. Hill has argued that hagiographers used Isidore's distinctions between *infancia*, *pueritia*, and *adolescencia* as 'essential and powerful tools' in the *vitae* of male saints but that they did not give that same attention to defined age boundaries within the lives of Anglo-Saxon female saints, focusing instead on their commitment to celibacy from an early age in the rare (and brief) occasions when their childhoods are mentioned.¹²⁸ For male saints, Hill included examples such as Cuthbert and Æthelwold, whose infancies revealed divine portents, childhoods marked extraordinary maturity, and adolescences founded the initial stages of their acts meriting sainthood.¹²⁹ For female saints, meanwhile, she focused on the late-eleventh-century and early-twelfth-century Anglo-Saxon hagiographies written by Goscelin of Saint-Bertin, particularly that of Æthelthryth, and found that they contained 'a narrative structure that does not systematically trace progress through various aspects of childhood and adolescence into a diversity of saintly roles in maturity.'¹³⁰ Even though Goscelin gave curtailed versions of childhood, we do, in fact, see that he presented female saints' lives with different age boundaries in mind, such as in the case of Wihtburh of Ely, who was 'full of divine loveliness' in her infancy until her childhood when 'as soon as she was able to understand, she charmed her senses with the name of Christ,' choosing him as her bridegroom

¹²⁸ J. Hill, 'Childhood in the Lives,' 161.

¹²⁹ Lapidge and Winterbottom also have argued that Wulfstan the Cantor knew of Isidore's *Etymologiae* when writing the *Vita s. Æthelwoldi* and thus used Isidore's definitions to help determine a more precise chronology of Æthelwold's early years: M. Lapidge and M. Winterbottom, 'Introduction' in Wulfstan of Winchester, *Life of Æthelwold*, xlii-xliv. Furthermore, Lapidge has argued that Byrhtferth of Ramsey used the same organization tactic based on Isidore's work in his *vita* of St Ecgwine: Byrhtferth of Ramsey, *The Lives of St Oswald and St Ecgwine*, ed. and trans. M. Lapidge (Oxford, 2009), 211, 221.

¹³⁰ Hill, 'Childhood in the Lives,' 156.

all before ‘the girl grew to womanhood.’¹³¹ Whilst this is a perfect example of an author laying emphasis on the spiritual significance of an age of understanding attained before puberty, Love has shown that Goscelin could not have written this *vita* of the seventh-century saint until at least the first decade of the twelfth century, too far beyond the range of this work’s scope.

However, if one broadens the range of analysis to those female saints who were not Anglo-Saxon themselves but whose lives were written in Old English before the Norman Conquest, we see a heightened narrative emphasis placed on the moment when a female saint chose a life of chastity. This style of representation might have been influenced by Aldhelm of Malmesbury’s late-seventh- or early-eighth-century *Prosa de virginitate* which gained renewed Anglo-Saxon scholarly interest and a number of Old English glosses starting in the early tenth century after the onslaught of the Viking invasions.¹³² In one chapter of the work, Aldhelm praised how the gift of an individual’s virginity held such immense merit ‘because it is offered with the free will of spontaneous choice’ for ‘whatever individuals who are dedicated by the free will of their choice and endowed with the consciousness of their election may be able to test the capacity of their strength.’¹³³ Here, Hollis has noted how Aldhelm held ‘such conscious respect for choice, such preference for persuasion and not compulsion, such an awareness of the spiritual life as an inwardly prompted dynamic’ in comparison to ‘the

¹³¹ ‘Adeo erat mellitula infantia et benedicta uena, diuina dulcedine plena. Mox ut intelligibiles animos ad Christi nomen’; ‘adolescebat puella’: Goscelin of Saint-Bertin, *The Hagiography of the Female Saints of Ely*, ed. and trans. R. Love (Oxford, 2004), 54-57.

¹³² S. Gwara, ‘The Transmission of the “Digby” Corpus of Bilingual Glosses to Aldhelm’s *Prosa de virginitate*,’ *Anglo-Saxon England* 27 (1998), 139.

¹³³ ‘quod libero spontaneae uoluntatis arbitrio offertur [...] ut singuli quique libero uoluntatis arbitrio dediti et electionis examine praediti facultatem uirium experiri queant’: Aldhelm, *Prosa de virginitate*, ch. 18, 209-211; trans. Lapidge and Herren, 74.

post-Conquest considerations of women religious which assumes that the dedication of the self to the religious life constitutes the acceptance of a compulsory obligation from which there is no permitted escape.¹³⁴ O’Sullivan has argued further that, for Aldhelm, ‘the preservation of virginity is as much a biological as a psychological activity. The disciplined self-control of the chaste spirit is a means by which the gates of Paradise can be reopened.’¹³⁵ Thus, to stress the true sacredness of a virgin saint, an Anglo-Saxon author had to emphasise their cognition, their ability to reason, and their understanding of Christianity to affirm that they made the choice to live in chastity by their own free will.

This pattern appears most prominently in Ælfric’s *Lives of Saints* within those stories of fourth- and fifth-century virgin martyrs and confessors known to have been celebrated widely in Anglo-Saxon England.¹³⁶ Although Ælfric chose not to describe in detail the miraculous childhoods of any female saints, he did make sure to promote not only their choice of chastity but also their wisdom and true acceptance of Christianity before making this decision. For example, Ælfric described Saint Agnes, whose martyrdom was celebrated on the twenty-first of January, as a girl of thirteen who was ‘childish in years but old in mind’ (‘cild-lic on gearum. and eald-lic on mode’).¹³⁷ When she returned from school, the son of the ruler Sempronius immediately began to woo her, but Agnes cast the youth off, stating with the maturity of ‘a completely fulfilled woman’ that she already had a lover who adorned her with

¹³⁴ Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women*, 108.

¹³⁵ S. O’Sullivan, ‘Aldhelm’s *De virginitate* – Patristic Pastiche or Innovative Exposition?’ *Peritia* 12 (1998), 293.

¹³⁶ Hill, ‘Childhood in the Lives,’ 153.

¹³⁷ Ælfric, *LoS*, volume 1, Homily 7, 170-171. For more on the *puer senex* motif see P. Wasyliv, *Martyrdom, Murder, and Magic: Child Saints and their Cults in Medieval Europe* (New York, 2008), 17.

jewels, robes, and honour.¹³⁸ The boy's father questioned who this mysterious man could be and learned that Agnes 'had quickly become a Christian from childhood, and was so filled with sorcery that she regarded Christ as her bridegroom' ('fram cild-hade sona cristen wære. and swa mid dry-cræfte afylled . þæt heo crist tealde hire to bryd-guman').¹³⁹ Agnes, as the youngest virgin-martyr of the collection, appears just old enough to have reached puberty but young enough for Ælfric to still call her a child. Ælfric highlighted her determination to remain chaste through her martyrdom but, quite importantly, chose to inform his audience of her precocity from the beginning of the *vita*.

Furthermore, in the cases of Lucy and Euphrosyne, he presented hagiographical accounts which highlighted in detail the decision-making process which these two female saints went through before choosing a life of chastity. Lucy's *vita* began with the future saint and her mother Eutychia praying in front of the tomb of Saint Agatha of Syracuse, pleading for a cure for Eutychia's bleeding disorder which had persisted for four years. Whilst laying prostrate in front of the tomb, Lucy fell asleep and experienced a vision of Saint Agatha surrounded by the heavenly hosts who informed Lucy that she too, through her virginity, would be venerated as a saint of Syracuse. When Lucy awoke, she asked her mother to 'never nominate a single bridegroom to me' ('nanne bryd-guman næfre me ne namige') and to give her the rights over her body so that she may go to Christ in chastity ('forgif me ða [to] clænnysse . to criste farendre').¹⁴⁰ This first episode of Lucy's life which Ælfric chose to tell in his vernacular rendition of the *vita* emphasised the process through which Lucy chose a life

¹³⁸ L. Donovan, *Women Saints Lives in Old English Prose* (Cambridge, 1999), 127.

¹³⁹ Ælfric, *LoS*, volume 1, Homily 7, 174-175. The next entry in the *Lives*, that of Saint Agatha, also described how the Lord protected her 'from childhood' (206: 'fram cyldhade').

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, volume 1, Homily 9, 212-213.

of virginity. Rather than focus on her infancy and childhood, where presumably Lucy established her strong faith in Christianity, this initial miracle focused on a specific moment of her later teenage years where she chose to preserve her virginity for God.

Ælfric's account of Saint Euphrosyne's life also accentuated her knowledge and religious understanding, including her education about purity from the local abbot, before she made the choice to hide from her promised fiancé in a monastery. After her mother died when she was twelve, her 'father then taught the maiden by means of holy writings, divine readings, and all secular wisdom' ('se fæder þa gelærde þæt mæden . mid halgum gewritum . and godcundum rædingum . and mid eallum woruldlicum wis-dome').¹⁴¹ Consequently, her learning and virtues ended up attracting a range of marriage offers which her father rejected until a wealthy nobleman made an offer he could not refuse. Still unmarried, Euphrosyne reached the age of eighteen and visited an abbot who instructed her in the values of 'chastity and patience' ('clænnysse and gepylde').¹⁴² Later, a monk, once learning of her desire for the monastic lifestyle and impending marriage, implored Euphrosyne to 'not allow that any man pollute your body, nor give your countenance to any reproach, but wed yourself to Christ, who, for these transitory things, can give you the heavenly kingdom' ('ne geþafa ðu þæt ænig man þinne lichaman be-smite . ne ne syle þu þinne wlite to ænigum hospe . ac bewedde þe sylfe criste . se þe mæg for þisum gewitenlicum þingum . syllan þæt heofon-lice rice'), before advising that she dress as a male and clandestinely take up the monastic habit.¹⁴³ Euphrosyne quickly took the monk's advice and lived disguised as a male in a monastery to live in

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, volume 2, Homily 33, 336-337.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 336- 337.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 340-341.

virginity until her dying day. Ælfric portrayed each of these female saints as already Christian, and beyond the first stages of social puberty, before they chose to remain virgins. And, particularly in the case of Euphrosyne, her reason, wisdom, and knowledge of Christianity are distinctly highlighted, making her choice of chastity appear as a well-informed decision based on the instruction of her father, an abbot, and a monk. Potentially using these examples as a teaching point for his audience, Ælfric presented the continuance of virginity as an active choice only to be made once an individual had been educated and enlightened in the ways of Christianity.

Not all renditions of these female saints' lives chose to address this critical moment of choice in the same way as did Ælfric. The *Old English Martyrology*, an earlier late ninth-century text, did discuss these same saints in a briefer curtailed fashion than Ælfric's treatment, often focusing on the saint's martyrdom rather than their upbringing. The life of Saint Marina of Antioch (later known as Margaret in Western Christendom) differs slightly, in that it explains how 'early in her childhood she was handed over to a Christian woman for nurturing, and from her she learnt to believe in God in chastity' ('heo was sona on hire cildhade befæsted Cristenum wife to fedanne, ond æt þære heo geleornode þæt heo on clænnesse God gelefde').¹⁴⁴ In just this short sentence we see the connection of Christian education and the choice of chastity in an early period of Marina's life before she faced martyrdom for choosing virginity over marriage at the age of fifteen.

The potential implications of these accounts in our understanding of Anglo-Saxon religious beliefs about the end of a soul's childhood immunity are significant. Through each of these cases we see women asserting authority not just over their bodies but also over their

¹⁴⁴ *Old English Martyrology*, ed. and trans. Rauer, 132-133.

souls through a well-informed decision to lead a life of chastity. They are described as old enough to be vulnerable to sexual temptation (although they are never actually tempted) and to have bodies which inspire violent attentions often ending in their martyrdoms, inferring that these women are at some point past the onset of social puberty. However, in spite of its necessary role in these hagiographies, the physical ability to feel sexual desire does not appear to be the factor which determines whether these future saints had developed the capability of acquiring sin. Instead, their knowledge of Christianity and understanding of their choice emerge as the dominant features of their childhoods rather than their bodily developments. Although puberty appears as a prerequisite for the actions which led to the martyrdoms of many of these saints, we can see emphasis instead placed on these women's religious understanding followed by their choice of chastity, rather than on their physical growth. These hagiographies taught that an individual could be trusted to make a choice which held eternal ramifications for their souls only after they had reached an age of reason.

In the absence of any precise details about puberty in texts written by Anglo-Saxon authors, we cannot categorically state that any moment of physical puberty definitively marked the end of a soul's childhood innocence, even if the *Scriftboc*'s ages of authority and the given age of 'fifteen' in different sources all appear close in the range of hypothesised pivotal moments of adolescent growth in the Middle Ages. Sexual maturity still appears to be an important age marker in Anglo-Saxon religious sources, but instead of the spiritual boundary between childhood and adulthood, it appears more simply as an age where the church encouraged decisions to be made to aid the health of an adolescent's soul which was now susceptible to a new type of sin. Rather than emphasise sexual maturity, hagiographical accounts of female virgin saints highlighted the choice of chastity as something to be made after an individual had gained a deep-rooted understanding and true acceptance of

Christianity. Although no text clearly stated that reaching an age of reason marked the end of childhood immunity, analysing puberty and the linked choice of taking a vow of virginity draws even more attention to the undercurrent of beliefs during this period promoting an age of reason as the most widely-used boundary marker between childhood and adult spirituality.

Conclusion

In one of Pope Gregory's miracles of Saint Benedict retold by Ælfric in his second series of *Catholic Homilies*, a child oblate at Benedict's monastery held a greater love for his parents than for God's distribution ('swiðor for ðære sibbe þonne for godes dæle') and ran back to his family's home without any blessing, only to die that same day.¹⁴⁵ Although his parents attempted to bury him multiple times, the ground would expel his body each morning. The parents pleaded to Benedict for help, and he gave them the housel to lay on the child's chest at the next burial attempt. Finally, the parents were able to permanently lay their child to rest.¹⁴⁶ Ælfric did not explain why the ground kept rejecting the child's body, but this story followed a similar one about holy ground rejecting two men who had died while excommunicated which

¹⁴⁵ Ælfric, *CH II*, Homily 11, 102. His source for this story can be found in Grégoire le Grand, *Dialogues*, Book 2, ch. 24, 210-212.

¹⁴⁶ The tale of the unburiable oblate does raise ideas about what archaeological evidence could tell us about beliefs about the souls of children who had passed. There are unfortunately many limitations to approaching analysis on this topic due to the many preservation factors which have limited the number of accessible Anglo-Saxon juvenile bones; see S. Crawford, 'Children' in *The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Anglo-Saxon England*, eds. M. Lapidge et al (Chichester, 2014), 106. See also J. Buckberry, 'Missing, Presumed Buried? Bone Diagenesis and the Under-Representation of Anglo-Saxon Children,' *Assemblage 5* (2000). Much of the research done already has focused on infants and the tenth- and eleventh-century burial sites where archaeologists have found clusterings of infant burials beneath the eaves-drips of a church 'possibly because the water dripping from the holy roof might be thought to "double-bless" these infants': S. Crawford, 'Children, Death and the Afterlife in Anglo-Saxon England,' in *The Archaeology of Anglo-Saxon England: Basic Readings*, ed. C. Karkov (New York, 1999), 352; See also S. Crawford, 'Baptism and Infant Burial,' 76.

might lend some clues about the status of the oblate's soul. The child had reached an age where his soul and body carried the guilt of his disobedient actions.¹⁴⁷ Sinning oblates continued as a theme in this homily, as Benedict reprimanded a child from a noble family whose pride stopped him from serving those in the monastery and also caught a child attempting to keep a bottle of wine designated as a gift for the saint. Ælfric did not declare the spiritual fate of these two boys, focusing more on the miraculous powers of Benedict, but the homily in its entirety gives the impression that children of a certain age were susceptible to many of the same sins to which adults fell.¹⁴⁸

Several beliefs about young souls appear to have persisted from the patristic era to influence later Anglo-Saxon thought. Through numerous Old English renditions preserving Gregory's tale of the five-year-old dragged down to hell for cursing the Lord's name combined with several other Anglo-Saxon homilies preaching that children needed to learn the Creed and *Pater noster* as soon as possible, we see that Anglo-Saxon authors believed that the acquisition of speech played an important role in attaining salvation. Whether or not the soul was affected by sinful behaviour immediately after a child acquired speech remains uncertain. However, these sources do stress that for some period of time, the souls of children were under the care of their parents who held the responsibility for correcting and teaching their child during his or her formative years.

¹⁴⁷ O'Brien O'Keefe has produced a comparison of Gregory's Latin account and Ælfric's vernacular, arguing that Ælfric's refashioning of the story shaped it into 'a cautionary tale of dangerous desire, lost identity, and the importance of obedience for the oblates of a monastic house': *Stealing Obedience: Narratives of Agency and Identity in Later Anglo-Saxon England* (Toronto, 2012), 98-102; 99.

¹⁴⁸ On the contrasting ideas about the purity of oblates through the Carolingian period see M. de Jong, *In Samuel's Image: Child Oblation in the Early Medieval West* (Leiden, 1996), 132-145. On oblation in the early Anglo-Saxon period see S. Foot, *Monastic Life in Anglo-Saxon England, c. 600-900* (Cambridge, 2006), 140-146. See also Crawford, *Childhood in Anglo-Saxon England*, 135-138.

The boundaries drawn by Augustine with his age of reason and Isidore with puberty seem to have both influenced Anglo-Saxon beliefs about the soul, but most evidence points to a belief that Augustine's age of understanding, however broad and undefinable, had the most impact on an early English theology of childhood. Penitentials, homilies, hagiographies, law codes, and visual culture all lean towards the idea that an individual needed to reach an age of discernment before their soul was affected by good or bad acts, although no formalised theology clearly stating this position exists within the surviving sources. When sources promoting this idea did give specific ages, those ages ranged anywhere from eight to twenty, perhaps demonstrating that Anglo-Saxon religious authors were themselves grappling with the variable nature of mental maturity. The potential association between physical punishments, an age of understanding, and spiritual maturity drawn by *The Rule of St Benedict* and the penitential tradition might lend itself to further analysis on a larger geographical scale about early medieval beliefs regarding children's souls, but the evidence from the late Anglo-Saxon period alone is too limited and varied to make any conclusions. Sexual maturation attained through puberty held an important role in itself during this period, but rather than existing as the point when the soul began to be tainted by sin, it instead existed as a focal point in an individual's life when the crucial decision of how to preserve the soul from sexual sin had to be made. We can tell from surviving sources that later Anglo-Saxon authors treated children's souls differently from those of adults, but no clear-cut boundary marker appears to have been established by this point to answer when they believed an individual's soul began to be weighed and measured by its actions.

Conclusion

Soon in turn it shall be that sickness or sword edge will deprive your strength, or fire's grasp, or flood's surge, or sword attack, or spear flight, or terrible old age, or the brightness of eyes fails and becomes dim [...] death overpowers.

eft sona bið
þæt þec adl oððe ecg eafopes getwæfeð,
oððe fyres feng, oððe flodes wylm,
oððe gripe meces, oððe gares fliht,
oððe atol ylðo; oððe eagenas bearhtm
forsiteð ond forswordeð; [...]
[...] deað oferswyðeð.
(‘Beowulf,’ ll. 1762b-1768b)

Always one of three things in every circumstance until the end of his life span becomes an occasion for uncertainty: sickness or old age or sword-hate.

Simle þreora sum þinga gehwylce,
ær his tid aga, to tweon weorþeð;
adl oþþe ylðo oþþe ecghete
(‘The Seafarer,’ ll. 68-70)

In the two Old English poems ‘Beowulf’ and ‘The Seafarer’ we see separate but similar listings of the types of death any person might face: sickness, human violence, fire, water, and finally old age. Any adult would eventually encounter one of these fates, for, as Hrothgar stated, ‘death overpowers’ (‘deað oferswyðeð,’ l. 1768). When Ælfric wrote his own account of the different classifications of deaths, however, he could not ignore a category which both poems had overlooked:

Mors acerba, mors inmatura, mors naturalis, that is in English, the bitter death, the too-early (unripe) death, and natural death. The bitter death is so

named which is in children, and the too-early death, in young people, and the natural death, which comes to the old.

Mors acerba, mors inmatura, mors naturalis, þæt is on Englisc, se bitera deað, se ungeripode deað, and gecyndelica. Se bitera deað is gecweden þe bið on cildum, and se ungeripoda deað, on geongum mannum, and se gecyndlica, þe becymð þam eadlum.¹

An ‘unripe’ death might encompass each item in Hrothgar’s list excepting terrible old age, but Ælfric distinguished this from a different type of death not mentioned in either ‘Beowulf’ or ‘The Seafarer’: the bitter deaths of children. The Old English word *biter* might be that from which we derive the word for an intensely sharp taste, but, for the Anglo-Saxons, this word encompassed another dimension of feeling; it was ‘cutting’, ‘stinging’, ‘painful’, ‘disastrous,’ ‘virulent’, and often ‘cruel’. Ælfric considered infant and child mortality to be more than purely unjust; it was something which generated physical pain for those who mourned. Many Anglo-Saxon authors faced anxieties about those who died at a young age and, when confronting the realities of a high infant mortality rate, felt compelled to teach about the care of young souls and explain the fates of souls which encountered untimely, and, in Ælfric’s words, bitter deaths. Grasping Anglo-Saxon beliefs about society’s youngest souls is, however, more than just understanding their beliefs about premature death; it also informs us of their beliefs about the process of life, the immortality of the soul, the guilts and innocence of childhood, and the growth of accountability as society finally handed an individual the responsibility for his or her own eternal existence.

At the beginning of this project, I envisaged a thesis with a very different architecture, one that would cover the whole life journey of the soul from its first encounter with a body until its rapture at Judgement Day. As my research progressed, however, it

¹ Ælfric, *Supplementary*, volume 1, Homily 11, 420; Ælfric was ‘basing his text on the seventh-century *Prognosticon Futuri Saeculi* of Julian of Toledo [...] Ælfric was perfectly ready to rework his sources if they did not suit his purposes, but he does not do so here’: Thompson, *Dying and Death*, 10.

became clear that an amazing opportunity lay in the fact that Anglo-Saxon authors recognised that even the earliest moments of a soul's life warranted significant attention. Although early English discussions of young souls are commonly only encountered in scattered incidental references, enough information still has survived to reveal how they painted the soul as an intricate and complex entity even from its earliest existence. Analysing the contemporary discourses on the subject divulges evolving conceptions about the soul, its nature, and its properties. The vibrant portrayals and debates concerning the beginning of a soul's life, largely unstudied until now, have transformed this thesis from its original wide-ranging structure. But the core question remained the same: this thesis sought to provide a better understanding of beliefs about the soul during a period in which the theology of the soul was manifestly still developing.

Rather than a quick tour of Anglo-Saxon beliefs about the soul's whole life journey, this thesis has taken a slower course, unearthing details about the soul's early life so that each chapter could lay a solid foundation for the next. It became apparent that topics that I originally intended only to address briefly required whole chapters. For example, the first chapter initially meant to discuss Anglo-Saxon beliefs about ensoulment, but the discourse of ensoulment largely relies on comprehending beliefs concerning a soul's origin. If the soul stemmed from the parents, it existed as part of the embryo from conception; if it pre-existed or was created *ex nihilo*, the soul could enter the developing body at any time before birth. If a single belief about the origin of souls had been taught in this period, this first chapter might have still gone according to its original plan. Instead, I found that the later Anglo-Saxons had a vast array of conflicting opinions about the beginning of a soul's existence which merited its own chapter. By choosing to address each gradual aspect of the soul in the detail it warrants, this thesis has achieved an

interlocking structure where the knowledge gained from each chapter influences and affects the next.

To start, the first substantive chapter on the origin of souls demonstrated that the Anglo-Saxons were not only considering patristic debates on the subject but were also drawing their own conclusions about what specific doctrine to believe. They made decisions which theologians such as Augustine of Hippo had previously avoided, possibly because he wished to circumvent any resolution's effects on other theological doctrines he wished to promote. We see in the texts from Alfred's translation circle a clear argument for the soul's pre-existence, and yet, at most a century later, that notion had been outright rejected in multiple genres by those writers coming from the school of bishop Æthelwold. Attempts to create orthodoxy by Ælfric and Wulfstan the Cantor, however, did not appear to last in religious spheres past the Norman Conquest; the regret that Anselm of Canterbury expressed on his deathbed in 1109 that he could not find an answer to the question of the soul's origin marks a distinct shift backwards to the indecision on the subject articulated by Augustine and Alcuin. Steadfast beliefs on the matter seem to have been extinguished as quickly as they came into existence.

No surviving texts from the period, however, promoted the belief in Traducianism, which stated that parents provided the soul for each child and that all souls thus stemmed from Adam. This understanding depends on a presumption that souls existed in bodies from the moment of conception, a view which is not compatible with surviving Anglo-Saxon sources describing initial ensoulment. Anglo-Saxon authors consistently described souls as first entering their bodies sometime between conception and birth, a theology of ensoulment 'in utero,' yet a fully established view on precisely when this took place during a pregnancy was never articulated. Could it have been when bodily autonomy was achieved in the womb? Or at the quickening when a mother first felt her child moving

within? Achieving a consistent doctrine on this theology did not seem to have taken precedence for religious scholars of the time, but by narrowing down the timing of ensoulment between the first forty days of pregnancy and the first sensation of movement, we find a theology with a possible pastoral role which might have allowed for early term pregnancy loss. If a developing foetus did not have a soul when a woman experienced pregnancy loss in the first trimester, parents would not have been burdened with the responsibility for a condemned soul whose only fault came from not being baptised.

After initial ensoulment was believed to have occurred, concern for that individual's soul, even as it lay in the womb, persisted until a child received the sacrament of baptism. Arguments for why the child needed baptism, though, were not always straightforward. The use of Augustine's developed doctrine of an innate, inherited sin as passed directly through the parents was not as popular in this period as some modern scholars have believed. Certainly, the Anglo-Saxons blamed the condemned state of unbaptised infants along with many other aspects of the human condition on Adam's actions, but several of the doctrinally-complex layers which Augustine added to this belief were not widespread. More often than not, authors would instead encourage parents to seek speedy baptism for their infants through a rhetoric of fear, stating that their children were owned by the devil or counted as heathens until immersed three times in the sacramental font. Ensuring the initiation of a child into the Christian community with baptism was seemingly more important than explaining the precise details of a doctrine which Augustine argued necessitated it.

Infants after baptism were, however, considered to be pure and without sin, but that state could not necessarily last forever. At some point an individual's soul left that period of innocence/immunity and became accountable for any actions which the church considered to be sinful, requiring the process of penance to begin. Although the sins of the

young were mentioned on multiple occasions, it appears that no definitive boundary between the souls of children and adults had been created by the first half of the eleventh century. Evidence points tentatively towards the strengthening of a belief in a fluid ‘age of reason’ for when the soul began to be affected by sins and good works, but, unlike debates over the origin of souls, religious scholars did not seem too concerned with creating a consistent boundary at this stage in the soul’s emerging theology.

The results of this study have been twofold. We have confirmed that this was a period of developing beliefs about the soul: Anglo-Saxon authors did not simply adopt patristic understandings of the soul but adapted them, forming their own distinct beliefs about the spiritual substance of humans. We have also found further insights into Anglo-Saxon attitudes towards the young. Investigating beliefs about individuals who were often too young to understand the basics of Christianity as described in texts often produced by monastic communities has revealed immense concern for the souls of the young. In every best-case scenario, children would grow into rational adults able to take responsibility for the salvation of their own souls. Unfortunately, this did not always happen. Women experienced miscarriages and other losses in pregnancy, and children could (and did) die too young to understand the redeeming fundamentals of Christianity. In most every occasion where young souls were mentioned in Anglo-Saxon texts, we see that the authors were aware of the heavy burden of explaining the fates of these lost souls to their families and communities.

We should still consider the late Anglo-Saxon period within the formative historical stage for theology of the soul. Few beliefs about the soul’s nature and existence had been solidified by this point as a number of patristic and early medieval ideas about the soul still fought to take charge. There might have been some efforts to consolidate these ideas later in the tenth or eleventh centuries, but many beliefs remained largely fluid in

nature. At least in regards to the soul, we should not focus, as many have done, on the dichotomy between Christian beliefs and pagan beliefs; instead, we should be asking if the clergy promoted a single orthodox belief or if, in fact, such beliefs were still under construction.

These four chapters have taken us through approximately the first fifteen years of the soul's corporeal existence; on the cusp of adulthood there were many journeys the soul could take. Topics ranging from sin and good works, collective penance, gendered souls, sexual pollution, sickness and disability, marriage and soulmates, death, lingering souls, and doomsday might all benefit from further re-evaluation in the future. One further investigation into the life journey of the soul might still be made here, for there is one respect in which some exceptional people's souls journeyed major distances during life if we can determine the Anglo-Saxons judged such a thing was possible. A belief might have persisted across the period in separable souls: souls that had the ability to separate from their bodies without the prerequisite of bodily death. If this truly was believed, it could have crucial consequences for our understandings of Anglo-Saxon beliefs concerning the supposed life-giving power of the soul to its body and of any discourse promoting the passivity of the embodied soul. The following epilogue addresses the presence of this manifest belief.

Epilogue

Souls Outside Living Bodies

Beliefs in free-ranging, wandering, or separable souls which leave their bodies during times of unconsciousness, illness, or trance-like meditations may be found across a range of cultures, both historic and modern. In anthropological studies, Stein and Stein have summarised that within many societies it is and/or was believed that:

when one dreams, it is as if one's soul leaves the body and travels rapidly through space and time. It meets up with all sorts of people, including the souls of relatives who have died. In some groups it is considered dangerous to wake someone up suddenly, for there might not be enough time for the soul to return from its travels, and the soul might be lost [...] We see a person sleeping, lying inert, devoid of activity and personality. We make the same observation when one faints or goes into a coma. Some believe that when a shaman enters a trance, the shaman's soul has left the shaman's body to travel to a supernatural world. Illness may be caused by the soul having left the body. Death is the permanent withdrawal of the soul from the body.¹

Harrell has studied, for example, how in Chinese folk religion 'the loss of one's "soul" is an extremely common explanation for many kinds of diseases and aberrations, both mental and physical, that are analysed and treated by Chinese "sacred medicine." Many cures concentrate on getting the "soul" back [...] Trance – a state common to folk practitioners in many parts of southern China – is invariably explained in terms of "soul" travel or spirit possession.'² Arnett's study on the soul, though antiquated, listed a number of cultures in the past and (then) present which held beliefs connecting wandering souls and dreaming,

¹ R. Stein and P. Stein, *The Anthropology of Religion, Magic, and Witchcraft*, 4th edition (London, 2017), 172-173.

² S. Harrell, 'The Concept of Soul in Chinese Folk Religion,' *The Journal of Asian Studies* 38 (1979), 519.

separating these dream sequences into two types: the soul-wanderer and soul-visitor.³

Different cultures have produced similar accounts across history and across the globe of beliefs in soul travel often times associated with sleep and sometimes illness.

In the early Middle Ages, we see appearances of this belief in folktales but also in texts produced under the aegis of different Abrahamic religions. Bremmer, when studying the belief in the *psyche*'s departure from the body during swoons in pagan Greek sources, paid important attention in his second appendix to instances of the 'free soul' or the 'wandering soul' in Christian Western Europe, arguing 'this concept expressed itself in many versions of one type of folktale, in which the soul leaves the body in the shape of a small animal or homunculus and later returns to it.'⁴ From this geographic area, Bremmer cited the oldest transcribed instance like this to come from the *History of the Lombards* by Paul the Deacon (d. 799) in an anecdote about the Merovingian King Guntram whose spirit left his body in the shape of a reptile during a slumber in the middle of a hunt.⁵ After the serpentine-shaped spirit journeyed and returned to its body, Guntram awoke and told his companion of the vision he had just experienced locating the whereabouts of a treasure-hoard. As his men dug up that area, they found an untold number of treasures.⁶ In Judaism, Hasan-Rokem has noted that in the (probably eighth-century) exegesis found in the *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer*:

Rabbi Zecharya says: sleep at night is like this world, and awakening in the morning is like the world to come. And as at night man lies down and sleeps and his soul roams around in the world and tells him in the dream everything that comes along, as it is said "In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falls upon men, in slumberings upon the bed; then he opens the ears of men and seals their instruction" [Job 33:15-16], likewise

³ L. Arnett, 'The Soul: a Study of Past and Present Beliefs,' *The American Journal of Psychology* 15 (1904), 131-133.

⁴ J. Bremmer, *The Early Greek Concept of the Soul*, Appendix Two (Princeton, 1983), 132.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 134.

⁶ Paulus Diaconus, *Historia Langobardorum*, Book 3, ch. 34, *MGH Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum separatim* 48, 138-140.

the souls of the dead roam in the world and tell them everything that comes along.⁷

In Islam, Tesei has found:

the Quran also compares death to the ‘common sleep’ that people experience on a daily basis. This seems to be the case in the cryptic statement found in Q 39:42 (cf. Q 6:60), ‘God takes the souls at the time of their death (hīna mawtihā), and [He takes] that which has not died, in its sleep (fī manāmiḥā); He withholds that against which He has decreed death, but sets loose the other until a stated term.’ This obscure passage appears to indicate that sleep is a death-like state; sleepers resemble the dead since their souls enter into a state similar to that which they will experience at the moment of death. However, unlike the souls of the dead, which will be raised only on the Day of Resurrection, the ordinary sleeper’s soul is sent back when he awakens—that is, of course, until the time of his death. This parallel between death and ‘common sleep’ finds a fairly close correspondence in the poetical language used by Ephrem, who in the Nisibene hymns (7:15) affirms that: ‘The one who lies down to sleep resembles the departed and death resembles a dream, and the resurrection the morning.’⁸

In all three accounts we see the soul leaving the body only for a short window of time, destined to return once the sleeper has awoken. Themes relating soul-travel, sleep, death, dreams, and true visions permeated through the religious structures of the early Middle Ages, whilst early medieval societies might have continued folk beliefs in separable souls nestled into their cultural milieu. To what degree did the belief in a separable soul persist in early medieval England? To answer this question, this epilogue first considers the popular *Visio Pauli* and those who rebutted any related beliefs in a separable soul. It then studies the case of the vision of Saint Fursa, whose soul left a still-breathing body to journey into the afterlife in most, but not all, accounts. An analysis of the instances of separable souls in Old English literature which have received the most modern critical attention follows. Finally, this section surveys other dream and vision literature from the

⁷ G. Hasan-Rokem, ‘Communications with the Dead in Jewish Dream Culture,’ in *Dream Cultures: Explorations in the Comparative History of Dreaming*, eds. D. Shulman and G. Stroumsa (Oxford, 1999), 226.

⁸ T. Tesei, ‘The *Barzakh* and the Intermediate State of the Dead in the Quran,’ in *Locating Hell in Islamic Traditions*, ed. C. Lange (Leiden, 2015), 40-41.

Anglo-Saxon period where the concept of the soul leaving the body is not introduced, querying if too much focus on the separable soul could distract from asking more pertinent questions about the relationships between souls, bodies, and dreaming.

Visio Pauli and Negation

Within early medieval religious circles, ideas surrounding the soul's ability to leave the body, particularly during dreams and visions, are often traced back to the influence of the *Visio Pauli*, or the *Apocalypse of Paul*, described by Palmer as 'an apocryphal apocalyptic tour of hell which was likely composed in Greek c. 400 and translated with some changes into Latin by the end of the fifth century.'⁹ This text served as an expansion of Paul's ambiguous statement in his second letter to the Corinthians which said a man was 'caught up to the third heaven' and twice repeated 'whether in the body, I know not, or out of the body, I know not: God knoweth.'¹⁰ The ambiguity of this passage sparked the imagination of an anonymous Late Antique writer who created an extended account of the vision which Paul of Tarsus had supposedly witnessed, but refused to tell. Of the three Long Latin versions of the text from the early Middle Ages, only one manuscript still contains the introductory material which began by quoting the passage from 2 Corinthians before explaining how the revelation of Paul was discovered in a marble box and then starting the

⁹ Palmer, *The Apocalypse*, 50. On dreams and visions in the early Middle Ages, see J. Le Goff, 'Dreams in the Culture and Collective Psychology in the Medieval West,' in J. Le Goff, *Time, Work, & Culture in the Middle Ages*, trans. A. Goldhammer (Chicago, 1980), 201-204; J. Le Goff, *The Medieval Imagination*, trans. A. Goldhammer (Chicago, 1988); S. Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1992) – Kruger passed directly from Gregory the Great to the early twelfth century; E. Gardiner, *Medieval Visions of Heaven and Hell: a Sourcebook* (New York, 1993); P. Dutton, *The Politics of Dreaming in the Carolingian Empire* (Lincoln, 1994); J. Schmitt, 'The Liminality and Centrality of Dreams in the Medieval West,' in *Dream Cultures: Explorations in the Comparative History of Dreaming*, eds. D. Shulman and G. Stroumsa (Oxford, 1999), 274-288; I. Moreira, *Dreams, Visions, and Spiritual Authority in Merovingian Gaul* (Ithaca, 2000); I. Moreira, 'Dreams and Divination in Early Medieval Canonical and Narrative Sources: The Question of Clerical Control,' *The Catholic Historical Review* 89 (2003), 621-642; J. Keskiäho, *Dreams and Visions in the Early Middle Ages: The Reception and Use of Patristic Ideas, 400-900* (Cambridge, 2015).

¹⁰ 2 Corinthians 12:2-14.

tale of Paul's vision.¹¹ This oldest surviving Latin version from the ninth century started the narration of the vision with Paul saying he saw everything: 'While I was in the body in which I was snatched up to the third heaven.'¹² This single version revealed the vision to be a bodily experience; however, at least one later medieval redaction of the text described the vision as happening 'in spirit.'¹³ The loss, or decision not to include, the initial sections of the *Visio Sancti Pauli* in early Latin manuscripts of the text prevents us from establishing a consistent understanding of how those in the early Middle Ages envisaged Paul's experience, whether in body or in spirit.

We also cannot establish how Old English versions of the *Visio Pauli* described Paul's state as he entered the third heaven. The popularity of the *Visio Pauli* in Anglo-Saxon England is attested not only by an anonymous translation of the Long Latin text into Old English, but also by uses of the text as a source in several vernacular anonymous homilies, the recycling of several of its motifs, and the outright condemnations of the text voiced by Aldhelm (*Prosa de virginitate*) and Ælfric (*Catholic Homilies*).¹⁴ The Old English translation, surviving in a now-separated mid-eleventh century manuscript followed an angel-led Paul ('se ængel hine ða gelædde') as he witnessed the going-out of wicked and righteous souls, heaven, hell, and the paradise of Eden.¹⁵ However, a leaf of the manuscript has been lost which potentially carried the opening lines of the *Visio* along with the

¹¹ Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS nouv. acq. lat. 1631.

¹² 'Qui dum in corpore essem in quo raptus sum usque ad tertium celum': *Visio Pauli* in *Apocrypha Anecdota*, volume I (1-42), ed. M. James (Cambridge, 1893), 11; translation from 'The Apocalypse of Paul,' in J. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford, 1993), 620. For side by side comparisons of the beginnings of the Long Latin traditions, see *Apocalypse of Paul: a New Critical Edition of Three Long Latin Versions*, eds. T. Silverstein and A. Hilhorst (Genève, 1997), 66-69.

¹³ 'in spiritum': 'Redaction II – Vienna, Cod. 3881,' in *Visio Sancti Pauli: the History of the Apocalypse in Latin, Together with Nine Texts*, ed. T. Silverstein (London, 1935), 156.

¹⁴ A. DiPaolo Healey, 'Introduction,' in *The Old English Vision of St. Paul* (Cambridge, MA, 1978), 41-57. For more on the impact of the *Visio Pauli* in Anglo-Saxon England, see A. Kabir, *Paradise, Death and Domesday in Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge, 2001), 14-48.

¹⁵ *The Old English Vision*, ed. DiPaolo Healey, 65.

passage from 2 Corinthians 4 and the angelic exposure of this formerly lost vision.

DiPaolo Healey has written that ‘whether the loss is intentional or accidental is uncertain.’¹⁶ Whatever the case, the biblical abstruseness over Paul’s physical or spiritual state as he visited the third heaven as understood from the Old English translation still remains.

For some theologians, however, there was no question that a soul could leave behind a living body even to experience holy visions. Augustine of Hippo seems to have been troubled by the nuanced question of Paul’s bodily or spiritual status as described in Corinthians (he apparently had no interest in the *Visio Pauli* aside from condemning it).¹⁷ He thus devoted the final chapter of his work *De Genesi ad Litteram* to muse on the question of paradise and souls leaving bodies to experience visions. Augustine first tried to explain how Paul could possibly have been ignorant about what part of him experienced the vision: ‘However, if it is impossible for the spirit to be carried without the body to corporeal places or for the body to be carried to spiritual places, this very doubt about his virtually forces us to the conclusion that the region to which he was carried (for he is obviously speaking about himself) was such that it was impossible to discern clearly whether it was corporeal or spiritual.’¹⁸ That settled, Augustine attempted to grapple with how Paul might have experienced the vision:

But the Apostle, who took such pains to distinguish what he knew from what he did not know, could not be guilty of a lie. Hence perhaps we should interpret him to mean that, when he was caught up to the third heaven, he could not tell whether he was in the body (as a man’s soul is in his body but withdrawn from the bodily senses while he is awake or asleep or in ecstasy, though his body is said to be alive) or whether he actually went out of the

¹⁶ DiPaolo Healey, ‘Introduction,’ in *The Old English Vision*, 6.

¹⁷ See Augustine, *In Johannis Evangelium tractatus CXXIV*, Tractate 98.8, CCSL 36, 581.

¹⁸ ‘uerum tamen si neque spiritus sine corpore ad loca corporalia rapi potest nec corpus ad spiritalia, haec ipsa dubitatio eius uelut cogit intellegi - siquidem de se ipso haec eum scripsisse nemo ambigit - tale fuisse illud, quo raptus est, quod, utrum corporale an spiritale esset, dinosci discernique non posset’: Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram*, Book 12, ch. 1, CSEL 28.1, 380; Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, volume 2, trans. J. Taylor (New York, 1982), 179.

body, so that his body would lie in death until, the vision over, the soul would be reunited with his dead members. In the latter case he would not awaken as if from sleep nor return to his senses as one coming from an ecstasy, but from death he would truly come to life again. Hence what he saw when caught up to the third heaven, and what he affirms with certain knowledge, he saw in reality and not under an image. But since it was doubtful whether the withdrawal from his body left his body truly dead, or whether his soul was still somehow present as it is in a living body, while his mind was carried away to see and hear the secrets of the vision – perhaps because of this doubt he said, Whether in the body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know, God knows.¹⁹

The soul, to Augustine, could not leave the body apart from at death; this left him with two options to explain the method of Paul's vision: he was either dreaming or dead and resurrected. Those were the only possibilities. Augustine then proceeded to speculate about the different types of visions which he deemed orthodoxically possible.²⁰

Augustine's certainty about the soul's inability to leave the body before death, particularly in the context of dreaming, was repeated by Alcuin in his *De animae ratione*. He expounded on the powers of the soul and how even during sleep, when the soul was still 'trapped within the mortal body,' it still had the ability to remain active through the powers of the mind, travelling across the world and viewing different cities and countries.²¹ The intricacies of Rome and Jerusalem might be imagined by the soul during sleep, but Alcuin carefully noted that the soul never left the prison of the body during these nocturnal journeys. The soul's exodus from the body could only mean death, for 'just as

¹⁹ 'restat ergo fortasse, ut, quoniam mentiri non posset apostolus, qui tanta cura egit, ut discerneret quid sciret et quid nesciret, hoc ipsum eum intellegamus ignorasse, utrum, quando in caelum tertium raptus est, in corpore fuerit, quomodo est anima in corpore, cum corpus uiuere dicitur, siue uigilantis siue dormientis siue in extasi a sensibus corporis alienata, an omnino de corpore exierit, ut mortuum corpus iaceret, donec peracta illa demonstratione membris mortuis anima redderetur et non quasi dormiens euigilaret aut extasi alienatus denuo rediret in sensus, sed mortuus omnino reuiuisceret. proinde, quod uidit raptus usque in tertium caelum - quod etiam se scire confirmat - proprie uidit, non imaginaliter. sed quia ipsa a corpore alienatio, utrum omnino mortuum corpus reliquerit an secundum modum quendam uiuentis corporis ibi anima fuerit, sed mens eius ad uidenda uel audienda ineffabilia illius uisionis abrepta sit, hoc incertum erat, ideo forsitan dixit: siue in corpore siue extra corpus nescio, deus scit': Augustine, *De Genesi*, Book 12, ch. 5; trans. Taylor, volume 2, 184-185.

²⁰ For more on Augustine's theorised types of visions, see Gardiner, *Medieval Visions*, xvi.

²¹ 'intra mortale corpus inclusae': Alcuin, *De animae ratione*, ch. 8, PL 101:643A.

the soul is the life of the body, so is God the life of the soul. As the soul departs from the body, the body dies.’²² Just in case his reader had failed to understand his message, Alcuin, when next listing the soul’s abilities, wrote the soul was ‘not possessing in itself the ability to depart from the body or again return into it.’²³ Alcuin could not support any belief in the free-ranging soul.²⁴ While he might not have had an answer for how souls originated, Alcuin very carefully reiterated the soul’s inability to leave the body of its own accord, particularly during sleep, but also at any point in corporeal life.²⁵ Ælfric translated these beliefs almost verbatim in his own exposition on the soul for his Anglo-Saxon audience in his homily on the Lord’s Nativity in his *Lives of Saints*.²⁶ To Augustine, Alcuin, and Ælfric, an essential aspect of the soul was that it could not leave its body until death.

Visions of the Afterlife (Saint Fursa)

Visions of the afterlife believed to be true experiences of the soul separated from its body account for the most vivid evidence we have for beliefs in journeying souls; however, as a rule these holy visions generally could not happen unless the body experienced extreme

²² ‘Sicut corporis vita anima est, ita animae vita Deus est. Dum anima deserit corpus, moritur corpus’: *ibid.*, ch. 9, PL 101:643B.

²³ ‘non habens in se potestatem exeundi de carne, et redeundi iterum in eam’: *ibid.*, ch. 10, PL 101:644A.

²⁴ Clemoes used the comparison of Alcuin’s flight of the mind as a faculty of the soul to argue for the flight of the *hyge* in *The Seafarer* to, in fact, only represent a ‘mental process’: Clemoes, ‘*Mens absentia cogitans*,’ 64.

²⁵ On Alcuin’s hesitancy, see above, page 45.

²⁶ Ælfric, *LoS*, Homily 1, 18.

distress through illness or, more regularly, death.²⁷ Moreira has suggested that one of the major developments of the vision genre in Merovingian Gaul was the literary addition of death before visionary soul-travel could take place.²⁸ However, the prerequisite of death did not always feature in this literary genre as time progressed.

There are certain analytical dangers to address first concerning one particular terminology which frequently appears in modern discussions of early medieval visions of the afterlife: the so called ‘apparent death.’ Sims-Williams has written that ‘most visions of heaven and hell came during sickness or apparent death’ and Carozzi started his monograph on visions explaining how he focused on ‘le thème de la mort apparente.’²⁹ Both talk about the visionaries having the ‘appearance’ of death, casting into doubt the certainty of mortality within many of these vision sequences unquestionably shared by the authors composing these works. For the purposes of this argument, we must eliminate this type of phrasing from the discourse. If the text stated that someone was dead or, indeed, alive, there are likely to be sound theological reasons behind that decision. We can always make speculations about the supposed true state in which a soul voyager’s body existed; could they have been in a coma? Did the soul voyager even truly live at all? Those types of questions will always exist and in themselves are worth studying, but if we are to investigate *beliefs* about the soul there are important theological implications about the nature of the soul we must consider when an author chose to write if a body lay dead or

²⁷ Le Goff tracked and periodized the vision genre as it grew in the Early Middle Ages, writing ‘the 7th to the 10th centuries are the great era of visions of the beyond. It corresponds to the rapid growth of monasticism and the monastic culture’s filtering of resurgent popular elements [...] During the 11th and 12th centuries, especially during the latter, folklore spreads the visions widely’: J. Le Goff, ‘The Learned and Popular Dimensions of Journeys in the Otherworld in the Middle Ages,’ trans. V. Aboulaffia, in *Understanding Popular Culture: Europe from the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century*, ed. S. Kaplan (Berlin, 1984), 34.

²⁸ Moreira, *Dreams, Visions*, 141-142.

²⁹ P. Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England 600-800* (Cambridge, 1990), 245; C. Carozzi, *Le Voyage de l’âme*, 4. Zaleski’s book on visions from near-death experiences stated its aim ‘to examine the return-from-death story,’ which also blurs the lines between near-death and stated death before these journeys to the afterlife took place: C. Zaleski, *Otherworld Journeys: Accounts of Near-Death Experiences in Medieval and Modern Times* (Oxford, 1987), 6.

alive. Here, using words such as ‘apparent’ could eliminate the power of the message the author tried to convey about the soul-body relationship.

The souls of the dead, even if they journeyed to heaven and hell and returned to their bodies, are not the focus of this study. Instead, this section addresses the more atypical vision narrative of Saint Fursa whose soul was described as journeying to the heavens while his sickly, but not-yet-dead, body waited below. His out-of-body experience gained popularity in early medieval England, first in its early *vita* form soon enhanced by Bede’s inclusion of the tale in his *Ecclesiastical History*; by the late Anglo-Saxon period we not only have the anonymous Latin *vita* circulating and a version of his life in the *Ecclesiastical History* but we also have versions of his visions translated into the vernacular in texts such as the *Old English Bede*, the *Old English Martyrology*, and Ælfric’s Second Series of *Catholic Homilies*. Although Godden has pointed out that ‘his feast-day was not of major status’ in late Anglo-Saxon England, we still seem to be dealing with a popular story where death was not a prerequisite for a soul’s journey, one of the very few of this vision genre.³⁰ Often the focus of studying Fursa’s life has been aimed at using it to discuss early medieval views about the concept of purgatory, but this rare opportunity to analyse the transmission of this vision across the entirety of the Anglo-Saxon period offers fascinating insights into beliefs about the separable soul.³¹ Carozzi has pointed out that many of these visions of the afterlife already present us with non-Augustinian conceptions of the soul in that they present a soul that is not unitary, invisible, or immaterial but instead something much more concrete.³² Additionally, in the case of

³⁰ Godden, *Ælfric’s Catholic Homilies*, 529.

³¹ For more on the visions experienced by Fursey and their relation to early medieval beliefs about purgatory, see M. Dunn, ‘Gregory the Great, the Vision of Fursey and the Origins of Purgatory,’ *Peritia* 14 (2000), 238-254; M. Dunn, *The Vision of St. Fursey and the Development of Purgatory* (Norwich, 2007); I. Moreira, *Heaven’s Purge: Purgatory in Late Antiquity* (Oxford, 2010), 113-130.

³² Carozzi, *Le Voyage de l’âme*, 173-183. See also Keskiäho, *Dreams and Visions*, 13, 60-63, 221.

Fursa as studied here, we see a break from any apparent continuation of Augustinian beliefs that a soul could not leave its body without corporeal death.

The anonymous *Vita S. Fursei*, a continental hagiographical account of Saint Fursa's life composed shortly after his death around 656, recounted the life of an Irish missionary saint who helped to convert the Kingdom of East Anglia. Rather than highlight his missionary activity or work in Ireland, however, the heart of the text lies in the two visions his soul experienced as his body lay sick. The composer of the *vita* carefully constructed the narrative in such a way that he never stated that Fursa died in this experience. From the earliest surviving eighth-century text to the early-modern *Acta Sanctorum* edition of the tale we see the consistent use of *quasi* or 'as if' expressions describing the state of Fursa's body: as darkness enclosed him and angels reached towards him after falling ill, his body lay 'as if he was dead' ('quasi si iam mortuus').³³ Although he welcomed death before his second vision three days later, his body fell back against the bed 'as if weighed down by sleep' ('quasi somno grauatus') perhaps in some form of cataleptic sleep.³⁴ When his soul finally returned to the body, he rose 'as if from the depths of death' ('quasi ex profundum mortis').³⁵ Furthermore, as part of his second vision, Fursa witnessed an approaching wall of fire which his angelic guides explained judged each soul according to its misdeeds and merits; rather than force Fursa through it, however, two angels pulled the flames aside for him to pass. Explaining this, Sowerby has written 'the

³³ *Transitus Beati Fursei: a Translation of the 8th Century Manuscript Life of Saint Fursey*, ch. 2, ed. O. Rackham (Norwich, 2007), 4. For further, later editions of the same text, see Carozzi's edition which combines three different manuscripts, the British Library Harley edition (British Library, Harley, MS 5041, f. 79r-98v) with two ninth century manuscripts: 'La Vision de Saint Fursy,' in C. Carozzi, *Le Voyage de l'âme*, 677-692. An eleventh-century manuscript's version of the tale may be found in 'Vita Fursei,' MGH *Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum* 4, 434-440. And the *Acta Sanctorum*'s rendition: 'Vita Fursei,' in *Acta Sanctorum quotquot toto orbe coluntur* (Antwerp, 1643-1894; 1925), Jan. II.36-41.

³⁴ *Transitus Beati Fursei*, ch. 5, 10.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, ch. 17, 46.

normal procedures of the otherworld had been suspended for a moment to allow one chosen soul to travel through the impassable fire.³⁶ As one not truly dead, Fursa seems to have been given a certain immunity not granted to the souls of the deceased. His body lay in a state so similar to death that his companions began the process of mourning as they believed he was a ‘*corpus ex anima*,’ but the author notably chose not to describe Fursa’s experience as death itself.³⁷

Bede gave his own version of the anonymous Latin *vita* of Saint Fursa in his narrative of the East Anglia conversion. He regularly referred to his Latin source for authority but also revised the source in his own way to add supplementary details as divulged by an older monk from Wearmouth-Jarrow who had supposedly known Fursa himself. He included the typical *topos* describing the saint’s pristine early life, but the weight of the narrative again focused on the extraordinary journey Fursa experienced as his soul left his body. Bede began describing this event in Fursa’s life saying: ‘On one occasion when he was attacked by illness, as his Life fully describes, he was snatched from the body; he quitted it from evening to cock-crow and during that time he was privileged to gaze upon the angelic hosts and to listen to their blessed songs of praise.’³⁸ After experiencing this heavenly, but rather generic, vision, Fursa was returned to his body only to have his soul separated from his body once again three days later to experience yet another, longer vision in which he was guided by four protecting angels to witness both the blessed and the damned. During the return voyage to place Fursa’s soul into his body, a group of evil spirits propelled one of the flaming damned souls at him – a man whose

³⁶ R. Sowerby, *Angels in Early Medieval England* (Oxford, 2016), 122.

³⁷ *Transitus Beati Fursei*, ch. 4, 8. This tale raises questions about medieval attitudes towards the souls of the unconscious and comatose which cannot be answered here.

³⁸ ‘ubi correptus infirmitate, sicut libellous de uita eius conscriptus sufficienter edocet, raptus est e corpore, et a uespera usque ad galli cantum corpore exutus, angelicorum agminum et aspectus intueri et laudes beatas meruit audire’: Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, Book 3, ch. 19, ed. and trans. Colgrave and Mynors, 270-271.

clothing Fursa had received after his death – searing his soul in two places. Bede wrote that ‘when Fursa had been restored to his body, he bore for the rest of his life the marks of the burns which he had suffered while a disembodied spirit [anima]; they were visible to all on his shoulder and his jaw. It is marvellous to think that what he suffered secretly as a disembodied spirit [anima] showed openly on his flesh.’³⁹

In contrast to the teachings of Augustine which stated a soul could only leave the body at death, we have from Bede a tale where a man’s body continued to live as his soul voyaged to the otherworld. Casey has argued that ‘as Fursa is not dead, the distinction between life and death is blurred and the division of the body from the soul is not complete.’⁴⁰ The distinction between life and death is certainly blurred here, but Bede did in fact make it clear that the division of Fursa’s soul from his body was complete. He specified repeatedly that it was the soul experiencing these visions even if he did not immediately state it was the *anima* which left the body at the beginning. However, even then he explained at the start that *something* was seized from Fursa’s body which was categorised as the essential self later described as the soul. The verb used to describe the separation, *rapio*, portrays aggression and imagery of something being forcibly grabbed out of the body. Similarly, Fursa’s soul remained passive through the text, only allowed where its angelic psychopomps guided it.⁴¹ Bede would then eliminate a part of the Latin *vita* which might have caused his audience some confusion about the state of Fursa’s body: there were no mourners surrounding his motionless body and, as Fursa’s soul contemplated

³⁹ ‘Qui postmodum in corpore restitutus, omni uitae suae tempore signum incendii, quod in anima pertulit, uisibile cunctis in humero maxillaque porauit, mirumque in modum quid anima in occulto passa sit, caro palam praemonstrabat’: *ibid.*, 274-275.

⁴⁰ A. Casey, *The Vita Fursei and its Use by Bede and Ælfric* (Norwich, 2010), 9.

⁴¹ For more about the role of angels as guides for the soul to the afterlife, see Sowerby, *Angels*, 110-146.

the prospect of returning to the prostrate form, Fursa's soul did not consider it as if it were a corpse.

Although Bede repeated that Fursa suffered from a serious illness before these visions took place, he never stated that Fursa died in the process. It is worth comparing this to the two other famous contributions to the heaven-and-hell vision genre from the first half of the eighth century which would later be translated into Old English. Drythelm, a lay man whose soul's visionary journey Bede included in Book Five of the *Ecclesiastical History*, had his vision introduced with Bede stating: 'in order to arouse the living from spiritual death, a certain man already dead came back to life and related many memorable things that he had seen.'⁴² Part of the power of this vision came with its attachment to a resurrection miracle, but we also see that Bede chose here to use language which clarified Drythelm's death during this process, differentiating it from Fursa's experience described two books earlier. Similarly Wynfrith – soon to change his name to Boniface in 719 – included the requested vision of an unnamed monk of Wenlock in his return letter to Eadburga 'who may have been a nun at Wimborne in Wessex.'⁴³ Wynfrith personally interviewed the monk who had recently died and come back to life, stating that angels carried him away after 'the extreme pain from a violent illness had suddenly freed his spirit from the burden of his body.'⁴⁴ Both visions share enough in common – such as the soul voyagers' distaste and reluctance when their angelic psychopomps revealed that they would be returned to their bodies – that Sims-Williams has suggested that 'the simplest

⁴² 'Namque ad excitationem uiuentium de morte animae quidam aliquandiu mortuus ad uitam resurrexit corporis, et multa memoratu digna quae uiderat narrauit': Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, Book 5, ch. 12, ed. and trans. Colgrave and Mynors, 488-489.

⁴³ P. Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature*, 243.

⁴⁴ 'mortuus est et reuixit'; 'Dicebat quippe se per violentis egritudinis dolorem corporis gravidine subito exutum fuisse': Boniface, *Die Briefe des Heiligen Bonifatius und Lullus*, Letter 10, *MGH Epistolae selectae tomus I*, 8; Boniface, *Letters*, trans. E. Emerton (New York, 1940), 25.

way of explaining the numerous general and verbal similarities between Boniface's account of the Wenlock vision and Bede's account of Drythelm in the *Historia ecclesiastica*, is to suppose that the priest Hæmgisl's lost account of Drythelm which Bede used in the 730s, was already in circulation in the south a few decades earlier.⁴⁵

Whilst all three visions in themselves have certain indisputable similarities, Wenlock and Drythelm's experiences both appear to oppose a critical feature of Fursa's tale: they both died and were resurrected while Fursa's body continued to live without its soul.

At the end of the ninth century and start of the tenth we see two interactions with Fursa's life translated into Old English. The first, found in the *Old English Bede*, translated the episode from Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* with only minor changes. The translator chose to render Bede's *anima* as 'sawle' or 'soul,' continuing the motif of soul-body separation without corporeal death in this account. However, rather than using a more aggressive verb to translate *rapio* as angels wrenched out the soul, they chose the verb 'ongierwan' – to unclothe – to describe how Fursa was 'unclothed of his body' ('he wæs lichoman ongyrwed') as the angels led his soul away.⁴⁶ This metaphor treating the body as clothing in which the soul robes itself corresponds to Anglo-Saxon descriptions of initial ensoulment where authors imagined souls as garbing themselves in the body formed in the womb.⁴⁷

The second, Fursa's entry for the sixteenth of January in the *Old English Martyrology*, might be shorter than other accounts of his life, but it included important discrepancies worth analysing. Cross found that 'the English martyrologist has interwoven information about Furseus from the *Anonymous Life* and from Bede's account' combining

⁴⁵ Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature*, 250.

⁴⁶ Bede, *The Old English Version*, 212. For more on this translation, see above, pages 161-162.

⁴⁷ See above, page 116.

information found solely in each source into this composition.⁴⁸ The martyrologist failed to include, however, any mention of sickness whilst they reduced the visions experienced by Fursa from two to one.⁴⁹ Fursa's vision itself is not described beyond general terms; the bulk of this entry lies on the point of reminding its audience that this is the saint whose spirit left his body, saw visions of heaven and hell, and then was forced to return. The didactic purpose of the tale formed through the lengthy vision, which Michelle Brown has argued taught 'in a succinct and vivid form the vital interaction of the process of sin, conscience, acknowledged responsibility, atonement, compassion and forgiveness,' is lost.⁵⁰ Further, a fascinating translation choice was made. Rather than choosing to translate the Latin *anima* into the Old English *sawle* as the *Old English Bede* did, the compiler chose to use the Old English *gast* to explain how 'the spirit was led from the body during a night' ('Pæs gast wæs neahterne of lichoman alæded') and 'God's angels afterwards brought his spirit back to the body' ('Godes englas eft his gast brohtan to þæm lichoman') even though it heavily resisted the return, as seen through the multiple use of negatives in this sentence and the use of the verb *sculan* which implies force.⁵¹ The *gast*, like the soul in other accounts, remained passive, unable to control its exit and re-entry into its body as angels took control over it.

Towards the end of the tenth century, we see the shaping of this tale into homiletic form. Ælfric began his homily for the Tuesday in Rogationtide in his second series of

⁴⁸ J. Cross, 'The Influence of Irish Texts and Traditions on the "Old English Martyrology",' *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy: Archaeology, Culture, History, Literature* 8C (1981), 173.

⁴⁹ It is worth noting that the *Fis Adamnáin*, or Vision of Adamnán, written in Middle Irish about a saint who died in the early eighth century also failed to include any description of death or serious illness before the soul experienced its vision: *Fis Adamnain: Slicht Libair na Huidre, Adamnan's Vision*, ed. and trans. W. Stokes (Simla, 1870), 2-3, 18-19.

⁵⁰ M. Brown, *The Life of St. Fursey: What We Know, Why it Matters* (Norwich, 2001), 21.

⁵¹ *Old English Martyrology*, 48.

Catholic Homilies by dismissing the popular *Visio Pauli* as a ‘false composition’ (‘leasan gesetnysse’) and then provided what he deemed to be a better alternative for the masses, the vision of Saint Fursa which he labelled, in contrast, as ‘true’ (‘unleas is’).⁵² Although he certainly would have been aware of Bede’s version of the tale (he even used Bede’s Vision of Drythelm as the source for the next entry in the homiletic collection) Ælfric chose to follow the anonymous *vita* as his main source.⁵³ Rowley has suggested Ælfric might have made this choice because the anonymous life ‘includes details of Fursa’s trial in heaven that Bede omitted. These details allow Ælfric to clarify the difference between *digelan* (‘hidden’) words, and words that should be made known.’⁵⁴ However, Ælfric might have also made this choice because it allowed a chance to extrapolate his own views about the soul’s ability to leave the body before death by following a version which included mourners and the soul looking down at its body as if it were a corpse.

Additionally, Ælfric appears to have altered his source material to cut out any uncertainty about the soul in this tale. Before Fursa’s first vision, Ælfric wrote ‘then after a period of time illness happened to him so that death befell him. Then two angels carried off his soul’ (‘Eft æfter fyrste getimode him untrummys. swa þæt he wearð to forðsiðe gebroht; Þa genamon twegen englas his sawle’).⁵⁵ Not only did he avoid the initial ambiguity of what part of Fursa left his body that was found in both Bede and the anonymous *vita*, but suddenly Fursa’s sickness has been described as killing him. Ælfric stressed this point as the angels returned Fursa’s soul to his body, describing him as ‘a man restored to life’ (‘geedcucod’), a word Ælfric saved expressly for those brought back from

⁵² Ælfric, *CH II*, Homily 20, 190.

⁵³ Godden, *Ælfric’s Catholic Homilies*, 530.

⁵⁴ S. Rowley, ‘Bede in Later Anglo-Saxon England,’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Bede*, ed. S. DeGregorio (Cambridge, 2010), 226.

⁵⁵ Ælfric, *CH II*, Homily 20, 191.

the dead and those resurrected at Judgement Day.⁵⁶ The mourners surrounding Fursa's body then immediately uncovered his face and explained how he had passed away in the night ('he on æfnunge gewite').⁵⁷ The Latin *vita*, but not Bede, did in fact include mourners surrounding him who had claimed he had been 'corpus ex anima' throughout the night, but Ælfric tweaked his source, adding constant verification that Fursa truly had died before the vision took place – a verification not confirmed in any previous renditions of the tale that we have available.

As the second round of visions approached, Ælfric described how Fursa 'happily passed away from this painful life' ('bliðe gewat of ðisum geswincfullum life').⁵⁸ Fursa certainly was 'happy' and 'welcoming death' before his second vision in the anonymous *vita*, but Ælfric failed to mention that Fursa, instead of dying at that moment as his source dictated, was described as falling upon the bed 'as if weighed down by sleep' translating 'quasi somno grauatus.' After the vision, Ælfric wrote he 'arose then from death another time' ('aras ða of deaðe oþre siðe') translating 'quasi ex profundum mortis quiete.'⁵⁹ Both earlier and later manuscripts holding this anonymous life continuously use these 'quasi' statements to explain the death-like state in which the saint was. In the absence of any further known sources for this homily we must address the likelihood that Ælfric was the person making these revisions to the original text in this translation and the person choosing to state that Fursa died twice and was resurrected twice to explain how his soul could leave and return to his body. It seems that Ælfric would have rather promoted the

⁵⁶ 'geedcwicod/geedcucod' in *The Dictionary of Old English Web Corpus*.

⁵⁷ Ælfric, *CH II*, Homily 20, 191.

⁵⁸ Ælfric, *CH II*, Homily 20, 192.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 197.

idea that a person, albeit a saintly man, could experience multiple resurrections than have his soul leave behind a living body as it ventured temporarily into the afterlife.

Each version of this vision was circulated in the late Anglo-Saxon period, and most inferred that Fursa's soul left behind a still-living body. Ælfric, however, appears to have attempted to suppress this belief in his own rendering of the tale, shaping it into what he deemed to be a more acceptable contribution to the vision genre. He produced something consonant with his own understanding of the soul's nature and capabilities. Fundamentally he believed that soul and body were so intimately connected that they could not split until death. Fursa still being alive through this journey posed a conceptual theological problem. Apparently to Ælfric, living through multiple resurrections was more doctrinally sound than the concept of souls ascending from still-living bodies. Even with these dissimilarities, common elements between the texts may be found in the necessity of psychopomps to transport the soul – Zaleski's 'universal motif' of the visionary genre⁶⁰ – and, consequently, the passivity of the soul.

The Wandering Soul in Late Anglo-Saxon Sources: some familiar examples

Four potential cases of souls leaving and returning to their bodies during corporeal life from later Old English sources have received critical attention as evidence for beliefs in this type of soul separation. The earliest two examples of soul journeying from this period may be found in separate texts associated with King Alfred's translation programme at the end of the ninth century.⁶¹ The first appears in the *Old English Boethius*, where, in a

⁶⁰ Zaleski, *Otherworld Journeys*, 53.

⁶¹ For a background on King Alfred's translation program and the translation of the *Consolation of Philosophy*, see above, pages 60-61.

discussion of nature versus will, the character Wisdom asserted: ‘So too our spirit wanders very widely without our will and our control because of its nature, not because of its will. That is when we are asleep’ (‘Swa eac ure gast bið swiðe wide færende urum unwillum and ures ungewealdes for his gecynde, nalles for his willan. Þæt bið þonne we slapað’).⁶² Fascinatingly, Godden has found this to be the only occasion where Alfred used the Old English word *gast* in this translation; furthermore, he noted that in the Latin: ‘Boethius says that some activities of the individual are the result of natural impulses rather than conscious volition, and he gives as one example drawing breath while we sleep: “quod in somno spiritum ducimus nescientes” (III, pr. ii). Alfred took *spiritum* in a different sense and spoke of spirits wandering abroad during sleep, without an individual wishing it or having power over it.’⁶³

This would appear to be a more literal than metaphorical instance where a soul is described as temporarily journeying from its living body, but we must turn to an earlier point in this same chapter to best reflect on this passage. In a discussion of unity, we see Wisdom ask Boethius: ‘Do you know what man is?’ Boethius answered, ‘I know that it is soul and body,’ and Wisdom replied: ‘Indeed you know that it is man as long as the soul and the body are undivided. It is not a man after they are divided’ (‘Wast þu hwæt mon sie? [...] Ic wat þæt hit bið sawl and lichoma [...] Hwæt þu wast þæt hit bið mon þa hwile þe sio sawl and se lichoma untodælde bioð. Ne bið hit nan mon siððan hi todælde bioð’).⁶⁴ Here, in a more faithful translation to the original Latin text than the one describing sleep, a person was said to stop existing once body and soul had been separated. This contrasts the apparently original extension of the *Boethius* where Wisdom stated that the spirit

⁶² *OEB*, I: Prose 21, 481; *OEB*, II: 160.

⁶³ Godden, ‘Anglo-Saxons on the Mind,’ 277; reaffirmed in Godden and Irvine, ‘Commentary,’ in *The Old English Boethius*, volume 2, 399.

⁶⁴ *OEB*, I: Prose 21, 479; *OEB*, II: 158.

naturally left the body while one slept. The reader must now ask how one might reconcile these two seemingly incompatible ideas. Should we interpret this to signify that the translator believed the soul and the spirit to be two separate entities? Did the spirit, able to travel outside the body, constitute one of the many components of the soul but not the complete soul?⁶⁵ Without the translator's interference, it seems impossible to resolve the placing of two divergent points of view so close in the text.

A similar dilemma appears in the popular *Dialogues* by Gregory the Great – translated into Old English by Wærferth at the end of the ninth century, in what Dudden described as a vision ‘of an unusual character.’⁶⁶ In Book Two describing Saint Benedict's miraculous life, two monks had planned to meet with Benedict to ascertain the location of a new monastery. The night before the prearranged date, both monks shared a dream where Benedict laid out the physical plans for the monastery, but, much to their disappointment, Benedict did not appear in person on the actual day. The two monks confronted Benedict the next day about failing to keep his appointment, but Benedict chastised both, verifying it was truly he who had visited them both in their sleep. Gregory's interlocutor Peter interjected at this point, questioning Benedict's ability to both travel that distance and appear in a vision, all whilst sleeping. Gregory answered:

Everyone knows that the soul is far more agile than the body. Yet we have it on the authority of holy Scripture that the Prophet Habacuc was lifted from Judea to Chaldea in an instant, so that he might share his dinner with the Prophet Daniel, and presently found himself back in Judea again. If Habacuc could cover such a distance in a brief moment to take a meal to his fellow Prophet, is it not understandable that Abbot Benedict could go in spirit to his sleeping brethren with the information they required? As the

⁶⁵ Both Alcuin and Ælfric, who was translating Alcuin's work at the end of the tenth century, would disagree with either of these beliefs. See above, pages 5-6.

⁶⁶ F. Dudden, *Gregory the Great: His Place in History and Thought* (London, 1905), 329. On the popularity of the *Dialogues* in both Latin and Old English during this period, see above, page 120, footnote 42.

Prophet came in body with food for the body, Benedict came in spirit to promote the life of the soul.⁶⁷

We see the transmission of this text into Old English when Wærferth translated this passage almost directly into the vernacular, replacing the Latin ‘spiritus’ with the Old English *gast*, the same term Alfred employed in the *Old English Boethius* as he described soul travel during sleep.⁶⁸ Discenza has suggested that, with both translations using the term *gast* in this regard, it seems likely that ‘Alfred could have read Gregory’s explanation of this phenomenon either in Latin or in Wærferth’s Old English rendering of the text.’⁶⁹ Alternatively, the use of *gast* could simply be a coincidence, or, with both texts using this word, we could take this evidence to suggest an agreement in theology at the end of the ninth century that, as opposed to Alcuin’s views which were later reiterated by Ælfric, the soul and spirit were considered as separate, but connected, entities.

Although Wærferth’s translation could be an instance where *gast* was synonymous with *sawl*, this is the third occasion where we have seen this terminology used to describe a part of the essential self which journeyed from a living body including the *Old English Martyrology*’s entry for Saint Fursa where it was the *gast* – the spirit – not the soul which journeyed outside the body. Carozzi, discussing the continental *Vision of Barontus*, has called into question the existence of a single belief in a soul-body dichotomy. He explained

⁶⁷ ‘Liquet profecto quia mobilioris naturae est spiritus quam corpus. Et certe scriptura teste nouimus quod propheta ex Iudaea subleuatus, repente est cum prandio in Chaldaea depositus, quo uidelicet prandio prophetam refecit, seque repente in Iudeaa iterum inuenit. Si igitur tam longe Abacuc potuit sub momento corporaliter ire et prandium deferre, quid mirum si Benedictus pater obtinuit, quatenus iret per spiritum et fratrum quiescentium spiritibus necessaria narraret, ut, sicut ille ad cibum corporis corporaliter perrexit, ita iste ad institutionem spiritalis uitae spiritaliter pergeret?’: Grégoire le Grand, *Dialogues*, Book 2, ch. 22, 202-204; trans. Zimmerman, 90. On this passage’s relation to Eustratius’ comments on saintly apparitions and the soul-travels of dead and living saints, see M. Dal Santo, *Debating the Saints’ Cults in the Age of Gregory the Great* (Oxford, 2012), 68-69.

⁶⁸ For the first line of Gregory’s explanation, Wærferth wrote: ‘truly it is known that the spirit is more mobile and of a travelling nature than the body’ (‘Witudlice hit is cuþ, þæt seo gast is styrigendlicran 7 ferendran gecyndes þonne se lichama): Gregory the Great, *Bischofs Waerferths von Worcester Übersetzung*, 149-150.

⁶⁹ N. Discenza, *The King’s English: Strategies of Translation in the Old English Boethius* (Albany, 2005), 41.

how Gregory the Great could use the word *spiritus* to signify the tripartition of a human being into *caro – anima – spiritus* (body – soul – spirit) where the *spiritus* represented the ‘upper part of the soul’ (‘la partie supérieure de l’âme’) as Cassian had described, or was, Carozzi has explained further, believed to be something completely distinct from the soul, able to act independently from it.⁷⁰ Whilst this word choice could just be a coincidence, it is worth considering this different conception of the human being as a distinct possibility. Our understanding of these ninth-century works which use the term *gast* relies heavily on how we comprehend early English definitions of the soul and the spirit, embodying the difficulties of fully distinguishing beliefs about the soul and its nature from this time period.

A brief passage from the Exeter Book’s elegiac poem ‘The Seafarer’ has occasioned further debate on Anglo-Saxon beliefs about wandering souls. The lines in question go as follows:

Even now my *hyge* wanders beyond the spirit-chamber (the body), my mind/heart/spirit/thoughts together with the sea over the whale’s country journeys afar, the earth’s surface, [and then] comes back to me greedy and ravenous.

Forþon nu min hyge hweorfeð ofer hreþerlocan,
min modsefa mid mereflode
ofer hwæles eþel hweorfeð wide,
eorþan sceatas, cymeð eft to me
gifre ond grædig (ll. 58-62)

I have attempted not to give a clean, fluid translation here to give a more complete picture of the difficulty encountered when translating this passage into modern English. The interpretation of the words *hyge* and *modsefa* in these lines has caused the most controversy; when defining *hyge*, for example, even dictionaries cannot seem to agree. Bosworth-Toller defines it as ‘mind, heart, soul’ whilst Hall gives the translation ‘thought,

⁷⁰ C. Carozzi, *Le Voyage de l’âme*, 174-175. On the believed division between spirit and soul in the *Vision of Barontus*, see Moreira, *Dreams, Visions*, 159-160.

mind, heart, disposition, intention’ and the *Dictionary of Old English* gives for their entry ‘mind, thought, intention, determination, purpose.’ Just for Hall, *modsefa* could mean anything from heart or mind to spirit or soul. We see here even before breaching academic literature covering the subject a large range of possible translations which could offer disparate understandings of the poem’s meaning. Williamson has recently translated the passage as:

My heart heaves from my breast-board,
Seeking the sea – my spirit soars
Over the whale’s home, twists and turns
Over the earth’s surface, rolls and returns
Greedy and ravenous.⁷¹

This translation conflating heart and spirit embodies the ambiguous nature of these lines. What, precisely, is leaving the solitary flyer’s (‘anfloga’) chest? Heart, mind, soul, thoughts – are they all one in the same?⁷² How literally should we be taking this *hyge*’s flight from the body?

Debates over the correct interpretation of these five lines began sixty years ago in a series of articles which attempted to answer these questions. Fundamentally, there were two ways to interpret these words. Starting with the literal camp, Salmon suggested that the *hyge*’s flight should be interpreted literally rather than figuratively, comparing the departure of the *hyge* to moments in Old Icelandic sagas where ‘there commonly occurs the idea of a spirit or “external soul” which can leave the body, in either animal or human shape, and travel vast distances to perform errands or obtain information.’⁷³ Whilst this comparison certainly offers an interesting theory for interpreting ‘The Seafarer,’ many of

⁷¹ ‘The Seafarer,’ in *The Complete Old English Poems*, trans. C. Williamson (Philadelphia, 2017), 469.

⁷² To Alcuin and Ælfric, most of these did count as facets of a single entity – the soul. For others in this period they might have been believed to be completely separate faculties. See above, pages 5-6.

⁷³ V. Salmon, “‘The Wanderer’ and ‘The Seafarer,’ and the Old English Conception of the Soul,” *The Modern Language Review* 55 (1960), 3.

the Icelandic sagas were not written down until long after the Norman Conquest even if the events they recounted coincided with the late Anglo-Saxon period. Hultin overcame this sequential problem by pulling cases of soul-wandering in patristic and early Christian works.⁷⁴ From the metaphorical camp, Clemoes chose the opposite position of this debate and argued that, with its similarity to Alcuin's treatment of the mind's wanderings in *De animae ratione* (where the mind and soul are unitary), one could best understand these lines as meditative thinking instead of literal separation of body and soul.⁷⁵ Diekstra took this one step further to include other cases of soul separation, stating 'the flight of the soul, both here and elsewhere, is thus not to be taken as actual separation of body and soul (as in death), but is achieved by interiorization, by which man's celestial nature, the soul, raises itself above its baser nature, the body.'⁷⁶ The most recent claims made about these ambiguous lines, those made by Harbus and Lockett in their monographs, have both argued that they represent more a contemplative flight of the mind than the temporary departure of a wandering soul.⁷⁷ These five vague lines have stimulated individuals to make clear-cut decisions on a single meaning when they are, I would argue, too ambiguous to ever comfortably confine into one interpretation be it the mind's contemplative thought or a soul's fleeting journey out of its living body.

Old English poetry, however, does not leave us bereft of cases of soul travel. For a more definite example of souls leaving their living bodies in vernacular poetry we may turn to the Vercelli Book's 'Andreas,' a poem 'based on a lost version of the apocryphal

⁷⁴ Hultin, 'The External Soul,' 39-45.

⁷⁵ Clemoes, '*Mens absentia cogitans*,' 70.

⁷⁶ F. Diekstra, 'The Seafarer 58-66a: The Flight of the Exiled Soul to its Fatherland,' *Neophilologus* 55 (1971), 440.

⁷⁷ Harbus, *The Life*, 157; Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies*, 38-41; Harbus, *Cognitive Approaches*, 43-45.

*Acta Andreae et Matthiae apud Anthropophagos.*⁷⁸ In an insufficiently studied section of the poem describing Saint Andrew's sea voyage to rescue a captive Saint Matthew from the cannibals of Mermedonia, we find a more certain case of soul separation. After a lengthy discussion about the saving nature of Christ with his disciples and the ship's crew (a clandestinely disguised Jesus accompanied by angels), Andrew fell asleep and woke up to find himself transported to the gates of Mermedonia. His disciples lay asleep on the ground, but once awoken they told how:

Sleep overcame us, weary from the sea-voyage. Then eagles came, flying over the swelling of the waves, wings exulting; they wrenched out our souls from slumber, [and] with joy carried them into the air in flight.

Us sæwerige slæp ofereode.
 Ða comon earnas ofer yða wylm
 on flyhte faran, feðerum hremige;
 us of slæpendum sawle abrugdon,
 mid gefean feredon flyhte on lyfte (ll. 862-866).

Their souls having been separated from their bodies, Andrew's companions journeyed to heaven accompanied by their winged psychopomps to witness the many holy patriarchs and troops of martyrs who resided there. The escorts who initiated the forceful separation of soul and body (probably translating the Latin word *rapio* also used in the vision of Saint Fursa) are here described as eagles, corresponding to the closest, but not fullest, analogue to the poem, the Latin 'Bonnet Fragment' found in the eleventh-century Codex Vallicellanus 'which answers to no more than lines 843-954 of the Old English poem.'⁷⁹

⁷⁸ On the analogues and lack of direct sources for 'Andreas,' see F. Michelet, 'Eating Bodies in the Old English *Andreas*,' in *Fleshly Things and Spiritual Matters: Studies on the Medieval Body in Honour of Margaret Bridges*, eds. N. Nyffenegger and K. Rupp (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2011), 168; R. North and M. Bintley, 'Introduction,' in *Andreas: an Edition* (Liverpool, 2016), 4-6.

⁷⁹ North and Bintley, 'Introduction,' in *Andreas*, 4. For the moment of soul separation, the Latin of the Bonnet Fragment reads 'Translati enim sumus in sommo gramori, et ascenderunt aquilae et rapuerunt animas nostras, et duxerunt nos in paradysum quod est in caelis, et uidimus mirabilia magna': 'Appendix I: The Bonnet Fragment,' in *Andreas and the Fates of the Apostles*, ed. K. Brooks (Oxford, 1961), 177.

Differing from the analogues, however, the Old English poem omitted any description of the souls returning to their bodies; the disciples simply woke up. In direct contrast, the ‘Bonnet Fragment’ fully described the transfer of the disciples’ souls back to their respective bodies.⁸⁰ By failing to describe the soul’s return, Harbus has argued ‘their sleeping experience is thereby bridged with waking reality.’⁸¹ Depending on the reader, however, confirmation of the soul’s full out-of-body experience might actually provide more authority to the experienced vision than blurring the lines between sleeping and soul activity, as seen in cases such the vision of Saint Fursa, whose spiritual scars obtained during his soul journey became authenticating physical scars as his soul re-entered his body. At the other end of the spectrum, the fragmented Blickling Homily about Saint Andrew followed the same narrative as ‘Andreas’ but did not include any type of soul separation. Instead, Jesus simply told his angels: ‘take Andrew and his disciples and place them before the city of Marmadonia. When you have transported them there return to me’ (‘Genimaþ Andreas ond his discipuli ond asettað hie beforan Mermedonia ceastre. Ond mid þy ðe ge hie þær asetton hweorfað eft to me’).⁸² It would seem the Old English homilist found soul separation and vision as not essential to their message, whilst the truth of the disciples’ soul journey proved crucial for the poetic narrative of ‘Andreas’ as it uplifted and rejuvenated the title Saint, preparing him for his imminent encounters with the Mermadonians.

Overall, these lines from ‘Andreas’ relate more closely to the typical vision experience found in earlier English sources where psychopomps, although more often than not angels rather than eagles, released and guided the soul to experience a vision of the

⁸⁰ ‘Et cum nos resuscitasti, tunc reddite sunt animae nostrae in corpore nostro’: ‘Appendix I,’ in *Andreas and the Fates*, 177.

⁸¹ Harbus, *The Life*, 18.

⁸² *Blickling Homilies*, Homily 18, ed. and trans. Kelly, 160-161.

afterlife. The soul on its own had no power to wander out of its body without a heavenly agent. What differs here is the degree of health possessed by those experiencing soul separation. Unusually, no one is dead or at point of death, but instead the disciples are healthy (albeit a touch seasick) as they drifted off to sleep and their souls were severed from their bodies. In addition to many of the visions of Fursa, 'Andreas' has given us the most definitive case from the late Anglo-Saxon period where a visionary journey was presented as a true experience of a separable soul.

Of these four well-known examples of soul wandering from the late Anglo-Saxon period, the first two raise more issues about beliefs in the nature and definitions of the soul than answers about beliefs in soul separation. From the two poetic cases, the lines from 'The Seafarer' might always exist in a continual void of uncertainty and our most definitive example found in 'Andreas' largely follows the mould set by earlier, Latin sources. It emphasised the inability of souls to leave the body voluntarily, but interestingly eliminated any description of the soul's re-entry. Together, these vernacular examples do not offer enough support to confirm or deny a large-scale belief in the separable soul. They cannot, for example, give certain proof to treat this as a substantial enough belief to support Dunn's argument that the inclusion of an astral projection in Gregory's *Dialogues* might suggest its origin in Anglo-Saxon England rather than Rome.⁸³ However, even when approaching the separable soul critically and with care, these confirmable instances from their literature force us to question our own understandings of Anglo-Saxon beliefs about what aspects comprised a living human being. The possibility remains that some believed that the body held the ability to live without a soul. Further, we must continue to question how the Anglo-Saxons defined the relationship between spirits and souls.

⁸³ M. Dunn, 'Reading the Dialogues,' *Studia Patristica* 39 (2006), 359.

Dreaming and the Soul

To understand how representative these familiar examples actually were, we can turn to other Anglo-Saxon dream sequences elsewhere in the corpus to consider if there is any more evidence that can support the association of soul separation and dreaming. Could those four occurrences actually represent a strong belief or are they the foundation from which an artificial edifice has been constructed? A study of every dream sequence is impossible for the scope of this thesis, but a brief tour across a range of genres highlights the prevalence of dreams within Anglo-Saxon literature. Davis has argued that in conversion narratives ‘dreams and visions are “preselected” for spiritual content, because the only ones that were preserved are those that were judged to be divine revelations by the Christian authorities of the time.’⁸⁴ The same appears to be true for late Anglo-Saxon use apart from prognostic interpretations which provided explanations for largely mundane items seen in dreams.⁸⁵ Dreams are often presented in the language of truth (and often religious truths), and, whilst sometimes affecting the soul, many portrayals never seem to consider the soul leaving the body as an available option.

Dreams and visions are part of the common stock of hagiographical tropes, either revealing prophecies and truths to the saint in question, or, after the saint’s death, verifying the individual’s sanctity by having the saint in question appear in a dream of a person (often in need of healing) or to deliver instructions for their body’s translation. Dreams were considered to be prophetic and able to reveal truths whilst also giving the saint authority, but souls were, more often than not, not brought into the equation even to

⁸⁴ P. Davis, ‘Dreams and Visions in the Anglo-Saxon Conversion to Christianity,’ *Dreaming* 15 (2005), 75.

⁸⁵ For example, see item T9, an alphabetical dream book in Old English, in *Anglo-Saxon Prognostics*, 178-189.

explain what aspect of the saint appeared post-mortem in dreams (something which Gregory *did* explain as the role of the soul).⁸⁶ So popular were saintly visions in hagiography that Ælfric decided to warn his audience that not all visions came from reliable, holy sources:

many magicians construct numerous illusions through the devil's might, just as diviners often do, and they deceive men as if they should truly do such a thing; but it is nevertheless illusion with the devil's might.

manega drymen maciað menigfealde dydrunga þurh deofles cræft, swa swa wischeras oft doð, and bedydriað menn swylce hi soðlice swylc þingc don; ac hit is swa ðeah dydrung mid deofles cræfte.⁸⁷

So as not to have his audience decide all their dreams were heaven-sent after being inspired by the multiple appearances of Saint Swithun in visions, Ælfric wrote that dreams too could come from the devil. Godden has noted the disparity between the homily including the visions of Saint Swithun and Ælfric's subsequent warning, stating that that 'the strongly positive value attached to dream and the acceptance of dream-messages in the narrative is strikingly at odds with the commentary.'⁸⁸ This disparity did, however, follow the legacy of Gregory the Great and Isidore of Seville's theories on the providence of dreams; they could come 'through illusory spiritual influence (Demons), revelatory spiritual influence (God), or through outside influence together with thought. Only dreams sent by God were real, but distinguishing them from the many varieties of false or misleading dreams was difficult.'⁸⁹ Perhaps Ælfric knew of the popularity of prognostic

⁸⁶ See above, 295-296.

⁸⁷ Ælfric, *LoS*, Homily 21, 470.

⁸⁸ M. Godden, 'Were it not that I Have Bad Dreams: Gregory the Great and the Anglo-Saxons on the Dangers of Dreaming,' in *Rome and the North: The Early Reception of Gregory the Great in Germanic Europe*, eds. R. Bremmer, K. Dekker, and D. Johnson (Leuven, 2001), 111.

⁸⁹ Keskiaho, *Dreams and Visions*, 8-9, 114; see also J. Schmitt, 'The Liminality and Centrality,' 278.

texts (also bereft of any mention of souls or any oneirological theory), which provided interpretations and predictions based on the details of a dream.⁹⁰

Old English poems where dreams and visions play leading roles portray them as something which can affect the soul but do not, other than in ‘Andreas’, describe them as instances where the soul journeyed from a living body. Perhaps the most well-known example for modern scholars, ‘The Dream of the Rood,’ provided a soul-inspiring experience where a vision played the focal role. The framework of the poem allowed for the poet to construct the situation as ‘the choicest of dreams’ (‘swefna cyst,’ l. 1) began and ended, but the approach to creating this vision-experience did not follow the same manner of the soul-journeying visions of those either alive or dead. The dream did, however, provide a transformative process for the dreamer’s soul. It was originally ‘stained with sins, severely wounded with sins’ (‘and ic synnum fah,/ forwunded mid wommum, ll. 13-14’) but afterwards became ‘joyous’ (‘bliðe,’ l. 122) and his ‘spirit/mind/soul was inspired with longing [to go] away’ (‘Wæs modsefa/ afysed on forðwege,’ ll. 124-125) and be taken to heaven. The dream in itself was fashioned as a process of penance, a process of soul-rejuvenation, for the narrator.

Next, ‘Genesis A’, when recounting Genesis 20:1-14, narrated how Abraham and Sarah (Old English ‘Sarra’) fled south to a new land, where, in an effort to save themselves, Abraham told the leaders that Sarah was his sister. King Abimelech thus took Sarah, and while he slept ‘wine drunk’ (‘wine druncen’, l. 2635) with her by his side, ‘the Truth-King began to speak to the prince through a dream’ (‘Ongan þa soðcyning ðurh swefn sprecaþ/ to þam aðelinge,’ ll. 2636-2637). God reprimanded Abimelech for stealing Abraham’s wife and threatened that, unless she was returned, ‘for that deed I shall wrench out death and your soul from your breast’ (‘þe abregdan sceal/ for þære dæde deað

⁹⁰ On Anglo-Saxon dream prognostics, see Liuzza, ‘Introduction,’ in *Anglo-Saxon Prognostics*, 38-43.

of breostum/ sawle þine,' ll. 2639-2641). This implied that his soul was not already outside his body while he experienced this dream. The Vulgate only had God threaten Abimelech with death because of Sarah's married state; the Old English poet embellished the dream, perhaps in another instance that Doane has noted where 'the Old English is so paraphrastic and so concerned with filling in emotional details that it does not resemble either the V[etus] L[atina] or the Vulg[ate].'⁹¹

As Nebuchadnezzar lay asleep in the Junius Book's 'Daniel', 'intoxicated with wine' ('wingal,' l. 116), the 'truth' ('soð,' l. 113) of the transitory nature of the world was also revealed to him as 'a dream-tumult came turning into his mind/heart/spirit' ('com on sefan hwurfan swefnes woma,' l. 110).⁹² Later, Nebuchadnezzar dreamt of a towering protective tree ordered by an Angel to be chopped down, its roots shackled. As he awoke 'horror stood in him, a terror from the spirit which God had sent thither' ('him þæs egesa stod,/ gryre fram ðam gaste ðe þyder god sende,' ll. 524-525). The soul, or spirit, was highly affected by this dream. But on both occasions in this poem, we see these dreams represented as internalised processes affecting the spirit within. This might have been intended to reflect the Biblical passages where there was plenty of talk about what Nebuchadnezzar saw in his mind: 'I saw a dream that affrighted me: and my thoughts in my bed, and the visions of my head troubled me.'⁹³ Both the 'Genesis' poet and the 'Daniel' poet added a drunken state of these dreamers to the biblical narrative whilst also emphasizing the truth of the vision itself. Dreams, in any case, were something on which to embellish when adapting into the poetic form to verify true contact with God. This embellishment did include effects and threats directly to the soul, but it did not contain

⁹¹ Doane, 'Introduction,' in *Genesis A*, 81.

⁹² Translating Daniel 2:1 - 'In the second year of the reign of Nabuchodonosor, Nabuchodonosor had a dream, and his spirit was terrified, and his dream went out of his mind.'

⁹³ Daniel 4:2; see also Daniel 4:10.

portrayals of souls separated from their bodies. In hagiography, poetry, and even prognostics, dreams were considered to be prophetic, able to reveal truths and futures, but souls were not described as leaving bodies for the majority of these occasions. Dreams and visions could, however, greatly affect the soul.

Connections made between sleep and the soul may also be seen in Anglo-Saxon medicine and penitentials. The first entry in *The Old English Herbarium* – an eleventh-century translation of a fourth- or fifth-century Latin medical compilation – described the many uses of betony (also known in Old English as *bisceopwyr*t), the first of which prescribed it against nightmares inflicted from either the state of the body or the soul. The text stated: ‘It is of use whether both for a man’s soul and his body, it protects him against horrible night-goers and against terrible visions and dreams, and the herb is very holy’ (‘seo deah gehwæper ge þæs mannes sawle ge his lichoman. hio hyne scyldeþ wið unhyrum nihtgengum 7 wið egeslicum gesihðum 7 swefnum. 7 seo wyr t byþ swyþe haligu’).⁹⁴ This book might have originated as a translation of a continental text, but it was deemed essential enough for Anglo-Saxon readers to be translated into the vernacular. The idea that problems with either the soul or the body could be the cause of nightmares might not be an original Anglo-Saxon idea, but we should still acknowledge the potential greater existence of this belief. Betony, taken bodily, could heal a problem triggered by the soul.

Penitentials also noted the relationship between dreams, the body, and the soul. Several vernacular texts, for example, prescribed a specific type of healing for the soul after an individual experienced an auto-erotic dream. Specific descriptions of said dreams, however, often used ambiguous language such as the *Old English Penitential* which stated:

The servant of God who is soiled in his sleep is to arise and sing 7 psalms and bend his knees to earth at the end of every verse and fast for that in the

⁹⁴ *The Old English Herbarium and Medicina de Quadrupedibus*, 1.1, ed. H. Jan de Vriend (Oxford, 1984), 30.

morning on bread and water, or sing 30 psalms that seem best to him and at the end of each verse bend his knees to earth.

Se godes þeow þe on slæpe besmiten bið. arise & singe his .vii. sealmas & bige his cneowa to eorðan æt ælces ferses ende. & fæste þæs on morgen on hlafe & on wætere. oððe singe .xxx. sealma þære þe him betste þince. & æt ælces ferses ende bige his cneowa to eorþan.⁹⁵

In comparison to other acts which required months or even years of fasting, the actions prescribed here appear mild, perhaps because the act itself was considered unintentional and uncontrolled. The issue is constructed with more shape in the *Scriftboc*, which specified: ‘he who is unwillingly (cor. from “willingly”) defiled in his sleep is to rise and sing the psalms of the psalter and in the morning bow his face thirty times to earth.’⁹⁶

Similarly, ‘if a man sleeping in church pours forth his seed, he is to rise and sing the psalter’ (‘Gyf man on cyrican slæpende his sæd ageote, arise singe psaltere’).⁹⁷ Once again we see a connection between the body, the soul, and sleep. In these examples, at least, the mind was not considered to be in control of body during sleep, but the soul still had to make reparations for the body’s actions.

The issue of nocturnal emissions was brought up in Augustine of Canterbury’s final question to Pope Gregory from the *Libellus responsionum* copied by Bede in his *Ecclesiastical History*. Augustine asked if a person could receive communion if they experienced ‘an illusion such as is wont to occur in a dream.’⁹⁸ Gregory answered by saying that under Old Testament Law a man would be considered ‘unclean’ (‘pollutum’), but he considered there to be further layers of accountability and sin in these types of

⁹⁵ *The Old English Penitential*, Y44.53.01, ed. and trans. Frantzen.

⁹⁶ *Scriftboc*, X03.03.01, ed. and trans. Frantzen. The next entry equated those taken against their wills with those who sin willingly in their sleep: *ibid.*, X03.04.01.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, X03.05.01, ed. and trans. Frantzen.

⁹⁸ ‘Si post inlusionem, quae per somnium solet accedere, uel corpus Domini quislibet accipere’: Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, Book 1, ch. 27, ed. and trans. Colgrave and Mynors, 98-99.

situations depending on the root cause. Using it as an example to explain the process of sin,

Gregory wrote:

But it must be considered whether the thought was the result of a mere suggestion or of pleasure, or what is much more serious, of consent to sin. For all sin is committed in three ways, namely by suggestion, pleasure, and consent. The devil makes the suggestion, the flesh delights in it and the spirit consents [...] For when an evil spirit suggests a sin to the mind, if no delight in the sin follows then the sin is not committed in any form; but when the flesh begins to delight in it then sin begins to arise. But if the mind deliberately consents, then the sin is seen to be complete. So the seed [*semen*] of sin is in suggestion, the nourishment of sin is in delight, and the maturity is in consent.⁹⁹

In what Godden has described as ‘an attempt to psychologize sin, to substitute issues of intention and inner mental states for questions of external pollution and accidental guilt,’ we see Gregory create different degrees to which sexual dreams affected the soul based on the amount of consent the dreamer gave. At the lowest tier, said dreamer could even still receive holy communion. Further reparations had to be made if the dreamer fell deeper into this devil’s trap. The nuances of Gregory’s delineations were, however, lost in the penitentials which cast this action as necessitating penance in every scenario.

Souls leaving their living bodies to experience dreams or visions appear as the exception rather than the rule in surviving Anglo-Saxon literature. More often than not, authors chose not to correlate dreams and soul journeying in the vast expanses of dream literature available. This could be for two reasons: either the belief in separable souls existed but was censured by those in charge of literary production or the belief in itself was not actually that popular. Exceptional evidence certainly catches the modern mind’s attention, and occasions where we do find soul separation raise critical questions about

⁹⁹ ‘Sed pensandum est, ipsa cogitatione utrum suggestione an delectatione uel, quod maius est, peccati consensus acciderit. Tribus enim modis impletur omne peccatum, uidelicet suggestione, delectatione, consensu. Suggestio quippe fit per diabolum, delectatio per carnem, consensus per spiritum [...] Cum enim malignus spiritus peccatum suggerit in mente, si nulla peccati delectatio sequitur, peccatum omnimodo perpetratum non est; cum uero delectare caro coeperit, tunc peccatum incipit nasci; si autem etiam ex deliberatione consentit, tunc peccatum cognoscitur perfici. In suggestione igitur peccati si mens [early correction to *semen*] est, in delectatione fit nutrimentum, in consensu perfectio’: *ibid.*, 100-101.

how the Anglo-Saxons conceived the very nature of the soul. However, paying too much attention to these instances might keep us from addressing other pertinent matters such as the relationship between the soul, the body, and dreaming.

For the Anglo-Saxon imagination, the chief journey of the soul remained its passage from corporeal life into death and finally Judgement Day. Just like their predecessors and, indeed, their successors, Anglo-Saxon authors did not have all the answers for pressing questions about the soul's entire existence; perhaps almost naturally, they faced uncertainties about the spiritual side of the human constitution and its nature. A study into late Anglo-Saxon beliefs about young souls exposes just a small window into Christianity's developing conception of the soul during the early Middle Ages. While some Anglo-Saxon authors might have attempted to preach a coherent theology about the different stages of a soul's early lifespan, they did not fully address every aspect which modern minds might deem crucial for understanding the beginning of its life journey. The soul's history, now a little less veiled than before, reveals humanity's developing notions of spirituality and the inner self. Further discovery into what people before us chose to concretely say, or not say, about a construct so open-ended as the soul will continue to reveal the historic values and priorities of those shaping their eternal identities.

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