Angels in Anglo-Saxon England, 700–1000

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SHORT ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to understand the changing place of angels in the religious culture of Anglo-Saxon England between AD 700 and 1000. From images carved in stone to reports of prophetic apparitions, angels are a remarkably ubiquitous presence in the art, literature and theology of early medieval England. That very ubiquity has, however, meant that their significance in Anglo-Saxon thought has largely been overlooked, dismissed as a commonplace of fanciful monkish imaginations. But angels were always bound up with constantly evolving ideas about human nature, devotional practice and the workings of the world. By examining the changing ways that Anglo-Saxon Christians thought about the unseen beings which shared their world, it is possible to detect broader changes in religious thought and expression in one part of the early medieval West.

The six chapters of this thesis each investigate a different strand from this complex of ideas. Chapters One and Two begin with Anglo-Saxon beliefs at their most theological and speculative, exploring ideas about the early history of the angels and the nature of their society – ideas which were used to express and promote changing ideals about religious practice in early England. Chapters Three and Four turn to the ways that angels were believed to interact more directly in earthly affairs, as guardians of the living and escorts of the dead, showing how even apparently traditional beliefs reveal changing ideas about intercession, moral achievement and the supernatural. Lastly, Chapters Five and Six investigate the complicated ways that these ideas informed two central aspects of Anglo-Saxon religion: the cult of saints, and devotional prayer. A final Conclusion considers the cumulative trajectory of these otherwise distinct aspects of Anglo-Saxon thought, and asks how we might best explain the changing importance of angels in early medieval England.

LONG ABSTRACT

My thesis seeks to understand the changing place of angels in the religious culture of Anglo-Saxon England between AD 700 and 1000. From images carved in stone to reports of prophetic apparitions, angels are a remarkably ubiquitous presence in the art, literature and theology of early medieval England. That very ubiquity has, however, meant that they have attracted little scholarly attention. Artistic depictions have seemed like the commonplace symbols of medieval Christianity, and descriptions of visionary encounters dismissed as exercises of fanciful monkish imaginations. But angels were always bound up with constantly evolving ideas about human nature, devotional practice and the workings of the world. By examining the changing ways that Anglo-Saxon Christians thought about the unseen beings which shared their world, it is possible to detect broader changes in religious thought and expression in one part of the early medieval West.

This thesis is therefore situated firmly within a rich seam of intellectual history which has taken the seemingly esoteric ideas about the supernatural, the otherworldly and the imaginary as a lens through which to study the society in which they evolved. Anglo-Saxon England has always been a productive focus for studies of this kind. The abundance of legendary material relating to the saints and their miracles continues to be a fruitful area of investigation, and its place within Anglo-Saxon society is well theorized and extensively researched.[1] In large part due to the enduring fascination of the

[1] The following monographs represent some of the fullest discussions, although vastly outnumbered by a range of crucial shorter studies, and still more with a broader European focus: Susan J. Ridyard, *The Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England: A Study of West Saxon and East Anglian Cults* (Cambridge, 1988); David Rollason, *Saints and Relics in Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 1989); Alan Thacker and Richard Sharpe (eds.), *Local Saints and Local Churches in the Early Medieval West* (Oxford, 2002); Mechthild Gretsch, *Ælfric and the Cult of Saints in Late Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge, 2005).

otherworldly landscape of *Beowulf*, the demonic and the monstrous have always been central to literary and cultural surveys of Anglo-Saxon world-views.[2] More recently, the magical or supernatural dimensions of the natural world in Anglo-Saxon have received renewed attention, and the difficult evidence for the non-Christian beliefs of both pre- and post-conversion England has, with appropriate caution, returned to the scholarly agenda.[3] In short, the belief-systems of Anglo-Saxon England are better understood than ever before. Yet angels have generally seemed less promising as an object for close study, taken to typify medieval Christianity at its most traditional and derivative. Recent studies of Late Antiquity, medieval Byzantium and early modern Europe have, however, demonstrated the usefulness of angels as a topic of historical enquiry and thereby gained new insights into the spread of asceticism in early Christianity, the issues of representation and veneration contested during Byzantine iconoclasm, and the emergence of new confessional identities in the Reformation.[4] Following their example, my thesis explores the way that ideas about angels changed and developed during the Anglo-Saxon period to further our understanding of religious change in early medieval England.

The six chapters of this thesis each investigate a different aspect of Anglo-Saxon beliefs about angels in which historical development is most apparent. Chapter One begins with Anglo-Saxon 'angelology' at its most theological and speculative, exploring the ways that early English writers treated the early history of heavenly beings. This was a difficult area for Christian thinkers, for the Bible was silent about the origins of

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2 Christine Rauer, *Beowulf and the Dragon: Parallels and Analogues* (Cambridge, 2000); Peter Dendle, *Satan Unbound: The Devil in Old English Narrative Literature* (Toronto, 2001); Andy Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the Beowulf-Manuscript* (Toronto, 2003).

3 Jennifer Neville, *Representations of the Natural World in Old English Poetry* (Cambridge, 1999); Alaric Hall, *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England: Matters of Belief, Health, Gender and Identity* (Woodbridge, 2007).

4 Glenn Peers, *Subtle Bodies: Representing Angels in Byzantium* (Berkeley, CA, 2001); Peter Marshall and Alexandra Walsham (eds.), *Angels in the Early Modern World* (Cambridge, 2006); Ellen Muehlberger, 'Angels in the Religious Imagination of Late Antiquity' (unpublished PhD thesis: Indiana University, 2008).

angels. This apparent omission prompted considerable debate in the early Church, but Anglo-Saxon Christians came to hold a relatively stable set of beliefs which filled the silence of scripture. They placed particular emphasis on the idea that some among the angels had rebelled against God and been cast out of heaven, a story found nowhere in the Bible but which had attained a critical importance. I explore the ways that early Anglo-Saxon writers treated this narrative, and show how it became enmeshed in the ecclesiastical politics of the tenth century, providing a justification for the actions of monastic reformers but being reinterpreted in the process – with unforeseen effects on the theological outlook of late Anglo-Saxon thinkers.

The close link with monasticism would appear to support the contention of some recent scholars that the prominence of angels in Anglo-Saxon art and thought was primarily a product of the way that monastics used celestial beings as models for their own way of life. A number of examinations of Anglo-Saxon stone sculpture have therefore argued that images of angels functioned as tools for the professional religious, expressing ideals about correct modes of contemplative preaching.[5] Chapter Two reassesses the visual evidence for this notion, along with the biblical exegesis which underpins it, and demonstrates that angels in fact held a much wider variety of meanings for early Anglo-Saxon Christians than has usually been recognized. Furthermore, it appears that the professional religious of early medieval England became increasingly reluctant to attribute exemplary qualities to the angels over the course of the period, and eventually ceased to uphold them as role models for any kind of human vocation.

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[5] Jane Hawkes, 'Gregory the Great and angelic mediation: the Anglo-Saxon crosses of the Derbyshire Peaks', in *Text, Image, Interpretation: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Literature and its Insular Context in Honour of Éamonn Ó Carragáin*, ed. Alastair Minnis and Jane Roberts (Turnhout, 2007), pp. 431–48; Thomas Pickles, 'Angel veneration on Anglo-Saxon stone sculpture from Dewsbury (West Yorkshire), Otley (West Yorkshire) and Halton (Lancashire): contemplative preachers and pastoral care', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* 162 (2009), 1–28.

If the Anglo-Saxons' persistent fascination with angels cannot be explained solely by the way that they could be put to practical use, as a vehicle for particular ideals, then we need to look more closely at the roles which angels were attributed by early medieval Christians. Angels were believed to play a very real part in the lives of human beings, and the Bible supported the notion that God regularly assigned angels as guardians over the souls of the living. Chapter Three explores the way that the relationship between the individual and their angelic assistant came to be reconsidered over the course of the Anglo-Saxon period. A discontinuous but surprisingly rich body of evidence shows that doubts about the power and potency of guardian angels became widespread in Anglo-Saxon culture after the end of the ninth century. Homilists and theologians began to complicate earlier understandings of guardian angels, turning to new ideas inspired by biblical apocrypha. I show how some late Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastics came to utterly reject the notion that angels could offer meaningful protection for the soul, and how echoes of their ideas can be found in one of the most famous monuments of Old English literature.

Chapter Four follows the fate of the Anglo-Saxon soul from life into death. The soul's exit from its body brought it into a new world teeming with spiritual forces. It was a vividly imagined world, given shape by the apparently first-hand accounts of those few who had been able to return to their bodies to tell the living about the things that they had seen. Angels played a critical role in the experiences of these otherworldly travellers, carrying the soul from its body and conducting it around a variety of heavenly and hellish regions. Yet the eighth-century Anglo-Saxons who wrote these things did not believe that their own souls were therefore guaranteed of a supernatural guide: the angels came only for the exceptional few, as the hagiographers of the saints made plain. The fate of the ordinary soul was rather less certain, being unaccompanied by the signs of a heavenly

presence which accompanied the deaths of the saints. I investigate the way that Anglo-Saxon preachers tried to reassure their congregations about what lay ahead, and show how a new attitude towards death took hold during the tenth century. The old sense that death came differently to different people dissolved as homilists tried to talk with certainty about the fate of the ordinary soul. Ecclesiastics ceased to consider the presence of angels at the deathbed to be a sign of special favour, but came to believe that heavenly beings would oversee the departure of every soul. As they did, the once awesome power of angels faded into the background as they became merely a small part of the natural laws which governed the transition from life to death.

The diminishing importance of angels over the course of the early Middle Ages has been observed before. Peter Brown connected it with the rise of the cult of saints in Late Antiquity, and argued influentially that many of the functions which had previously been fulfilled by angels were appropriated by human saints, with whom late antique Christians could identify as fellow human beings.[6] It is readily apparent, however, that the undeniable rise of the saints to prominence had not been contingent upon a simultaneous decline of angels, and the hagiographical writings of eighth-century England show that early Anglo-Saxon sanctity was in fact dependent, to a large extent, on the continued potency of the angels. Chapter Five reassesses the interaction of saints and angels in the religious imagination of Anglo-Saxon England, and argues that the changing relationship of the two kinds of heavenly intercessors is best understood as a product of developments within the genre of hagiography itself. The actions of angels were a necessary part of saints' Lives, but problematic in ways that other kinds of miraculous events were not. The difficulties that hagiographers faced when proving that

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[6] Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago, 1981), pp. 50–68.

their saints had been in the habit of talking with angels, and the way that these writers attempted to overcome those difficulties, provide a better way to understand why angels failed to retain their old importance.

Chapter Six turns finally to place of angels in the ordinary devotional practices of Anglo-Saxon England, as revealed through the surviving prayerbooks and liturgical manuscripts. Scholars have long treated prayers involving angels as a somewhat dubious strand of medieval religiosity, noting the suspicions which had been raised about improper veneration of celestial beings during early Christianity. The existence of petitions addressed to named angels not found in the Bible has confirmed to many that the practice 'does not have its roots in Christian soil'.[7] Judgements of this kind do not greatly help us to understand how and why angels did come to play a part in private prayers, benedictions and liturgical blessings. By showing the rationale behind Anglo-Saxon invocations of angels, I argue that the practice is best understood within an ecclesiastical context rather than as a deliberate subversion of orthodox opinion. Although it has recently been argued that there was a widespread 'shadow tradition' of angelic invocation within Anglo-Saxon popular religion, condemned by the official Church,[8] a re-examination of the sources in fact indicates the breadth of early insular ecclesiastical learning, and shows that even the most unusual beliefs could only be expressed through the established channels of prayer.

While each of the various strands of Anglo-Saxon thought examined in this thesis stands alone, developing at its own pace largely independent of others, there are nevertheless common themes which emerge from this investigation. I therefore conclude

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7 Michael W. Herren, *Hisperica Famina: II. Related Poems* (Toronto, 1987) , p. 31.

8 Karen Louise Jolly, 'Prayers from the field: practical protection and demonic defense in Anglo-Saxon England', *Traditio* 61 (2006), 95–147.

by considering the overall shape of Anglo-Saxon ideas about angels, and observe that over the course of the period, a variety of mental shifts had resulted in the loss of much which was once distinctive about angels. I suggest that these shifts are best understood as a symptom of the way that early medieval Christianity was made up of different genres of religious writing, each operating according to its own rules and moulding beliefs into particular forms. Angels touched on so many aspects of Anglo-Saxon life and thought that they appear across the spectrum of these texts, from sermon to poetry to prayer. Yet as Anglo-Saxon Christians made connections between ideas expressed in these different sorts of texts, complications and accidental innovations tended to arise. This kind of accidental change does not often find a place in our histories of religions, which are more often structured around doctrinal pronouncements or social changes, but I argue that the history of angels in Anglo-Saxon Christianity cannot be understood without it.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements *ii*

List of illustrations *iv*

Abbreviations and short titles *vi*

A note on citations *xii*

INTRODUCTION 1

CHAPTER ONE
Authority and ideology in the creation and fall of the angels 17

CHAPTER TWO
The meanings of angels 53

CHAPTER THREE
The changing fortunes of the guardian angel 89

CHAPTER FOUR
The rules of the otherworld 124

CHAPTER FIVE
The servants of the saints 164

CHAPTER SIX
Prayer, benediction and the edges of beliefs 208

CONCLUSION 248

Bibliography *256*

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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

1. Dublin, Trinity College Library, MS 58, 7v (detail) 11
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2. Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Amiatinus 1, 796v (detail) 11
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4. Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 286, 129v (detail) 11
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5. London, British Library, Cotton Claudius B.iv, 2r 23
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6. Eyam, Derbyshire: remains of standing cross 59
© Richard Sowerby.

7. Dewsbury, West Yorkshire: fragment of cross-arm 62
© Archaeological Services WYAS, photographed by Paul Gwilliam: reproduced with permission.

8. Otley, West Yorkshire: fragment of cross-shaft 62
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9. Halton, Lancashire: fragment of cross-shaft (detail) 62
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10. Dewsbury, West Yorkshire: fragment of column 64
© Archaeological Services WYAS, photographed by Paul Gwilliam: reproduced with permission.

11. Halton, Lancashire: fragment of cross-shaft (detail) 64
© Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, photographed by Ross Trench-Jellicoe: reproduced with permission.

12. Halton, Lancashire: fragment of cross-shaft 65
© Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, photographed by Ross Trench-Jellicoe: reproduced with permission.

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15. Utrecht, Universiteitsbibliotheek, MS 32, 17r (detail) 121
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16. London, British Library, Harley 603, 17r (detail) 121
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17. London, British Library, Harley 603, 17v–18r 122
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18. London, British Library, Harley 603, 18r (detail) 122
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19. Remains of St Cuthbert's wooden coffin, long side 225
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20. Remains of St Cuthbert's wooden coffin, narrow end 225
© Richard Sowerby, after drawings by S. Dickinson published in *St Cuthbert's Coffin: The History, Technology and Conservation*, ed. J.M. Cronyn and C.V. Horie (Newcastle, 1985), fig. 1b.

ABBREVIATIONS AND SHORT TITLES

Adomnán, *VC*	Adomnán, *Vita S. Columbae*, ed. and trans. Alan Orr Anderson and Marjorie Ogilvie Anderson, *Adomnán's 'Life of Columba'* (2nd ed., Oxford, 1991)
Ælfric, *CH*, I	Ælfric, *Catholic Homilies* (first series), ed. Peter Clemoes, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: The First Series* (Oxford, 1997)
———, *CH*, II	Ælfric, *Catholic Homilies* (second series), ed. Malcolm Godden, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: The Second Series* (Oxford, 1979)
———, *Supp.*	Ælfric, *Supplementary Homilies*, ed. J.C. Pope, *Homilies of Ælfric: A Supplementary Collection*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1967–8)
Ælfwine's Prayerbook	London, British Library, Cotton Titus D.xxvi + xxvii (Ælfwine's Prayerbook), ed. Beate Günzel, *Ælfwine's Prayerbook* (London, 1993)
Æthelwulf, *DA*	Æthelwulf, *De abbatibus*, ed. and trans. Alistair Campbell, *Æthelwulf: De abbatibus* (Oxford, 1967)
Alcuin, *Ep.*	Alcuin, *Epistolae*, ed. Ernst Dümmler, MGH, Epp. IV.2 (Berlin, 1895), pp. 18–48
Aldhelm, *CdV*	Aldhelm, *Carmen de uirginitate*, ed. Rudolf Ehwald, MGH, Auct. ant. XV (Berlin, 1913–19), pp. 327–471
ASC	*The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition. Volume 3: MS A*, ed. Janet M. Bately (Cambridge, 1986); *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition. Volume 6: MS D*, ed. G.P. Cubbin (Cambridge, 1996); *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition. Volume 7: MS E*, ed. Susan Irvine (Cambridge, 2004); *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition. Volume 8: MS F*, ed. Peter S. Baker (Cambridge, 2000)

ASE	*Anglo-Saxon England*
B., *VD*	B., *Vita S. Dunstani*, ed. and trans. Michael Winterbottom and Michael Lapidge, *The Early Lives of St Dunstan* (Oxford, 2012), pp. 1–109
Bazire-Cross	Joyce Bazire and James E. Cross (eds.), *Eleven Old English Rogationtide Homilies* (2nd ed., London, 1989)
Bede, *HE*	Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, ed. and trans. Bertram Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors, *Bede's EcclesiasticalHistory of the English People* (Oxford, 1969)
———, *Hom.*	Bede, *Homeliarum euangelii*, ed. David Hurst, CCSL 122 (Turnhout, 1960), pp. 1–378
———, *VCP*	Bede, *Vita S. Cuthberti*, ed. and trans. Bertram Colgrave, *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert: A Life by an Anonymous Monk of Lindisfarne and Bede's Prose Life* (Cambridge, 1940), pp. 141–307
Blickling	Princeton, Scheide Library, MS 71 (The Blickling Homilies), ed. and trans. Richard J. Kelly, *The Blickling Homilies* (London, 2003)
Brodie Pontifical	London, British Library, Add. 57337 (The Brodie Pontifical), ed. Marie A. Conn, 'The Dunstan and Brodie (Anderson) Pontificals: An Edition and Study' (unpublished PhD thesis: University of Notre Dame, 1993), pp. 172–338
Byrhtferth, *VO*	Byrhtferth, *Vita S. Oswaldi*, ed. and trans. Michael Lapidge, *Byrhtferth of Ramsey: The Lives of St Oswald and St Ecgwine* (Oxford, 2009), pp. 1–203
CASSS	Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture (Oxford, 1984–)
CCCC	Corpus Christi College, Cambridge
CCCM	Corpus christianorum continuatio mediaeualis
CCSL	Corpus christianorum series latina
Cerne	Cambridge, University Library, Ll.1.10 (The Book of Cerne), ed. A.B. Kuypers, *The Prayer Book of Aedeluald the Bishop, Commonly called the Book of Cerne* (Cambridge, 1902)

CSEL	Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum
Die Briefe	*Die Briefe des heiligen Bonifatius und Lullus*, ed. Michael Tangl, MGH, Epp. sel. I (Berlin, 1955)
Dunstan Pontifical	Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, lat. 943 (The Dunstan Pontifical), ed. Marie A. Conn, 'The Dunstan and Brodie (Anderson) Pontificals: An Edition and Study' (unpublished PhD thesis: University of Notre Dame, 1993)
Durham Collectar	Durham, Cathedral Library, A.IV.19 (The Durham Collectar): 1r–61r, ed. Alicia Corrêa, *The Durham Collectar* (London, 1992); 61r–88v, ed. U. Lindelöf, *Rituale ecclesiae Dunelmensis. The Durham Collectar* (London, 1927)
Egbert Pontifical	Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, lat. 10575 (The Egbert Pontifical), ed. H.M.J. Banting, *Two Anglo-Saxon Pontificals* (London, 1989)
EETS	Early English Text Society
EHR	*English Historical Review*
Eighth-Century Gelasian	Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, lat. 12048 (The Gellone Sacramentary), ed. A. Dumas, CCSL 159–159A (Turnhout, 1981)
EME	*Early Medieval Europe*
Fadda	A.M. Luiselli Fadda (ed.), *Nuove omelie anglosassoni della rinascenza benedettina* (Florence, 1977)
Felix, *VG*	Felix, *Vita S. Guthlaci*, ed. and trans. Bertram Colgrave, *Felix's Life of St Guthlac* (Cambridge, 1956)
Harleian Prayerbook	British Library, Harley 7653 (The Harley Fragment), ed. F.E. Warren, *The Antiphonary of Bangor: Part II* (London, 1895), appendix
HBS	Henry Bradshaw Society
JEGP	*Journal of English and Germanic Philology*
JML	*Journal of Medieval Latin*
JTS	*Journal of Theological Studies*

Ker, *Catalogue*	N.R. Ker, *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon* (Oxford, 1957)
Lantfred, *Translatio*	Lantfred, *Translatio et miracula S. Swithuni*, ed. and trans. Michael Lapidge, *The Cult of St Swithun* (Oxford, 2003), pp. 252–333
Leofric Missal A, B, C	Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 579 (The Leofric Missal), ed. Nicholas Orchard, *The Leofric Missal*, 2 vols. (London, 2002)
LSE	*Leeds Studies in English*
MGH	Monumenta Germaniae Historica
Auct. ant.	Auctores antiquissimi
Capit.	Capitularia regum Francorum
Capit. episc.	Capitularia episcoporum
Epp.	Epistolae
Epp. sel.	Epistolae selectae
Poetae	Poetae Latini medii aevi
SS	Scriptores (in folio)
SS rer. Germ.	Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum separatim editi
SS rer. Merov.	Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum
Napier	Arthur Napier (ed.), *Wulfstan. Sammlung der ihm zugeschriebenen Homilien* (Berlin, 1883)
Nunnaminster	British Library, Harley 2965 (The Book of Nunnaminster), ed. Walter de Gray Birch, *An Ancient Manuscript of the Eighth or Ninth Century* (London, 1889)
Old Gelasian	Vatican, Biblioteca apostolica, cod. reg. 316 + Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, lat. 7193, 41/56 (The Old Gelasian Sacramentary), ed. Leo Cunibert Mohlberg, *Liber sacramentorum Romanae aeclesiae ordinis anni circuli* (Rome, 1960)

P&P	*Past and Present*
PG	*Patrologia Graeca*, ed. J.-P. Migne, 161 vols. (Paris, 1857–66)
PL	*Patrologia Latina*, ed. J.-P. Migne, 221 vols. (Paris, 1844–65)
Plummer, *BOH*	Charles Plummer (ed.), *Venerabilis Baedae opera historica*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1896)
RegConc	*Regularis concordia*, ed. Lucia Kornexl, *Die 'Regularis Concordia' und ihre altenglische Interlinearversion* (Munich, 1993)
Robert Benedictional	Rouen, Bibliothèque municipale, Y.7 (369) (The Benedictional of Archbishop Robert), ed. H.A. Wilson, *The Benedictional of Archbishop Robert* (London, 1903)
Robert Missal	Rouen, Bibliothèque municipale, Y.6 (274) (The Missal of Robert of Jumièges), ed. H.A. Wilson, *The Missal of Robert of Jumièges* (London, 1896)
Royal Prayerbook	British Library, Royal 2.A.xx (The Royal Prayerbook), ed. A.B. Kuypers, *The Prayer Book of Aedeluald the Bishop, commonly called the Book of Cerne* (Cambridge, 1902), appendix
S	P.H. Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters: An Annotated List and Bibliography* (London, 1968). Unless otherwise stated, charters are cited from the Electronic Sawyer, <http://esawyer.org.uk>
Stephen, *VW*	Stephen, *Vita S. Wilfridi*, ed. and trans. Bertram Colgrave, *The Life of Bishop Wilfrid by Eddius Stephanus* (Cambridge, 1927)
Supplement	*Supplementum Anianense*, ed. Jean Deshusses, *La sacramentaire grégorien*, 3 vols. (Freiburg, 1971–82), i, 349–605
VCA	*Vita S. Cuthberti auctore anonymo*, ed. and trans. Bertram Colgrave, *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert: A Life by an Anonymous Monk of Lindisfarne and Bede's Prose Life* (Cambridge, 1940), pp. 59–139

Vercelli	Vercelli, Biblioteca Capitolare, CXVII (The Vercelli Homilies), ed. D.G. Scragg, *The Vercelli Homilies and Related Texts* (Oxford, 1992)
Wulfstan, *Hom.*	Wulfstan, *Homilies*, ed. Dorothy Bethurum, *The Homilies of Wulfstan* (Oxford, 1957)
Wulfstan of Winchester, *Narratio*	Wulfstan of Winchester, *Narratio metrica de S. Swithuno*, ed. and trans. Michael Lapidge, *The Cult of St Swithun* (Oxford, 2003), pp. 372–551
———, *VÆthel*	Wulfstan of Winchester, *Vita S. Æthelwoldi*, ed. and trans. Michael Lapidge and Michael Winterbottom, *Wulfstan of Winchester: The Life of St Æthelwold* (Oxford, 1991)

A NOTE ON CITATIONS

Throughout this thesis, quotations from historical documents are given in translation. While it would have been desirable to supply each with the original text in an accompanying footnote, considerations of space and readability make this impossible. I therefore quote from Latin, Old English and Greek texts in the original language only where the argument depends on the interpretation of particular words or phrases. Unless otherwise stated, all translations are my own.

Biblical citations refer to the text of the Vulgate, quoted in translation from the Douay-Rheims version.

References to website addresses are correct as of 17 September 2012.

INTRODUCTION

Searching for an appropriate image to sum up the Anglo-Saxon past in the first decades after the Norman Conquest, an unnamed author sought to conjure a sense of a golden age irrevocably lost. He struggled at first for words – 'What shall I say about England? What shall I tell those to come?' – before finally offering his lament for the present age: 'Woe unto you, England, you who once shone forth with holy, angelic offspring, but now groan mightily with worry for your sins'.[1] Fleeting though this eulogy for pre-Conquest England was, the Anglo-Saxons themselves would have thought its choice of imagery apt. When they had considered their own history, they too had found it studded with angels. They believed that the occasional visitations of heavenly beings had played a direct role in bringing the early Anglo-Saxon kingdoms to Christianity, and that a steady stream of supernatural messengers had continued to take an interest in the affairs of the English ever since. During that time, Anglo-Saxon Christians dedicated churches to angels and adorned others with their image, speculated about their nature and their origins, prayed for their assistance, and anticipated a future world in which they would live alongside them in deathless eternity. Early medieval England in fact produced such a volume of material relating to these immaterial spirits that it would be possible, if one were so inclined, to string it together as a narrative, starting with the Northumbrian

[1] *Vita Ædwardi regis*, II.7, ed. Frank Barlow, *The Life of King Edward who Rests at Westminster, attributed to a Monk of Saint-Bertin* (2nd ed., Oxford, 1992), p. 108. As Monika Otter has emphasized, it is difficult to know whether these are the sentiments of the original author, writing shortly after the Conquest at the instigation of Queen Edith, or whether they are part of the interpolation made to his work some time after *c.* 1100: '1066: the moment of transition in two narratives of the Norman Conquest', *Speculum* 74 (1999), 565–86, at pp. 583–4.

slave-boys whose faces were allegedly so angelic that a pope determined to convert their countrymen, and ending with the Norman fleet which landed in Sussex just as the churches of England were preparing to offer their annual prayers to the archangel Michael.[2]

This thesis is not that narrative. Rather, it constitutes an attempt to use ideas about angels as evidence for broader patterns of religious change across the Anglo-Saxon period. By paying attention to the way that a discrete body of inherited beliefs shifted and developed over time, it seeks to illuminate the changing preoccupations, assumptions and practices of a single early medieval polity. In that, this thesis is situated firmly within a rich seam of intellectual history which has taken the diffuse and seemingly esoteric ideas about the supernatural, the otherworldly and the imaginary, and used them as a lens with which to examine the society in which they evolved. Anglo-Saxon England has always been a productive focus for studies of this kind, due in large part to an enduring fascination with the demon-stalked landscape of *Beowulf*, as well as the abundance of legendary material related to the saints and their miracles.[3] Yet while the monstrous and the marvellous have gained their place in early medieval cultural history, angels have seemed rather less promising as an object for close scrutiny. They have long been taken to typify medieval Christianity at its most traditional and derivative – an impression that

[2] For the legendary encounter between Gregory the Great and the angelic youths, see below, pp. 10–12. Concerning the arrival of Duke William and his forces, the evidence is divided as to whether it occurred on Michaelmas or Michaelmas Eve; attempts to rationalize the testimony of sources are usefully summarized by Marjorie Chibnall, *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis*, 6 vols. (Oxford, 1968–80), ii, 170–71, n. 2.

[3] The literature here is vast; the following monographs offer some of the fullest discussions, although they are greatly outnumbered by an array of crucial shorter studies: David Rollason, *Saints and Relics in Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 1989); Andy Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the Beowulf-Manuscript* (Cambridge, 1993); Christine Rauer, *Beowulf and the Dragon: Parallels and Analogues* (Cambridge, 2000); Peter Dendle, *Satan Unbound: The Devil in Old English Narrative Literature* (Toronto, 2001); Alan Thacker and Richard Sharpe (eds.), *Local Saints and Local Churches in the Early Medieval West* (Oxford, 2002); Mechthild Gretsch, *Ælfric and the Cult of Saints in Late Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge, 2005); Alaric Hall, *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England: Matters of Belief, Health, Gender and Identity* (Woodbridge, 2007).

older generations of historical theologians in fact did much to promote, making a point of noting when their investigations found the shape of Christian tradition to be at its 'most constant and solid'.[4]

It is only relatively recently that this impression has been overturned and the theological subfield of 'angelology' opened up to strictly historical, rather than devotional, study. A growing body of scholarship now amply illustrates the fluidity of late antique, medieval and early modern beliefs about angels, as well as the degree to which those beliefs might both respond and contribute to broader changes in religious and philosophical thought. This has perhaps seemed most relevant to historians of the early modern period, during which time angels came to play critical but complicated roles in defining confessional identities and became the explicit subject of apology, polemic and parody.[5] Yet while the Reformation may have brought angels under a particularly intense and public scrutiny, they had always been bound up with theological debates and concerns about 'correct' religious observance. A small but insightful collection of studies has thus used angels as a way to talk about religious diversity in the late Roman world, the emergence of asceticism, and the issues of representation and veneration contested in Byzantium during the iconoclast era.[6] The restricted

4 Jean Daniélou, *Les anges et leur mission d'après les Pères de l'Église* (Paris, 1951), p. 93; cf. also Erik Peterson, *Das Buch von den Engeln. Stellung und Bedeutung der heiligen Engel im Kultus* (Leipzig, 1935).

5 Peter Marshall and Alexandra Walsham (eds.), *Angels in the Early Modern World* (Cambridge, 2006); Feisal G. Mohamed, *In the Anteroom of Divinity: The Reformation of the Angels from Colet to Milton* (Toronto, 2008); Joad Raymond, *Milton's Angels: The Early Modern Imagination* (Oxford, 2010); Alexandra Walsham, 'Invisible helpers: angelic intervention in post-Reformation England', *P&P* 208 (2010), 77–130; Joad Raymond (ed.), *Conversations with Angels: Essays towards a History of Spiritual Communication, 1100–1700* (Basingstoke, 2011); Laura Sangha, *Angels and Belief in England, 1480–1700* (London, 2012).

6 Glenn Peers, *Subtle Bodies: Representing Angels in Byzantium* (Berkeley, CA, 2001); Conrad Leyser, 'Angels, monks, and demons in the early medieval West', in *Belief and Culture in the Middle Ages: Studies Presented to Henry Mayr-Harting* (Oxford, 2001), ed. Richard Gameson and Henrietta Leyser, pp. 9–22; Ellen Muehlberger, 'Angels in the Religious Imagination of Late Antiquity' (unpublished PhD thesis: Indiana University, 2008); Rangar Cline, *Ancient Angels: Conceptualizing Angeloi in the Roman Empire* (Leiden, 2011).

chronological focus of these investigations has enabled their authors to engage in sensitive and richly contextualized analysis, alive to the subtleties of the past.

In contrast, although the place of the angels in the medieval West has not escaped attention, the fullest treatments of the subject have generally taken the European Middle Ages as a unit, with the sources for a thousand years of belief assembled in all their variety but often at the expense of their social context or development across time.[7] Although these surveys ably demonstrate medieval Europe's enduring fascination with the angelic, the best attempt to understand its changing significance remains the published text of an inaugural lecture given by Henry Mayr-Harting in 1997 – a compelling exploration of the topic, but one necessarily constrained by its occasion.[8] The need to give definition to an otherwise disparate body of material culled from the centuries has, moreover, tended to give priority to doctrinal pronouncements over other evidence of belief, using the extended expositions of theologians to unpack more allusive statements encountered in liturgy, poetry or prayer. It is a practical solution to the sheer quantity of evidence, but one which has inclined historians to linger on the patristic era or on the age of scholasticism, when speculation about the nature of angelic bodies, the organization of celestial societies and the modes of heavenly communication exercised the most probing minds in Christendom. In the absence of any equally sustained and original treatise on angels from the pen of an early medieval writer, it has been easy to assume that the intervening centuries contented themselves with the repetition of past opinion, or else laboured under superstitious, semi-pagan notions of their own which would soon be swept away.[9]

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7 David Keck, *Angels and Angelology in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1998); Richard F. Johnson, *Saint Michael the Archangel in Medieval English Legend* (Woodbridge, 2005).

8 Henry Mayr-Harting, *Perceptions of Angels in History* (Oxford, 1998).

9 Philippe Faure, 'L'ange du Haut Moyen Âge occidental (IV^{e}–IX^{e} siècles): création ou tradition?', *Médiévales* 15 (1988), 31–49; Michel Rouche, 'Le combat des saints anges et des démons: la

If arguments about 'pagan survivals' now seem less persuasive than they once did,[10] the sense that early medieval ideas about angels were largely traditional and backwards-looking carries greater weight. Although modern scholars might be right to suggest that angels are a 'malleable' part of Christian belief, able to withstand changes in practice or doctrine because they can be continually reinterpreted by believers of all kinds, early medieval Christians would have strongly opposed such a view.[11] Looking back to the Bible, which gave abundant though somewhat disconnected evidence about the nature of angels, and to the writings of the Church Fathers, which attempted to impose order on those biblical hints, medieval Christians saw little that still required original interpretation. Thinking about angels no longer involved the careful assembly of enigmatic scriptural statements: all this had already been done. In the westernmost reaches of the Christian world, a hagiographer from the early eighth-century monastery of Whitby singled out the contribution of one man in particular – Pope Gregory the Great (d. 604):

> For Gregory dealt with their orders – that is, the orders of the [angelic] hosts – with an ingenuity that we have never found in any other saint before or since. Even St Augustine, a man sound in faith and pure of life, from whose belly flow rivers of living water, said about them: 'I confess that I know nothing about these things'. But not only did Gregory divide them up in their hosts, basing everything on holy scriptures, he also drew out the commonalities to our way of life, with that clean heart by which only the blessed shall see God.[12]

That this anonymous Anglo-Saxon should have praised Gregory above all others should not surprise us – he was, after all, writing a Life of the pope. But of all Gregory's

victoire de saint Michel', *Settimane di studio del Centro italiano di studi sull'alto Medioevo* 36 (1989), 533–71.

10 See especially C.S. Watkins, *History and the Supernatural in Medieval England* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 68–106. Salient words are also offered by Robert Bartlett, *Trial by Fire and Water: The Medieval Judicial Ordeal* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 153–6.

11 Cf. Sangha, *Angels and Belief*, p. 10.

12 *Liber beatae Gregorii papae*, ch. 25, ed. Bertram Colgrave, *The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great by an Anonymous Monk of Whitby* (Cambridge, 1968), pp. 118–20. The words attributed to Augustine might derive from statements in *De ciuitate Dei* (XV.1), *Enchiridion* (ch. 58) or *De Trinitate* (III.iii.5), but since the quotation is not exact, it may be that the author knew Augustine only through *florilegia*, as discussed by Siân E. Mosford, 'A Critical Edition of the *Vita Gregorii magni* by an Anonymous Member of the Community of Whitby' (unpublished DPhil thesis: University of Oxford, 1988), p. xl.

writings, including the massive exegetical project undertaken in the 32-volume *Moralia in Iob*, he thought that Gregory's explanation of the angels provided the best evidence that 'the heavens had been opened to this pope of ours', no less than to St Peter and the prophet Ezekiel before him.[13]

The explanation took the form of a lengthy excursus in a sermon on Luke 15.[14] There, Gregory revealed that the angels of scripture were in fact divided into different orders. The names of the orders could be found scattered through the Old and New Testaments, and there were nine in total: angels, archangels, virtues, powers, principalities, dominations, thrones, cherubim and seraphim. Those names did not indicate that each was a different kind of being, for they all shared the same spiritual nature, but rather that each fulfilled its own distinct function. Their duties were hierarchically arranged, from the lower angels and archangels who brought messages to humanity, to the higher cherubim and seraphim who offered incomparable worship to God by virtue of their eternal closeness to him. To a reader in the Latin West, Gregory's confidence against the silence of scripture might well have seemed unparalleled and revelatory, but the scheme was not of the pope's own making. It summarized the basic points of a heady Neoplatonic treatise known as *The Celestial Hierarchy*, taken for centuries to be the work of Dionysius the Areopagite, a convert of St Paul's briefly mentioned in the book of Acts. Dionysius was a pseudonym, however, and whatever had prompted the author to adopt it, his elaborate angelology seems to have been composed

[13] *Liber beatae Gregorii*, ch. 27 (ed. Colgrave, p. 122). On the emphasis given to Gregory's written achievements in the Life, see Kate Rambridge, '*Doctor noster sanctus*: the Northumbrians and Pope Gregory', in *Rome and the North: The Early Reception of Gregory the Great in Germanic Europe*, ed. Rolf H. Bremmer Jr., Kees Dekker and David F. Johnson (Paris, 2001), pp. 1–26.

[14] Gregory, *Homeliae in euangelia*, XXXIV, ed. Raymond Étaix, CCSL 141 (Turnhout, 1999), pp. 299–319. A slightly different arrangement of nine orders is provided in the *Moralia in Iob* (XXXII.xxiii.48), but the hagiographer clearly had this homily in mind, since he praises the way that Gregory 'drew out the commonalities' between angelic and human life, which is the major purpose of the sermon's angelic digression. On those 'commonalities', see below, pp. 66–9.

in Syria, *c.* 500.[15] *The Celestial Hierarchy* differed from earlier discussions of angelic ranks, often listed simply to highlight the sheer number of unseen multitudes in the heavens, in that it attempted to explain more fully the nature and interrelation of the orders, and use them as the basis for its more extended mystical theology.[16]

Gregory's knowledge of *The Celestial Hierarchy* was not deep – it is remarkable that he knew its basic features at all, since he professed to be ignorant of Greek – and the work would remain unknown in the West until Latin translations were made in the ninth century.[17] Yet by then, through Gregory, the bare bones of pseudo-Dionysius' ninefold hierarchy had already become entirely traditional. Early medieval theologians pondering the matter of angels returned continually to his exposition, or to the summary of it made in Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae*, and did not question what they found there.[18] Passing references to *nouem ordines angelorum* were soon to be made in everything from private

[15] Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Celestial Hierarchy*, ed. Günter Heil and Adolf Martin Ritter, *Corpus Dionysiacum II* (Berlin, 1991). On Dionysian angelology, see Andrew Louth, *Denys the Areopagite* (London, 1989), pp. 33–51; Paul Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius: A Commentary on the Texts and an Introduction to their Influence* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 47–90; Muehlberger, 'Angels', pp. 215–41.

[16] Among others, see: Irenaeus, *Aduersus haereses*, II.30, ed. Adelin Rousseau and Louis Doutreleau, *Irénée de Lyon. Contre les hérésies*, 10 vols. (Paris, 1965–82), iv, 306–8; *Apostolic Constitutions*, VIII.xii.8 and 27, ed. Marcel Metzger, *Les constitutions apostoliques*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1985–7), iii, 182 and 192; Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catecheticae orationes*, V.6, ed. Auguste Piédagnel, *Cyrille de Jérusalem. Catéchèses mystagogiques* (2nd ed., Paris, 2004), pp. 152–4; Gregory of Nazianzus, *Orations*, XXVIII.31, ed. Paul Gallay, *Grégoire de Nazianze. Discours 27–31 (Discours théologiques)* (Paris, 1978), p. 172; Gregory of Nyssa, *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, XV.vi.4, ed. Hermann Langerbeck, *Gregorii Nysseni in canticum canticorum* (Leiden, 1960), pp. 445–6; Ambrose, *Expositio euangelii secundum Lucam*, VII.210, ed. Marcus Adriaen, CCSL 14 (Turnhout, 1957), p. 287; John Chrysostom, *On the Incomprehensibility of the Nature of God*, II.30, III.5, IV.11–12, ed. Ferdinand Cavallera, Jean Daniélou and Robert Flacelière, *Sur l'incompréhensibilité de Dieu* (Paris, 1951), pp. 136–8, 166, 214–16; Jerome, *Aduersus Iouinianum*, II.28, ed. Migne, *PL* 23, col. 325.

[17] For Gregory's knowledge of Greek, with particular reference to *The Celestial Hierarchy*, see Joan M. Petersen, '*Homo omnino Latinus*? The theological and cultural background of Pope Gregory the Great', *Speculum* 62 (1987), 529–51, esp. at pp. 530–42. For the Carolingian translations of pseudo-Dionysius: P.G. Théry, *Études dionysiennes. Hilduin, traducteur de Denys*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1932–7); *Iohannis Scoti Eriugenae Expositiones in ierarchiam coelestem*, ed. J. Barbet, CCCM 31 (Turnhout, 1975); see further Paul Rorem, *Eriugena's Commentary on the Dionysian Celestial Hierarchy* (Toronto, 2005).

[18] Isidore, *Etymologiae*, VII.5, ed. W.M. Lindsay, *Isidori Hispalensis episcopi etymologiarum sive originum libri XX*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1911), i. A litany in a Breton psalter of *c.* 900 does contain an additional rank of 'seats' (*sedes*) alongside the usual nine, but it seems likely that the compiler was so intent on listing as many heavenly intercessors as possible that he misconstrued Isidore's statement that 'throni sunt agmina angelorum, qui Latino eloquio sedes dicuntur', and thereby split one rank into two: Salisbury, Cathedral Library 180, 170r, ed. Michael Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Litanies of the Saints* (London, 1991), p. 288 [no. 44].

prayers to judicial formulae – so much so that when one English monk sat down to list the exegetical significance of numbers at the turn of the eleventh century, the number nine suggested to him only angelic meanings.[19]

Dionysius and his angelic speculation would remain unchallenged for around a millennium.[20] Nothing would rival his writings in scale and ambition until scholasticism ushered in a new wave of speculation about celestial beings.[21] The installation of the ninefold hierarchy in mainstream Christian thought has therefore seemed like the first and the last creative addition of the early Middle Ages to the matter of angels. If producing a history of a doctrine were our only goal, then this might be a satisfactory position. It is rather less so if we are interested instead in the religious culture of early medieval Europe on its own terms. Beliefs about angels were not self-contained. They informed and were themselves informed by other, deeper notions about free will, perfection, divine foreknowledge, life and death. These ideas voiced themselves not at the level of doctrine, but of assumption. At times, they could be highly personal, but at others the opinions of homilists, poets and artists seem to cluster around shared concerns that might offer an insight into the particular nature of their society at a specific point in time. Those shifting concerns, at times almost unconsciously expressed, are the real object of this investigation.

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[19] Byrhtferth, *Enchiridion*, IV.1, ed. Peter S. Baker and Michael Lapidge, *Byrhtferth's 'Enchiridion'* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 212–14. A rare invocation of 'XX ordines angelorum', found in an adjuration against toothache copied into the contemporary medical manuscript known as the *Lacnunga*, is a simple scribal error, and later versions of the same text give the more usual nine (cf. BL, Royal 12.B.xii, 206v). Nevertheless, since the adjuration concludes with a nonsense formula, it might not be too fanciful to think that the copyist left the reference to an unusual number of angelic orders uncorrected in the hope that it communicated some efficacious mystery: *Lacnunga*, 183v–184r, ed. Edward Pettit, *Anglo-Saxon Remedies, Charms, and Prayers from British Library MS Harley 585: The Lacnunga*, 2 vols. (Lewiston, NY, 2001), i, 108 [no. 158].

[20] On the fate of Dionysian thought: C.A. Patrides, 'Renaissance thought on the celestial hierarchy: the decline of a tradition', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 20 (1959), 155–66; Mohamed, *Anteroom of Divinity*, esp. pp. 7–9, 33–54, 87–114.

[21] See now Isabel Iribarren and Martin Lenz (eds.), *Angels in Medieval Philosophical Inquiry: Their Function and Significance* (Aldershot, 2008).

While religious ideas do not stop at political borders, the most rigorous way to approach this task is at a regional level, looking at the broadest possible spectrum of written and visual evidence from a single early medieval polity rather than assembling an idiosyncratic selection of sources drawn from across Europe. Taking Anglo-Saxon England as my focus is not meant to imply that it was unique in its beliefs about angels: although the early insular world certainly produced a wealth of diverse material relating to angels, its oddity in that respect has sometimes been exaggerated.[22] This thesis can be viewed in many ways as a case study, and it is to be hoped that comparable investigations of the changing place of angels in other parts of early medieval Europe might also reward careful study. I have looked for contrast and commonality where the sources have encouraged it, especially where the Anglo-Saxon material draws on opinions first voiced in late antique Egypt, or seventh-century Ireland, or ninth-century Francia; but I have resisted using unconnected evidence uncritically to produce a homogenized synthesis that erodes the evidence for change and variety.

For beneath apparent unanimity on points of doctrine, there *was* variety. It often went unrecognized by early medieval Christians, who seldom considered that their own beliefs might not be representative. They generally presumed, for instance, that one person's mental image of an angel was essentially the same as another's, or at least that there were defining characteristics which were commonly understood and widely shared. Not that angels themselves could be known by human beings as they actually were, for whatever kind of bodies they might possess, they were spiritual rather than corporeal in nature. The learned repeatedly noted that it was technically incorrect to talk about

[22] For example, Rouche, 'Le combat', pp. 543–6, 548–50. The alleged importance of the archangel Michael in early insular culture has often been presumed on this basis, drawing in large part on an argument first made by Olga Rojdestvensky, *Le culte de saint Michel et le moyen âge latin* (Paris, 1922), esp. pp. 18–33. Her thesis and its subsequent influence are robustly critiqued by John C. Arnold, '*Ego sum Michael*: The Origin and Diffusion of the Christian Cult of St Michael the Archangel' (unpublished PhD thesis: University of Arkansas, 1997).

'angels' as if they were a particular kind of being: the Latin word *angelus* came from the Greek *angelos*, which simply meant 'messenger', and denoted their function rather than their nature.[23] They themselves were spirits and therefore immaterial, adopting a visible form only when they had to appear before humans, who thus saw them as they seemed to be rather than in their natural state.[24]

Even so, things might nevertheless be said to be 'angelic' in appearance and it was assumed that people would know what that meant, and that the word would call to mind a specific set of characteristics which all Christians might share. The famous story which explained how the Anglo-Saxons had come to receive Christianity depended on that assumption. The story went that Gregory the Great, before his election to the papacy, had run across a group of young Northumbrians in Rome. The most extended telling of the tale stated that they were being sold as slaves; all explained that they had caught Gregory's eye on account of the exceptional whiteness and beauty of their faces and hair.[25] When he asked about their origins, he found that his meeting with these radiant pagans carried a spiritual significance, for their people called themselves the *Angli*, which Gregory immediately connected with the *angeli* whose heavenly society was still unknown to them. From that moment, the English believed, Gregory had determined one day to bring about the salvation of their people. Nevertheless, although attempts have been made to find a kernel of historical truth within this memorable tale, it seems

[23] The eventually commonplace observation seems to have begun with Augustine: *Enarrationes in psalmos*, CIII.i.15, ed. Franco Gori, CSEL 95, 5 vols. (Vienna, 2001–11), i, 131–2; *Sermones de uetere testamento*, VII.3, ed. Cyrille Lambot, CCSL 41 (Turnhout, 1961), p. 72. Cf. also Gregory, *Hom. in euang.*, XXXIV (ed. Adriaen, p. 306); Isidore, *Etym.*, VII.5 (ed. Lindsay, i); Isidore, *Sententiae*, I.10, ed. Pierre Cazier, CCSL 111 (Turnhout, 1998), pp. 29–38.

[24] For the various positions of early theologians, see Peers, *Subtle Bodies*, esp. pp. 1–4, 107–8.

[25] *Liber beatae Gregorii*, ch. 9 (ed. Colgrave, p. 92); Bede, *HE*, II.1 (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 132–4). Later versions largely depended on Bede for their details: Old English Bede, II.1, ed. Thomas Miller, *The Old English Version of Bede's Ecclesiastical History* (London, 1890–98), p. 96; Ælfric, *CH*, II.9 (ed. Godden, pp. 73–4). Stephen J. Harris discusses the importance of physical description in Bede's version: 'Bede and Gregory's allusive Angles', *Criticism* 44 (2002), 271–89, esp. at pp. 272–7.

FIG. 1

FIG. 2

FIG. 1. Book of Kells, detail (Dublin, Trinity College Library, MS 58, 7v: unknown insular centre, s. viii/ix)
FIG. 2. Codex Amiatinus, detail (Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Amiatinus 1, 796v: Monkwearmouth Jarrow, s. viii^{in})

FIG. 3

FIG. 4

FIG. 3. Basilica of San Vitale, detail of apse mosaic (Ravenna, s. vi)
FIG. 4. St Augustine Gospels, detail (Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 286, 129v: Italy, s. vi)

highly unlikely that pale faces and paler hair would have corresponded with Gregory's own notion of angelic beauty.[26] These were the attributes given to angels by English and Irish Christians of the seventh and eighth centuries. Italian artists from Gregory's own day supposed instead that angels would naturally carry Mediterranean features, and consistently presented them with dark hair (compare figs. 1–4). This was a trivial discrepancy, but a revealing one. The Anglo-Saxons who told the tale

[26] Michael Richter argues that parallels for some of the words attributed to Gregory in the story can be found in his writings: 'Bede's *Angli*: Angles or English?', *Peritia* 3 (1984), 99–114. He cites in particular an allusion to angels in a letter of 601 to Bertha of Kent, but its imagery ought to be compared to an earlier letter sent to the Visigothic king Reccared I in 599 which uses a similar description of rejoicing angels to express general sentiments of conversion, weakening the case for a specifically English connection: compare *Registrum epistularum*, IX.229 and XI.35, ed. Dag Norberg, CCSL 140–140A (Turnhout, 1982), pp. 806 and 924.

remained utterly unaware that their sense of the angelic had in fact been culturally conditioned.

Even within England itself, assumptions about the kind of physical form that angels could or could not adopt remained varied for well over a century. Some supposed that since angels manifested themselves in a form which was not their own, there was nothing to prevent a spirit appearing in the likeness of a specific human individual – even if that person was alive and well in another part of the world. Edwin, king of Northumbria (d. 633), had supposedly once received an unexpected visitor while he took refuge in East Anglia, driven from his kingdom by dynastic rivals after the death of his father. The visitor was not human. According to the Northumbrian monk Bede (d. 735), who told the story in his *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, the figure spoke in cryptic words, suggesting that there existed a power which could return Edwin to the throne, before suddenly vanishing 'so that Edwin might realize that it was not a man but a spirit who had appeared to him'. The meaning of the encounter was revealed only after Edwin had regained his kingdom, by a missionary preacher named Paulinus who seemed somehow aware of what had happened. Through Paulinus' explanation, Edwin came to understand that it was God who had restored his crown, indicating that the Northumbrians ought now to accept Christianity.[27] Yet as the tale was first told, by the anonymous monk of Whitby in his Life of Pope Gregory, the sequence of events was altogether stranger – for the spirit that visited the king during his exile had in fact assumed the physical form of Paulinus, so as to tell Edwin to await, and then obey, 'the one who will appear to you in this form [*cum hac specie*]'.[28] The notion that a spirit could have assumed the appearance of a living person was evidently untenable to Bede,

[27] Bede, *HE*, II.12 (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 174–82).
[28] *Liber beatae Gregorii*, ch. 16 (ed. Colgrave, p. 100).

since he passed over the Whitby Life's statement that 'it was Bishop Paulinus who first appeared to him in that form' and offered other explanations as to how Paulinus had gained Edwin's obedience.[29] Although none doubted that God's spiritual messengers could assume visible bodies when the need arose, the implications of what that might mean in practice varied from one early Anglo-Saxon writer to the next.

Still others evidently believed that angels might dispense with a human form altogether, and reported that the spirits of heaven had sometimes also been seen in the form of birds. An account of St Mildthryth's life and deeds, written down around 1000 but shown to be of mid-eighth-century origin, described how 'an angel of God in the form of a dove [*in columbae specie*] settled on her head to protect her from the deception of evil spirits'.[30] Heavenly doves were more often interpreted as manifestations of the Holy Spirit, but other avian forms might also be taken by angels. In the early ninth century, a monastic poet named Æthelwulf alleged that two brightly coloured songbirds had attended the body of a scribe named Ultán, shining with light and singing joyfully as monks moved his bones into a new tomb; others came to receive the prayers of the living and the souls of the dead.[31] Previous scholars have tended to point out that the appearance of angelic birds can be paralleled in Irish literature,[32] but Anglo-Saxon

[29] *Ibid.*, ch. 16 (ed. Colgrave, p. 100): 'Sub hac igitur specie dicunt illi Paulinum prefatum episcopum primo apparuisse'. Bede, *HE*, II.12 (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, p. 176): 'Cum ergo uideret Paulinus difficulter posse sublimitatem animi regalis ad humilitatem uiae salutaris [...] tandem, ut uerisimile uidetur, didicit in spiritu, quod uel quale esset oraculum regi quondam caelitus ostensum'. While it has not always been accepted that Bede knew the Whitby Life, I follow Alan Thacker's reasons for thinking it likely that he did: 'Memorializing Gregory the Great: the origin and transmission of a papal cult in the seventh and early eighth centuries', *EME* 8 (1998), 59–84, at pp. 69–70.

[30] Byrhtferth, *Chronica*, I.15, ed. Cyril Hart, *Byrhtferth's Northumbrian Chronicle: An Edition and Translation of the Old English and Latin Annals* (Lewiston, NY, 2006), pp. 22–4. For the dating of the material relating to St Mildthryth, see David Rollason, *The Mildrith Legend: A Study in Early Medieval Hagiography in England* (Leicester, 1982), pp. 15–16.

[31] Æthelwulf, *DA*, lines 174–8, 234–69, 576–8 (ed. Campbell, pp. 17, 21–3, 47).

[32] Campbell, *De abbatibus*, p. xxxii; John Carey, 'The hand and the angel: observations on the holy book in early Ireland and Northumbria', *Temenos Academy Review* 2 (1999), 76–96, at p. 85; Maria Elena Ruggerini, 'St Michael and the dragon from scripture to hagiography', in *Monsters and the Monstrous in Medieval Northwest Europe*, ed. K.E. Olsen and L.A.J.R. Houwen (Leuven, 2001), pp. 23–58, at pp.

Christians might have drawn equally upon Jerome, who had described how 'angels in the likeness of birds bear our words and our thoughts to heaven'.[33] Whatever their inspiration, it is readily apparent that ideas about the forms of angels were far from uniform in early Anglo-Saxon England. When such basic questions about the spirits and their earthly manifestations prompted different responses, it is clear that we should expect a similar range of opinion regarding other, more profound matters about angels in Anglo-Saxon thought.

If there was variety, there was also change. The angels had relinquished their multiplicity of bodies by the tenth century, and thereafter they appeared only as anonymous men of radiant whiteness.[34] Had we the necessary volume of evidence, we might be able to determine whether the earlier diversity reflected the local traditions of many separate religious communities, and thus use its disappearance to chart the progress of an increasingly homogenized religious culture. But the sources for Anglo-Saxon culture are fragmentary and uneven. They cluster in the earlier part of the eighth century and the latter part of the tenth, and our understanding of the intervening decades is limited by that discontinuity. The gap can often be minimized, but not overcome: the silence of much of the ninth century frequently looms large in this thesis, as it does in other studies of Anglo-Saxon Christianity.[35] The wide chronological limits of my

39–43; cf. also Andrew Breeze, 'Celtic symptoms in *De abbatibus* and *Altercatio magistri et discipuli*', *JML* 15 (2002), 148–52, at p. 150.

[33] Jerome, *Commentarius in Ecclesiasten*, X.20, ed. Marcus Adriaen, CCSL 72 (Turnhout, 1959), p. 344. Early Anglo-Saxon manuscripts of Jerome's commentary survive (see Donald A. Bullough, *Alcuin: Achievement and Reputation* (Leiden, 2003), p. 266, n. 41), and his words were certainly known to Alcuin, who was reliant upon Jerome for his own *Expositio in Ecclesiasten*, X.20, ed. Migne, *PL* 100, col. 712.

[34] Among others, see Lantfred, *Translatio*, chs. 2 and 35 (ed. Lapidge, pp. 266–70 and 324–6); B., *VD*, chs. 29–30 (ed. Winterbottom and Lapidge, pp. 86–90). Ælfric tended to observe that angels shone with light even if it seemed ill-suited to the story he was telling, as when paraphrasing biblical scenes where angels had been mistaken for ordinary mortal men: see, for instance, *Supp.*, XIII (ed. Pope, p. 593).

[35] On sources, see Michael Lapidge, 'Latin learning in ninth-century England', in his *Anglo-Latin Literature, 600–899* (London, 1996), pp. 409–54. On institutions, see John Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 291–323.

investigation – *c.* 700 to *c.* 1000 – are a response to this unevenness in the evidence, and provide the simplest way to capture a sense of changing attitudes across the Anglo-Saxon period as a whole, even when it is impossible to trace the *process* of change with absolute precision. Yet enough does survive to make reasonable speculation possible, and I have tried at every stage to explain change rather than merely to describe it.

Studying ideas about angels in order to study religious change means that this thesis is emphatically not an attempt to list and catalogue everything which an Anglo-Saxon Christian might ever have thought about supernatural beings. Each of the six chapters which follow instead examines in detail a particular strand or theme in which change is most apparent. The opening chapters begin with Anglo-Saxon 'angelology' at its most theological and most speculative, considering questions about the origins of the angels and the nature of their society which arose from biblical study, exegesis and scholarship. Yet to view ideas about angels as a purely scholarly pursuit would give a very misleading picture of Anglo-Saxon beliefs. In the second part of this thesis, I turn therefore to subjects which were less often the focus of direct theological discussion, but which were arguably of more pressing concern for individuals: the angels' perceived roles as guardians of the living and escorts of the dead. These were what we might term 'normal' angelic duties, but the early medieval supernatural was an active force that might also manifest itself in more immediate and surprising ways. The changing ideas about how and why angels might intervene directly in human affairs, expressed through Anglo-Saxon writings on the saints and the more personal words contained in their prayerbooks, comprise the final section of my study.

The rationale behind this structure inevitably means that some themes which were undoubtedly important for the Anglo-Saxons themselves, but which show little or no

evidence of significant historical development, are noticeably absent from this investigation. The appearance of the archangel Gabriel before the Virgin Mary at the Annunciation is a case in point, for although the angel's visitation must have been familiar to any medieval Christian – and indeed although we know that Anglo-Saxon artists lavished attention on the scene – the importance of the moment gave the Annunciation a fixed significance. In contrast, it was in the exploration of matters which were less familiar and less well-trodden that Anglo-Saxon writers revealed their own preoccupations and concerns. Examining how these concerns changed over time might ultimately, therefore, allow us to say what the idea of the angelic might have expressed in Anglo-Saxon England at any one time, and thus to map the changing contours of a world drawn from a fertile mixture of belief, imagination and experience.

CHAPTER ONE

Authority and ideology in the creation and fall of the angels

Genesis 3:24 states that God placed cherubim to protect to the way to the tree of life; the first unambiguous *angelus* in the Vulgate appears before Hagar in the wilderness at Genesis 16:7; but as to the origins of the angels, the Bible was silent. This apparent omission in the narrative of the six days of Creation prompted considerable debate in the early Church. Augustine, in particular, made extensive efforts to reconstruct the early moments of angelic creation, both in his writings on Genesis and at greater length in *De ciuitate Dei*. His difficulties with the subject are readily apparent in the latter, which faltered and backtracked whenever it turned to the angels' history. Augustine was certain that angels were not co-eternal with God, and supported his position with passages from the Psalms and the book of Daniel which numbered them among God's other works.[1] On the basis of Job 38:7 – 'When the stars were made, all my angels praised me with a loud voice'– he reasoned that the angelic creation must logically have taken place at some point before the creation of the stars on the fourth day, and plausibly enough suggested that they were signified by the 'Light' of the first day.[2] Yet Augustine still seemed dissatisfied with his explanation, for rather than trying to resolve the issue, he decided to abandon it:

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1 Augustine, *De ciuitate Dei*, XI.9 ed. Bernhard Dombart and Alfons Kalb, CCSL 47–8 (Turnhout, 1955), p. 329 (citing Ps. 148:1–5 and Dan. 3:57–58).

2 Augustine, *De ciu. Dei*, XI.7, 9, 19–20 (ed. Dombart and Kalb, pp. 327–30, 338–9). See also *De Genesi ad litteram*, IV.32, and *De Genesi ad litteram imperfectus liber*, chs. 3 and 5: ed. Joseph Zycha, CSEL 28/1 (Vienna, 1894), pp. 130–31, 461–4 and 471–6.

> Each person may take it as he likes, for the matter is so profound that it may produce many interpretations which are not incompatible with the rule of faith, to exercise the minds of readers – so long as no-one questions that the holy angels in their lofty seats are not co-eternal with God.[3]

Only a few chapters later, he circled back on himself to offer a contradictory opinion that the angels may have been meant by the 'waters' above the firmament made on the second day, an idea with which he had doubts but not solid refutation.[4] In the next book, Augustine still did not consider that he had settled the matter, and he asked yet again 'if it is correct that the first-created light signifies them; or better, that they are signified by "heaven" in the place where it is written: "In the beginning, God created heaven and earth"'.[5]

Augustine's confusion is worth highlighting because it is symptomatic of the range of opinion within early Christianity. Origen had proclaimed that the angels had been created before the fashioning of the physical world, and his position found widespread acceptance from a variety of major early writers before the fifth century.[6] Other, perhaps less authoritative but certainly influential works such as the apocryphal book of Enoch, however, had placed the angels among the works of the second day of Creation, and this notion was clearly sufficient to give Augustine cause for concern as he struggled to refute that which he doubted.[7] When Gregory the Great asserted, on the basis of Augustine, that the angels had been created on the first day, the matter had apparently still not been conclusively settled to his satisfaction either:

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3 Augustine, *De ciu. Dei*, XI.32 (ed. Dombart and Kalb, p. 352); similarly also XI.33 (p. 353).

4 *Ibid.*, XI.34 (pp. 354–5).

5 *Ibid.*, XII.16 (p. 370).

6 David F. Johnson compiles examples from Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus, Ambrose and Cassian: 'The Fall of Lucifer in *Genesis A* and two Anglo-Latin royal charters', *JEGP* 97 (1998), 500–21, at p. 511.

7 II Enoch 29:3–5, trans. F.I. Andersen, *The Old Testament Pseudepigraphia. Volume 1: Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (London, 1983), pp. 148–9. This notion also continued in certain Jewish traditions: see Avigdor Shinan, 'The angelology of the "Palestinian" targums on the Pentateuch', *Sefarad* 43 (1983), 181–98.

> For because the nature of rational spirits is believed [*creditur*] to have been created first in time, the angels are not undeservedly called 'morning stars'. But if this is so [*Quod si ita est*], then while the earth was invisible and unformed, while darkness was over the abyss, they prefigured by their existence the coming day of the following age through the light of wisdom.[8]

Gregory evidently allowed for Augustine's other possibilities even while he ignored them, although his predecessor's preferred explanation had clearly become somewhat traditional. But Augustine's indecision finally slipped from view with Isidore of Seville, who elided any uncertainty and said only that 'on the first day, by the name of "light", God created the angels'.[9] Isidore also included the creation of the angels in an early 'Sunday List' that was copied and reworked in subsequent liturgical handbooks.[10] These lists, found throughout early medieval Europe, are compilations of the notable events in sacred history that took place on Sundays, thereby establishing the especial holiness of that day. The creation of the universe itself was long held to have taken place on a Sunday; if the creation of the angels was now simultaneous with that first day, then it too took place on a Sunday, and compilers of these lists from Isidore onwards regularly included it as a separate item.[11] Augustine's uncertainty had gradually been elided as subsequent readers of *De ciuitate Dei* accepted the explanation that the bishop of Hippo seemed to have preferred and passed over his suggestions of other possibilities. His unfinished arguments had thus, by the seventh century, become traditional without ever quite being resolved.

We might have expected that when all this came to be known in early Anglo-Saxon England it would have attracted the attention of Bede, whose interests in

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8 Gregory, *Moralia in Iob*, XXVIII.xiv.34, ed. Marcus Adriaen, CCSL 143 (Turnhout, 1979–85), p. 1421.

9 Isidore, *Etym.*, V.39 (ed. Lindsay, i).

10 Isidore, *De ecclesiasticis officiis*, I.25, ed. Christopher M. Lawson, CCSL 113 (Turnhout, 1989), p. 28.

11 On these lists and their development, see Clare A. Lees, 'The "Sunday Letter" and the "Sunday Lists"', *ASE* 14 (1985), 129–51; and Dorothy Haines, *Sunday Observance and the Sunday Letter in Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge, 2010), pp. 59–62. It is perhaps worth noting that the pre-Isidorean list cited by Lees, in a letter of Pope Leo I, does not include refer to the creation of the angels; after Isidore, it is almost universally included.

chronological precision are well known. In fact, the Anglo-Saxon monk dealt with it only twice in his exegetical writings, and in each case with extraordinary brevity: first in his writings on the seven Catholic Epistles, where he simply asserted that 'it should not be doubted that the angels were made among the first created things';[12] and again, almost as briefly, in his commentary on Genesis:

> The higher heaven, which is inaccessible to the sight of all mortals, was not created empty and vacant like the earth, which produced nothing in the way of green shoots or living things in its first creation, because truly as soon as it was made it was filled with its inhabitants; that is, with the most blessed hosts of the angels. They were created in the beginning with heaven and earth.[13]

There was nothing here to reopen the question that had vexed Augustine. Placing the angels on the first day of Creation was by now conventional wisdom. But we ought to note a change of emphasis. The fact that Bede only raised the issue in *In Genesim*, and not in his earlier *De temporum ratione*, reveals that he considered the matter in need of spiritual explanation rather temporal determination.[14] Numbering the angels among the works of the first day might have become entirely traditional, but the reason why Genesis had neglected to mention them had never been explained after it had been abandoned by Augustine and passed over by Gregory. Bede's short statement sought to negate the potentially problematic notion that the book of Genesis did not, in fact, detail the origin of every being in the universe. He explained that the apparent silence was misleading, for the brevity which with scripture treated the creation of heaven in fact reflected the immediacy with which it had come into being. Heaven had not been created as a place to be populated, but that it was in made a single act as a complete society.

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12 Bede, *In epistolas septem catholicas*, IV.iii.8, ed. David Hurst, CCSL 121 (Turnhout, 1983), p. 305.

13 Bede, *In Genesim*, I.i.2, ed. C.W. Jones, CCSL 118A (Turnhout, 1967), p. 4.

14 Bede's only allusion to the issue in *De temporum ratione* is in a quotation from Rufinus' translation of pseudo-Clement's *Recognitiones* (VI.7), which mentioned that God 'made the upper [regions into] a home for the angels, the lower a home for men': *De temporum ratione*, ch. 5, ed. C.W. Jones, CCSL 123B (Turnhout, 1977), p. 286.

Bede was the first Anglo-Saxon writer to comment directly on the angelic creation, and in so doing he immediately resolved a hitherto open question. It is an obvious point to make, but it ought to reinforce our sense that early medieval theologians could and did make creative additions to the traditions which they had inherited. The additions that they made to the tradition may sometimes have been small and incremental, but this was evidently a part of Christian theology that still called for greater definition. Their judgements might become as authoritative as those of their predecessors, and we should note that after Bede, the old worry that the book of Genesis had somehow neglected to mention the creation of the angels seldom resurfaced. In the last years of the eighth century, an Anglo-Saxon priest named Sigewulf posed a series of 281 questions on Genesis to the Northumbrian scholar Alcuin (d. 804). He sought from Alcuin guidance about the book's literal meaning and its coherence as a narrative.[15] As we shall see, Sigewulf asked other questions relating to apparent silences and omissions in the biblical text, but the angelic creation was not one of them. Nor did Alcuin, despite his own familiarity with the foundational patristic texts, seek to complicate matters.[16] Instead, he commented only that the angels had been created 'from nothing', and that they were the beings that inhabited heaven.[17]

Only in the 990s did an Anglo-Saxon writer again revisit the absence of the angelic creation from scripture. In a letter prefacing his translation of Genesis, Ælfric, the

[15] It has been correctly observed that Sigewulf's questions 'have, in fact, more in common with *haggadah*, which attempts to fill in the gaps in the biblical account, than with patristic exegesis, which sets out to interpret the meaning of the story as it stands': J.M. Evans, '*Genesis B* and its background', *Review of English Studies*, n.s. 14 (1963), 1–16, at pp. 3–4.

[16] See further: Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe, 'The use of Bede's writings on Genesis in Alcuin's *Interrogationes*', *Sacris Erudiri* 23 (1978–9), 464–83; Michael Fox, 'Alcuin the exegete: the evidence of the *Quaestiones in Genesim*', in *The Study of the Bible in the Carolingian Era*, ed. Celia Chazelle and Burton van Name Edwards (Turnhout, 2003), pp. 39–60.

[17] Alcuin, *Interrogationes et responsiones in Genesin*, 2 and 20, ed. Migne, *PL* 100, cols. 517, 519. Alcuin's clear statement here that angels, along with heaven, earth, light, air, water and the human soul, are among the 'creations made from nothing' undermines previous suggestions that 'the idea that the material world could result from a creation *ex nihilo* was in fact foreign to the Anglo-Saxon way of thinking': Fabienne L. Michelet, *Creation, Migration, and Conquest: Imaginary Geography and Sense of Space in Old English Literature* (Oxford, 2006), p. 45.

abbot of Cerne Abbas and later abbot of Eynsham (d. *c.* 1010), stated that 'the book is named Genesis, that is "origin book", because it is the first book and it tells of the origin of everything (but it does not tell of the creation of the angels)'.[18] This may well have been a rather personal note of disappointment for, as we shall see, the subject was a particular concern of Ælfric's. This letter was copied as the opening of the illustrated Old English Hexateuch created, possibly at St Augustine's, Canterbury, in the early eleventh century.[19] Immediately following Ælfric's letter, with its note about the silence in Genesis, is a full-page illustration unparalleled in composition and iconography depicting God in a mandorla surrounded by serene angels in the upper register, from which naked or partially clothed beings tumble into the lower register towards a larger figure clasping his own mandorla, held in the jaws of a coiled beast (fig. 5).[20] The illustrations of the Hexateuch manuscript frequently exhibit a dependency on the Old English text that accompanies them and, as Benjamin Withers has observed, this image is in some sense a reaction to Ælfric's words, in that it illustrates the absence of the angels from the text that the prefatory letter has just highlighted.[21] However, this pictorial 'second preface' to the manuscript did not illustrate precisely that which Ælfric's written 'first preface' had observed was lacking, but a related moment in the traditional history of the angels that had, for this early eleventh-century artist and for a number of his contemporaries, subsumed the earlier speculation about angelic origins and gained new significance in late Anglo-Saxon England.

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18 Ælfric, *Preface to Genesis*, ed. Jonathan Wilcox, *Ælfric's Prefaces* (Durham, 1994), p. 117.

19 On the date and place of creation: Benjamin C. Withers, *The Illustrated Old English Hexateuch, Cotton Claudius B.iv: The Frontier of Seeing and Reading in Anglo-Saxon England* (Toronto, 2007), pp. 53–85.

20 London, British Library, Cotton Claudius B.iv, 2r. The unique iconography is the subject of a detailed investigation by Benjamin C. Withers, who compares it also with the other representations of the scene copied into the slightly earlier Anglo-Saxon manuscript, Oxford, Bodleian Library, Junius 11 (s. x^2): 'Satan's mandorla: translation, transformation, and interpretation in late Anglo-Saxon England', in *Insular and Anglo-Saxon: Art and Thought in the Early Medieval Period*, ed. Colum Hourihane (University Park, PA, 2011), pp. 247–69.

21 Benjamin C. Withers, 'A "secret and feverish genesis": the prefaces of the Old English Hexateuch', *The Art Bulletin* 81 (1999), 53–71, at pp. 57–8. On the relationship close between text and image in Claudius B.iv more generally, see further: Rebecca Barnhouse, 'Pictorial responses to textual variations in the Illustrated Old English Hexateuch', *Manuscripta* 41 (1997), 67–87.

FIG. 5. The Fall of Lucifer (London, British Library, Cotton Claudius B.iv, fol. 2r)

THE FALL OF THE ANGELS

The opening image of the Old English Hexateuch depicts the moment when Lucifer, brightest of the angels, had rebelled against God, and was cast out of heaven into the torments of hell, given the name of Satan and deprived of his former angelic nature. Since then, his host – the demons, fallen angels who had followed him into perdition – had contended against humanity out of envy and hatred, inciting evil in the

world. This narrative was already ancient in the eleventh century and had taken many different forms before it became a part of Judeo-Christian cosmology, although the Anglo-Saxons were unaware of the story's long prehistory.[22] Scripture itself gave only the merest hints that there had ever been discord among the angels, and the Church Fathers had done all they could to draw those allusions together into a coherent narrative. The development of the myth in early Christian and patristic thought has been regularly and thoroughly documented elsewhere; what should be noted in relation to Anglo-Saxon England is that it had received authoritative, if not entirely consistent, form in the works of Augustine, whose judgements were accepted and largely repeated by Gregory the Great.[23] It is their version of the story that was taken in its entirety by the earliest Anglo-Saxon writers, and upon which they built.

In their accounts, the fall of the angels provided an explanation for evil on a cosmic, suprahuman level. While the earliest versions of the myth placed the angelic fall after the creation of Adam and Eve, or in some cases after their transgression, the New Testament stated that the Devil 'was a murderer from the beginning' and 'the Devil sins from the beginning'.[24] From this, Augustine reasoned influentially that Lucifer's rebellion and his immediate ejection from heaven must have been instantaneous with his creation, the first act of his will.[25] Adam and Eve's sin in Paradise had thus been to break God's instructions rather than to invent evil; the angelic sin was the elder and the graver. More precisely, Lucifer's sin was pride, and the expression of its calamitous effects by

[22] On the pre-Christian origins and development of the myth, see: J.M. Evans, *'Paradise Lost' and the Genesis Tradition* (Oxford, 1968), pp. 26–58; Virginia Day, 'The Fall of the Angels in Old English Literature' (unpublished PhD thesis: University of Cambridge, 1974), pp. 1–20; Jeffrey Burton Russell, *The Devil: Perceptions of Evil from Antiquity to Primitive Christianity* (Ithaca, NY, 1977), esp. at pp. 174–220.

[23] On the range of opinion in the early Church, see Evans, *Genesis Tradition*, pp. 58–104; Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Satan: The Early Christian Tradition* (Ithaca, NY, 1981).

[24] John 8:44; 1 John 3:8.

[25] Augustine, *De ciu. Dei*, XI.13 (ed. Dombart and Kalb, pp. 333–5); *De Gen. ad lit.*, XI.14–26 (ed. Zycha, pp. 346–59).

Aldhelm, abbot of Sherborne (d. 709), was typical of the mainstream consensus by the seventh century:

> The other seven hosts [i.e. seven of the eight Vices], which I enumerated a little while ago, originate among mortals of earthly stock; but that Monster of which my page is now speaking [i.e. Pride] found its beginning above the high peaks of heaven, when out of the north, the angelic prince and first light-bearer of heaven was eager to raise his own seat, and by his deceit vowed to be like the Lord.[26]

The reason why the angelic fall found a place in Aldhelm's *Carmen de uirginitate* was simply that it demonstrated the pervasive nature of pride as the root of other sins. Armed with that knowledge, it might therefore be better avoided: 'for if it was able to beat the companies of heaven into submission [...] then let [us] fear even more to cut down the arrogant serpent here on earth'.[27]

This was the most common deployment of the myth in early Anglo-Saxon texts: a brief summary with emphasis placed firmly on the moral lesson for the present. At the close of the eighth century, one of Alcuin's letters provided a concise reminder of the story in exactly the same manner as Aldhelm had done a century before:

> Thus fell the first of the angels who, rejoicing in his power, deviated from his great goodness, rejoicing in his power; and he who was more glorious than the rest in his creation, came to be the most wretched of all in his perdition. Pride arose from his mind, then completely overthrew it. For this reason, humility is especially necessary in serving God with obedience...[28]

Mentioning pride without being aware of its angelic origins was impossible. Two earlier Anglo-Latin riddles with the solution *Superbia*, composed by the future archbishops of

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[26] Aldhelm, *CdV*, lines 2730–36 (ed. Ehwald, p. 464). For a similar, and roughly contemporary, emphasis from Canterbury, see *Commentarius augmentatus in Genesim, Exodum et euangelia*, ch. 6, ed. Bernhard Bischoff and Michael Lapidge, *Biblical Commentaries from the Canterbury School of Theodore and Hadrian* (Cambridge, 1994), p. 386.

[27] Aldhelm, *CdV*, lines 2748–51 (ed. Ehwald, p. 464). Daniel Anlezark notes that the association of Lucifer with pride is 'one of the few elements of fall narratives that is actually biblical', being derived from 1 Tim 3:6: 'The fall of the angels in *Solomon and Saturn II*', in *Apocryphal Texts and Traditions in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. Kathryn Powell and Donald Scragg (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 121–33, at p. 124.

[28] Alcuin, *Ep.*, CXXXVII (ed. Dümmler, p. 211); cf. also I and XXXVIII (pp. 18 and 81).

Canterbury and of Mainz – Tatwine (d. 734) and Boniface (d. 754) – both began with allusions to the mythic narrative:

> *Tatwine:* Long ago a distinguished ancestor begot me,
> who, ensnared by evil, lost his realm through me...
>
> *Boniface:* An angelic serpent gave birth to me in the height of heaven,
> viperously and harmfully breathing sins into the heart...[29]

A roughly contemporary sermon by Bede developed the moral dimension further by using it as a demonstration of God's powers of judgement, but deemed the narrative sufficiently well known that he too needed only to evoke rather than describe it:

> the world is accused of the judgement by which the Devil is judged when people presume to resist the will of God, frightened by the example of the archangel who was damned for his pride.[30]

If suggestions that Bede's homiletic audience occasionally included the local laity are correct, these meanings may well have held far wider currency in early England and been considered common knowledge for all Christians.[31] Certainly within the monastery, the narrative became ingrained in the routine of study and contemplation. A prayer in the early ninth-century Book of Cerne praising Christ, quite in passing, for 'putting down the host of angels who resisted with pride' shows just how widespread the story had become.[32] It could be expected across the spectrum of written and spoken texts produced in early Anglo-Saxon monasteries, and the consistently compressed references reveal not only its ubiquity, but also its accumulation of an extremely narrow and stable set of moral meanings. A belief that certain celestial beings had rebelled against God and fallen from perfection no longer required a specialist engagement with exegesis and the

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[29] Tatwine, *Enigma* XXV; Boniface, *De uirtutibus et uitiis*, lines 251–2: ed. Maria De Marco, CCSL 133 (Turnhout, 1968), pp. 192, 325.

[30] Bede, *Hom.* II.11 (ed. Hurst, p. 256); cf. also II.3 (p. 205). For similar allusions, cf. *Epistola ad Ecgberhtum episcopum*, ed. Plummer, *BOH*, i, 422; *In epist. sept. cath.*, III.ii.4 (ed. Hurst, p. 270); and *In Lucae euangelium expositio*, III.x.18, ed. David Hurst, CCSL 120 (Turnhout, 1960), p. 218.

[31] See Alan Thacker, 'Monks, preaching and pastoral care in early Anglo-Saxon England', in *Pastoral Care before the Parish*, ed. John Blair and Richard Sharpe (Leicester, 1992), pp. 137–70, at pp. 140–42.

[32] Book of Cerne, 68r (ed. Kuypers, pp. 135–6 [no. 37]).

amassing of biblical fragments. Undeveloped allusions were all that was necessary to invoke a story as well known as that of Eden, and a once speculative theology was now deeply embedded within the cosmological framework of early Anglo-Saxon England.

Nevertheless, this tendency towards allusion may have left the angelic fall rather untethered from the greater narrative of salvation history. Its details and meaning were well known, as an origin-story of the Devil and an explanation for evil, but one might rightly wonder how this immediate and eternal condemnation of the first sinner fitted with the notion of a benevolent Creator – and, moreover, why his judgement was not more clearly laid out in scripture, where it might more easily provide a warning to humankind. These were the problems which nagged at Sigewulf the priest as he posed his 281 questions on Genesis to Alcuin. After asking about God's rest on the seventh day and about the number of God's creatures which possess rational natures, Sigewulf's third question was: 'Why is the angelic sin hidden by silence in Genesis, and that of man made known?'[33] He had a list of other concerns relating to the angelic rebellion, and continued by asking Alcuin why the sin of the angels was not redeemable, as man's was; where the Devil's evil will came from; and what the essence of evil itself is.[34] That is to say that Sigewulf did *not* ask what Lucifer's sin was and why it deserved punishment, nor anything about the sequence of events that led to his expulsion and how this came to be known if it was not to be found in the biblical text. Instead, his questions sought to know why such a well-known, and apparently fundamental, event was absent from its proper place in the chronology of Creation, and whether evil came from within Lucifer or from some external – and hence pre-existing – source. He sought from Alcuin reassurance about the completeness and correctness of the biblical account, and an explanation of

[33] Alcuin, *Int.* 3, ed. Migne, *PL* 100, col. 517.
[34] *Ibid.*, 4, 93–4 (cols. 517, 526).

'why the sin of the angels was incurable, and that of man was curable' that would not destabilize the entire notion of salvation.[35]

It does not seem improbable that Sigewulf represents a norm. His question about the ultimate cause of the Devil's sin suggests that his knowledge came from an encounter with the story *as* story, rather than in the exegesis of the Fathers, who consistently coupled with an explanation of how evil could arise in a creature made entirely good.[36] Schooled in an environment where the narrative of Lucifer's fall was more often repeated as an isolated *exemplum* against the sin of pride rather than as an integral part of the progression of salvation history, it is easy to appreciate how Sigewulf's uncertainties had arisen.

NARRATIVE CONNECTIONS: AUGUSTINIAN DOCTRINE AND OLD ENGLISH VERSE

What could happen when the subject of the angelic fall passed out of its original exegetical setting and was handled instead simply as a narrative is revealed in the Old English poem known as *Genesis A*. In common with almost all Old English poetry, its original date of composition is not self-evident. The extant manuscript witness (Oxford, Bodleian Library, Junius 11) dates from the later tenth century, and by then the shape of the original Old English poem had been changed, enlarged by an interpolation derived from a ninth-century Old Saxon poem (the name *Genesis B* now refers to the Old English translation of this Old Saxon verse) and subjected to other revisions. It has long been noted, however, that *Genesis A* shares otherwise unattested vocabulary with *Beowulf*, as well as similarities in metre and style which suggest some degree of common origin.[37]

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35 *Ibid.*, 4 (col. 517).

36 For example: Augustine, *De ciu. Dei*, XI.13 (ed. Dombart and Kalb, pp. 333–5); *De Gen. ad lit.*, XI.20–21 (ed. Zycha, pp. 352–3); Gregory, *Mor. in Iob*, XXXII.xxiii.47–9 (ed. Adriaen, pp. 1665–7); Isidore, *Etym.*, VIII.xi.19 (ed. Lindsay, i).

37 Shared vocabulary was first noted by Robert J. Menner, 'The date and dialect of *Genesis A* 852–2936 (Part III)', *Anglia* 70 (1951), 285–94, at pp. 286–9. Menner's evidence is qualified and extended by

The dating of *Beowulf* is itself infamously contentious, but Michael Lapidge has provided persuasive reasons to think that an eighth-century archetype underlies the sole surviving manuscript copy of the poem.[38] This cannot firmly establish a date for *Genesis A*, but as its most recent editor has rightly stated: 'Any dating of *Genesis A* must be on a sliding scale, but *Genesis A* and *Beowulf* must slide together'.[39] Dating *Genesis A* to the early part of the eighth century seems therefore the most probable judgement – but fortunately, the poem's interest for our present purposes lies less in when it was written, as how it was written.

Genesis A is a versification of its scriptural namesake, running from Creation to the sacrifice of Isaac. Yet the poet was not slavishly dependent on the biblical account, for he opened his work with the extrabiblical story of Lucifer's rebellion. Its details are vivid, but largely familiar: 'the chief of the angels fell into error from pride', desiring to rule the northern part of with his followers.[40] Fashioning hell as a punishment and a prison, God 'cast the presumptuous race of angels from the heavens', whereby peace was returned to heaven and the rebels subjected to eternal torment.[41] In what follows, however, the *Genesis A*-poet placed a wholly different emphasis on the importance of these events than did Aldhelm, Bede or Alcuin. The ejection of the rebels had left their shining thrones empty, and for that reason:

> our Lord then pondered with his thoughts, how he might people that glorious creation again, its dwellings and its heaven-bright thrones, with a better company now that the

Dennis Cronan, 'Poetic words, conservatism and the dating of Old English poetry', *ASE* 33 (2004), 23–50, esp. at pp. 27–30. Metrical similarities are discussed by R.D. Fulk, *A History of Old English Meter* (Philadelphia, 1992), with a summary at pp. 348–51.

38 Michael Lapidge, 'The archetype of *Beowulf*', *ASE* 29 (2000), 5–41. Lapidge's argument has not been universally accepted: the most serious criticisms are offered by E.G. Stanley, 'Paleographical and textual deep waters: <a> for <u> and <u> for <a>, <d> for <ð> and <ð> for <d> in Old English', *ANQ: A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes and Reviews* 15 (2002), 64–72. Stanley's counter-argument is itself rebutted, however, by George Clark, 'The date of *Beowulf* and the Arundel Psalter gloss', *Modern Philology* 106 (2009), 677–85.

39 A.N. Doane, *'Genesis A': A New Edition* (Madison, WI, 1978), p. 37.

40 On the patristic authorities behind the connection of the northern part of heaven with Lucifer's rebellion, see Paul Salmon, 'The site of Lucifer's throne', *Anglia* 81 (1963), 118–123.

41 *Genesis A*, lines 9–91 (ed. Doane, pp. 109–11).

> boastful ones had given them up, high in the heavens. And so with mighty powers, holy God willed that under the span of the skies, an earth and a sky and a wide sea should be made for them, earthly creatures in place of those evil ones which, fallen, he had sent from his protection.[42]

The poet's final words on the angelic fall are subtly, but importantly, different to the shape of the early English tradition. In concluding this part of his verse, the poet made the event more than a mere prologue to biblical Creation, and of greater significance than simply being the first punishment for the first crime: it is also the event that directly led to the fashioning of the physical world and of humankind. Here, human beings were created specifically to resettle the empty thrones of heaven. The importance of the angelic fall in the cosmological framework is, therefore, vastly increased. Put simply: if the angels had not fallen, the creation of humanity would not have been necessary. As a result, the vision of Creation in *Genesis A* is not the unfolding of a preconceived design, but subject to a cause-and-effect series of events.

The crucial question is whether this shifted emphasis reveals a conscious theological position on Creation, and man's place within it, that is genuinely different from that of other early Anglo-Saxon writers, or whether the poet was unaware of the implications of his words. Until relatively recently, critics had failed to note *Genesis A*'s theological peculiarity, noting only the regularity with which retellings of the angelic fall appear in Anglo-Saxon texts but overlooking its new contours.[43] David Johnson first drew attention to the poem's particular view of Creation, and noted its similarities with a line of thought developed by Origen that had gained support in the fourth century: that matter itself was created in response to the angelic fall, so that the material world and its

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[42] *Ibid.*, lines 92–102 (p. 111).

[43] A.N. Doane, for example, characterizes the section on the angelic creation and fall in *Genesis A* as simply 'part of the hexameral prelude to the verse-by-verse running commentary on the text proper': *The Saxon Genesis: An Edition of the West Saxon 'Genesis B' and the Old Saxon Vatican 'Genesis'* (Madison, WI, 1991), p. 116. Daniel Anlezark still considers the poet to be simply 'draw[ing] on a medieval theological commonplace': *Old Testament Narratives* (Cambridge, MA, 2011), p. ix.

inhabitants would become God's perpetual humiliation of Lucifer and his thwarted attempt to best his maker. Johnson thought the similarity worth highlighting, but ultimately accidental.[44] Certainly, the crucial element of *Genesis A*'s version of the myth is the idea that mankind will replace the depleted ranks of heavens; and in that respect its theological position owes more to a strand of Augustinian thought which underwent a curious transformation in the hands of early medieval writers.

The idea that mankind would be united with the angels in the future had explicit biblical foundation. Christ had said that 'when they rise again from the dead, they shall neither marry, nor be married, but are as the angels in heaven'.[45] Combining this revelation of the future with the idea of a heavenly host that had lost some of its number through sin, Augustine was first to explain this union of man and angels as a restoration of original perfection.[46] In the *Enchiridion*, he asserted that the angels currently in heaven 'know how great a number the completeness of that city awaits as a supplement from the human race'.[47] Later, in *De ciuitate Dei*, he related this more directly to the angelic fall, stating that God 'is assembling a people so great that he may then supplement and restore the part from which the angels fell'.[48] He remained wary, however, both of assigning the creation and fall of the angels to a time before the world, of implying the sort of cause-and-effect vision of Creation espoused by the followers of

[44] Johnson, 'Fall of Lucifer', pp. 511–12. On Origen's initial formulation of these ideas, see Russell, *Satan*, p. 130. The idea that the material world was made as a retort to Lucifer is expressed in Ambrosiaster, *Quaestiones ueteris et noui testimenti*, II.2, ed. Alexander Souter, CSEL 50 (Vienna, 1908), pp. 17–18.

[45] Mark 12:25; cf. Luke 20:34–36; Matt. 22:29–30. On this, see further below, pp. 71–3.

[46] Dorothy Haines notes that 'attempts to find antecedents to Augustine's doctrine of replacement have been unsuccessful': 'Vacancies in heaven: the doctrine of replacement and *Genesis A*', *Notes and Queries* 44 (1997), 150–54, at p. 151, n. 2. Brian E. Daley observes that Augustine appears to have developed this idea only late in his career, since it is not attested in his earlier works: *The Hope of the Early Church: A Handbook of Patristic Eschatology* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 146–7.

[47] Augustine, *Enchiridion ad Laurentium de fide et spe et caritate*, XVI.62, ed. E. Evans, CCSL 46 (Turnhout, 1964), p. 82.

[48] Augustine, *De ciu. Dei*, xxii, 1 (ed. Dombart and Kalb, p. 807).

Origen's theology. He was insistent throughout his formulation of this so-called 'replacement doctrine' that 'all is simultaneous in the creative act of God'.[49]

Augustine's replacement doctrine proved popular with later writers. In the 570s, Martin of Braga wrote in his *De correctione rusticorum*, a work inspired by and modelled after Augustine's writings, that God 'placed [man] in Paradise, and said to him that, if he kept the Lord's command, he would succeed to that heavenly place without death from which the angels fell; if he neglected God's command, he would die a death'.[50] This was not the reason for the creation of the material universe, however, for God had made heaven and earth simultaneously in the beginning.[51] Martin's contemporary, Gregory the Great, was similarly explicit that the two *mundi* had been jointly conceived in the Word: God 'made two creations to contemplate himself, that is the angelic and the human'.[52] The latter was not brought into being to correct the former; they were complementary creations that were to jointly inherit the kingdom of heaven. Gregory connected this, in an influential piece of exegetical creativity, with Christ's parable about a woman who possessed ten silver coins, one of which was lost and then found again:

> The Lord created the nature of angels and humans so that they might come to know him. [...] The woman had ten silver coins, because there are nine ranks of angels; but so that the number of the elect would be complete, man was created as the tenth – which, after its crime, was not lost by its Creator because, by eternal wisdom, he restored it.[53]

For Gregory, it was thus not the purpose of humanity to restore the angels; it was instead

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[49] Augustine, *De Gen. ad litt.*, IV.35 (ed. Zycha, p. 136); *De ciu. Dei*, XI.32 (ed. Dombart and Kalb, pp. 351–2). On the Origenist and Augustinian positions, see further Haines, 'Vacancies in heaven', p. 151; Day, 'Fall of the Angels', pp. 23–30.

[50] Martin, *De correctione rusticorum*, ch. 4, ed. Claude W. Barlow, *Martini episcopi Bracarensis: opera omnia* (New Haven, CT, 1950), p. 185; the influence of Augustine is discussed at pp. 163–4.

[51] *Ibid.*, ch. 3 (p. 184).

[52] Gregory, *Mor. in Iob*, IV.iii.8 (ed. Adriaen, p. 168).

[53] Gregory, *Hom. in euang.*, XXXIV (ed. Étaix, pp. 304–5). Unlike Augustine, Gregory went on to assert that 'as many of the human race ascend to there as there were chosen angels who happened to remain there'; a view later shared by Ælfric, *CH*, I.2 and 14, (ed. Clemoes, pp. 192 and 295).

Christ who restored both heaven and earth. Augustine had cited Ephesians 1:10 on this matter – 'all things are gathered together in one in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth' – and Gregory followed after in stating that a double restoration was worked through Christ: 'the Mediator came to restore, so that, having redeemed the human race, he might repair these losses of angels'.[54]

In its early expression from the fourth to sixth centuries, replacement doctrine was thus conceived as a reward effected through Christ. It was not, as *Genesis A* made it, the fundamental reason for human existence. But the distinction was a subtle one, and it could be easily overlooked. In the early eighth century, Martin's *De correctione rusticorum* was reworked by Pirmin of Reichenau (d. 753) in his *Scarapsus*. Pirmin repeated Martin's overview of angelic origins almost verbatim, but with a tiny change. Martin had said that, when God made man from the earth, 'he said to him that [*et dixit ei ut*] if he kept the Lord's command, he would inherit that place in heaven without death, from which the rebel angels had fallen'. Pirmin followed closely after, but removed a few words from his source. They had a profound effect on his message: 'God formed man from the mud of the earth, so that [*ut*], if he kept the Lord's command, he would succeed to that heavenly place'.[55] The alteration was minute, perhaps simply an accidental product of contraction. But it changed what was originally a promise made to Adam into a *reason* for his creation, showing how God had responded to the circumstances of the angels' revolt. In Pirmin's version, the fall of the angels and the creation of humanity were more than concurrent: they were causally connected. Later, in the mid-ninth century, Gregory's reading of the ten silver coins was also reworked

[54] Augustine, *Enchiridion*, XVI.62 (ed. Evans, p. 82); Gregory, *Mor. in Iob*, XXXI.xlix.99 (ed. Adriaen, pp. 1618–19).

[55] Martin, *De correctione rusticorum*, ch. 4 (ed. Barlow, p. 185) ; Pirmin, *Scarapsus*, ch. 3, ed. Gallus Jecker, *Die Heimat des Hl. Pirmin des Apostels der Alamannen* (Münster, 1927), p. 35.

to similar effect. Following the pope's explanation of the parable, Haimo of Auxerre (d. *c*. 855) explained that:

> The woman had ten silver coins, because he [God] created the rational creatures of men and angels. There are nine orders of angels [...] The tenth fell through pride. But so the number of the elect might be filled up, man was created to restore the tenth. We believe that as great a multitude will ascend from the faithful souls to heaven as there were angels that remained...[56]

This was a more conscious change to his source than Pirmin had made to the words of Martin of Braga, but it had the same effect. In Haimo's revision of Gregory, the parable's tenth coin which was lost and then found again was not a comment on the state of humanity, redeemed from original sin, but a reflection of the greater cosmic order. There had been another rank of angels whose loss mankind was created specifically to correct.

For Pirmin and Haimo – as for the anonymous poet of *Genesis A*, who probably lived and worked in the century or so between them – the essential narrative of an angelic fall and the more specific doctrine of replacement were now uncontroversial parts of the Christian tradition. They were, moreover, completely inseparable. But the act of narrating the angels' expulsion, knowing how it was going to be redressed in the future, created a strain. Away from the careful shoring of abstract theology erected by Augustine and Gregory, the process of fitting replacement doctrine into a narrative framework was in constant danger of presenting a causal vision of Creation, with mankind explained as God's remedy to the actions of the angels. Those telling the story could fall into this distinctly un-Augustinian position by different means. Pirmin accidentally implied it simply by removing a few words from Martin of Braga's writings, turning what was originally God's promise to Adam into God's correction of plans thrown askew by

[56] Haimo, *Homiliae de tempore*, CXIV, ed. Migne, *PL* 118, col. 613. In Migne's edition, the homilies are wrongly attributed to Haimo of Halberstadt, but see Henri Barré, *Les homéliaires carolingiens de l'école d'Auxerre. Authenticité, inventaire, tableaux comparatifs, initia* (Vatican City, 1962).

Lucifer. Haimo slipped more knowingly into making the same causal connections, through his efforts to reconcile the story of Lucifer's fall, replacement doctrine and the parable of the ten coins – three subjects by now traditionally related to the angels, but the combination of which led Haimo briefly to deny the unity of God's creative act, because the number of elect needed reinforcements.

In Anglo-Saxon England, the *Genesis A*-poet deemed the matter of the angels' rebellion of such importance that a verse retelling of the events of Creation and mankind's own fall would be incomplete without it. Having opened his poem with it, he sought a natural link between the end of the angelic narrative and the beginning of the human. He did so by pausing for a moment on God, the rebels punished but the material world not yet in existence. Lingering on God and his intentions at this juncture placed the poet on theologically thin ice. A recent series of cognitive studies, with profound implications for historians reconstructing past beliefs from written records, has investigated the extent to which stories told about God, or gods, narrate the actions of omniscient and omnipotent beings in anthropomorphic terms. While individuals might, when questioned abstractly about their beliefs, profess that God's actions are not bounded by time, causality or imperfect knowledge, nevertheless the demands of creating a coherent narrative of sequential events result in them telling stories which go against their stated beliefs, reducing the deity to a limited, anthropomorphized figure.[57] This appears to have happened regularly in Old English narrations of the angelic fall, which frequently describe God's ejection of the rebel angels in highly physical terms, often

[57] See further Justin L. Barrett and Frank C. Keil, 'Conceptualizing a nonnatural entity: anthropomorphism in God concepts', *Cognitive Psychology* 31 (1996), 219–47; Justin L. Barrett, 'Cognitive constraints on Hindu concepts of the divine', *Journal of the Scientific Study of Religion* 37 (1998), 608–19.

using the verb *scufan* to present God literally 'shoving' Lucifer's host out of his realm.[58] *Genesis A* is no exception:

> He had a stern mind, grimly provoked; in anger, he grabbed them with hostile hands and broke them in his grasp, wrathful in mind; he cut off his adversaries from their homeland, from the glorious dwellings. Then our Creator shoved out and cut off [*Sceof þa and scyrede*] the presumptuous race of angels, the faithless host.[59]

In the act of narration, the unity and perfection of God's knowledge disappears; his intentions become to 'avenge' (*gewræcan*) himself, to react and to repay. As we saw earlier with Sigewulf, the *Genesis A*-poet knew the story of the angels' rebellion as a story, shorn of the careful qualifications with which patristic theology had once encased it, and a story it remained as he retold it. As his anthropomorphized deity paused and thought his thoughts (*þeahtode mod-geþonce*) after the angels' expulsion, the poet drew on his knowledge of Augustinian replacement doctrine which assured an eventual place for humanity amongst the angels. It was a natural connection to make, but by placing it within the mind of God at this moment in Creation, the poet let the need for dramatic and narrative continuity imply a theological position that he may well not have professed under other circumstances.

If the altered conception of the relationship between the celestial and earthly creations expressed in *Genesis A* had remained its own peculiarity, all this would be of limited interest. As has been rightly pointed out in different context, there is a 'tendency to treat every variation in mythic narratives as equally significant' and to forget that 'if

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[58] With detailed discussion: Catherine Brown Tkacz, 'Heaven and fallen angels in Old English', in *The Devil, Heresy and Witchcraft in the Middle Ages: Essays in Honor of Jeffrey B. Russell*, ed. Alberto Ferreiro (Leiden, 1998), pp. 327–44. On other types of anthropomorphic language relating to the fall of the angels, possibly derived from a liturgical source, see also Thomas D. Hill, 'When God blew Satan out of heaven: the motif of exsufflation in *Vercelli Homily XIX* and later English literature', *LSE*, n.s. 16 (1985), 132–41.

[59] *Genesis A*, lines 60b–67a (ed. Doane, p. 110). The manuscript and Doane's edition read 'Sceop' in place of 'Sceof', but cf. George Philip Krapp, *The Junius Manuscript* (New York, 1931), p. 162; the emendation is maintained by the Dictionary of Old English. An analogous use of *scufan* in relation to God later in the poem similarly anthropomorphizes the mechanics of divine inspiration: see lines 2813b–2815a (ed. Doane, p. 217).

mythology is like a language, it may still contain spelling mistakes'.[60] The importance of the theological statements made in *Genesis A*, whenever exactly they were written, is that they would go on to become bound up with a particular instance of political ideology, whereby they would justify contemporary events and go on to shake the cosmological certainties of one of the most influential churchmen of tenth-century England.

IDEOLOGY, UNCERTAINTY AND ECCLESIASTICAL POLITICS

In 966, a royal charter issued by King Edgar 'refounding' the New Minster at Winchester opened with a proem which retold the story of the creation and fall of the angels. The account was brief, including only the basic outline of events: the angels were created in beauty from nothing but one of them, 'disdaining to serve the Creator of the universe', was cast into the flames of the abyss for all eternity, implanting in Creation 'the pattern of all crime'. The myth was evidently as familiar during Edgar's reign as it had ever been, and the charter sought to evoke rather than to establish. What follows, however, shares nothing with the allusive *exempla* of early Anglo-Saxon England that used the story as a warning against pride. Instead it entirely parallels the version of the story from *Genesis A*:

> WHY HE FOUNDED MAN AND WHAT HE ENTRUSTED TO HIM.
> When the seat of the heavens had been emptied and the filth of swollen arrogance expelled, the highest Judge of all goodness, not suffering the bright thrones of the heavens to be idle without an inhabitant [and] having formed diverse species of things from inform matter, at length, shaping him from clay, formed man to his likeness with the breath of life. Subjecting all created things on the surface of the whole universe to him, he subjected him and his descendants to himself, in order that his posterity, which was to follow, should supply the number of the angels of heaven driven down from their thrones by swelling pride.[61]

[60] Richard Buxton, *Imaginary Greece: The Contexts of Mythology* (Cambridge, 1994), p. 1.

[61] 'New Minster Refoundation Charter' (S 745), ch. 1, ed. Alexander R. Rumble, *Property and Piety in Early Medieval Winchester: Documents Relating to the Topography of the Anglo-Saxon and Norman City and its Minsters* (Oxford, 2002), p. 75.

The similarities between this and *Genesis A* are hard to miss. The two texts do not exhibit particular similarities of phrasing which would suggest a direct dependency of the charter upon the poem, although demonstrating such a link between Old English verse and Latin prose is a matter of relative rather than absolute proofs.[62] The charter's draftsman is unlikely to have set about his task with a copy of *Genesis A* before him. But *Genesis A* may stand as a representative of the *kind* of work that had inspired the charter, for some narrative account of Creation, containing the same particular account of replacement doctrine, seems to have achieved a degree of currency in oral or written form by the mid-tenth century. A fleeting reference in a vernacular sermon for the feast of the Ascension to 'the holy seat from which the Devil had previously been cast out because of his pride' parallels both *Genesis A* and the 'New Minster Refoundation Charter' in describing Lucifer's lost realm in terms of empty thrones – a detail for which no patristic or exegetical precursors have been identified.[63] The sermon belongs to the collection known as the Blickling Homilies, a group of anonymous Old English sermons which seems to have been assembled in the year 971.[64] Its relevance for our present purposes is that it the homilist, like the charter's draftsman, appears to have known a form of the myth of the angelic fall which was unlike the standard early *exempla* against pride, but more akin to the extended narration in *Genesis A,* with the myth set more fully into an hexameral narrative complete with incidental details of vacant heavenly thrones. Circulating in

[62] Cf. Johnson, 'Fall of Lucifer', pp. 518–19, concluding that the similarity could equally be owed to a common source, which 'could be a catechetical narrative concerning creation; it could conceivably be an elaborated liturgical text of some sort; or it could be as textually amorphous as an Anglo-Saxon preaching tradition'.

[63] Blickling XI (ed. Kelly, p. 86). Haines comments on the idea's 'distinctly Anglo-Saxon origins': 'Vacancies in heaven', pp. 153–4.

[64] Blickling XI contains a reference to the lapse of 971 years of the sixth age of the world (ed. Kelly, p. 82), which would place either the individual homily or the entire collection to the year 971. General consensus favours the latter explanation, but there is no independent evidence that can be brought to bear on the matter. Even were this conclusively settled as the date of the compilation, the individual homilies could have been written at any point prior to that, and not necessarily contemporaneously. See variously Robert J. Menner, 'The Anglian vocabulary of the Blickling Homilies', in *Philologica: The Malone Anniversary Studies*, ed. Thomas A. Kirby and Henry Bosley Woolf (Baltimore, MD, 1949), pp. 56–64, esp. at p. 63; Milton McC. Gatch, 'The unknowable audience of the Blickling Homilies', *ASE* 18 (1989), 99–115, at p. 114.

extended form, the popularity of the myth in extended narrative form may well, therefore, have been at a high point by the time King Edgar issued his charter.

It would be wrong to think that this was an idle rendition of cosmology, in the way that allusions to the first events of Creation had occasionally prefaced the charters issued by previous tenth-century rulers.[65] The 'Refoundation Charter' of 966 is strikingly atypical in form, function and context, being an illustrated book rather than a true charter, furnished with a lavish frontispiece and written throughout in gold letters. The direct hand of Æthelwold, bishop of Winchester (d. 984), in its composition has been established by several previous scholars.[66] It was created as a public statement of ideology rather than as a mere record of property ownership, and its vastly extended proem addresses contemporary politics rather than the norms of diplomatic form.[67] The context of its production is the violent establishment of the Benedictine reform movement at Winchester. In 964, at Æthelwold's instigation, the Old and New Minsters were emptied of their former occupants by the forceful ejection of the existing clerical communities and their replacement with Benedictine monks. The justification for this unprecedented event was the alleged laxity and sinfulness of the clerics' unregulated life.[68] A stream of texts written by those associated with 'reformed' Winchester returned time and again to this justification for their presence: thirty years after the event, Wulfstan the Cantor, who had been only an infant when the clerics were expelled from

65 Cf. S 221, 461, 629, 723.

66 Dorothy Whitelock, 'The authorship of the account of King Edgar's establishment of the monasteries', in *Philological Essays: Studies in Old and Middle English Language and Literature in Honour of Herbert Dean Meritt*, ed. J.L. Rosier (The Hague, 1970), pp. 125–36; Michael Lapidge, 'Æthelwold as scholar and teacher', in *Bishop Æthelwold: His Career and Influence*, ed. Barbara Yorke (Woodbridge, 1988), pp. 89–117, at pp. 95–6; Rumble, *Property and Piety*, pp. 65–8.

67 For other ways in which ideology dictated the charter's form, see also Catherine A.M. Clarke, *Literary Landscapes and the Idea of England, 700–1400* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 61–4; and Julia Barrow, 'The ideology of the tenth-century English Benedictine "reform"', in *Challenging the Boundaries of Medieval History: The Legacy of Timothy Reuter*, ed. Patricia Skinner (Turnhout, 2009), pp. 141–54, at p. 153.

68 *ASC* 964 AEF; Wulfstan of Winchester, *Væthel*, chs. 18 and 20 (ed. Lapidge and Winterbottom, pp. 32 and 36).

his eventual monastic home, was still seeking to remind his readers of the 'vices, evil deserts and impious acts' of the old Winchester clerics.[69]

Against this backdrop, the story of Lucifer's crime and punishment gained a new relevance that was used to full effect in the 'Refoundation Charter'. While the proem continues to describe the life and expulsion of Adam and Eve and the Flood, thus establishing a clear pattern of just punishments before recounting how Edgar 'expelled the crowds of depraved canons from the various monasteries of our kingdom', the opening account of the angelic fall was its most rhetorically potent passage. Recurring phrases forge a link between the angels who had once 'made assumptions with insolent arrogance' (*contumaci arrogans fastu*), only to find their 'the filth of their bloated arrogance cast out' (*eliminata tumidi fastus spurcitia*), with 'the overthrown clerics who glorify in the arrogance of presumption' (*fastu superbientes arrogantiae*) and whose ejection from the New Minster 'cleansed it of the filth [*spurcitias*] of sins'.[70] The same language would in fact be reused again in reference to the clerical life in a variety of documents produced by Æthelwold and his circle, including even the *Regularis concordia* of *c.* 970, the document in which the bishop laid out his prescriptions for the religious life in England.[71]

David Johnson first noted the suitability of the theme of the proem in the document that consolidated the violent 'refoundation' of the religious life in Winchester,

[69] Wulfstan of Winchester, *Narratio*, II.164–74 (ed. Lapidge, p. 420); expanding on Lantfred, *Translatio*, ch. 1 (ed. Lapidge, p. 260). On the evidence for the date of Wulfstan's birth in *c.* 960 and subsequent life, see Lapidge, *Cult*, pp. 337–9.

[70] 'New Minster Refoundation Charter', chs. 1, 6, 9–10 (ed. Rumble, pp. 75, 80, 83–4).

[71] Cf. 'Confirmation of the Endowment of the Old Minster', chs. 2 and 14, ed. Rumble, *Property and Piety*, pp. 111 and 131–2; *RegConc*, ch. 2 (ed. Kornexl, p. 2). On this language, see also Rumble, *Property and Piety*, p. 75, n. 11.

and others have concurred with his reading.[72] As a single document, its self-conscious use of the myth to further an ideological agenda attests, at the least, to the overwhelmingly confident self-image of the bishop and his circle. It expressed the Benedictine reformers' agenda in its most extended and polemical form, making King Edgar the present-day instrument of God's judgement, uprooting and expelling the sinful in the pattern established since the beginning of time. There was more to this than a simple literary flourish, for the politically-charged rendition of Christian myth did not remain locked within its pages. The document's lavish presentation suggests its production as a display piece, and a rubric preceding a missing leaf reveals that the 'Refoundation Charter' originally contained instructions for 'How often, and why, this privilege should be read to the brothers [of the New Minster] in the course of the year'.[73] The 'Refoundation Charter' was made to be repeated, and thereby to continue to justify the clerics' expulsion and their rightful replacement with a more virtuous host. It was a deliberate and public piece of ideological self-promotion meant for regular repetition at Winchester – and on the basis of subsequent documents which emerged from the community in the following years, there is good reason to think that this was happening according to Æthelwold's wishes.

A diploma of King Æthelred issued in 984, granting estates in Oxfordshire to his *scriptor*, Ælfwine, but produced by a draftsman either schooled at or working from Winchester, also opened its proem with an account of the early history of the angels.[74] It

[72] Johnson, 'Fall of Lucifer', pp. 520–21; Mercedes Salvador, 'Architectural metaphors and Christological imagery in the Advent Lyrics: Benedictine propaganda in the Exeter Book?', in *Conversion and Colonization in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. Catherine E. Karkov and Nicholas Howe (Tempe, AZ, 2006), pp. 169–211, at pp. 181–2; Barrow, 'Ideology of "reform"', pp. 148–50.

[73] 'New Minster Refoundation Charter', ch. 22 (ed. Rumble, p. 92); see also Rumble, *Property and Piety*, pp. 65 and 92, n. 120.

[74] On royal diplomas associated with the Winchester *scriptorium*, and the problems arising from them, see Simon Keynes, *The Diplomas of King Æthelred 'the Unready', 978–1016* (Cambridge, 1980), pp. 19–28; further on this document, see pp. 135–6.

presented the narrative of their creation and fall in exactly the same way as had the earlier 'Refoundation Charter':

> Before the creation of the world, [our Lord] wondrously established ten hosts of angels, and after the tenth had fallen through pride from the north into the abyss with Lucifer, he mercifully conserved nine in their stability. And wanting to fill up the tenth order, he afterwards made heaven and earth, [and] formed man from the mud of the earth. And serpentine envy led the first-created man into death, and all the human race after him. And when God in his immeasurable mercy perceived this, he felt [man's] pain, and sending his only son, begotten from the undefiled Virgin Mary, he affectionately redeemed all the human race through death on the cross.[75]

There were no barbs directed at disinherited clerics here, only an explanation of sin and the need for redemption: a popular theme for proems of the tenth and eleventh centuries.[76] But the formulae used in other charters did not make the connection between the loss of the angels and the creation of man specifically to replace them. The way that the theme is handled by diploma of 984 and its Winchester draftsman thus recalls the emphasis of the 'Refoundation Charter', and reveals that the particular version of the story promoted by the New Minster had clearly not been forgotten. It might be that the moment when the charter was issued had contributed to its draftsman's choice of subject matter, for the grant lacks the signature of any bishop of Winchester among the witnesses, and was probably therefore made shortly after the death of Bishop Æthelwold on 1 August but before the consecration of his successor, Ælfheah, on 19 October.[77] This was a potentially uncertain moment for the Benedictine community, for the vigorous reforming bishop who had been instrumental in their ascendancy could no longer assist them, and their continued occupation of the site may have seemed precarious as a result. We might speculate that reassertions of the founding charter's angelic justifications for the monastic presence became all the more necessary in those uncertain months, and that

[75] S 853.
[76] See Keynes, *Diplomas of King Æthelred*, p. 72.
[77] *Ibid.*, p. 243.

this made the topic more naturally suggest itself to the mind a Winchester draftsman as he searched for a suitably moralizing theme for his proem.

Certainly, only a few years afterwards, another self-proclaimed 'student of Winchester', Ælfric of Eynsham, penned the first of what would become a series of treatments of the angelic creation and fall.[78] Over two decades, he would return to the topic in his *Exameron*, in letters to the laymen Sigeweard and Wulfgeat, and the tract *De creatore et creaturae*, and allude to it more sparingly in several other works.[79] A homily on Creation written *c.* 989 was his first, and ultimately his most extended, discussion of angelic history. Its details share much with the Winchester charters of 966 and 984. God created ten hosts of angels (*tyn engla werod*) and Lucifer, the prince of the tenth, grew proud at his beautiful form and thought that he could become God's equal. The tenth order bowed to Lucifer's intentions, but their desired rebellion was known to their Creator, who changed their forms from fair to loathsome, created hell for them and let them 'fall into the eternal fire that was prepared for them for their pride'. God then sought a way to make good the loss in heaven, 'and said that he would make man of earth, so that earthly man should prosper, and merit with meekness the dwellings in the kingdom of heaven which the Devil had forfeited'.[80]

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[78] For Ælfric's explicit identification of himself as 'Wintoniensis alumnus' or 'alumnus Æthelwoldi', see Ælfric, *Vita S. Æthelwoldi*, ch. 1, ed. Lapidge and Winterbottom, *Life of Æthelwold*, p. 71; *CH* I, preface (ed. Clemoes, pp. 173–4); cf. also *Grammar*, preface, ed. Julius Zupitza, *Ælfrics Grammatik und Glossar* (Berlin, 1880), p. 1; and *Letter to the Monks of Eynsham*, ch. 1, ed. Christopher A. Jones, *Ælfric's Letter to the Monks of Eynsham* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 110. See Wilcox, *Ælfric's Prefaces*, pp. 7–9; and Christopher A. Jones, 'Ælfric and the limits of the "Benedictine reform"', in *A Companion to Ælfric*, ed. Hugh Magennis and Mary Swan (Leiden, 2009), pp. 67–108, at p. 76.

[79] Ælfric, *Exameron*, ed. S.J. Crawford, *'Exameron Anglice' or 'The Old English Hexameron'* (Hamburg, 1921), pp. 55–8; *Letter to Sigeweard*, ed. S.J. Crawford, *The Old English Version of the Heptateuch: Ælfric's Treatise on the Old and New Testaments and his Preface to Genesis* (London, 1922), pp. 18–20; *Letter to Wulfgeat*, ed. Bruno Assmann, *Angelsächsische Homilien und Heiligenleben* (Kassel, 1889), pp. 2–3; *De creatore et creatura* (transcript prepared by the Dictionary of Old English). Shorter treatments of these matters are found in *CH*, I.2, 24, 36 and II, 12; and his translation of Alcuin's *Interrogationes in Genesin*. On his sources and innovations, see Michael Fox, 'Ælfric on the creation and fall of the angels', *ASE* 31 (2002), 175–200.

[80] Ælfric, *CH*, I.1 (ed. Clemoes, pp. 180–81).

Ælfric's subsequent retellings of this narrative deal with these events more briefly, but it is striking that even when Ælfric contracted the details, he retained that final causal link between the loss of one creation and the fashioning of the second. In the *Exameron*, which laid out the works of the six days of Creation, Ælfric gave his least elaborated account of the fall, eliding many of the details of angelic nature and Lucifer's precise actions but retaining the connection between the angels' expulsion and mankind's creation. Indeed, the connection had become so strong that Ælfric placed Lucifer's fall on the sixth day of Creation, thereby aligning it directly with the creation of man:

> On the same day [i.e. the sixth], our Lord wished to create man from the same earth, for at this time the Devil fell from the lofty heaven with his companions, on account of his presumption, into hell.[81]

Augustine's reasons why Lucifer's fall must have been instantaneous with his creation had been almost universally accepted for centuries. The fact that Ælfric, consciously or otherwise, broke from this tradition demonstrates the changed significance that the angelic fall had for him. The myth's old function of explaining the presence of evil had, for Ælfric, been superseded by its explanation of human origins themselves, and in his mind, the two events were now inextricably linked in a single moment.

The politicized vision of Creation generated at Winchester to justify the forceful occupation of the site by the monastic community had therefore continued to be retold, and unusually extended accounts of the angelic fall and its consequences were repeated in new contexts by those who had been schooled there under Æthelwold. Nevertheless, neither the draftsman of the 984 diploma nor Ælfric simply copied the version of the myth from the 'Refoundation Charter'. They had both added an additional detail: God had originally created ten hosts of angels, one of which had fallen with Lucifer. We have

[81] Ælfric, *Exameron* (ed. Crawford, pp. 55–6).

encountered this idea before, inserted into Haimo of Auxerre's mid-ninth-century reworking of Gregory the Great's explanation of the parable of the ten coins.[82] Assigning Lucifer and his followers to a separate band of angels was not, however, Haimo's innovation; nor was it simply an alternative enumeration of equal antiquity.[83] It seems to have arisen through different channels during the early Middle Ages, possibly unconnected at first with Gregory's exegetical comment on the meaning of the tenth coin. Revelation 12:4 – 'And [the dragon's] tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and cast them to earth' – earlier writers, including Aldhelm, believed that Lucifer's rebellion had resulted in the loss of a third of the angelic host.[84] The installation of pseudo-Dionysius' hierarchy of nine orders, each of which ascended in perfection and closeness to God, in established western thought after Gregory the Great made the problem more complex, for Lucifer was meant to have been among the highest of the created angels.[85] His fall from a high, and therefore supposedly more divine, rank among the celestial hierarchy may have been problematic in this scheme.[86] The idea that he was the leader of a separate band of angels, which was created and fell together, may well have been an attempt to resolve the issue – and since it was now well-established that the number of the angelic ranks in heaven was nine, the fallen order must logically have been the tenth.

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82 See above, p. 34.

83 Anlezark oversimplifies when he asserts that 'Two notions circulated in the Middle Ages about the number of angelic orders': 'Fall of the angels', p. 126; Peter Hunter Blair indeed thought that Lucifer's tenth rank was the orthodox position in the eighth century: *Northumbria in the Days of Bede* (London, 1976), p. 144. Raymond recognizes the rarity of the idea in a later period, but ascribes it only to 'a Franciscan tradition': *Milton's Angels*, p. 35.

84 See, for example, Victorinus, *Commentarii in Apocalypsin*, XII.2, ed. Johannes Haussleiter, CSEL 49 (Vienna, 1916), pp. 106–8; Cassian, *Conlationes*, VIII.8, ed. Michael Petschenig, CSEL 13 (Vienna, 2004), pp. 223–5; Aldhelm, *CdV*, lines 2743–7 (ed. Ehwald, p. 464). On the earlier background, see also Hermann Lichtenberger, 'The down-fall of the dragon in Revelation 12 and the down-fall of God's enemy', in *The Fall of the Angels*, ed. Christoph Auffarth and Loren T. Stuckenbruck (Leiden, 2004), pp. 119–47.

85 See Gregory, *Mor. in Iob*, XXXII.xxiii.47–8 (ed. Adriaen, pp. 1665–7). For the angelic hierarchy, see above, pp. 6–7.

86 Such debate was certain a feature of later writers attempting to reconcile the nine ranks of increasingly perfect beings with the supposedly elevated status of Lucifer: see Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Lucifer: The Devil in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY, 1984), p. 173.

Early emergences of such a modified enumeration of the angelic ranks could sometimes, therefore, couple with the Gregorian idea of mankind as the future tenth rank after the resurrection, but did not share the emphasis of Haimo of Auxerre and assert that mankind was specifically created as a *replacement* to a lost tenth host. The so-called '*Cosmographia* of Aethicus Ister' – a complex work of the early to mid-eighth century – thus stated, with a wholly Augustinian expression of replacement doctrine, that 'Paradise [was created] with nine orders of angels. The tenth order, the most highly elevated, [...] fell. In the future, that same tenth order will be [comprised of] holy men'.[87] The *Cosmographia* was certainly known in Anglo-Saxon England, and the similarly enigmatic Old English poem *Solomon and Saturn II* used it as a source for arcane geographical knowledge.[88] It is perhaps no coincidence, then, that the latter also associated Lucifer with a tenth part of the angelic society:

> He said that he wished to ravage all the kingdom of the heavens with his companions, and then to settle half of it himself and propagate himself with the tenth part, until he could give his anger an end through incest.[89]

The precise dating of the various forms of the Old English *Solomon and Saturn* dialogues is open to debate, but the linguistic evidence favours a date between *c.* 890 and *c.* 930.[90] For the present purpose, it is sufficient to note that *Solomon and Saturn II* certainly pre-dates the Benedictine reform, and that its association of Lucifer with a tenth order of angels does not rely on the idea of the subsequent creation of humanity as a new tenth

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87 *Cosmographia Aethici Istrici*, ch. 4, ed. Michael W. Herren, *The Cosmography of Aethicus Ister* (Turnhout, 2011), p. 4.

88 See Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe, 'The geographical list of *Solomon and Saturn II*', *ASE* 20 (1991), 123–41.

89 *Solomon and Saturn II*, lines 275b–278a, ed. Daniel Anlezark, *The Old English Dialogues of Solomon and Saturn* (Woodbridge, 2009), p. 92.

90 Arguments have previously been made for composition during the reigns of either Alfred or Æthelstan: see Patrick P. O'Neill, 'The date, provenance and relationship of the *Solomon and Saturn* dialogues', *ASE* 26 (1997), 139–68, esp. at pp. 152–64; Charles D. Wright, *The Irish Tradition in Old English Literature* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 267–9. The dialogues' most recent editor argues for composition in Dunstan's Glastonbury, *c.* 930: Anlezark, *Solomon and Saturn*, pp. 49–57. His suggestion merits further investigation, but his own argument unfortunately seems to depend upon accepting an editorial emendation, which is itself justified by the putative context, as Charles D. Wright notes in his review: *JEGP* 111 (2012), 403–6, at p. 404.

order. Throughout the work, the poet frequently displays a delight in mystical enumeration, and this may well have been his sole reason for deploying this oblique piece of cosmological information derived from the '*Cosmographia* of Aethicus Ister'.

A careful reconstruction of the development about this seemingly inconsequential piece of lore about the original number of the angelic hosts has more important implications. The idea of the tenth order of angels in an Anglo-Saxon text is first attested in a poem of probably the early tenth century. The fact that it was not included in the 'New Minster Refoundation Charter' of 966, where it would have bolstered its politically-charged rhetoric, suggests that it was not yet connected with the idea of the replacement creation in Anglo-Saxon England. By the 980s, however, both the Winchester draftsman of King Æthelred's grant to his *scriptor*, and Bishop Æthelwold's pupil Ælfric made use of the ideological version of the myth, now combined with additional lore about the original number of angels. The years between 966 and 984 seem therefore to have seen continued development of the myth contained in the New Minster's foundational text. This might indicate that attempts were being made to consolidate a piece of augmented Christian myth which had first been taken not from a patristic authority but from a narrative account similar in emphasis to the extant Old English poem *Genesis A*. Either bishop or community had now realized that their retelling of the angelic myth, upon which their presence in the New Minster was justified, rested on somewhat uncertain foundations and sought to bolster rather than jettison its controversial theology. They may have drawn upon Haimo's homily for this purpose, for his homiliary was certainly known to, and used by, Ælfric.[91] The emergence of a modified form of replacement doctrine suggests that not only had the monks of Winchester initially used the myth for political purposes, but that the community had

[91] See Joyce Hill, 'Ælfric and Haymo revisited', in *Intertexts: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Culture presented to Paul E. Szarmach*, ed. Virginia Blanton and Helene Scheck (Tempe, AZ, 2008), pp. 331–47.

continued to develop and corroborate their version of the story in the decades that followed, to shore up a narrative about God's resettlement of heaven which had no clearly authoritative support.

Some indication that the matter was still being hammered into shape in the 980s is revealed by Ælfric's first attempt to give authoritative form to the story, in his homily on Creation. Like the poet of *Genesis A*, attempting to fuse variant ideas into a narrative whole, Ælfric's original version of the story strayed uncomfortably close to dangerous notions:

> the nine hosts that were left bowed to their Creator with all humility, and committed their minds to his will. Then almighty God confirmed and established the nine hosts of angels, so that they could never turn from his will, nor want to do so. Nor can they now wish to carry out any sin, but they are always [thinking] about how they can obey God and please him.[92]

Previous readers of Ælfric's homily have failed to note the striking novelty in these lines, presumably seeing in them only a recapitulation of Augustine, who had stated that the angels who remained after the fall were 'confirmed' in their faith of God. According to Augustine, when the resolute angels had made the right choice and adhered to will of their Creator, they had thereby 'been given the certain knowledge of eternal felicity after the ruin of the others'.[93] Ælfric's emphasis is different, for his good angels are not simply confirmed of the correctness of their decision. Rather, just as Lucifer's host were transformed into devils, so were the angels who remained changed in their nature, so that they are now incapable of sin (*hi nellað nane synne gewyrcan*). This was, in fact, a possibility that Augustine had carefully avoided implying. Ælfric's angels were not

[92] Ælfric, *CH*, I.1 (ed. Clemoes, p. 180).

[93] Augustine, *De ciu. Dei* XI.13 (ed. Dombart and Kalb, pp. 333–5). Fox summarizes the passage without comment in his otherwise exhaustive study of the variant treatments of the narrative across Ælfric's writings: 'Creation and fall', p. 192, n. 68. Lynne Grundy does pick up the novel strand in Ælfric's thought in this homily, but does not develop its implications: *Books and Grace: Ælfric's Theology* (London, 1991), pp. 90–91.

created in perfection, but had been adjusted by God after a fault in their nature had been exposed. Assertions of this kind necessarily portray the universe as a failed Creation: the first created beings had been made imperfectly and were altered in their nature to correct a fault; and the second order of rational beings that followed after had to function as its replacement. There is little of a predetermined creative process in the perfection of the divine Word, here. Ælfric's homily presents God, in the first moments of his Creation, changing his universe by reacting to a series of causes and effects rather than laying it out in a unitary design.

It may be that Ælfric's implications of a failed Creation were accidental – and also that he sought to correct them. None of his later versions of the angelic fall opened such possible readings; and if Eduard Dietrich was correct to think that Ælfric's *Exameron* was written to replace the sermon on Creation in revised versions of his homiliary, it may be that Ælfric was trying to expunge his rather problematic early attempt to explain the extrabiblical history of Creation.[94] But the problem was not Ælfric's alone. Æthelred's charter of 984 suggested something similar, when it said that: 'when the tenth [order] had afterwards fallen through pride from the north into hell with Lucifer, he mercifully conserved [*misericorditer conseruauit*] nine in their stability'.[95] The diploma's version of the story thus suggested that if God had turned his wrath on the entire angelic host, sinful or not, he would have been entirely justified. Only mercy stayed his hand. Like Ælfric's homily, the notion that the first created beings, so apparently perfect in form and function, had in fact turned out to be fundamentally flawed and could all have been cast aside by God is hard to escape. This altered conception of Creation was classed as 'pessimistic' by David Johnson, for in such a

[94] Eduard Dietrich, 'Abt Ælfric, zur Literatur-Geschichte der angelsächsischen Kirche', *Zeitschrift für die historische Theologie*, n.s. 19 (1855), 487–594, at pp. 515–16; Fox, 'Creation and fall', pp. 177–8.

[95] S 853.

scheme, mankind is not the culmination of Creation but its remedial afterthought.[96] But if these causal narrations of the first six days of the world undermine the idea that Creation was made according to one unitary design, what can better be classed as 'pessimistic' is not the state of man, but of God. At the heart of the Benedictine reform movement, individuals such as Ælfric were testing the implications and consequences of the reformist conception of the angelic creation and fall. They shied away from pushing these consequences to their extremes but in the tenth century, the narrative of the early moments of angelic history was not an obscure piece of apocrypha, nor an essentially didactic tool that explained evil and warned of its necessary punishment. It had opened up new meanings, meanings that remained somewhat uncharted but dangerously present.

Ælfric's expression of the New Minster's politicized version of an ancient myth disseminated it beyond the walls of Winchester. In addition to his works being widely read and copied anew, Wulfstan, bishop of London and Worcester, and archbishop of York (d. 1023) used Ælfric's homily, combined with Pirmin of Reichenau's *Scarapsus*, as the basis of his own sermon outlining Christian history since Creation.[97] Following both of his sources, Wulfstan repeated the causal connection between angelic loss and human reparation:

> And Almighty God created them [Adam and Eve] so that they and their offspring would fill and enlarge that which had been depleted in heaven; it was a countless number that had fallen into hell through the Devil's pride.[98]

Whether Ælfric was also the source for the proem of an Exeter charter of 994 and Byrhtferth of Ramsey's *Enchiridion*, written between 1010 and 1012, is less certain. Both briefly mention the detail of an original tenth order of first-created angels, but

[96] Johnson, 'Fall of Lucifer', p. 517.
[97] For Wulfstan's treatment of his sources for this homily, see Dorothy Bethurum, *The Homilies of Wulfstan* (Oxford, 1957), pp. 293–8; Day, 'Fall of the Angels', Appendices, pp. 8–9.
[98] Wulfstan, *Hom.* VI (ed. Bethurum, pp. 144–5).

neither narrates the event itself, mentioning only the traditional matter of the Devil's pride.[99] As we have seen, this idea of a tenth order could have been derived from a variety of texts circulating in later Anglo-Saxon England, and Ælfric's works are only one possibility.[100] But Ælfric himself kept returning to matter of the angels' creation and fall throughout his literary career, and it may not be far-fetched to speculate that he was attempting to find the correct explanation for the story that had been so important in the monastic community of his youth, but which remained incompletely aligned with theological orthodoxy. Ælfric's concerns with sound doctrine were once stereotyped as an extreme aversion to apocryphal texts and traditions; recent scholarship has demonstrated the more complicated processes whereby he evaluated the doctrinal usefulness of extrabiblical narratives and just how idiosyncratic his vision of orthodoxy could be.[101] The matter of the angelic fall clearly stood on the unimpeachable foundations of patristic authority, but Ælfric appears to have searched for further biblical corroborations for it nonetheless. A letter written shortly after his first homily on the theme, in the 990s, addressed to his patron Æthelweard and prefacing the translation of the book of Genesis which the ealdorman had commissioned from him, reveals Ælfric's very personal sense of disappointment or confusion at finding it absent. 'The book is named Genesis', Ælfric explained, 'that is "origin book", because it is the first book and it tells of the origin of everything; but it does not tell of the creation of the angels'.[102]

[99] S 880; Byrhtferth, *Enchiridion*, IV.1 (ed. Baker and Lapidge, p. 214). On the charter and its unusual form and context, see Charles Insley, 'Charters and episcopal scriptoria in the Anglo-Saxon South-West', *EME* 7 (1998), 173–97, at pp. 188–9; Keynes notes the connection between this charter and Æthelred's grant to Ælfwine, and posits a mutual dependence on a form of the catechetical *narratio*: *Diplomas of King Æthelred*, p. 100, n. 51. Ælfric's homily is itself an example of the *narratio* form: see further Virginia Day, 'The influence of the catechetical *narratio* on Old English and some other medieval literature', *ASE* 3 (1974), 51–61, at pp. 56–9.

[100] See above, pp. 34 and 44–7.

[101] See especially: Aideen O'Leary, 'An orthodox Old English homiliary? Ælfric's views on the apocryphal acts of the apostles', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 100 (1999), 15–26; and Frederick M. Biggs, 'Ælfric's Andrew and the apocrypha', *JEGP* 104 (2005), 473–94. See also Mary Clayton, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary in Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 260–65.

[102] Ælfric, *Preface to Genesis* (ed. Wilcox, p. 117).

As we have seen, this letter was itself copied as a preface to the Old English Hexateuch (London, British Library, Cotton Claudius B.iv), an illustrated manuscript containing vernacular translations of the first six books of the Old Testament made, perhaps at St Augustine's, Canterbury, during the early eleventh century.[103] The illustrator, responding to Ælfric's observation about the silence of the biblical text, prefaced his own artistic contributions to the manuscript with a similar – visual – note to the reader that corrected the apparent deficiency and filled the first moments of biblical history with angels. But if Ælfric's vocal disappointment about the absence of angels in Genesis was the product of his own fruitless search, his attempts to find the authoritative scriptural basis for a vital but problematic doctrine promoted intensely by his monastic school, the illustrator's strong and vivid composition presented no hint of uncertainty or tentative suggestion (see fig. 5 above, p. 23). Prompted by Ælfric's writing that lamented the lack of scriptural evidence for the angels' creation, the artist immediately ran on to the event that he knew followed it. He devoted his entire page not to their creation, but to their fall. By *c.* 1000, a curious set of circumstances had made the myth of the angelic fall into a matter of extreme importance, central to the Anglo-Saxon understanding of human origins themselves. Those circumstances had seen theological speculation turned to a political agenda, and the politically-transformed myth fed once more back into the theological output of the Benedictine reform. Even in truly ancient stories, whose shifts in meaning are so slow and unannounced as to pass easily unnoticed, fundamental changes were accidentally triggered that destabilized the old cosmology of early Anglo-Saxon England and generated anxiety at the very heart of a movement that was attempting to reform the religious life.

[103] See above, p. 22, n. 19.

CHAPTER TWO

The meanings of angels

Although ecclesiastical politics contributed to increased speculation about the history of the angels in later Anglo-Saxon England, it would be wrong to assume that early medieval thinkers only thought creatively about heavenly beings when they stood to gain materially from it. Angels were not consistently politicized; the uses to which they were put in reformist Winchester are quite atypical.[1] Still, it is abundantly clear that other religious communities besides Winchester also expended considerable time and energy thinking about angels, writing about them, and covering their manuscripts and their buildings with images of celestial beings. The effort put into understanding and imagining otherworldly creatures by the professional religious seems to have struck many scholars as odd. 'Why were these communities going to such expense to commission and carve these monuments?' asked one recent investigation faced with a cluster of Northumbrian stone crosses carved prominently with figures of angels; 'what was he doing there?' asked another, in relation to the sculpted angel set high into the wall of a church in Gloucestershire.[2] Together, these and other studies have argued for the primarily symbolic, didactic or functional purposes of both visual depictions and written

[1] It is worth noting that the narrative of the angelic fall lent itself to political appropriation by later medieval writers too, functioning as allegory or as justification for present-day concerns, and sometimes adopting theologically contentious forms in the process: see Jan R. Veenstra, *Magic and Divination at the Courts of Burgundy and France: Text and Context of Laurens Pignon's 'Contre les divineurs' (1411)* (Leiden, 1998), pp. 54–5; Rory Cox, 'War and Politics: John Wyclif in the Context of Fourteenth-Century Political Thought' (unpublished DPhil thesis: University of Oxford, 2009), pp. 95–100.

[2] Thomas Pickles, 'Angel veneration on Anglo-Saxon stone sculpture from Dewsbury (West Yorkshire), Otley (West Yorkshire) and Halton (Lancashire): contemplative preachers and pastoral care', *JBAA* 162 (2009), 1–28, at p. 10; Richard N. Bailey, *Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculptures at Deerhurst* (Deerhurst, 2005), p. 14.

discussions of angels. Explanations for the ubiquity of the angel in Anglo-Saxon religious culture are therefore to be sought in its associative qualities and significations. Thinking about angels, they contend, was really a way to think about other things: in art, images of celestial beings might act as mnemonics, communicate social ideals, or serve apotropaic or even 'deeper, magical' needs; while in preaching and exegesis, angels could provide a useful way to reify complex theology, personify psychological abstractions, or provide role models for imitation and virtuous conduct.[3]

To many, it is this last idea which has come closest to providing a general explanation for the place of angels in Anglo-Saxon religious culture. While it is difficult to demonstrate beyond doubt that a particular image was or was not intended to perform an apotropaic function, or to show precisely how framing a sermon with discussions of invisible spirits made its theology any simpler than if it had referred only to human matters, a number of medieval writers offered very explicit advice on how and why angels ought to be put to practical use as exemplars for human beings. Gregory the Great had been adamant on that point: 'What use is it for us to ruminate on these angelic spirits, if we do not also strive to take something from them for our own gain?', he asked in one sermon, 'We must draw from them something useful for our own way of life'.[4] In eighth-century Northumbria, the voluminous exegetical and homiletic writings produced by Bede returned with some frequency to that same theme. On those occasions when his exposition turned to the matter of angels, Bede regularly exhorted his readers to consider their way of life, free from any worldly imperfections and distractions. He observed that

[3] Among others, see: E. Kitzinger, 'The coffin-reliquary', in *The Relics of Saint Cuthbert*, ed. C.F. Battiscombe (Oxford, 1958), pp. 202–304, at p. 280; Michael D. Cherniss, *Ingeld and Christ: Heroic Concepts and Values in Old English Christian Poetry* (The Hague, 1972), pp. 228–9; Ian N. Wood, 'Anglo-Saxon Otley: an archiepiscopal estate and its crosses in a Northumbrian context', *Northern History* 23 (1987), 20–38, at p. 32; Sandra Duncan, '*Signa de caelo* in the Lives of St Cuthbert: the impact of biblical images and exegesis on early medieval hagiography', *The Heythrop Journal* 41 (2000), 399–412, at p. 410, n. 3; Bailey, *Sculptures at Deerhurst*, p. 14; and the works listed below, p. 55, n. 6.

[4] Gregory, *Hom. in euang.*, XXXIV (ed. Étaix, p. 309).

these qualities made the angels into a perfect model of virtuous living which corruptible human beings could – and indeed, must – emulate if they wished one day to join them after the resurrection. His commentary on the Tabernacle was particularly insistent:

> The angels are his perfect tabernacle in every way, for the one by whom they were made never ceases to remain and to dwell in them. An existence like theirs, sharing a common way of life before the Lord, is promised to all in the resurrection, as long as we strive, while we are on earth, to leave the contagions of this world behind and to imitate their life by praising and loving God, by loving our neighbour in God, and by helping even our enemies.[5]

To Bede, thinking seriously about angels was an obligation which all Christians ought to fulfil. He at least would have found nothing odd about the way that the artistic and literary productions of his age kept returning to the idea of the angel, for he himself found in it something valuable and urgent. Their life provided a model which humanity might hope to imitate in the progress of their own journey towards a heavenly existence.

It has been proposed that these exhortations, made by influential and widely disseminated theologians, were therefore responsible for much of the evident fascination with the angelic displayed by the professional religious in early medieval England. Across the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, monastic foundations erected new monuments bearing striking scenes of angels carved into stone crosses and pillars. According to recent articles by Jane Hawkes and Thomas Pickles, the reason that they did so is that they were responding to the words of Bede and Gregory: they were raising complex pieces of public art to express the same notion that the 'life of the angels' ought to be replicated on earth, and urge those who saw these images to model their own lives on the angels' example.[6] In particular, both Hawkes and Pickles argue that Gregory's exegesis

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5 Bede, *De tabernaculo*, I.3, ed. David Hurst, CCSL 119A (Turnhout, 1969), p. 12.

6 Jane Hawkes, 'Gregory the Great and angelic mediation: the Anglo-Saxon crosses of the Derbyshire Peaks', in *Text, Image, Interpretation: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Literature and its Insular Context in Honour of Éamonn Ó Carragáin*, ed. Alastair Minnis and Jane Roberts (Turnhout, 2007), pp. 431–48; Pickles, 'Angel veneration'. Brief comments along similar lines are also offered by Rosemary Cramp,

had imbued the idea of angels with a set of meanings which resonated deeply with Anglo-Saxon monastics – that he had used angels as an image of a society devoted to contemplation and reflection, yet at the same time actively engaged with the world and not isolated from it. This, they contend, proved richly meaningful to the monasteries of early Christian England, which sought themselves to combine a life of idealized contemplation with the necessary business of providing pastoral care to the laity.[7] The display of monumental artwork involving angels, they conclude, was meant to conjure up this web of connected ideas; and the historian might therefore reconstruct these 'by exploring patristic writing and Bede's biblical commentary [so as] to examine what themes the images [...] would have brought to mind for members of the communities by whom they were commissioned, carved, encoded and decoded'.[8]

While it is not my intention to deny that angels could and did carry symbolic and associative significance for Anglo-Saxon Christians, the present chapter argues that this confidence in the potential of exegesis to provide evidence for a single, coherent set of widely-shared 'themes' or 'meanings' may be misplaced. Methodologically, it pays too little attention to the way that medieval biblical exegesis often drew out different meanings from the same figure, or number, or image, depending entirely on the context. It is one thing to say that medieval monastic artwork, or medieval monastic literature,

'Nature redeemed', in *The Sense of the Sacramental: Movement and Measure in Art and Music, Place and Time*, ed. David Brown and Ann Loades (London, 1995), pp. 122–36, at p. 131; *eadem*, CASSS, vii, 61.

7 The pastoral dimensions of Anglo-Saxon monasticism are the subject of substantial discussion: see especially Eric Cambridge and David Rollason, 'The pastoral organization of the Anglo-Saxon church: a review of the "minster hypothesis"'; and John Blair, 'Ecclesiastical organization and pastoral care in Anglo-Saxon England': in *EME* 4 (1995), 87–104 and 193–212. Among other contributions, see variously Sarah Foot, 'Parochial ministry in early Anglo-Saxon England: the role of monastic communities', in *The Ministry: Clerical and Lay*, ed. W.J. Sheils and Diana Wood (Oxford, 1989), pp. 43–54; John Blair and Richard Sharpe (eds.), *Pastoral Care before the Parish* (Leicester, 1992); D.M. Palliser, 'The "minster hypothesis": a case study', *EME* 5 (1996), 207–14; David Rollason, 'Monasteries and society in early medieval Northumbria', in *Monasteries and Society in Medieval Britain*, ed. Benjamin Thompson (Stamford, 1999), pp. 59–74.

8 Pickles, 'Angel veneration', p. 8; cf. Hawkes, 'Gregory the Great', pp. 438–42.

needs to be read exegetically in order that it might be 'decoded'. It is quite another to suppose that exegesis provided early medieval ecclesiastics with a uniform set of symbols whose meanings were fixed and commonly understood. To take one mundane example from a single exegete that illustrates the problem: at different points in his biblical commentaries, Bede found it necessary to explain the allegorical meaning of walls. On one occasion, he followed Ambrose to note that that since walls were often built around places in order to protect them, the wall mentioned in the Song of Songs clearly 'signifies the guard of the heavenly powers with which the Lord has encircled the church'.[9] Yet when he came to consider the walls of the Temple some years later, he explained that those walls signified instead 'the multitudes of believers which make up the holy universal Church'.[10] The meaning of any one thing in scripture was not, therefore, always absolutely fixed; its significance was often fluid, and had to be discerned on the basis of its broader context.

For angels, such a regular presence through the Bible, this inevitably meant that they quickly possessed a wide range of possible meanings. That fact necessarily weakens any attempt to argue that the appeal of angels for Anglo-Saxon religious communities came solely, or even predominantly, from ideas about the kind of lifestyle which they were believed to exemplify. This chapter suggests that the tendency of scholars to look backwards into the pages of patristic exegesis to search for an appropriate 'meaning' for the angels which occupied the minds of later Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastics may have sometimes obscured more than it has revealed. Beginning with the eighth- and ninth-century stone sculpture which Hawkes and Pickles had thought to be 'encoded' with messages about contemplative preaching, I will show that the varied iconography cannot

[9] Bede, *In cant.*, II.ii.13–14 (ed. Hurst, p. 225); cf. Ambrose, *Exameron*, III.12, ed. Karl Schenkl, CSEL 32 (Vienna, 1896), p. 92.
[10] Bede, *De templo*, I.8, ed. David Hurst, CCSL 199A (Turnhout, 1969), p. 169.

convincingly be reduced to a single theme or set of significances. Developing that observation, the second half of this chapter provides a fragmentary but suggestive attempt to show the extent to which variety characterized even apparently commonplace notions about angels, their heavenly lifestyle, and their status as exemplars for humanity. Unlike the rest of this thesis, its conclusions are largely negative, intended to show the shortcomings of overly hasty attempts to find a single 'meaning' in the idea of the early medieval angel. Negative though it may be, I hope that this chapter might serve to indicate some of the problems caused when scholars of early medieval Christianity begin and end their investigations in the pages of patristic exegesis. If we do not make the effort to engage equally with the opinions of less authoritative writers from across the early Middle Ages, we risk leaving too much unsaid.

FINDING MEANING IN ANGLO-SAXON STONE SCULPTURE

The late eighth- or early ninth-century cross in the churchyard at Eyam, Derbyshire, is certainly striking for the sheer number of angels it carries (fig. 6). Atop a shaft decorated with interlace and plant-scroll motifs, and above figural depictions of a prophet carrying a scroll and the Virgin carrying her child, sits a cross-head covered in winged figures. The angels fill both of the broad faces of the cross-head, even the central roundel where an image representing Christ might be expected, and another is carved into the narrow end of one of the cross-arms. Only the narrow face of the opposite cross-arm bears a human image, an unassuming male figure devoid of accoutrements. For Jane Hawkes, the position of this single human figure amidst the angels 'serves dramatically to associate the human viewer standing below, being "stretched upwards" in contemplation, with the angelic company of heaven'. This suggested to her a connection with Gregory

FIG. 6. Eyam, Derbyshire: remains of standing cross:
Left. West face
Top right. Cross-head (west face)
Centre right. Ends of north and south cross-arms
Bottom right. Cross-head (east face)

the Great's conception of the priesthood as an idealized union of spiritual reflection and active ministry. She saw this confirmed by another Derbyshire cross, a roughly contemporary monument from Bradbourne, which bears more images of angels on its very fragmentary cross-head, along with what may be a portrait of St Gregory at the base of its shaft. Both crosses, she concluded, were thus reflections on the status of angels as exemplars for the Anglo-Saxon ministry, produced by self-aware ecclesiastical communities 'that wished to present themes expressly concerned with the Church and its pastoral role in the Christian community'.[11]

[11] Hawkes, 'Gregory the Great', pp. 440–48.

Prominent though they may be, the angels on the Derbyshire crosses do not easily evoke ideals of either contemplation or exemplarity. Just as distinctive as the winged figures themselves are the accoutrements which they bear. The objects are clearest on the Eyam cross, one side of which carries angels bearing foliate rods, the opposite side showing others blowing trumpets. The same paraphernalia accompanies the angels on the Bradbourne cross-head, although too little of it survives to know if they were similarly arranged on opposite sides as at Eyam.[12] Rods and trumpets were common enough attributes for angels in early medieval art: the rod was customarily used to show angels in their role as divine messengers, used frequently in depictions of the archangel Gabriel at the Annunciation; while trumpets were regularly placed into the hands of angels to echo the imagery of the book of Revelation. But on the Eyam cross at least, the arrangement of the rod-bearing and trumpet-blowing angels on opposite faces of the cross-head suggests that the artist was intended to draw attention to a contrast between one group and the other.

Rather than trying to showing angels busy in the act of divine contemplation, it seems more likely that the sculptor at Eyam intended to deliver a message about the shape of Christian history. He carved one face with angels in their historical role as messengers to humanity, while the other turned towards the future duty as heralds of the Last Judgement. The arrangement draws attention to the passage of time, and especially to the moment upon which past had given way to future: the incarnation of Christ. The images on the cross-shaft seem to have made the same connection as those on the head, for as Hawkes rightly notes, the image of the Virgin and Child above a prophet carrying a scroll serves to highlight ‘the salvation of humanity as foretold by the prophets,

[12] On more general similarities of style and form between the carvings, see Rosemary Cramp, ‘Schools of Mercian sculpture’, in *Mercian Studies*, ed. Ann Dornier (Leicester, 1977), pp. 191–233, at p. 219; Hawkes, ‘Gregory the Great’, p. 435.

confirmed in the incarnation of the Christ Child'.[13] With salvation also came the means whereby humanity could gain eternal fellowship with the angels, which might provide a clue about the meaning of the sole human figure carved upon the cross-head. His position on the narrow end of one of the cross-arms places him amidst the angels, completing their number and filling up the artistic scheme. We should note that there are a total of nine angels on the cross-head at Eyam, four on each broad face and another one, unusually, in the more cramped space of the narrow end of a cross-arm; the human figure fills the tenth position.[14] If there is a connection with exegetical and homiletic discussions of angels here, it seems to be with Gregory's exposition of Luke 15 and its parable of the ten coins, the impact of which we have already explored.[15] We have seen how Gregory's suggestion, that the nine coins signified the nine ranks of angels and the tenth coin – which was lost and then found again – signified mankind fallen and restored, became a central aspect of early medieval speculation about the angels. It explained how humanity came to inherit a place among the angels after Christ had redeemed it. This seems an apt iconographic programme for a monumental cross, itself symbolic of the means by which human beings had attained that angelic inheritance. The Eyam cross might thus be an eloquent piece of Anglo-Saxon artwork that deals with the revelation of Christ's coming, the changed roles of the angels before and after his incarnation, and the changed fate of mankind after his death and resurrection – but the significance of the angels carved upon it was based on their past and future dealings with mankind, not their status as models for human contemplation.

[13] Hawkes, 'Gregory the Great', p. 443.

[14] It should be noted that the cross-shaft is truncated, and we cannot therefore know whether or not there was another image above the Virgin and Child. Nevertheless, while this position could have been filled by another angel, there is no indication of the top of a head or a pair of wings beneath the central angel on either side of the cross-head. On balance it would seem more probable that the missing portion continues the iconography of the shaft rather than the arms of the cross-head.

[15] Gregory, *Hom. in euang.*, XXXIV (ed. Étaix, pp. 304–5). See above, pp. 32–3.

An altogether closer relationship between human and angelic figures in Anglo-Saxon stone sculpture is suggested by surviving fragments of stone crosses from Dewsbury and Otley in West Yorkshire, and Halton in Lancashire. Roughly contemporary with the Derbyshire monuments, each depicts an image of a human figure bowed or knelt before an angel (figs. 7–9).[16] Despite differences between the images, Thomas Pickles argued that the sculptors sought to represent the same biblical event: the

FIG. 7

FIG. 8

FIG. 9

FIG. 7. Dewsbury, West Yorkshire: fragment of cross-arm
FIG. 8. Otley, West Yorkshire: fragment of cross-shaft
FIG. 9. Halton, Lancashire: fragment of cross-shaft (detail of angel and figure)

prostration of John of Patmos before the angel during his vision of the Apocalypse (Rev. 19:10 and 22:8–9).[17] The significance of this moment, he proposed, derives again from Gregorian exegesis, since Gregory had drawn attention to the angel's reaction: '"See that you do not [adore me]: I am thy fellow servant, and of thy brethren, who have the testimony of Jesus. Adore God"'. This, stated Gregory, marked a stark contrast with those moments in Old Testament history when angels had been content to accept human

[16] Dewsbury 9 (CASSS viii, 141–2); Otley 1a–c (CASSS viii, 215–19); Halton St Wilfrid 3 (CASSS ix, 185–7).
[17] Pickles, 'Angel veneration'.

beings falling at their feet.[18] He explained the angels' changed attitude as symptomatic of mankind's redemption in the Christian era:

> Why was it that before our Redeemer's coming angels were worshipped by human beings and remained silent, but afterwards they shunned it, if it is not that after they beheld our nature, which they had formerly despised, raised above them, they were afraid to see it ranked beneath them?[19]

Pickles argues that this moment was the cornerstone of Gregory's angelology in which angels functioned as a model for uniting the contemplative life with pastoral ministry, an angelology which he sees repeated by early Anglo-Saxon writers, notably Bede. He concludes that the Northumbrian sculptors used this scene to communicate a message of exemplary monastic preaching, raised to promote angelically contemplative ideals in the face of the increasingly secular nature of the religious life in the eighth and ninth centuries.

The scene from Revelation is certainly a persuasive candidate for the images on the West Yorkshire crosses, and Pickles' observation that the sculptors depicted only the moment of prostration (while other early medieval illustrators showed the angel raising John from the ground) does indeed suggest that the image, like the Eyam cross-head, was intended to call to mind the contrast between the status of humanity before and after Christ's incarnation. The Halton sculpture is less easily interpreted in this way. Most obviously, this angel carries a large rectangular object, presumably intended as a book or tablet; but equally distinct is the fact that the angel appears to be seated. The folds of drapery around the angel's legs are clearly visible. Although the angel's robes have been cut short to accommodate the kneeling figure at its feet, they flow over and

[18] Gregory makes reference to prostration before angels in Gen. 19:1 and Jos. 5:15; equivalent scenes are at Num. 22:31; Jdg. 13:20; 1 Chron. 21:16; Tob. 12:16; and Dan. 8:17–18.

[19] Gregory, *Hom. in euang.*, VIII (ed. Étaix, p. 56).

around its knees in the manner of other seated figures, notably in depictions of the enthroned Christ depicted both on the Dewsbury monument and on the Halton cross itself (figs. 10 and 11).

FIG. 10. Dewsbury, West Yorkshire: fragment of column

If another fragment of cross-shaft from Halton, carved with an image of two opposing flocks of sheep or goats (fig. 12), does indeed belong to the same monument, then it seems likely that this enthroned angel was part of an apocalypse cycle. Although that fragment has tentatively been explained as a zoomorphic depiction of either the apostles or the twenty-four elders, the animals are clearly divided into two groups in a way that seems to illustrate an eschatological image found in the gospel of Matthew.[20] There, Christ describes how the nations of the earth will be gathered for Judgement and 'separated one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left'.[21] Certainly, other works of early medieval art, such as the sixth-century mosaics in Ravenna, had illustrated the scene

FIG. 11. Halton, Lancashire: fragment of cross-shaft (detail)

[20] Halton St Wilfrid 7A (CASSS ix, 191–2). The fragment was connected with the cross-shaft which bears the image of the angel and attendant figure by both W.G. Collingwood, *Northumbrian Crosses of the Pre-Norman Age* (London, 1927), p. 74, and W.T.W. Potts, 'A fragment of an Anglo-Saxon cross shaft from Halton Green', *Contrebis* 9 (1982), 18–20, at p. 19; although Bailey expresses reservations: CASSS, ix, 192. The scene has previously been interpreted as a single flock, taken to stand either for the twenty-four elders or the apostles: James Lang, 'The apostles in Anglo-Saxon sculpture in the age of Alcuin', *EME* 8 (1999), 271–82, at p. 279; *idem.*, 'Monuments from Yorkshire in the age of Alcuin', in *Early Deira: Archaeological Studies of the East Riding in the Fourth to Ninth Centuries AD*, ed. Helen Geake and Jonathan Kenny (Oxford, 2000), pp. 110–19, at p. 118; Pickles, 'Angel veneration', p. 20. The prominent division of the animals is not, however, easily explained by either interpretation.

[21] Matt. 25:31–33.

with the two figurative flocks and the Judge 'sat on his throne of glory' attended by angels according to the words of the parable (fig. 13).[22] The presence of all the same elements on the Halton monument – Christ enthroned in Judgement, angels, the separated nations of humanity – argues strongly for a similarly eschatological meaning. This would accord with suggestions that the object carried by the angel represents a *liber uitae*

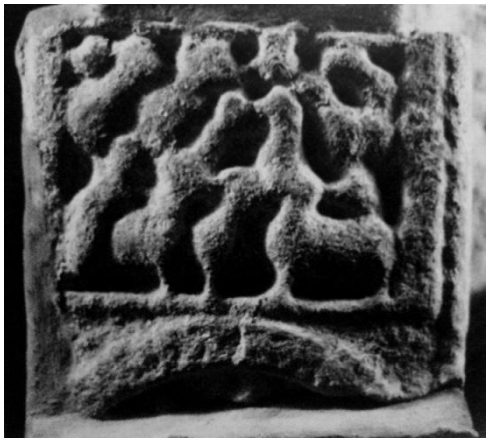

FIG. 12

FIG. 13

FIG. 12. Halton, Lancashire: fragment of cross-shaft

FIG. 13. Basilica of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo, Ravenna: detail of mosaic

containing the earthly deeds of the prostrate figure at the angel's feet.[23] Presumably the angel had been depicted enthroned so as to reinforce the judgement setting, perhaps adapting an image of Christ in Majesty with the simple addition of wings and book. His place below the enthroned Christ renders him God's agent, in accordance with literary portrayals of angels presenting the deeds of mankind on Doomsday, and the supplicating figure therefore kneels not only to the angel but also to the supreme Judge who looks down from the uppermost arch. Despite the partial similarity with the image on Dewsbury and Otley monuments, then, the figure bowed before an angel on the Halton

[22] On the iconography of the angels on the Ravenna mosaic, see further E. Kirschbaum, 'L'angelo rosso e l'angelo turchino', *Rivista di archeologia cristiana* 17 (1940), 209–48, at pp. 209–27; Giuseppe Bovini, *Mosaici di S. Apollinare Nuovo di Ravenna. Il ciclo cristologico* (Florence, 1958), pp. 37–40.

[23] Cramp, 'Nature redeemed', p. 131; Bailey, CASSS ix, 186.

cross does not illustrate John's adoration in the book of Revelation, but belongs to an original and well-articulated depiction of the Last Judgement based on the gospel of Matthew. We are thus left with only two monuments that might communicate ideas about the need for religious communities to imitate the lifestyle of the angels, if Pickles' reading of the symbolism of Revelation 19:10 and 22:8–9 is correct.

There needs to be a compelling reason to think that a scene from Revelation necessarily carried any message that angels ought to be imitated by humankind. It is not after all, what the angel itself said to John in his vision: it spoke only of equality between humans and angels, as 'fellow-servants' of God, rather than one being the guide for the other. Pickles argues that it was Gregory the Great who first derived a lesson about human life from the biblical episode, making it 'the linchpin of his angelology and his model for the role of the contemplative preacher'.[24] In reality, however, while Gregory did draw out a moral message from the angel's words to John, it had nothing to do with either emulation or contemplative preaching:

> ...after the angels beheld our nature, which they had formerly despised, raised above them, they were afraid to see it ranked beneath them. Therefore, beloved brothers, let us take care not to pollute ourselves with corruption, we who are citizens of God in the eternal foreknowledge, equal to his angels. Let us claim our dignity by our way of life: let no luxury stain us, no shameful thought accuse us, no malice gnaw at the mind, no tarnishing of envy consume us, no boasting puff us up, no desire for worldly pleasures pull at us, no anger inflame us. For human beings have been called gods! So defend the honour of God against vice for yourself, O human, for it was on your account that God became man.[25]

Gregory's advice here is of a wholly conventional nature. He exhorted his audience to make themselves worthy of being called *ciues Dei* and *equales angelis*, but in such general terms that it is hard to see how he might be 'promoting imitation of angels as

[24] Pickles, 'Angel veneration', p. 13.
[25] Gregory, *Hom. in euang.*, VIII (ed. Étaix, p. 56).

the key to gaining access to heaven through a ministry combining contemplation with action'.[26]

This is not to say that Gregory was unconcerned with heavenly role models. In his other sermons, angels do occasionally feature as exemplary figures – but when they do, Gregory's teaching had little to do with either John of Patmos or with ideas about contemplative preaching. When he listed the nine ranks of angels, he encouraged his audience to 'strive, with appropriate reflection, to take something from them for our own gain'.[27] John's prostration before the angel was nowhere mentioned; instead, he took as his starting-point Augustine's suggestion that the numbers of the angels had been diminished by Lucifer's rebellion. Gregory argued that angels had probably fallen from all nine ranks and that human souls would therefore need to be placed in every order, from the lowest angels to the highest seraphim.[28] Since the name of each angelic order carried an etymological or exegetical significance which showed their particular qualities or functions, the human beings who would join them would have exhibited corresponding virtues during their earthly life. The order of the Powers, for example, held sway over demonic forces, so their counterparts among mankind would be those who have excelled in exorcism. Knowing how the inheritance of heaven was to be apportioned meant that one knew what virtues should be pursued on earth that would merit a place in the celestial society. Armed with this knowledge, Gregory concluded, 'it

[26] Pickles, 'Angel veneration', p. 15. This is not to deny that the question of how best to combine contemplative and active ideals was elsewhere a recurring concern in Gregory's writings: G.R. Evans, *The Thought of Gregory the Great* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 105–11; Carole Straw, *Gregory the Great: Perfection in Imperfection* (Berkeley, CA, 1988), pp. 248–51; R.A. Markus, *Gregory the Great and his World* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 17–23.

[27] Gregory, *Hom. in euang.*, XXXIV (ed. Étaix, p. 309).

[28] Haines notes that Gregory differs from Augustine in his understanding of the numbers of human beings who will restore heaven's ranks to fullness: 'Vacancies in heaven', p. 152.

remains for those humans who are returning to heavenly homeland to imitate the [angelic] hosts in some way as they are returning'.[29]

In Gregory's eyes, imitating angels was a surprisingly simple matter. He took comfort in the notion that 'there are different kinds of human life that correspond to the orders of the hosts'. While emulating some of those ranks involved rather particular feats – only saintly miracle-workers could claim to have lived like the rank of the angelic Virtues – most of the qualities that he saw exemplified in the angels were less narrowly defined, and more easily attainable. The men and women who will be joined with the lowest rank of angels in the future, then, were those who might not be exceptional, but who nevertheless spoke to others with what wisdom as they had; those who have achieved dominion over their own vices will be placed among the Dominations; while those who are 'filled with love for God and their neighbour will rightly receive the name of the cherubim'. Profession of one's faith to others, resistance to temptation, and love of God and man are not exclusive virtues tied to a particular vocation, but the basic components of any Christian life.[30] Simply repeating Christian truths was sufficient for anyone to be counted as an angel, Gregory proclaimed in another homily, where he explained why John the Baptist had been called an angel by Christ:

> You too can gain the loftiness of this name, if you are willing. Each one of you, in so far as he can, in so far as he receives the grace of heavenly inspiration – if he calls his neighbour away from depravity, if he makes sure to encourage him to do good, if he instructs the wayward about the eternal kingdom or the eternal punishment, offers a holy message with words – then surely, each one of you steps forward as an angel.[31]

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[29] Gregory, *Hom. in euang.*, XXXIV (ed. Étaix, p. 309).

[30] Both Pickles and, especially, Leyser emphasize Gregory's comments about the seraphim, the rank which does indeed represent contemplative ideals by virtue of its elevated status: Pickles, 'Angel veneration', p. 14; Conrad Leyser, *Authority and Asceticism from Augustine to Gregory the Great* (Oxford, 2000), p. 184; *idem.*, 'Angels, monks, and demons', pp. 21–2. Gregory himself, however, places no greater emphasis on this contemplative rank of angels than on those which correspond to other kinds of human life. Leyser's observation that 'The ethical imperative of Gregory's angelology applied not only to monks, but to all the faithful' ('Angels, monks, and demons', p. 21) is a better encapsulation of the sermon and its purpose.

[31] Gregory, *Hom. in euang.*, VI (ed. Étaix, pp. 42–3).

Gregory's instructions about emulating the angels here remain of a deliberately generalized nature. Any attempt to read more specific messages into them about the lifestyle of contemplative preachers is therefore hard to support.

However it is that we interpret Gregory's homiletic advice, we need to ask why we should necessarily expect it to have been pivotal in the decision of Anglo-Saxon artists, centuries later, to adorn their monuments with images of angels. Both Hawkes and Pickles turned to Gregory because his writings were so voluminous, and so well read. They assumed that by understanding Gregory's idea of the angelic, they would thereby uncover a set of ideas which became part of the fabric of early medieval Christianity for centuries to come. Generations of Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastics grew up 'steeped in these ideals', they argued, to the extent that 'these angelic associations would have been widely known and understood', and the presence of angels in other religious texts, from saints' Lives to litanies, 'would have reinforced all these associations'.[32] Yet if we actually examine the briefer but nonetheless illuminating words of early Anglo-Saxon Christians themselves, it quickly becomes clear that Gregory's opinions on the angels had not achieved a monopoly. Although a number of early Anglo-Saxon writers shared his conviction that it was beneficial to emulate angelic virtues on the path towards salvation, it quickly becomes clear that there existed a greater range of opinion about precisely how to achieve that ideal than either Hawkes or Pickles anticipated. While they may be correct to think that an Anglo-Saxon Christian once gazed up at winged figures carved upon a stone cross and felt moved to contemplate their meaning, it seems unlikely that the message which they took away from it would have been identical that propounded by Pope Gregory many years before. The remainder of this chapter will

[32] Hawkes, 'Gregory the Great', p. 442; Pickles, 'Angel veneration', pp. 15–17, 21.

therefore explore the extent to which Gregory's basic exhortation about imitating the example of the angels was adopted, modified, and ultimately rejected during the Anglo-Saxon period, and thereby highlight the pitfalls of using patristic exegesis as an exclusive guide to the thoughts of even those early medieval men and women who read the Fathers with avid attention.

LIVING THE *VITA ANGELICA*

Keen student of Gregory though he was, Bede thought that the pope had failed to capture fully the essence of the angels and their existence. While he echoed his predecessor's basic point that human beings could benefit from imitating the example of heavenly spirits, Bede dispensed with almost all the features which Gregory had identified as typical of an 'angelic life'. At regular intervals in his homilies and biblical commentaries, he supplied his own instructions about how best to emulate the angels:

> With their example, we can free ourselves on earth by mutual love in God, by divine praise, by unanimous peace, by genuine chastity and other such virtues, and so deserve to be their comrades in heaven according to the promise of the Lord, who says: 'But those that who be accounted worthy of that world, and of the resurrection from the dead, shall neither be married, nor take wives. Neither can they die any more: for they are equal to the angels, and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection'.[33]

Like Gregory, Bede believed that angels possessed a number of different qualities which were worthy of emulation. Gregory, however, had thought that replicating any one characteristic would qualify someone for a place among them in the future. Here, in a commentary on the Tabernacle, Bede opined instead that an angelic life was gained through amassing an entire collection of heavenly virtues. In that regard, Bede's inclusion of 'genuine chastity' (*sincera castitas*) among those virtues gives his otherwise rather non-specific list a very particular meaning. It restricted the full attainment of a life

[33] Bede, *De tab.*, II.7 (ed. Hurst, pp. 69–70), quoting Luke 20:35–36.

lived according to angelic standards to men and women avowed to a life of celibacy – in short, to strict monastics like himself. Other virtues came and went whenever Bede found it necessary to compile a list of 'angelic' qualities, but the stress on chastity remained constant. In the final book of his *In Genesim*, completed around the same time as the commentary on the Tabernacle, Bede thus explained that an 'angelic way of life on earth' referred to 'those who live soberly and justly and piously and chastely'.[34] Returning to theme a few years later, in his work on the Temple, he was uncompromising in his view that any other good actions were only really a means by which truly angelic chastity could be reached: 'God teaches [his chosen ones] to imitate in this world, as far as they can, the chastity of the angelic way of life, which is done especially by vigils and divine praises, by genuine love of the Creator and one's neighbour'.[35] The lesson that Bede derived from the example of the angels was therefore far more restrictive than the expansive vision of Gregory the Great before him, firmly tied to a narrowly monastic sense of morality.

Bede's understanding derived from a particular reading of the gospels that had been confidently propounded in Late Antiquity by writers justifying the earliest monastic ideals of sexual renunciation. The gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke all testified to a Christ's response to a question posed by the Sadducees, who denied the soul's existence after the death of the body and challenged him specify to whom a woman who had been married seven times in life would be married in the resurrection. Matthew and Mark both stated that Christ had dismissed their question as wrong-headed, 'for when they rise again from the dead, they shall neither marry, nor be married, but are as the angels in

[34] Bede, *In Gen.*, IV.xviii.16 (ed. Jones, p. 219).
[35] Bede, *De temp.*, I.14 (ed. Hurst, p. 184).

heaven'.[36] The future life in the resurrection, being free of death, had no need of marriage. Luke's version of the story, however, expressed Christ's response in a subtly, but importantly, different way:

> The children of this world marry, and are given in marriage: but they that shall be accounted worthy of that world, and of the resurrection from the dead, shall neither be married, nor take wives. Neither can they die any more: for they are equal to the angels, and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection.[37]

In Luke, Christ's response implies that those who will be 'worthy' of the resurrection will be those who had already shunned marriage while still on earth, as a result of which they have escaped death 'for they are equal to the angels'. While the point of the Christ's words in Matthew and Mark had been primarily to express that marriage would be unnecessary in an existence without death, Luke's wording thus implied that the renunciation of marriage itself provided the means to achieve an equality with the angels even while still living in the flesh.[38] As Ellen Muehlberger has recently shown, the first ascetic communities of early Christianity placed a substantial emphasis on Luke's version of the story, because it seemed to offer a crucial support for their own practices of sexual renunciation.[39] Passing over the divergence of the gospels, Gregory of Nyssa thus fixed his attention solely on the implications of Luke's words, confidently asserting in 371 that 'if part of the angelic nature is being released from marriage, then the virgin has already received the benefits of the promise'.[40]

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[36] Mark 12:25; cf. Matthew 22:30: 'For in the resurrection they shall neither marry nor be married; but shall be as the angels of God in heaven.'

[37] Luke 20:34–36.

[38] See further Turid Karlsen Seim, 'Children of the resurrection: perspectives on angelic asceticism in Luke-Acts', in *Asceticism and the New Testament*, ed. Leif E. Vaage and Vincent L. Wimbush (New York, 1999), pp. 115–25, esp. at pp. 119–20.

[39] Ellen Muehlberger, 'Ambivalence about the angelic life: the promise and perils of an early Christian discourse of asceticism', *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 16 (2008), 447–78, esp. at pp. 451–4. See also Elizabeth A. Clark, *Reading Renunciation: Asceticism and Scripture in Early Christianity* (Princeton, NJ, 1999), pp. 199–203.

[40] Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, XIV.4, ed. Michel Aubineau, *Grégoire de Nysse. Traité de la virginité* (Paris, 1966), p. 442.

The importance of this early use of Luke to justify ascetic celibacy is that it entered the rhetoric of the monastic enterprise, and found expression in a host of works by such widely read authors as Cassian and Ambrose.[41] In the centuries that followed, the idea of a strictly monastic *uita angelica* defined primarily by sexual renunciation never really seemed like a notion that ought to be challenged. It entered the imaginative framework of medieval monasticism, and its firm basis in patristic opinion ensured that it stayed there. At least one modern scholar thought that that was all that needed to be said, for 'the equation of the celibate life of the monk with the *uita angelica* is so common throughout the medieval period that it needs no further comment'.[42] Common though it may have been, it was nevertheless a notion which ebbed and flowed. Occasionally it seemed like a pressing concern. Scott Bruce has recently argued that the efforts of Cluniac monks to cultivate an atmosphere of silence punctuated only by psalmody were motivated by a particularly keenly-felt desire to turn rhetoric into reality.[43] In other communities and at other times, the idea of the angelic monk seemed more like a piece of casual self-affirmation than a true organizing principle.

The latter seems to best characterize its status in Anglo-Saxon England in Bede's day. No longer a live issue, as it was in the first decades of the ascetic movement, the monastic *uita angelica* became for many a simple stereotype. Bede's homilies and commentaries offered occasional pointed reminders that the example of the angels ought

41 Cassian, *De institutis coenobiorum*, VI.6, XII.11, ed. Michael Petschenig, CSEL 17 (Vienna, 2004), pp. 118–19, 213; Ambrose, *De institutione uirginis*, ch. 104, ed. Franco Gori, *Sant'Ambrogio. Opere morali II : verginità e vedovanza*, 2 vols. (Milan, 1989), ii, 184–6.

42 John Bugge, *Virginitas: An Essay in the History of a Medieval Ideal* (The Hague, 1975), pp. 30–35. The fullest discussions of the theme have typically assembled expressions drawn widely from across the Middle Ages, ably attesting to its overall longevity but giving little indication of its historical development: cf. Jean Leclercq, *La vie parfaite. Points de vue sur l'essence de l'état religieux* (Turnhout, 1948), pp. 19–56; García M. Colombás, *Paraíso y vida angélica: sentido escatológico de la vocación cristina* (Monsterrat, 1958), esp. pp. 196–201; Karl Suso Frank, *Αγγελικος Βιος: begriffsanalytische und begriffsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zum 'engelgleichen Leben' im frühen Mönchtum* (Münster, 1964), pp. 23–86.

43 Scott G. Bruce, *Silence and Sign Language in Medieval Monasticism: The Cluniac Tradition, c. 900–1200* (Cambridge, 2007), esp. pp. 1–28.

to be properly considered, and that human beings ought to strive to imitate it, but for some of his monastic contemporaries the idea was more of an emblem than an aspiration. Boniface, writing to the nun Eadburg, deployed the image as a simple commonplace with which to close a letter: 'Farewell, may you live a life of angelic virginity, and so reign forever with honest reputation in heaven'.[44] Even Aldhelm's monumental eulogy to the virtues of celibacy with its lengthy justifications of the asexual life deemed the angelic connection almost too obvious to labour.[45] There, near the beginning of his *De uirginitate* addressed to the nuns of Barking at the close of the seventh century, he simply commented that if angels 'are praised for the merit of chastity, then it ought to be extolled with the acclaim which it is due', ensuring that 'the future loftiness of the angelic life is now greedily anticipated, to some extent, by those who continually follow the way of inviolate virginity'.[46] Yet when Aldhelm revisited his work to set it into verse a few years later, he passed over these lines. All that remained of angelic chastity in the poetic version, the *Carmen de uirginitate*, was the pithy assertion that virginity 'is the most chaste sister of the angelic life'.[47] The connection between the life of the angels and an asexual life on earth was only one thread in Aldhelm's virginal tapestry, and apparently not a critical one. Aldhelm's role models of exemplary chastity remained the congregation of human saints, and he recounted their individual deeds in preference to the more abstracted qualities of the angels.

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[44] *Die Briefe*, X (ed. Tangl, p. 15). Cf. also Boniface, *De uirtutibus et uitiis*, lines 162–3 (ed. De Marco, p. 305).

[45] On Aldhelm's broader ideas about sexual renunciation, and the changes he made to his patristic authorities on the subject, see Michael Lapidge and Michael Herren, *Aldhelm: The Prose Works* (Cambridge 1979), pp. 55–6; Michael W. Herren, 'Aldhelm the theologian', in *Latin Learning and English Lore: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Literature for Michael Lapidge*, ed. Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe and Andy Orchard, 2 vols. (Toronto, 2005), i, 68–89, at p. 82; Sarah Foot, *Monastic Life in Anglo-Saxon England, c. 600–900* (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 147–9.

[46] Aldhelm, *De uirginitate*, chs. 7 and 18, ed. Scott Gwara, CCSL 124A (Turnhout, 2001), pp. 77 and 203.

[47] Aldhelm, *CdV*, lines 100–101 (ed. Ehwald, p. 357). Cf. *De uirg.*, ch. 7 (ed. Gwara, p. 77): 'sanctae uirginitate gloria angelicae beatitudinis germana creditur'.

Although the connection between monastic renunciation and the life of angels was thus firmly rooted in early Anglo-Saxon religious rhetoric, few seem to have shared Bede's interest in elevating it into a truly motivating ideal. It may well be that his sense that monasticism alone provided the exclusive means to an earthly *uita angelica* was not, therefore, shared by other Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastics. Certainly, others seem to have been more flexible in their thought. Alcuin, for instance, found nothing objectionable in the idea that 'chastity is the angelic life', and quoted a pseudo-Augustinian sermon to that effect when he compiled his *De uirtutibus et uitiis*.[48] Yet perhaps because Alcuin himself had never taken monastic vows, his own formulations of the ideal permitted a greater range of people to share in the same honour.[49] Instead of turning to the gospel of Luke, Alcuin recalled Malachi 2:6: 'the lips of the priest shall keep knowledge, and they shall seek the law at his mouth: because he is the angel of the Lord of hosts'. The example of the angels ought therefore to be a prompt for the way that an office was carried out, rather than the practices of the individual, as Alcuin reminded Æthelheard, archbishop of Canterbury, in a letter of 793: 'Be mindful that, since the priest is the angel of the high Lord God, the holy word is required from his mouth, just as we read in the prophet Malachi'.[50] Love and praise were sufficient for humankind to aspire to the angelic: 'he who is eager to live among men peaceably, with charity and holy love, may live the angelic life on earth', he enthused to the community at Lérins around 801.[51] Lérins was a monastic foundation, but Alcuin offered the same guidance in a contemporary letter to Charlemagne, indicating that even an emperor with secular duties might participate in such a life: 'praise without contempt, without defect, sung from the heart and the

[48] Alcuin, *De uirtutibus et uitiis*, ch. 18, ed. Migne, *PL* 101, col. 626; pseudo-Augustine, *Sermo* CCXCI, ed. Migne, *PL* 39, cols. 2296–7; Donald A. Bullough, 'Alcuin and the kingdom of heaven', in his *Carolingian Renewal: Sources and Heritage* (Manchester, 1991), pp. 161–240, at p. 198.

[49] Alcuin's lack of monastic vows was a sensitive subject for his Carolingian biographer: *Vita Alcuini*, ch. 5, ed. Wilhelm Arndt, MGH, SS XV.1 (Hanover, 1887), p. 187; Mayke de Jong, 'From *scholastici* to *scioli*: Alcuin and the formation of an intellectual élite', in *Alcuin of York: Scholar at the Carolingian Court*, ed. L.A.J.R. Houwen and A.A. MacDonald (Groningen, 1998), pp. 45–57, at pp. 50–52.

[50] Alcuin, *Ep.*, XVII (ed. Dümmler, p. 46). Cf. also CXIV (p. 168).

[51] *Ibid.*, CCXIX (p. 363).

mouth – this we drive towards on earth when we imitate the angelic life'.[52] On the basis of Alcuin's correspondence, we can see that a common expression embedded within traditional religious language – *uita angelica* – could hold varied meanings depending on the circumstances and moral certainties of individuals. If the strictly monastic sense of angelic celibacy is the most widely attested, it is difficult to judge whether or not that might be a false impression produced by the overwhelmingly monastic nature of so much of our evidence for this period. Alcuin's writings are sufficient to show that there were other, more expansive, ideas about what constituted angelic exemplarity, but we have no means of knowing how many others might have shared his opinions.

While the notion of an 'angelic life' clearly meant different things to different people, what united them all was a shared sense that this life could never be achieved fully while still on earth. That was the fundamental meaning of a *uita angelica*, however one thought it should be put into practice. The love and praise which the angels offered to their Creator, Alcuin told Adalhard of Corbie, was being given 'always and unceasingly' (*semper et iugiter*) but mankind could only ever hope to join along 'often' (*saepius*). Alcuin did not doubt that it was 'a necessary thing for us to do', but he was under no illusion that that which was done on earth could be a match for that being done in heaven.[53] An earlier Old English poet implied that the ideal had only ever been truly fulfilled by living human beings in their first-created state, before they fell from Eden:

> They were like the angels [*englum gelice*] once Eve, Adam's bride, was furnished with a spirit. By the Lord's might, they were both born into the world in radiant youth. They did not know sin, how to do or commit it, but a burning love of the Lord was in the breast of both.[54]

Adam and Eve were neither preachers nor asexual celibates – certainly not the latter, for

[52] *Ibid.*, CXCVIII (p. 328).
[53] *Ibid.*, CCXXII (p. 365).
[54] *Genesis A*, lines 185b–191 (ed. Doane, p. 117).

here, in the early part of *Genesis A*, the poet told how God had blessed their physicality and explicitly ordered them to 'be fruitful now and multiply, fill the all-green earth with your offspring and progeny'.[55] The idea that Adam and Eve had been 'like the angels' might have been prompted by biblical commentaries which observed that angels and humans shared the same rational nature, as Frederick Biggs has argued.[56] Yet for the poet, not an artless writer but certainly a literal-minded one,[57] what impressed itself most about Adam and Eve's angelic nature seems to have been the fact that they had been born into the world without the prior knowledge of sin. That made them unique among humankind, akin instead to the angels who sinless state at their creation he had already described in similar terms.[58] The prelapsarian state of angelic humanity was a condition which none in the poet's own generation might ever again reclaim until their earthly existence was concluded.

The present corruptible, mortal state of humankind made any attempt to emulate the incorrupt and immortal angels only ever a partial venture. Bede was convinced that it was beneficial to try, but was clear that the goal remained ever out of reach. Whenever he raised the possibility of emulating 'angelic life' in his writings, he consistently added to it a brief reminder that earthly existence always placed limits on what could be attained. In a Christmas homily, for instance, Bede sought first to inspire his brethren with the example of the angels who had appeared with joyful tidings in that season, but then immediately qualified his words by noting that human beings were not capable of fully joining the life of angels: 'let us be in harmony with that most clean life of the blessed

[55] *Ibid.*, lines 192–198a (p. 117).
[56] Frederick M. Biggs, '*Englum gelice*: *Elene* line 1320 and *Genesis A* line 185', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 86 (1985), 447–52.
[57] Previous attempts to read the poem as a sustained allegorical or Christological exposition are forcefully, and persuasively, countered by Charles D. Wright, '*Genesis A* ad litteram', in *Old English Literature and the Old Testament*, ed. Michael Fox and Manish Sharma (Toronto, 2012), pp. 121–71.
[58] *Genesis A*, lines 15–21 (ed. Doane, p. 109).

spirits, as far as we are capable [*quantum ualemus*]'.[59] The note of caution, or perhaps of reassurance, became a refrain that ran through Bede's thoughts on angelic role models. In his earlier *Expositio apocalypsis*, he had already spoken of human souls who were 'always devoted to heavenly thought and to a certain extent [*quodammodo*], as far as mortals are allowed [*quantum mortalibus fas est*], approach the angelic way of life'.[60] They reappeared again in *De templo*, the ones who 'imitate in thought and deed the angelic life on earth, as far as mortals can [*quantum mortalibus possibile est*]'.[61] The matter seems to have lingered in his mind for decades, and in *c.* 730 he sought to give more concrete guidance as to what was and was not possible in an extended passage in his commentary on the Tabernacle:

> Perhaps you are asking how you, a fleshly human born from of the earth, can imitate [the heavenly angels which are] spiritual. They love God and their neighbours: imitate this. They come to the aid of the wretched (not to the angels, of course, who are all blessed, but certainly to human beings): imitate this. They are humble, they are gentle, they are peaceful towards each other, they obey divine commands: imitate this insofar as you can [*hoc in quantum uales imitare*]. They neither speak, nor do, nor think anything evil, or idle, or unjust, but attend the divine praises with unwearied speech and mind: as far as you are able, imitate this [*hoc quantum potes imitare*].[62]

Even reduced to a mimetic checklist of straightforward actions, Bede's vision of living an 'angelic life' was shot through with the idea of the unattainable. The striving mattered more than a misplaced notion that one could achieve a flawless existence. Bede sought to reassure his monastic readership that imitating the angels 'as far as you are able' was still virtue enough.

In all these early Anglo-Saxon uses of the idea of a *uita angelica*, it is clear that what angels provided was not so much a model as a mirror, reflecting moral certainties

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59 Bede, *Hom.*, I.6 (ed. Hurst, p. 45).
60 Bede, *Explanatio Apocalypsis*, III.37, ed. Roger Gryson, CCSL 121A (Turnhout, 2001), p. 553.
61 Bede, *De templo*, I.16 (ed. Hurst, p. 187). The phrase recurs in connection with the angelic life in *De templo*, I.7 (ed. Hurst, p. 163), and *Hom.*, I.24 (ed. Hurst, p. 173).
62 Bede, *De tab.*, I.3 (ed. Hurst, pp. 12–13).

already held. Learning a lesson from them was never really about poring over scripture looking for clues as to the details of angelic behaviour, but rather about fashioning an image of one's own way of life that shone more brilliantly than any mundane, human ideal could capture. It was in all probability, and despite Bede's best efforts, an ideal that few would actually spend their lives trying to achieve. But even as a purely rhetorical ideal, the notion of a *uita angelica* contributed in a small way to a sense of profound difference between the natural states of earthly and heavenly beings. Even if humanity attempted to adopt some of the characteristics which it attributed to the angels, earthly existence always placed limits on what was possible. This would be an unremarkable observation to make – were it not that by the end of the ninth century, this once firm sense of insurmountable difference between angelic and human life seems to have faded; and with it, much of the reason for maintaining the angels on their exemplary pedestal.

THE LOSS OF PERFECTION

Although the sixth-century philosopher Boethius believed in angels, he had little to say about them. In his *De consolatione Philosophiae*, he identified 'angelic power' as one of the links in the 'chain of Fate' but offered no further comment about their nature.[63] When Boethius' complex meditation on suffering, free will and providence was translated into Old English, the Anglo-Saxon translator regularly took the opportunity to engage more directly with matters of Christian history and cosmology. Alongside digressions on Nimrod and the Tower of Babel, or brief allusions to the sacrifice and eternal reward of saintly martyrs, the English translator also added several comments about angels and demons. Although they were neither extensive nor developed, they were more than an

[63] Boethius, *De consolatione Philosophiae*, IV, prose 6, ed. Ludwig Bieler, CCSL 94 (Turnhout, 1957), p. 80.

attempt to make his source seem 'more Christian'.[64] The translator sought to amplify, or to modify, some of Boethius' opinions about the spiritual world with his own ideas about supernatural beings and the characteristics they might share with humans. It seems best to leave open the question of exactly *whose* ideas these might be, for although the preface asserts that 'King Alfred was the translator of this book', that attribution remains the subject of entrenched debate.[65] It is a debate worth having, and is surely vital if we are to interpret correctly the well-known passages of the Old English Boethius which touch on matters of kingship and justice, let alone accurately characterize the nature of Alfred's reign. But confining our investigation of the Old English Boethius to its philosophical musings on the nature of angels means that we inevitably leave behind the personal experiences of the translator, whatever his station in life, and move instead into a wider world of theological speculation. On that basis, we might proceed by merely using the Old English Boethius as a guide to the ideas of an educated Anglo-Saxon working, so its dialect reveals, sometime between *c.* 890 and *c.* 930.[66]

Where Boethius spoke in terms of neoplatonic *diuini*, *spiritus* and *daemones*, the Old English translator preferred the less problematic language of simple angels and demons. He was not alone, and the wealth of glosses and annotations which accreted around *De consolatione* from the ninth century onwards regularly made the same

[64] Cf. Nicole Guenther Discenza, *The King's English: Strategies of Translation in the Old English 'Boethius'* (New York, 2005), pp. 44–5.

[65] Old English Boethius, preface, ed. Malcolm Godden and Susan Irvine, *The Old English Boethius: An Edition of the Old English Versions of Boethius's 'De consolatione Philosophiae'*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 2009), i, 239 and 383. For various perspectives on the question of authorship, see especially: Janet M. Bately, 'The Alfredian canon revisited: one hundred years on', and Malcolm Godden, 'The player king: identification and self-representation in King Alfred's writings': in *Alfred the Great*, ed. Timothy Reuter (Aldershot, 2003), pp. 107–20 and 137–50 respectively; Malcolm Godden, 'Did King Alfred write anything?', *Medium Ævum* 76 (2007), 1–23; David Pratt, 'Problems of authorship and audience in the writings of King Alfred the Great', in *Lay Intellectuals in the Carolingian World*, ed. Patrick Wormald and Janet L. Nelson (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 162–91; Janet M. Bately, 'Did King Alfred actually translate anything? The integrity of the Alfredian canon revisited', *Medium Ævum* 78 (2009), 189–215; Godden and Irvine, *Old English Boethius*, i, 140–51.

[66] Godden and Irvine, *Old English Boethius*, i, 145–6.

connection.[67] Thus in the hands of the Old English translator, as in the minds of most other medieval readers of Boethius, statements about the free will of 'celestial beings' (*superni*) and 'divine beings' or 'gods' (*diuini*) lost their original ambiguity: 'Angels', the Old English translator clarified, 'have just judgements and good wills'.[68] Having introduced angels into the *Consolation*, the translator occasionally felt compelled to add small truisms of his own about them. As he did, his meaning began to diverge from his source. Boethius had set up a contrast between the untrammelled power and intellect of suprahuman beings, and the will of human beings who are curtailed by the passions and vices of their corporeal bodies. Even as he repeated Boethius' distinction between higher and lower forms of free will, the translator felt compelled to add his own observation: 'There is no creature which has freedom and reason except angels and people'.[69] Short added comments like this swiftly made the Old English Boethius rather equivocal. It followed a source which insisted on difference between the nature of heavenly and earthly creatures, yet inserted new comments about their shared potential for perfection. Thus, where Boethius distinguished sharply between the sentience of animals, the reason of humanity and the true intelligence granted 'only to the divine', the Old English version refused to confine human beings to their intermediate position. The translator followed Boethius' argument for a while, but then asserted that some among humanity had, in fact, proved capable of sharing – completely – in the loftier nature of heaven. More people ought to do the same, he said, 'for it is pitiful that the majority of people [...] do not seek that which is above them, that which angels and wise men have: that is perfect understanding'.[70] There was no stark difference between the earthly and the celestial in the mind of the translator, not when the state of the angels could be attained by humanity with a little effort.

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67 *Ibid.*, ii, 465, 485, 493.
68 OEBo, ch. 40 (ed. Godden and Irvine, i, 373); cf. Boethius, *DCP*, V, prose 2 (ed. Bieler, p. 91).
69 OEBo, ch. 40 (ed. Godden and Irvine, i, 373).
70 OEBo, ch. 41 (ed. Godden and Irvine, i, 378–9); cf. Boethius, *DCP*, V, prose 5 (ed. Bieler, p. 100).

If human nature was capable of 'perfect understanding' from the perspective of the Boethian translator, then so too were celestial beings less stable in their own perfection. Where he read about the ways that 'mighty Nature guides the reins of all things', the translator felt it necessary to offer a few caveats:

> Now, I want to tell with songs how wonderfully the Lord governs all creatures with the reins of his power, and with what orderly arrangement he fixes and orders all creatures, and how he has bound and fettered them with unbreakable chains, so that every creature is bent and inclined towards its nature, the nature to which it was created – except for people and some angels, who sometimes turn from their nature.[71]

The translator knew too much about the distant past to be content with Boethius' sketch of a wholly orderly universe, for he knew that the inhabitants of both heaven and earth had failed to remain obedient to their Creator. Not every human being turned against God, of course, nor every angel – 'only a foolish man or, again, the rebellious angels' the translator reiterated, unprompted, in a later chapter.[72] Yet it is clear that in the mind of the translator, the nature of angels and humans shared more in common than they had for Boethius. Alone among created beings, they shared the capacity both for perfection and for perdition. As a result, no clear division between the nature of one and the nature of the other emerges from the pages of the Old English Boethius, even though it followed a source which drew firm lines between the perfection of celestial beings and the lesser qualities granted to humankind. Adding caveats and qualifications to Boethius' discourses on the nature of created beings, the translator blurred those lines and held instead that the angelic and human worlds were united by far more than divided them.

This is meagre evidence to be sure, but the passing remarks offered in the Old English Boethius offer a perspective which is most unlike the opinions voiced a century or more before by Bede or Alcuin. Had either of those men set about translating *De*

[71] OEBo, ch. 25 (ed. Godden and Irvine, i, 293); cf. Boethius, *DCP*, III, metre 2 (ed. Bieler, p. 40).
[72] OEBo, ch. 35 (ed. Godden and Irvine, i, 333).

consolatione Philosophiae, they would have found its tidy divisions between higher and lower beings entirely in accord with their own ideas about the unapproachable perfection of the angels. Yet the knowledge that the angels had fallen from grace hung more heavily in the mind of our late ninth- or early tenth-century translator, and prevented him from sharing their confidence in the superiority of heavenly creatures. Taken to its logical conclusion, this made angels rather poor exemplars for humanity, for both seemed as changeable as the other.

These were not implications drawn out in the Old English Boethius – but what makes them worth mentioning is that after the turn of the tenth century, it became extraordinarily difficult to find any reference whatsoever to the exemplary qualities of angels coming once more from the pen of an Anglo-Saxon writer. Among all the exhortations and admonitions of late Anglo-Saxon homilists, the notion of striving towards any sort of 'angelic life' had almost entirely disappeared. Preachers still reminded their congregations about the need for regular and heartfelt praise, and monastics still glorified their life of chastity, but neither made any great use of angelic role models when they did.[73] Only a tiny handful of documents still made the connection, and even then only when they passively followed the lead of some older source. 'Blessed are those men who are like angels in this world' proclaimed a tenth-century Life of St Euphrosyne, but only because it followed closely on its much earlier Latin source; 'I am not like [those who are] exalted for contempt of the world, glorified for the merit of justice, angelic for the praise of chastity' moaned a prayer in an eleventh-century

[73] On asexual ideals in late Anglo-Saxon England, see Mary Clayton, '*Æ*lfric's *Judith*: manipulative or manipulated?', *ASE* 23 (1994), 215–27; Hugh Magennis, '"No sex please, we're Anglo-Saxons"? Attitudes to sexuality in Old English prose and poetry', *LSE*, n.s. 26 (1995), 1–27; Catherine Cubitt, 'Virginity and misogyny in tenth- and eleventh-century England', *Gender and History* 12 (2000), 1–32.

collection, but quoting from Bede's commentary on Luke.[74] Unprompted, no original writings of the tenth and eleventh centuries offered their own messages about the virtuous state of those who emulated angels.

Some, in fact, seem to have purposefully avoided making such a statement. Ælfric's sermon for the fourth Sunday after Pentecost is an instructive example. It followed Gregory the Great's homily on Luke 15, the sermon in which Gregory had laid out his ideas about the nine hosts of angels, how humanity would ultimately be joined to them, and why it was therefore a Christian's duty to meditate on their example. 'Examine your merits and your secret thoughts', Gregory had urged, 'See if you are doing anything good inside which can be seen in these hosts which we have briefly considered'.[75] For Gregory, this had been the whole point for his lengthy digression on the ranks and virtues of the angels. When Ælfric came to the same place, however, he said nothing whatsoever about using the angels as moral guides:

> But let us stop speaking about the mysteries of heavenly citizens for a while, and think about ourselves. Let us mourn our sins with repentance, so that we might possess the heavenly dwellings through the Lord's mercy, just as he promised us...[76]

Where Gregory had sought to turn speculative angelology to practical advantage, Ælfric turned instead to simple and well-worn teaching about the value of penitence. The example of the angels played no part in this. Although Ælfric still believed that 'we will be joined to their hosts according to our worth', he offered no sense that actively imitating their example while on earth was the key to achieving that reward. Nor did any of his contemporaries. As far as we can tell, the idea of the exemplary angel no longer

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[74] *Life of St Euphrosyne*, ed. Skeat, *Lives of the Saints*, ii, 336–8; rendering *Vita S. Euphrosynae*, ch. 4, ed. Migne, *PL* 73, col. 644. Ælfwine's Prayerbook, 67r–67v (ed. Günzel, pp. 190–91 [no. 76.48]); quoting Bede, *In Lucae*, V.xviii.14 (ed. Hurst, p. 325).

[75] Gregory, *Hom. in euang.*, XXXIV (ed. Étaix, p. 311).

[76] Ælfric, *CH*, I.24 (ed. Clemoes, p. 377).

played any part in either the rhetoric or the reality of Anglo-Saxon Christianity after *c.* 900.

It is difficult to say now why that should have been. Our evidence dwindles away after Alcuin and only truly resumes in the middle of the tenth century, by which time the angels seem already to have been unseated from their old position as role models for humanity. Yet perhaps we ought to recall the Old English Boethius, and suppose that the ideas about the fall of the angels which had nagged at its translator had also occurred to others. Faced with a decision between upholding the perfection of the angels, as Boethius seemed to suggest, or acknowledging instead their own capacity for fallibility, the translator tended towards the latter. So too did an anonymous homilist working a few decades later. His piece for the third Sunday in Lent, collected among the Blickling Homilies, focused on the theme of obligation and he turned, like Alcuin before him, to the biblical connection between priests and angels made in Malachi 2:6 ('the lips of the priest shall keep knowledge, and they shall seek the law at his mouth: because he is the angel of the Lord of hosts').[77] Nevertheless, where Alcuin had drawn a positive meaning from the words of the prophet – 'since the priest is the angel of the high Lord God, the holy word is required from his mouth' – this tenth-century preacher inverted the Malachian language by drawing on the image of *fallen* angels instead:

> Bishops and priests must diligently encourage men of all classes, and command them appropriately to observe God's decrees [...] The mass-priest must do this out of necessity, or else take upon him himself the sins of [the laity]: he will then be like the angels of old who contended against God and were thrown into hell.[78]

[77] Cf. above, p. 75.

[78] Blickling IV (ed. Kelly, pp. 30–32). The statement does not derive from either of the homilist's main sources, Caesarius of Arles' *Sermo* XXXIII and the *Visio Pauli*. For discussion of the homilist's sources in general, see Rudolph Willard, 'The Blickling-Junius tithing homily and Caesarius of Arles', in *Philologica*, ed. Kirby and Woolf, pp. 65–78; Marcia A. Dalbey, 'Hortatory tone in the Blickling homilies', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 70 (1969), 641–58, at pp. 649–58; Gatch, 'Unknowable audience', pp. 101–5.

It was the same message, but differently framed. For this homilist, the biblical equation of priest and angel provided him with a way to offer a warning about the price of failure rather than a call to live up to celestial standards. The story of the angelic fall seems to have monopolized his understanding of heavenly spirits and their nature: negative associations came more readily than positive ones. He was probably not alone, given how frequently Anglo-Saxon poetry and prose alluded to the story of Lucifer and his rebellion, as we saw in the previous chapter. With so many different writers all drawing attention to the angels' sinful past, it is perhaps unsurprising that they failed to maintain their position as guides for human life.

If angels exemplified anything at all in late Anglo-Saxon England, it was not so much a lifestyle as an appearance. Tenth-century hagiographers remarked not when their saintly heroes had lived like the angels, but only when they looked like them. St Dunstan's features were particularly commented upon, and he was remembered for seeming 'angelic with snowy-white hair' or for being 'as beautiful as an angel'.[79] When St Swithun returned to visit the living after his death, he too regularly appeared 'resplendent with an angelic likeness, clothed in a linen robe and wearing golden sandals on his feet'.[80] It was a form which all the righteous would share in the resurrection, and it sometimes seemed as if the physical transformation impressed Anglo-Saxon writers more than their entry into a world which had been reborn. The gospels promised that the elect would live now without death 'like the angels', yet for the Old English poet Cynewulf, this denoted an aesthetic state as much as an existential one. 'They will shine forth in beauty like the angels and enjoy the inheritance of the King of glory for evermore',

[79] Wulfstan of Winchester, *Narratio*, dedicatory letter (ed. Lapidge, p. 376) and *VÆthel*, ch. 14 (ed. Lapidge and Winterbottom, p. 26). Cf. also Byrhtferth, *VO*, V.8 (ed. Lapidge, p. 166), quoting verses composed by Abbo of Fleury.

[80] Lantfred, *Translatio*, ch. 1 (ed. Lapidge, p. 260); likewise also ch. 10 (p. 294), and Wulfstan, *Narratio metrica*, I.1384–5, II.183, 1006 (ed. Lapidge, pp. 478, 500, 542).

Cynewulf foretold at the end of his poem *Elene*.[81] Ælfric too, whenever he described the nature of angels, spoke of their 'great strength and might' in preference to their intellectual or moral superiority to human beings.[82]

These were not qualities which it greatly benefitted human beings to emulate. Although the angels were still thought of as creatures which were somehow more-than-human, it was perhaps in a more superficial sense than before. Anglo-Saxon Christians set their sights on other role models instead. When the *Regularis concordia* evoked a golden age of monasticism, it spoke of the days when 'abbots and abbesses, with communities of monks and nuns under them, used to strive competitively in following the footsteps of the saints'.[83] It sought to create the conditions whereby that would become second nature once again, prescribing rules by which the professional religious would once more be 'bound by monastic custom and the imitation of the fathers'.[84] Yet although there was evidently a value in human role models, all that the *Regularis concordia* had to say about the imitation of angels was contained in its instructions for the Easter celebrations:

> Four monks should dress themselves, one of whom, wearing an alb as if doing something different, are to enter and go stealthily to the place of the 'sepulchre' and sit there quietly, holding a palm in his hand. [...] The other three brothers, all wearing copes and carrying thuribles with incense in their hands, are to follow after and go the place of the 'sepulchre', step by step, as if searching for something. Now these things are done in imitation of the angel seated on the tomb and the women coming with perfumes to anoint the body of Jesus.[85]

Far removed from Bede's impassioned instructions to cultivate the moral qualities of the angels diligently, the kind of imitation recommended by the new monastic leaders of

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[81] Cynewulf, *Elene*, lines 1319b–21, ed. P.O.E. Gradon, *Cynewulf's Elene* (rev. ed., Exeter, 1977), p. 75; Biggs, '*Englum gelice*', pp. 447–8.

[82] Ælfric, *CH*, I.1 (ed. Clemoes, p. 179); *Exameron* (ed. Crawford, p. 41); *Letter to Sigeweard* (ed. Crawford, p. 18). See also Fox, 'Creation and fall', p. 184.

[83] *RegConc*, ch. 4 (ed. Kornexl, pp. 3–4).

[84] *Ibid.*, ch. 14 (p. 21).

[85] *Ibid.*, ch. 51 (p. 105). For further comment on this ritual as 'liturgical drama', see M. Bradford Bedingfield, *The Dramatic Liturgy of Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge, 2002), pp. 156–61.

tenth-century England went no further than impersonation. It is a facile contrast, perhaps, but an emblematic one nonetheless. Late Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastics fixed on the physicality of angels where their predecessors had looked for celestial role models, of one kind or another. It had, perhaps, become difficult to shake the knowledge that even angels had fallen, and that made their nature seem ultimately just as changeable and potentially as fallible as humanity's. Almost imperceptibly, Anglo-Saxon Christians had turned their backs on otherworldly guides for life.

This chapter began as an attempt to test the assumption of several recent scholars that the root cause of the Anglo-Saxons' interest in the angels was to be found in their practical application, and the way that they could be put to use as a contemplative tool for the professional religious. Although it is an attractive notion at first, it must ultimately been deemed insufficient, for the exemplary quality of the angels seems to have dwindled to the point of insignificance over the course of the Anglo-Saxon period. Yet even as it did, the fascination of Anglo-Saxon Christians with the angelic did not diminish, for at no point did they cease in their attempts to try to understand these inhuman beings which invisibly populated their world. In fact, the passage of time only seems to have brought new questions to their minds. We would best understand their beliefs not by trying to reduce them to a simple utility, but by trying to understand the ways that they thought that their lives intersected – in a very literal and real sense – with the activities of God's messengers. Exploring these questions, the ones which the Anglo-Saxons themselves pursued when they thought about angels, is the task of the remainder of this thesis.

CHAPTER THREE

The changing fortunes of the guardian angel

Speculating about the origins and history of angels, or the nature of their society, was not greatly aided by scripture. Stray hints and associations had to be assembled and explained with a good deal of creativity. When it came to thinking about the ways that these first-created spirits interacted with humanity in the present, however, early medieval theologians found the Bible to be a less ambiguous guide. It gave assurance about the constant presence of angels by the side of the living, and described that unseen world in unambiguous terms. In Anglo-Saxon England, ecclesiastical writers often simply reproduced biblical statements about the characteristics of the angels who attended human beings with only the most minimal gloss of their own, for the words seemed to need no further explication. 'The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and shall deliver him' quoted Bede; 'I say unto you, that their angels ever see the face of my Father, who is in heaven' said Ælfric, almost three hundred years later, rendering Christ's words into the vernacular.[1] On the basis of these lines, and others like them, Christians throughout the Middle Ages took it for granted that God assigned angels to look over human souls.

Beneath the appearance of a stable and long-lived tradition that flowed unbroken and unchanged from the Old Testament into early England and beyond, however, a

[1] Bede, *In cantica canticorum*, II.ii.13–14, ed. David Hurst, CCSL 119B (Turnhout, 1983), p. 224, quoting Ps. 33:8, added to a discussion of angels guarding the church derived from Ambrose; Ælfric, *CH*, I.34 (ed. Clemoes, p. 473), quoting Matt. 18:10.

diffuse but revealing body of evidence shows that late antique and early medieval Christians did not always think about the soul's otherworldly counterpart in the same ways. In England, old formulations of the relationship between the individual and their angelic assistant came to be reconsidered over the course of the Anglo-Saxon period. In some cases, new ideas pushed out the old; but more often, ecclesiastical writers modified the conclusions of their predecessors by trying, consciously or otherwise, to probe the limits of angelic action and find a place for these intermediary powers that did not seem to impinge upon either human freedom or divine omnipotence. By the tenth century, their writings often contained many more implicit questions than confident answers, and focused surprisingly often upon the failures and limitations of guardian angels – a theme which found a place in some rather unexpected corners of Anglo-Saxon literature and culture. At the same time that Anglo-Saxon Christians were finding ways to overcome the biblical silence about the origins of angels, it appears that the apparently sounder scriptural evidence for the role of angels as guardians of human souls in the present day was insufficient to sustain a consistent body of opinion.

GAINING PROTECTION IN EARLY ANGLO-SAXON ENGLAND

'Of the angels, the apostle says: "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent to serve for the sake of those who are to receive the inheritance of salvation?"'.[2] The knowing statement of Hebrews 1:14 came easily to the lips of early medieval writers when they needed to offer a reminder about the constant presence of angels in their world. They tended to have one particular kind of service in mind. In a commentary on the Song of Songs, Bede observed that the ministry of the angels ought to be linked with the words of the prophet Isaiah, who had lingered over the image of a wall surrounding a hilltop vineyard. 'The wall', Bede noted, 'signifies the guard of the heavenly powers with which the Lord has

[2] Bede, *In cant.* II.ii.13–14 (ed. Hurst, p. 225), quoting Heb. 1:14. Cf. *De templo*, I.xiii.6 (ed. Hurst, p. 181); *Hom.*, II.10 (ed. Hurst, pp. 248–9).

encircled his vineyard, the church, so that it may not be ravaged by the invasion of unclean spirits'.[3] This was a thoroughly scholarly interpretation of Isaiah's meaning, following an exegetical path laid down by Ambrose.[4] But it was hardly necessary to be a patristic scholar to think that an unseen force of angels was busily engaged with the spiritual defence of human souls. It was such basic Christian teaching that when Bede took to the pulpit in the 720s or 730s, he thought it almost too obvious to labour: 'It is no secret that angels are frequently present, invisibly, alongside the elect, so that they can defend them from the snares of the cunning enemy, and raise them up with the mighty grace of heavenly desire. The apostle attests to this when he says: "Are they not all ministering spirits..."'.[5]

These were uncomplicated duties, easily imagined. An anonymous Old English poet contemporary with Bede cannot have been alone in thinking that the angels went about their tasks in much the same manner as warriors performed more mundane services for earthly lords. He pictured them stationed in readiness beside the men and women placed under their protection:

> Before them stand angels, ready with the weapons of spirits and mindful of their safety. They preserve the life of holy people, knowing that their hope is with the Lord. They are the proven champions who serve a king who never withholds the reward from those who persevere in his love.[6]

The degree to which this was a distinctly 'Germanic' image is less self-evident than some have supposed; angels had become militarized centuries before, and warrior-spirits were already a major theme in Jewish writing of the Second Temple period.[7] Still, to judge

[3] Bede, *In cant.*, II.ii.13–14 (ed. Hurst, p. 225), drawing on Isa. 5:1–2.
[4] Ambrose, *Exameron*, III.12 (ed. Schenkl, p. 92).
[5] Bede, *Hom.*, II.10 (ed. Hurst, pp. 248–9).
[6] *Guthlac A*, lines 88b–92, ed. Jane Roberts, *The Guthlac Poems of the Exeter Book* (Oxford, 1979), p. 85. For the date, see below, p. 96, n. 19.
[7] For example, Cherniss, *Ingeld and Christ*, pp. 228–9. The growth of military language to describe angels in antiquity is noted by Saul M. Olyan, *A Thousand Thousands Served Him: Exegesis and the Naming of Angels in Ancient Judaism* (Tübingen, 1993), p. 69. Aleksander Michalak's forthcoming

from the recurrent concerns of their surviving prayers, eighth-century Anglo-Saxons deemed the protection of body and soul to be among the most needful services to obtain from the powers of heaven.[8] When a nun named Eadburg received a letter from the missionary Boniface, who had recently interviewed a monk from Wenlock who had purportedly risen from the dead, she might have found it reassuring to read that the man could provide incontrovertible testimony about the angels he had seen protecting the souls of the living.[9]

The letter is now the most detailed Anglo-Saxon discussion about guardian angels to survive from the eighth century. It revealed that the angels were in fact very particular about their choice of mortal companions. Boniface told Eadburg that while the unnamed monk was out of his body, he had looked with spiritual sight onto the world and seen that it contained two kinds of people, only one of which lived alongside heavenly protectors:

> The ones who were not guilty of sins and who were supported by holy virtues were known to have the favour of almighty God; these were overseen and defended at all times by angels, and were joined to them in kindness and intimacy. But for those who were defiled by wicked crimes and the stains of a polluted life, a hostile spirit constantly accompanied them, always urging them on to evil deeds. Whenever they sinned in word or deed, the demon always made it known to other loathsome spirits for their joy and delight. And if a man sinned, the evil spirit did not even wait until he might sin again, but brought each vice individually to the attention of the other spirits. As soon as it persuaded the man to sin, it gave an account of what had been done to the demons.[10]

The account provides rather better evidence for Boniface and his own ideas about what a resurrected man *ought* to have seen than for an eighth-century 'near death experience' as

monograph promises to explore the development in greater detail: *Angels as Warriors in Late Second Temple Jewish Literature* (Tübingen, 2012).

8 See Patrick Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England, 600–800* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 285–302.

9 *Die Briefe*, X (ed. Tangl, pp. 8–15). Patrick Sims-Williams dates the letter to 716 × 719, and proposes that Eadburg may have been a nun at Wimbourne: 'A recension of Boniface's letter to Eadburg about the monk of Wenlock's vision', in *Latin Learning and English Lore*, ed. O'Brien O'Keeffe and Orchard, i, 194–214, at pp. 194–6. For other aspects of the monk's otherworldly journey, see below, pp. 134–5, 139–40.

10 *Die Briefe*, X (ed. Tangl, p. 13).

it may actually have happened.[11] It certainly seems typical of Boniface to have hurried past the righteous and their angelic helpers to dwell upon the sinners plagued by demons. He had nevertheless said enough to indicate that both angels and demons only descended upon those individuals who had already earned their fellowship. They joined themselves to those individuals whose moral outlook matched their own, and abided with them thereafter. Those men and women might then find themselves nudged one way or another by invisible forces, but it was only along the road that they had already chosen for themselves.

It is worth pausing to consider that idea in detail. At one level, Boniface was being very careful about the implications of what he was saying. He noted that while demons might coax people into error – an unproblematic notion, since the devil had once 'put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, to betray Jesus'[12] – the wellspring of both virtue and vice lay firmly within the mind of the human individual rather than their invisible companion. Neither the angels nor the demons were simple puppet-masters of the soul; they could only nurture and encourage what they found there. That much provided a tacit but cogent defence of human free will in a world which could still be rocked by powerful beings of absolute good or evil. Yet at the same time, Boniface was adamant that individual souls could only be placed in charge of either one or other spiritual warden, whereupon the good might find it easier to remain good, and the wicked increasingly likely to persevere in wickedness. The entire organization of the cosmos seemed to have a natural inertia about it. Human society was therefore not only divided: the gap between moral extremes was also widening.

[11] For a full consideration of the various stages of oral and literary reshaping that must underlie Boniface's letter, see Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature*, pp. 243–72, esp. at pp. 248–9.

[12] John 13:2.

While there was perhaps no theological obstacle to such a view, it can never have seemed very true to life. Boniface was fully aware that human nature was changeable, that a single lifetime in fact produced a mixture of the good and the bad. Earlier in the letter he had described how the souls of the dead were confronted by both when they entered the next world.[13] But his understanding of guardian angels twinned with the unreservedly virtuous, the rest abandoned to demons long before their final days, did not easily express that changeability of human life. In fact, he held that if the balance of a person's deeds shifted too far from its previous state, so that the soul had to be relinquished by one group of spirits into the power of the other, the results could be catastrophic. That became abundantly clear when Boniface described the fate of Ceolred, king of Mercia, whom the monk of Wenlock had seen while he was out of the body. The monk had chanced to witness the king at the very moment when Ceolred's moral worth lay briefly undecided:

> He said that he saw the king protected against the assault of demons by a kind of angelic screen, extended over him like an enormous book. But the demons begged the angels with breathless voices to withdraw the protection and to let them work their savage will on him. They accused him of a horrible and wicked collection of shameful acts, threatening to have him shut up in the most frightful dungeons of the underworld, there to be racked with eternal torments as his sins deserved. Then the angels spoke, more sadly than usual: "Alas that this sinful man no longer allows himself to be protected. We can offer him no more help, because of the things he has done." And they withdrew the protection of the sheltering screen. The demons gathered together then with joy and exultation from every part of the world, a greater number than the monk had thought there were human souls in existence, and attacked the king with an incalculable burden of diverse torments. [...] The swift death of the wicked king shortly after proved beyond doubt that the things which had been seen happening to him were the truth.[14]

Ceolred had not simply lost the friendship of spiritual allies; the retreat of the angels led directly and swiftly to his death. Those who had never known the fellowship of angels simply laboured on in gloomy lives, but to have gained their attention and then lost their favour was evidently to have committed sins that brought a higher price. Boniface pinned

[13] *Die Briefe*, X (ed. Tangl, pp. 9–11).
[14] *Ibid.*, (pp. 14–15).

the credibility of his letter on that point: 'it proved beyond doubt that what the monk had seen was the truth'. Presumably this indicates that he expected his readers to share this starkly black-and-white outlook about what it meant to be cast aside by one's own guardian angels.

Measuring how representative Boniface's ideas were in eighth-century England is nevertheless difficult. Few of his contemporaries talked about the entanglement of human beings and supernatural companions with such an eye for circumstantial detail, and may never have given the matter such considered thought. Even so, it might be worth recalling the way that Bede had turned to the text of Hebrews 1:14 to describe the actions of angels in the world. There it was revealed that their errand was 'to serve those who are to receive the inheritance of salvation', a reward for those already walking towards eternal life rather than a helping hand to steer the sinful away from damnation. Previous Christian writers had been content to overlook the connotations of exclusivity in these words. In the fourth century, for instance, Eusebius of Caesarea assumed that angels had offered assistance even to people who had no access of salvation whatsoever, for he thought he could see evidence of guardian angels in the works of pre-Christian Plato.[15] But as Ellen Muehlberger has shown, monastic communities during Late Antiquity began to insist that human beings had to live up to more exacting criteria before angels took an interest in their affairs. In his sermons, the Egyptian abbot Shenoute of Atripe thus spoke of the need for Christians to prove worthy of supernatural aid, warning about the folly of anyone 'who has not acquired for himself an angel to rescue him from Satan'.[16] An air of contractual obligation permeated the monastic vision of guardian angels after the fifth

[15] Eusebius, *Preparation for the Gospel*, XIII.13, ed. Karl Mras, *Eusebius Werke VIII.2*, 2 vols. (Berlin, 1956), i, 199–200.

[16] Shenoute, *De iudicio*, trans. Heike Behlmer, *Schenute von Atripe: De iudicio* (Turin, 1996), p. 251. I owe these references to Muehlberger's detailed discussion: 'Angels', pp. 72–87. See also David Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk: Spiritual Combat in Early Christianity* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 230.

century, replacing the breezy optimism of earlier thinkers who had enthused in more sweeping terms that 'every visible thing in the world is placed under angelic power'.[17] When Bede's homilies spoke of angels standing as guardians alongside only 'the elect' rather than beside every single human being alive,[18] and when Boniface described the fates of kings who had lost their angels along with their right to salvation, they were standing firmly in this relatively recent strand of monastic thought.

The understanding that guardian angels associated themselves only with the right sort of people impressed itself deeply upon the Old English poet who wrote an account of the life and deeds of St Guthlac at some point during the eighth century.[19] His poem – now known as *Guthlac A* – did not shy away from the fact that its hero had probably not done enough in his youth to have been assured of salvation. In his early years, the eventual hermit-saint had lived an avowedly secular lifestyle and 'loved many perilous things'. This the poet blamed in large part on the instigations of a demon, who 'urged him on so that he sought by night a band of marauders, to struggle with audacity after worldly things as outcasts do'.[20] Yet since Guthlac was now remembered as a saint,

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17 Augustine, *De diuersis quaestionibus octoginta tribus*, ch. 79, ed. Almut Mutzenbecher, CCSL 44A (Turnhout, 1975), p. 225.

18 Bede, *Hom.*, II.10 (quoted above, p. 91).

19 An early to mid-eighth-century date is implied by the poet's reference to people who had known St Guthlac before his death in 714 but were still alive. Alaric Hall points out that this is not a common claim in Old English verse, and ought therefore to be taken seriously: 'Constructing Anglo-Saxon sanctity: tradition, innovation and Saint Guthlac', in *Images of Sanctity: Essays in Honour of Gary Dickson*, ed. Debra Higgs Strickland (Leiden, 2007), pp. 207–35, at p. 209. Others have placed the poem in the context of tenth-century monastic reform, on the basis of general conformities with Benedictine ideals; but the evidence does not seem to me sufficient to rule out composition in earlier centuries: cf. Patrick W. Conner, 'Source studies, the Old English *Guthlac A* and the English Benedictine reformation', *Revue bénédictine* 103 (1993), 380–413; Christopher A. Jones, 'Envisioning the *cenobium* in the Old English *Guthlac A*', *Medieval Studies* 57 (1995), 259–91.

20 *Guthlac A*, lines 109b–110a, 127–9 (ed. Roberts, pp. 86–7). Cherniss confidently explains that the demon as a 'psychological fiend', and the ensuing struggle for Guthlac's soul 'clearly a *psychomachia* which takes place in Guthlac's mind [rather than] a physical encounter between angel and devil': *Ingeld and Christ*, p. 229; similarly Daniel G. Calder, '*Guthlac A* and *Guthlac B*: some discriminations', in *Anglo-Saxon Poetry: Essays in Appreciation for John C. McGalliard*, ed. Lewis E. Nicholson and Dolores Warwick Frese (Notre Dame, IN, 1975), pp. 65–80, at pp. 71–3. If the poet had restricted his discussion of angels and demons to this episode, or only to other discussions of Guthlac's state of mind, this would be possible; but repeated references to the protagonists in 'real world' settings both before

it was also self-evident that he had somehow escaped the demon's clutches. Not only that, his demon would be replaced by 'a holy guardian from the heavens [who] eagerly nourished that pure mind in goodness of spirit'.[21] The poet put a great deal of emphasis on the moment when Guthlac's soul switched sides. The changing of the guard, when it came, had been a tense but ultimately preordained affair:

> The time was approaching. Two guardians kept watch about him when the Lord's angel and the loathsome spirit waged war. Many times they brought advice – by no means alike – into his mind's thoughts. [...] They incited him on two sides, until the Lord of hosts ordered the end of the fight in the angel's favour. The fiend was put to flight, and the consoling spirit stayed thereafter in support of Guthlac.[22]

For a moment, the scene appeared reminiscent of more ancient teaching. It was the opinion of the *Shepherd of Hermas*, a late first- or second-century work of Christian mysticism, that every human being 'has two angels, one of righteousness and one of wickedness'. Their presence could be easily discerned, for the former brought serenity and a desire for virtue, while the latter aroused bitterness and greed.[23] Previous readers of *Guthlac A* have noted the similarity and occasionally suggested that the *Shepherd*'s teachings about good and bad angels, known directly or indirectly, had motivated the poet's imagery for this pivotal scene.[24]

While the connection is not implausible, we ought to note that the two warring spirits in *Guthlac A* met under very different circumstances to their forebears in the *Shepherd of Hermas*. Although they offered their dissimilar teachings to Guthlac 'many times' (*mongum tidum*), theirs was no lifelong struggle over a soul but a short-lived

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and after this episode do not easily support an allegorical reading: cf. similarly Jennifer Neville, *Representations of the Natural World in Old English Poetry* (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 126–7.

21 *Guthlac A*, lines 105b–107 (ed. Roberts, p. 86).

22 *Ibid.*, lines 114–37 (pp. 86–7).

23 *Shepherd of Hermas*, Mandates, VI.2, ed. Bart D. Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA, 2003), ii, 262–6; Pierre Boyancé, 'Les deux démons personnels dans l'antiquité grecque et latine', *Revue de philologie, de littérature et d'histoire anciennes*, 3rd ser., 9 (1935), 189–202.

24 Roberts, *Guthlac Poems*, p. 131; John P. Hermann, 'The recurrent motif of spiritual warfare in Old English poetry', *Annuale Mediaevale* 22 (1982), 7–35, at pp. 23–4.

moment of conflict. The good spirit, *engel Dryhtnes*, was a newcomer and had been absent during Guthlac's wayward youth. Its arrival had been preordained, the moment when 'God in his wisdom would give an angel to Guthlac, so that the lust for sinful things would subside in him', but the hour remained for a long while at the Lord's discretion (*fyrst wæs swa þeana* / *in Godes dome*).[25] Guthlac's own free will played little part in this. Setting out for a new life as an ascetic hermit was not the product of some personal spiritual awakening with Guthlac himself, which God then rewarded with an angel. Rather, Guthlac's new course had been entirely prearranged by God; the eremitical life 'was his hope ever since [*siþþan*] the one who illuminates life's road prepared his spirit and gave him an angelic gift'.[26] Boniface had struggled to find accommodate moral change in his rigidly divided picture of the world, preferring to keep the sinners with their demons and the righteous with their angels. The only image he could find to express changeability was that of the king who had turned his back on God's gifts, and thereby come to his death. The *Guthlac A*-poet found the concept of moral change equally unnatural, for he could only explain it by assuming that God had taken a direct hand in proceedings, personally moulding an unlikely soul into a suitable candidate for sainthood. Although the arrival of an angel marked a necessary stage in the process of that remodelling, the impetus for Guthlac's changed outlook came from God alone.

In the way that these otherwise unconnected eighth-century writings expressed their beliefs about guardian angels, a sharply monochrome vision emerges of a world divided between the righteous and the wicked. In more careful and extended writing about salvation, or in texts with more pastoral intentions, this might have been something that authors would seek to qualify or nuance. But perhaps in these short and almost anecdotal episodes about the winning and losing of guardian angels, early Anglo-Saxon

[25] *Guthlac A*, lines 110b–113 (ed. Roberts, p. 86) .
[26] *Ibid.*, lines 98b–102a (p. 86).

writers fell back on ways of thinking that came more naturally to them. The tone which they adopted was somewhat eschatological, for they presumed that those who would eventually number among the saved and the damned could already be easily distinguished from each other during life. More fundamentally, they acted as if an individual's place on either side of that divide was generally fixed, and found it hard to express change and moral development as anything other anomalous. It was a rather uncompromising vision of their world – and one with which future generations seem to have grown dissatisfied.

THE DAYLONG SPACE OF THE DEVIL'S DEEDS

The statement of the *Shepherd of Hermas* about the two opposite angels attached to every person was only a small, almost incidental, part of its theology, but it was a convenient piece of lore that swiftly became detached from its original context. 'Scripture attests that two angels, one good and one bad, are attached to each one of us,' observed Cassian in the early part of the fifth century, 'The book of the Shepherd teaches very explicitly about both'.[27] It was probably through such a second-hand reference that Bede recommended the *Liber Pastoris* as an authority on guardian angels to readers of his *Expositio in actuum apostolorum*, for he said nothing further about the teaching it provided on the subject.[28] But eventually, floating free from its source, the idea of the two spirits who accompanied human beings throughout the course of their lives came to the attention of Anglo-Saxon preachers. Among the corpus of later Old English sermons, a rich but complex body of material for historians, the words of the *Shepherd* reappear

[27] Cassian, *Conlationes*, VIII.17 (ed. Petschenig, p. 233).

[28] Bede, *Expositio in actuum apostolorum*, XII.15, ed. M.L.W. Laistner, CCSL 121 (Turnhout, 1983), p. 59. The fragmentary remains of an eighth-century Anglo-Saxon manuscript of the *Shepherd of Hermas*, probably of Northumbrian origin, makes it possible that Bede did know it directly, but there is little suggestion of its influence on his thought. Evidence for wider knowledge of the *Shepherd* in the early medieval West, beyond its observations about angels, is equivocal. On these issues, see Charles D. Wright, 'Shepherd of Hermas [Vulgata]' and 'Shepherd of Hermas [Palatina]', in *Sources of Anglo-Saxon Literary Culture: The Apocrypha*, ed. Frederick M. Biggs (Kalamazoo, MI, 2007), pp. 63–6.

twice but fused each time with new images. In Arthur Napier's collection of sermons attributed to Archbishop Wulfstan, a piece on the general themes of correct behaviour in church and the need for penitence gave the angels and demons extended consideration:

> It is said in holy books that every man has two teachers during the day and two at night. One teaches us about the wonder of the heavenly kingdom; that is God's angel. The other teaches us about the terror of hell; he is called a devil. At sunrise they bring this in writing to God – the angel, everything that we did for good in that night; and the devil, everything that we did and committed for evil. And he wants, if he can, to confute the angel with those evil works. They come at sunset too and bring to God everything that we did for good and everything we did for evil.[29]

Napier's homily XLVI is not in fact an authentic piece by Wulfstan, but instead a composite work put together by an anonymous homilist. Its comments on the 'two teachers' are closely linked to a more summary scene at the end of an eschatological sermon, another anonymous and composite piece, surviving in three manuscripts including the tenth-century Vercelli Book:

> Let us also consider how we are surrounded every day. Every day we have two shepherds: one comes from the heavens, who is to set a good example for us and teach us good virtues [...] and he wishes to defend us against the accursed devil, who comes from the steely hell with his sharp arrows to shoot us.[30]

The unknown authors of these two pieces – Napier XLVI and Vercelli IV – thus believed that the contest that had once briefly raged over St Guthlac's soul was now being endlessly reconvened. They exhorted their congregations to be mindful of the fact that the potential for vice and virtue lay within reach of every single person, being constantly offered up by two invisible 'teachers' (*lareowas*) or 'shepherds' (*hyrdas*).

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[29] Napier XLVI (p. 233).

[30] Vercelli IV (ed. Scragg, p. 104). For the relationship between the two complete manuscript witnesses and the additional single-page fragment, see Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, p. 87; *idem.*, 'Studies in the language of copyists of the Vercelli homilies', in *New Readings in the Vercelli Book*, ed. Samantha Zacher and Andy Orchard (Toronto, 2009), pp. 41–61, at pp. 53–6.

It is a simple matter to see that these homilists were expressing ideas about human action, guardian angels and demonic temptation which were utterly different from those held by Boniface, Bede and – despite the ostensibly similar imagery – the Old English poet of *Guthlac A*. The conclusion we ought to draw from that contrast is less immediately obvious. A complicating factor is our almost total ignorance of exactly when and where these, and most other, anonymous Old English homilies were written. There has long been a tendency to regard items such as these, less sustained and sophisticated than the works of Ælfric and less powerfully expressed than those of Archbishop Wulfstan after him, as reflective of Anglo-Saxon Christianity before the Benedictine Reform. Some clearly are: the Vercelli Book, in which one of our two pieces is found, is probably no later than 975; and a second compilation, the Blickling Homilies, may be roughly contemporary if a single internal reference to the year 971 refers to the point when the collection was put together, as seems most probable.[31] Being compilations, their contents must obviously pre-date the creation of the manuscript collections, but there is little way to determine precisely how much earlier any one sermon may be. But assuming similarly early dates for all other anonymous vernacular homilies as a matter of course is unwise, and scholars have increasingly questioned the validity of making facile distinctions between the 'reformed' writings of Ælfric or Wulfstan and the 'less orthodox' teaching of their unnamed counterparts.[32] The difficulties of placing the anonymous homilies into any well-defined historical context thus make them suggestive but necessarily imprecise tools for historical studies of belief. This complicates any attempt to explain when – and why – some Anglo-Saxon Christians

[31] Opinion on the dating of the Vercelli Homilies is usefully summarized by Samantha Zacher, *Preaching the Converted: The Style and Rhetoric of the Vercelli Book Homilies* (Toronto, 2009), pp. 5–9. For the compilation of the Blickling Homilies, see above, p. 38, n. 64.

[32] Words of warning are sounded by Mary Clayton, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary in Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 260–65; Nancy M. Thompson, 'Anglo-Saxon orthodoxy', in *Old English Literature in its Manuscript Context*, ed. Joyce Tally Lionarons (Morgantown, WV, 2004), pp. 37–65; Zacher, *Preaching the Converted*, pp. 5–9, 32–62.

began to think about guardian angels in ways that their ancestors would hardly have recognised.

Connections between Napier XLVI and Vercelli IV suggest that the two homilists were not extemporizing on common knowledge but drawing their ideas from a pre-existing written source which had combined two separate traditions about guardian angels. Napier XLVI gave the clearest indication of its dependency on textual authorities when it began, 'Men ða leofestan, Sanctus Gregorius cwæð...'. None of what it has to say bears any relationship to the known works of St Gregory, but the attribution presumably indicates that a Latin sermon circulating under Gregory's name was being rendered into Old English, as Charles Wright has previously observed.[33] Almost all the details in this opening half, before the homily abruptly moves into exhortations about almsgiving, show their dependency in turn upon the remarkably influential apocryphon, the *Vision of St Paul*, a widely disseminated and much redacted account of the things seen by the apostle while he was 'caught up to the third heaven'.[34] Among the various otherworldly sights related in the Long Latin versions of the *Vision,* St Paul had watched the souls of the dead as they were taken from their bodies for judgement according to their works.[35] That formed the set-piece of Napier XLVI – '*Sanctus Paulus apostolus* was speaking and said that God's angel showed him some impious and very sinful soul leaving of its wretched body...'.[36] In the *Vision of St Paul*, these death scenes had been preceded by an account

[33] Wright, *Irish Tradition*, p. 261.

[34] The *Vision* was probably composed in Greek during the third century, and was translated into numerous languages during the Middle Ages. Of the Latin texts, the 'Long Latin' versions recount Paul's experiences in full, while a number of short redactions excerpt (with differing degrees of creative freedom) only the events which take place in hell. The current state of knowledge is usefully summarized, with full bibliography, by Antonette diPaolo Healey, 'Apocalypse of Paul', in *The Apocrypha*, ed. Biggs, pp. 67–70. Since the redactions omit most of the comments relating to angels, reference is here made only to the Long Latin texts edited by Theodore Silverstein and Antony Hilhorst, *Apocalypse of Paul: A New Critical Edition of Three Long Latin Versions* (Geneva, 1997).

[35] *Visio Pauli* (Long Latin), chs. 11–18 (ed. Silverstein and Hilhorst, pp. 82–109).

[36] Napier XLVI (pp. 235–8).

of guardian angels reporting the deeds of the living to God every sunrise and sunset.[37] Napier XLVI reiterated the basic point, but applied the idea to the 'two teachers' to assert that both the angel and the demon come before God at those hours. The framework of the homily, then, is predominantly that of the *Vision of St Paul* with the addition of a small morsel of angelic lore derived, at whatever remove, from the *Shepherd of Hermas*.

The same combination of details from the *Vision* and the *Shepherd* underlies Vercelli IV, although the traces are fainter. The homilist twice stated that the angel and the demon were present 'every day' (*ælce dæg*). It is not a remarkable phrase, but some of the homilist's other expressions are less prosaic, including the evocative comment that the demon came from the 'steely hell' (*stylenan hell*). That phrase is found again only in the esoteric wisdom poem, *Solomon and Saturn II* – where it reappears once more in combination with the theme of the two opposed spirits:

> The Lord of the heavens sends an angel to each man when day breaks. It must watch how [the man's] mind grows hungry for the will of God, agonizes over the glory of the Creator, for as long as it is day. Then two spirits hover about him: one is brighter than gold, the other blacker than the abyss; one comes < . . . >[38] [the other from] the steely hell [*stylenan helle*]. One teaches him that he should keep the Creator's love and mercy, and his kinsmen's council; tempts him and teaches him into ruin [...] until the man turns, because of the daylong space of the devil's deeds, and performs the will of the one who lures him into error. Then the angel departs, weeping on his way home, and reports it all...[39]

Robert Menner first noted the coincidence of theme and expression between Vercelli IV and this part of *Solomon and Saturn II*, and reasonably posited that a common source lay

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37 *Visio Pauli* (Long Latin), chs. 7–10 (ed. Silverstein and Hilhorst, pp. 76–81).

38 The sole manuscript (CCCC 422, p. 26) reads through without a break, but a lacuna has long been noted: as well as losing the sense of the opposing forces, the line is defective on alliterative grounds. The missing words presumably describe heaven, from which the angel has been sent, in a contrasting manner to the reference to the *stylenan helle* that follows. Grein supplied two entirely conjectural half-lines to fill the gap, followed by Shippey in a recent translation, but the instability of the text at this point should not be overlooked: cf. C.W.M. Grein, *Bibliothek der angelsächsischen Poesie*, 3 vols. (Göttingen, 1857–64), i, 368; T.A. Shippey, *Poems of Wisdom and Learning in Old English* (Cambridge, 1976), pp. 102–3.

39 *Solomon and Saturn II*, lines 303–14 (ed. Anlezark, p. 94).

behind them.[40] *Solomon and Saturn II* is clearly dependent on the *Vision of St Paul*: the coming and going of spirits at the beginning and end of each day, and the striking image of an angel brought to tears by reporting human misdeeds to God, both derive from details in the Long Latin versions of the *Vision*.[41] We should, therefore, understand Vercelli IV's reference to the spirits who fight over human souls *ælce dæg* as a different way to express the *Vision of St Paul*'s assertion that the spirits renew their watch at the beginning and end of every day.[42] But, like Napier XLVI, both Vercelli IV and *Solomon and Saturn II* have conflated the *Vision of St Paul*'s details with the two tutelary spirits of the *Shepherd of Hermas*. The combination must be deemed sufficiently unusual as to make it likely that the pseudo-Gregorian sermon behind Napier XLVI also lay at the heart of this scene in Vercelli IV and *Solomon and Saturn II*.

Establishing the nature of the connections between these three otherwise dissimilar pieces is laborious but necessary. It may at first seem that revealing the influence of a single text, essentially an interpolated reworking of the *Vision of St Paul*, reduces the value of these writings as evidence for Anglo-Saxon beliefs – that it leaves us only with three Old English writers paraphrasing a single idea which did not originate with any of them. In fact, it is only in the telltale details that Napier XLVI, Vercelli IV and *Solomon and Saturn II* are alike. The uses to which they put the idea of the angel and the demon, sent morning and night to accompany the living, were individual and distinct. Napier XLVI sought primarily to explain to its congregation what it meant when their

[40] Robert J. Menner, *The Poetical Dialogues of Solomon and Saturn* (New York, 1941), p. 143; Wright supports the proposition, but notes that 'a more direct literary relationship' may also be possible: *Irish Tradition*, pp. 260–61.

[41] For the weeping angels of sinners, see *Visio Pauli* (Long Latin), ch. 10 (ed. Silverstein and Hilhorst, pp. 80–81).

[42] Thomas D. Hill suggests that *Solomon and Saturn II*'s decision to stage the action in a single 'day' should best be understood as an allusion to John 9:4, 'I must work the works of him that sent me, whilst it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work': 'Two notes on *Solomon and Saturn*', *Medium Ævum* 40 (1971), 217–21, at p. 220. It may be that the poet wished to draw such an additional meaning from his source, but the weeping angel is sufficiently unusual to suggest that the *Visio Pauli* was the primary influence, as noted also by Hermann, 'Recurrent motifs', pp. 25–6.

minds began to wander during church services: 'the spirits lead us into the church, where God's angel teaches us stillness and moderate speech and meditation on God's commands', but 'the demon teaches us unstillness and immoderate laughter', encouraging people to 'stand and gawp and look behind, which is careless worship. A person cannot make amends for it, because the demon has his heart in its hands'.[43] The point being made in *Solomon and Saturn II* is less immediately obvious, since the sole manuscript breaks off soon after the weeping angel leaves his stricken charge, but it seems to be narrating the progress of one man's slide into depravity 'until his eyes are full of grudges, made angry through miserable crime'.[44] Vercelli IV turned instead to the means whereby such things could be avoided. It used the common poetic and homiletic image of demons as malevolent archers, with 'a bow made of pride, and as many kinds of arrows as there are sins', but explained that human virtues acted like shields – 'one shield is wisdom, another caution, and constancy in good works', and so on – which the guardian angel could use against the demon's arrows.[45] So although a common source provided the framework for these three pieces, it was clearly being used actively and imaginatively by Anglo-Saxon writers addressing a number of related but distinct themes about sin and human action. The three were probably not contemporaries. A late ninth- or early tenth-century date for *Solomon and Saturn II* is presumed from linguistic evidence, although attempts to locate the poem to a more precise context remain conjectural.[46] Napier XLVI, on the other hand, appears to have been written at least sixty years later, if Malcolm Godden is correct to see a brief echo of Ælfric in it.[47] Vercelli IV currently floats untethered somewhere in between.[48] Not only were individual writers turning a

[43] Napier XLVI (pp. 233–4).
[44] *Solomon and Saturn II*, lines 318–19 (ed. Anlezark, p. 94).
[45] Vercelli IV (ed. Scragg, pp. 102–4).
[46] For proposed dates, see above, p. 46, n. 90.
[47] Malcolm R. Godden, 'An Old English penitential motif', *ASE* 2 (1973), 221–39, esp. at pp. 230, 236–8.
[48] The passage relating the activities of the two spirits appears to be a mid-tenth-century appendix to an earlier piece on only tangentially related matters: in addition to the abrupt dislocation of theme, the

common source about the activities of angels and demons to different uses, they were apparently doing so for a very long time.

Ideas which first attract attention as the specific conflation of extra-biblical motifs and assertions now begin to look like well-tended and enduring components of tenth-century Anglo-Saxon belief. That makes the contrast with earlier Anglo-Saxon opinion, which thought of the guardian angel as a reward rather than a birthright, more significant. Looking through the eyes of the resurrected monk of Wenlock, Boniface had split the world into two groups, already living utterly dissimilar lives that straightforwardly prefigured their eventual separation after Doomsday. The late Anglo-Saxon preacher responsible for the Napier XLVI, on the other hand, saw only a single mass of constantly contested souls and he spoke in inclusive terms: 'they bring to God everything that *we* have done for good and for evil. And they also lead *us* into church, there to teach *us*'.[49] He spoke of the holy and the damned in clear-cut terms when he narrated the progress of their souls after death, for by then the worth of a soul could be measured. He did not project that separation back into the present. For him, human beings had a constant potential for both goodness and wickedness which indicated that one could never truly be rid of either guardian angels or attendant demons during life in the way that Boniface and his contemporaries had imagined.

Yet it was Boniface's outlook which had had biblical support, following the words of the letter to the Hebrews which stated that angels attended 'those who are to receive the inheritance of salvation'. There was not the slightest biblical hint that a personal demon accompanied its more benevolent cousin, and that the two waged

language lacks any of the non-West Saxon features found in the remainder of the extant homily. See Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, p. 89.

49 Napier XLVI (p. 233).

endlessly repeated war over the soul which had been placed into their keeping. Evidently this did not matter. The idea that there were two spirits rather than one lent itself better to the shifting emotions of daily life, the way that a single person's mind might 'turn [...] in the space of one day' as *Solomon and Saturn II* expressed it.[50] This was teaching which seemed supported by experience, rather than by the careful sourcing of biblical evidence. It was on that basis that it had gained acceptance in Anglo-Saxon thought.

If these late Anglo-Saxon texts represent a different way of thinking about humankind, their ideas also necessitated a different way of thinking about angels and their abilities. The angels' duties themselves remained unchanged: Bede's comment that they attended human beings 'to defend them from the snares of the cunning enemy and raise them up with the mighty grace of heavenly desire' was still a fitting encapsulation.[51] But one of those tasks now seemed of dubious efficacy. When each individual was offered two choices at every turn by two teachers, what defence against demonic snares was the angel bringing? Napier XLVI spoke of a man unable to repent for his sins 'because the demon has his heart in its hands, and it is as hard as stone or flint against God's commands, and as loose as cloth. It melts like wax before fire in the face of the demon's teaching'.[52] The report of the weeping angel in *Solomon and Saturn II* was the report of a failed protector to God: 'The angel departs, weeping as he heads home, and explains everything: "I could not draw the hard steel stone from his heart; it is stuck within him"'.[53] In light of the close connection between the poem and Vercelli IV, this stone ought to be understood as one of the demon's sin-bringing arrows which the homily described less allusively. Vercelli IV itself may at first appear more optimistic

[50] *Solomon and Saturn II*, lines 321–2 (ed. Anlezark, p. 94).
[51] Bede, *Hom.*, II.10 (quoted above, p. 91).
[52] Napier XLVI (p. 234). For the heart as the seat of thought, see now Leslie Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies in the Vernacular and Latin Traditions* (Toronto, 2011).
[53] *Solomon and Saturn II*, lines 324–7 (ed. Anlezark, p. 94).

about the efficacious presence of heavenly spirit given its comments about the shields of the soul – but the kind of guardian angel it envisaged as a result was one which, although always present, could be rendered powerless to protect a human soul if it had not first been armed with those shields of virtues. The responsibility for attaining the shields is placed firmly with the individual not with its putative protector, which might find itself incapable of protecting the soul it watches over.

This consistent stress on the failing angel, or the angel impotent against his demonic opposite, is a surprising theme. Not that a guardian angel had ever been a guarantee of salvation, as King Ceolred once found to his cost; but his angels had still been an effective fighting force, and they successfully defended his soul against demonic attacks until the worthiness of his soul came to be reconsidered. Their tenth-century descendents were hardly *guardian* angels at all, and although no-one doubted the idea that individuals had angels personally assigned to them, the spirits' role and purpose had become oddly unclear. This was more than the problem of a handful of authors. Looking beyond them to the writings of their contemporaries, it becomes quickly apparent that almost every late Anglo-Saxon Christian who considered the uncontroversial idea that there were angels who personally attended the souls of human beings found it oddly difficult to say with certainty why these angels were a necessary presence. This was a theological issue, of course, but some unexpected evidence suggests that doubts about the powers of angels spread much further than we might first imagine.

INCONSTANCY

Faced with theological difficulties, Ælfric of Eynsham tended to think through his problems aloud. His writings do not suggest that it was his custom to develop all the ramifications of his ideas before committing them to the page, and they had a habit of

unravelling as he sought to bring them together in written form. Mary Clayton's comments on his vernacular retelling of the biblical story of Judith are in fact appropriate to a good deal of his theological output: 'Like a dog worrying a bone, Ælfric circles around and round in his conclusion, unable to find a safe resting-place [...] it is evident that [his source's] problematic nature had already been exercising his mind as he translated and adapted'.[54]

When Ælfric decided to conclude his homily for the feast of St Michael with an overview of the nature and function of angels, he ought to have been on solid ground.[55] He had a copy of Haimo of Auxerre's sermon for the occasion, and his Carolingian predecessor had usefully stitched together the most pertinent biblical passages relating to the angels and their care of humanity.[56] Ælfric began confidently: 'It is a great honour for Christian men that everyone has from birth an angel assigned to them in fellowship'. These were Jerome's words, either placed alongside Haimo's sermon by a redactor or by Ælfric himself.[57] Jerome had not specified that this was the honour of *Christian* men, and this added detail from Ælfric complicated the statement that the guardian angel was assigned at the moment of birth (*fram his acennednysse*) rather than upon entry into the community of believers at baptism. But in a country which was, at least nominally, entirely Christian this might have seemed a moot point, and it did not divert Ælfric's attention. He did feel the need to offer caveats, however, when he came to explain why the angel was there in the first place. Haimo had stressed the fact that the angels were a perfect intermediary between humanity and a distant deity, 'because when they go forth

54 Clayton, 'Ælfric's *Judith*', pp. 222–3.
55 Ælfric, *CH*, I.34 (ed. Clemoes, pp. 473–5).
56 Haimo, *Homiliae de sanctis*, VII, ed. Migne, *PL* 118, cols. 770–76. The sermon is included in the homiliary of Paul the Deacon: *Homiliarius*, II.58, ed. Migne, *PL* 95, cols. 1525–30.
57 Jerome, *Commentarii in euangelium Matthaei*, III.18, ed. David Hurst and Marcus Adriaen, CCSL 77 (Turnhout, 1969), p. 159; also quoted by Smaragdus, *Expositio libri comitis*, ed. Migne, *PL* 102, col. 479; Malcolm Godden thinks it more likely that Ælfric was using an expanded version of Haimo's homily: *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: Introduction, Commentary and Glossary* (Oxford, 2000), p. 282.

on our account, they do so in such a way that they never withdraw from the vision of God'. Ælfric took his meaning to be that God was omnipresent and omnipotent. He turned Haimo's statement around: 'they never depart from his presence, for God is everywhere [*forðan ðe God is æghwær*]'. But offering reminders about God's constant presence and awareness sat badly with Haimo's point about the intermediary status of angels. The importance of angels being present alongside human beings without being removed from God, the Carolingian monk had said, was that it made them perfectly placed 'to announce our deeds to God, just as the angel said to Tobias: "When thou didst pray with tears I offered thy prayers to God"'.[58] Ælfric appears to have had doubts about this, given what he had just said about God being 'everywhere'. He added a caveat to Haimo's point: 'they announce our works and prayers to the Almighty, *even though nothing is hidden from him*, as the archangel Raphael said to the man of God, Tobias...'. In the same breath, Ælfric had thus explained what guardians do, then shown how they were entirely redundant beside their omniscient Creator. As he brought the homily to an end, he even managed to undermine Haimo's other point, about guardian angels offering protection for the soul. Casting around for a way to tie his angelological discussion back to the primary needs of a Michaelmas sermon, Ælfric turned his comments about angelic protection in general into a eulogy to St Michael exclusively: 'the great heavenly angel is the continual helper of Christian men on earth, and their intercessor in the heavens before almighty God'. Honouring Michael in this way was appropriate for the feast-day setting of this homily – but it made the personal protection offered by individual guardian angels now seem of secondary importance. Within the space of a single homily, Ælfric's guardian angels which started out as the 'great honour for all Christian men' had thus faded into insignificance beside an omnipotent deity who required no intermediaries, and a single powerful archangel whose abilities required no caveats.

[58] Cf. Tob. 12:12.

The logical problems running through Ælfric's sermon are best explained as the accidental blunders of a homilist trying to cover all his bases, providing somewhat provisional reactions to issues that he had not completely worked through in his own mind. It is nevertheless clear that he was not the only one to find his belief in guardian angels rather difficult to express in practical terms. Two decades after Ælfric, Byrhtferth of Ramsey offered similar comments in a homiletic conclusion to his *Enchiridion*. Like Ælfric, he began with a simple reminder about the reality of guardian angels (identifying baptism as the moment of their arrival this time), and then immediately described the ways in which they could swiftly become incapable of fulfilling their duties:

> Dear friend, when you are baptized you become God's soul and body, and God entrusts you to his angels until your last day. As often as you sin they turn away from you, and every day they report your deeds before the sight of God; and the devil writes down all your misdeeds beside them, so that your soul and your body may part company. No hungry man ever wants his meal as much as demons do the soul.[59]

Once again, a late Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastic had no sooner introduced the topic of guardian angels than he turned straightaway to an explanation of how they might 'turn away' from their task. Byrhtferth's words thus mirror those of Napier XLVI and *Solomon and Saturn II,* in that his angels are said to be incapable of offering protection against the demonically induced sins. He might well have known one or other of those works, and so been familiar with their discussion of failing angels; he certainly shared their notion that the angels carry out a daily report before God. Although Byrhtferth undoubtedly believed in guardian angels, he advised his readers to place their trust elsewhere: 'Pray to your Lord' was his final counsel, 'Through his might you can and will overcome the devil'. The guardian angel has ultimately left the picture, pushed out this time not by concerns about the omniscience of God but by human free will which allows any human to commit sins which would make their angels turn away from their task.

[59] Byrhtferth, *Enchiridion*, postscript (ed. Baker and Lapidge, p. 246).

Pursuing the ramifications of homiletic discussions about guardian angels in this way is an inescapably artificial exercise: we have no means of gauging directly the reaction of their actual audiences. Its value, however, lies in highlighting the way that ideas about the services of angels were being moulded, and ultimately encroached upon, by matters which seemed more fundamental – human nature on the one hand, and God on the other. Ecclesiastical writers from late Anglo-Saxon England tended to respond to these overlapping concerns by drawing attention to the ways in which angels might prove insufficient as protectors and intercessors, might be less constant in their attention than the higher power which they served, and might even fail in their allotted tasks. The effect that such teaching upon congregations who listened to listened to it cannot be known for certain, but an echo of the theme from an unexpected source goes some way to suggest that doubts about angelic power had become widespread.

In his speech to the victorious Beowulf, Hrothgar warns the young warrior about the dangers of pride.[60] The importance of the king's words within *Beowulf* as a whole has been much debated, but their relevance to our discussion lies in the way that Hrothgar explains how pride first comes to lodge itself in a man's heart:

> He swells in prosperity [...] until a measure of pride grows and flourishes within him, when the keeper sleeps, the soul's shepherd. The sleep is too sound, bound with cares; the slayer very close, the one who shoots with sins from his bow. Then under the helm, he is struck in the heart by a bitter arrow – he cannot defend himself from the twisted teachings of the evil spirit. That which he has long possessed now seems to him too little; frenzied, he begins to covet...[61]

A long history of *Beowulf* scholarship has almost invariably explained the figure of this shooting 'slayer' (*bona*) as the devil with his sin-bringing arrows, sometimes in direct reference to Vercelli IV with its two contending spirits, but has generally been reticent to

[60] *Beowulf*, lines 1700–84, ed. Frederick Klaeber, *Beowulf and The Fight at Finnsburg* (3rd ed. with supplements: Lexington, MA, 1950), pp. 63–6.
[61] *Ibid.*, lines 1735a, 1740–47 (p. 65).

identify the soul's 'keeper' or 'guardian' (*weard*), its 'shepherd' (*hyrde*), with a guardian angel.[62] Gregor Sarrazin did propose just such an identification in the nineteenth century, but presumably because the reading formed part of his convoluted theory that *Beowulf* was written at the Danish court of Ingeld and reworked into a Christian mould by the Anglo-Saxon poet Cynewulf, others were quick to dismiss his suggestion.[63] Thereafter the *weard* has generally been read as a personification of an abstract quality, such as Wisdom, Reason or Conscience; or else a figurative reference in the patristic tradition to the mind of a man negligent of his moral state.[64] Nevertheless, given the transparently homiletic mode of Hrothgar's 'sermon', the presence of a guardian angel in *Beowulf* is not such an unlikely suggestion. Andy Orchard has noted the rarity of the phrase *sawele hyrde* in Old English, and its application to guardian angels specifically in the Old English translation of the *Vision of St Paul* and to the archangel Michael elsewhere.[65] Recently, Daniel Anlezark has emphasized the similarities between this passage and the image of the two spirits in Vercelli IV and especially *Solomon and Saturn II*, and revived

[62] Klaeber, for instance, noted a connection between the *bona* and the devil of Vercelli IV when revising his edition, but evidently did not deem the parallel sufficient to revise his previous, more abstract explanation of the soul's *weard*: *Beowulf*, pp. 191–2. The most extended discussion of the *bona* and his weaponry is Mark Atherton, 'The figure of the archer in *Beowulf* and the Anglo-Saxon psalter', *Neophilologus* 77 (1993), 653–7.

[63] Gregor Sarrazin, *Beowulf-studien. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte altgerminscher Sage und Dichtung* (Berlin, 1888), p. 103. For an explicit dismissal of his reading, see A.J. Wyatt's confident note: '*weard* is apparently "the conscience" [...] hardly, as Sarrazin suggests, "the guardian angel"': *Beowulf with The Finnsburg Fragment*, rev. R.W. Chambers (Cambridge, 1933), p. 86.

[64] See variously: W.J. Sedgefield, *Beowulf* (2nd ed., Manchester, 1913), p. 134; Wyatt, *Beowulf*, p. 86; Klaeber, *Beowulf*, p. 191; R.E. Kaske, '*Sapientia et fortitudo* as the controlling theme of *Beowulf*', *Studies in Philology* 55 (1958), 423–56, at p. 433; Bruce Mitchell and Fred C. Robinson, *Beowulf: An Edition with Relevant Shorter Texts* (Oxford, 1998), p. 105; Dorothy Haines, 'Unlocking *Exodus* ll. 516–532', *JEGP* 98 (1999), 481–98, at p. 495; Dennis Cronan, 'Poetic meanings in the Old English poetic vocabulary', *English Studies* 84 (2003), 397–425, at p. 408. R.M. Liuzza's reading is more consistent, attributing an allegorical meaning to both the *bona* and the *weard*, rather than the latter alone: *Beowulf: A New Verse Translation* (Peterborough, ON, 2000), p. 106, n. 1. Margaret E. Goldsmith argues that such any personified abstractions 'seem altogether alien to the rest of the poem', but prefers to see echoes of Ambrose and Gregory, with the *weard* being the neglectful man himself: *The Mode and Meaning of Beowulf* (London, 1970), pp. 196–9. R. Mark Scowcroft elides the *weard* altogether, and argues that it is the soul itself which sleeps: 'The Irish analogues to *Beowulf*', *Speculum* 74 (1999), 22–64, at p. 46, n. 77.

[65] Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, pp. 51–2. Richard North's more recent attempt to extend Orchard's observation into evidence for *Beowulf*'s composition at Breedon is, at best, flawed and inconsistent: *The Origins of Beowulf: From Vergil to Wiglaf* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 184–92.

the identification of the *weard* as an angel.[66] While it is not clear from Hrothgar's speech whether the *bona* should be identified as an individual demon personally assigned to the soul, as in *Solomon and Saturn II*, rather than *the* Devil, in the guise in which he appears in other Old English works like Cynewulf's *Juliana*,[67] both terminology and subject matter support a reading of Hrothgar's words as a narrative about Christian supernatural forces and their interaction with human souls.

Anlezark's reasons for returning to the idea that the *weard* is a guardian angel have not found universal acceptance from readers, some of whom have thought that any notion derived from the *Shepherd of Hermas* is too 'esoteric' a piece of lore to belong with the rest of Hrothgar's speech.[68] His intention was to demonstrate a 'common intellectual milieu' in which *Solomon and Saturn II* and *Beowulf* were created, since 'the failure of the soul's protector presents a suggestive link' between the two poems.[69] As we have now seen, however, emphasizing the limits of the powers of guardian angels was in fact a far more widespread feature of late Anglo-Saxon religious writing – the theme links *Beowulf* not only with the esotericism of *Solomon and Saturn II*, but also with much more straightforward pieces of late Anglo-Saxon moralizing in the vernacular homilies. The 'common intellectual milieu' which fostered ideas about failing angels was a wide one, and this portion of *Beowulf* would fit comfortably into any part of it.

Interpreting Hrothgar's words about the *weard* and the *bona* has been problematic for critics chiefly because is so allusive. Therein, however, lies the importance of this passage for our present discussion. Such Christian wisdom as Hrothgar's speech provides

66 Daniel Anlezark, *Water and Fire: The Myth of the Flood in Anglo-Saxon England* (Manchester, 2006), pp. 331–3.
67 Cynewulf, *Juliana*, lines 382–417a, ed. Rosemary Woolf, *Juliana* (London, 1955), pp. 38–40.
68 Frederick M. Biggs, review of Anlezark, *Water and Fire*, in *Speculum* 83 (2008), 655–6, at p. 655.
69 Anlezark, *Water and Fire*, pp. 332–3.

is limited to that which could be deployed without explicit reference to Christ himself, salvation, or to other overtly theological issues; it deals in commonplaces which could remain recognisable to a Christian audience even when cast into a deliberately vague and allusive mould.[70] The fact that Hrothgar provides the failure of the guardian angel against demonic attack as one of these commonplaces may therefore reveal the degree to which the theme was familiar in the poet's day. Ascertaining exactly when that was is, of course, the notorious sticking-point of all *Beowulf* scholarship, and it is not my intention to digress far into that territory. Personally, I see no reason to dissent from Michael Lapidge's incisive argument that an early eighth-century archetype is detectable behind the scribal errors in the sole surviving manuscript – but Lapidge himself identifies part of Hrothgar's speech as a likely tenth-century interpolation into a predominantly earlier work, given its stylistic similarities to the distinctive language of vernacular preaching.[71] It must suffice to point out that the veiled allusion to the workings of the guardian angel placed into Hrothgar's mouth would also fit uncomfortably with the early eighth century, when it was believed that a person had to merit the assistance of an angel who would therefore prove to be a powerful ally, and is more reminiscent of a theme which was regularly taken up by later Anglo-Saxon preachers.

If the veiled but recognisable image of the failing guardian angel in *Beowulf* indicates how far the theme had spread, it should not surprise us to find that at least one

[70] On the deliberate vagueness of Christian doctrine in *Beowulf*, see especially Edward B. Irving Jr., 'Christian and pagan elements', in *A Beowulf Handbook*, ed. Robert E. Bjork and John D. Niles (Exeter, 1997), pp. 175–92, at pp. 189–92; and also Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, p. 53. Of relevance to the veiled identification of the *weard* as a guardian angel is H. Munro Chadwick's observation that one noticeable peculiarity of *Beowulf* is 'the total absence of the word *engel*, for expressions such as "lord of angels" (*engla dryhten*) are among the most frequent epithets of the Deity in Anglo-Saxon religious poems': *The Heroic Age* (Cambridge, 1926), pp. 47–8.

[71] Lapidge, 'Archetype', pp. 38–40. Part or all of Hrothgar's speech has been under suspicion by proponents of an early *Beowulf* for some time, although Margaret E. Goldsmith was correct to say that much of it came from only from its 'inappropriateness to a preconceived theory of the meaning of the poem and its date of composition': 'The Christian perspective in *Beowulf*', *Comparative Literature* 14 (1962), 71–90, at p. 85.

late Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastic dispensed altogether with the idea that the angels were really guardian spirits at all. In his *Institutes of Polity*, a work which he seems to have been still revising at the time of his death, Archbishop Wulfstan remained convinced that angels attended human souls, but not for their protection:

> What I say is true: after his baptism, angels continually watch over every man, [to see] how he fulfils that which he promised before when he wanted to be baptised. Let us regularly think that over, and diligently fulfil the things we promised when we accepted baptism, as is our duty.[72]

When Wulfstan's contemporary, Byrhtferth, had identified baptism as the moment when Christians receive their angels, only to describe them turning away as often as a sin was committed, he had still clung to the idea that the angels were present to assist the soul in some way. Wulfstan's angels were silent watchers, detached from the things they observed. Not that they had ceased to be actively involved in the world, but they came to preserve the dignity of ecclesiastical rites rather than the souls of the living: 'as often baptism is performed or the host is consecrated, angels hover there and protect those actions, and through the power of God help the priests as often as they serve Christ correctly'.[73] To Wulfstan, the ministries of angels were dispassionate. They oversaw procedure and assessed human worth. There could even be something disquieting about their constant yet detached watchfulness. When they were placed over human souls they came not as guardians, but as guarantors of a baptismal pledge, inspecting thoughts and deeds in preparation for 'the great Judgement to which we shall all come'.[74] Wulfstan found a place for guardian angels in his mental picture of the world only by first freeing them of any obligation to be guardians at all.

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[72] Wulfstan, *Polity*, ed. Karl Jost, *Die «Institutes of Polity, Civil and Ecclesiastical». Ein Werk Erzbischof Wulfstans von York* (Bern, 1959), pp. 162–3.
[73] *Ibid.* (p. 104).
[74] *Ibid.* (pp. 164–5).

The nature of the evidence for Anglo-Saxon ideas about the 'ministering spirits sent to serve for the sake of those who are to receive the inheritance of salvation' is not continuous. A cluster of vignettes from the eighth century is followed by silence, and the new opinions voiced after the turn of the tenth century are expressed through texts which can only be assigned to the loosest of chronologies. It is only really possible to observe a contrast between the earlier material, with its monochrome vision of the saved and the damned, and the later, with its more uncertain attitudes towards the powers of heavenly spirits. Trying to bridge the gap by examining the remains of Anglo-Saxon prayerbooks, which do survive from the late eighth, ninth and tenth centuries alike, is also of no avail. Among all the petitions made to the powers of heaven for assistance and protection in these books, not a single one sought to enlist the aid of the personal spirit attached to the soul.

This apparent omission evidently struck one twelfth-century woman as odd. In her possession, or otherwise available to her, was an early eleventh-century prayerbook made either by or for the New Minster at Winchester, and to it she added the following entreaty:

> I believe that you are the holy angel, assigned by Almighty God as my protection, and so I beg, and through him who has appointed you to this [duty] I humbly implore, that always and everywhere in this life you may guard me, wretched, frail and unworthy; may you protect and defend [me] from all evil, and when God orders my soul to depart from here, may you not permit demons to have power over it, but may you take it gently from the body and lead it sweetly into the bosom of Abraham with the bidding and support of God, our Creator and Saviour, who is blessed for ever and ever. Amen.[75]

It is the earliest prayer of its kind to survive in an English manuscript. It may well have been a modification of a petition originally directed to St Michael, for not only is it almost identical to a Michaeline prayer in a psalter made at Shaftesbury around the same

[75] Ælfwine's Prayerbook, 74r (ed. Günzel, p. 128 [no. 47]).

time, but in fact the business of offering prayer to personal guardian angels was not yet common practice anywhere in western Europe.[76] It would ultimately blossom into a vital strand of private devotion in the later Middle Ages,[77] and we might therefore be tempted as a result to pay little heed to the difficulties and doubts about angelic guardianship which exercised the minds of late Anglo-Saxon Christians. Whatever had led Archbishop Wulfstan to relieve angels of their duties as personal protectors evidently did not occur to subsequent generations who still addressed guardian spirits through prayer.

Yet perhaps uncertainty and fervent prayer do actually belong together. The first Anglo-Saxon prayerbooks compiled material which had been current in the days of Boniface and St Guthlac's poetic hagiographer, when the powers of the guardian angel were assured.[78] We might think of their lack of reference to guardian angels as a product of that wider confidence about angelic power, and consider that a being whose abilities are not questioned need not be cajoled and entreated to remain mindful of its duties. Making requests of guardian angels, on the other hand, is in effect a precautionary measure; it presupposes the reality of the angel, but does not take its assistance for

[76] André Wilmart's survey suggests that these prayers only just pre-date the tenth century: *Auteurs spirituels et textes dévots du moyen âge latin. Études d'histoire littéraire* (Paris, 1932), pp. 537–58. He discusses this prayer, and its other appearance as a petition to Michael in London, British Library, Lansdowne 383 (169v), at p. 543. Philippe Faure argues that devotion to the guardian angel grew entirely from the cult of St Michael, but the impetus for the development has not yet been adequately explored: 'L'homme accompagne. Origines et développement du thème de l'ange gardien en Occident', *Cahiers de Saint-Michel de Cuxa* 28 (1997), 199–212. Equally unclear is whether the situation was the same in eastern Christianity; although Migne appended a petitions to the guardian angel from Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, cod. theol. gr. 231 (59v–60r) to his edition of works attributed to the late fourth-century Macarius (*PG* 32, cols. 447–8), the prayer is unattributed in the fifteenth-century miscellany in which it is preserved, and its antiquity therefore uncertain.

[77] The widespread popularity of the cult of guardian angels in the later Middle Ages remains to be fully explored. For preliminary comments, see R.N. Swanson, *Religion and Devotion in Europe, c. 1215–c. 1515* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 170–72; Anne F. Sutton and Livia Visser-Fuchs, 'The cult of the angels in late fifteenth-century England: an Hours of the Guardian Angel presented to Queen Elizabeth Woodville', in *Women and the Book: Assessing the Visual Evidence*, ed. Lesley Smith and Jane H.M. Taylor (London, 1997), pp. 230–65; Philippe Faure, 'Les anges gardiens (XIII^{e}–XV^{e} siècles). Modes et finalités d'une protection rapprochée', in *La protectione spirituelle au Moyen Âge*, ed. Philippe Faure and André Vauchez (Paris, 2001), pp. 23–41.

[78] The early books are the subject of detailed study by Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature*, pp. 275–327. For other aspects of their attitude towards angelic prayer, see below: pp. 214–18 and 220–24.

granted. One can more easily imagine the unfortunate subject of Hrothgar's sermon begging his angel not to fall asleep at the critical moment than one can picture St Guthlac needing to plead with the warrior-spirit that followed him into the fens. Not every prayer to a guardian angel has to be thought of as a response to some acute anxiety, but it is important to recognize that personal doubt and devout prayer are far from incompatible. They might belong to the same mental universe. These are themes to which we will return.[79]

A suggestive visual postscript to this dwindling confidence in the constancy of angelic protection over the course of the Anglo-Saxon period comes from an arresting image in the illustrations of the Harley Psalter. Begun at Christ Church, Canterbury in the early eleventh century, modified and extended by a dozen different hands over the century that followed, the lavishly decorated book of psalms was modelled upon the imported Utrecht Psalter, made at Reims around 830. Individual artists approached their task with different intentions, some intent upon reproducing their exemplar in minute detail, others responding to its images with more creative freedom.[80] 'Artist G' belonged to the second category, taking it upon himself to alter the illustrations of his predecessors as well as providing his own. He is known to have been actively engaged upon other projects in the third quarter of the eleventh century.[81] One of his compositions in the Harley Psalter is the dynamic image which accompanies Psalm 30, depicting the Psalmist poised on difficult terrain between the opposing figures of an angel, which reaches to

[79] See below, pp. 244–7.

[80] London, British Library, Harley 603. The illustrations are reproduced in black and white in Thomas H. Ohlgren, *Anglo-Saxon Textual Illustration* (Kalamazoo, MI, 1992); most are also available in colour via the British Library's online catalogue of illuminated manuscripts. The fullest consideration of the Harley Psalter remains William Noel, *The Harley Psalter* (Cambridge, 1995). A digital facsimile of Utrecht, Universiteitsbibliotheek, MS 32 accompanies *The Utrecht Psalter in Medieval Art: Picturing the Psalms of David*, ed. Koert van der Horst, William Noel and Wilhelmina C.M. Wüstefeld (Tuurdijk, 1996).

[81] Noel, *Harley Psalter*, p. 139; see also Richard Gameson, 'The Anglo-Saxon artists of the Harley (603) Psalter', *JBAA* 143 (1990), 29–48, at pp. 33–4.

him with outstretched hands, and a ragged demon, which attacks him with a curved trident (fig. 14). The scene could almost be a visual counterpart to the ever-present warring spirits described in Vercelli IV, Napier XLVI and *Solomon and Saturn II*, but artist G's composition was effectively a reduced summary of a more complex image from the Utrecht Psalter, which had already been copied in full by an earlier hand on the previous side (figs. 15 and 16). Bringing together two originally separate elements, the

FIG. 14. London, British Library, Harley 603, 17v (detail)

FIG. 15. Psalm 30 in the Utrecht Psalter (Utrecht, Universiteitsbibliotheek, MS 32, 17r)

FIG. 16. Psalm 30 in the Harley Psalter (Harley 603, 17r)

snake-haired demon who plucks an unwary man from a crowd and the Psalmist reaching to an angel across the mouth of hell, the new composition vividly communicates a sense of spiritual turmoil and the plight of a beleaguered soul.

The scene is not, however, complete in itself. At the top of the facing page, the illustration to Psalm 31 saw hosts of men and angels gazing upwards at the central figure of God, faithfully reproducing the depiction of the psalm in the Utrecht Psalter. To this, artist G added small details: an extra fish in the sea, some touches of colour to the figures

and their landscape, a larger cross behind the Lord's head. To the left of the scene, standing on the shore, he added a small figure in red. The man points upwards to God but looks back over his shoulder, out of the frame and over the page towards the Psalmist caught between the two spirits (figs. 17 and 18). As William Noel noted, the unexpected figure 'is pointing out the presence of the Lord to the Psalmist, a castaway at the bottom of the preceding page, and the fact that he has heard his cry'. The previous artist, following his ninth-century model, had already inclined the Lord's head down towards

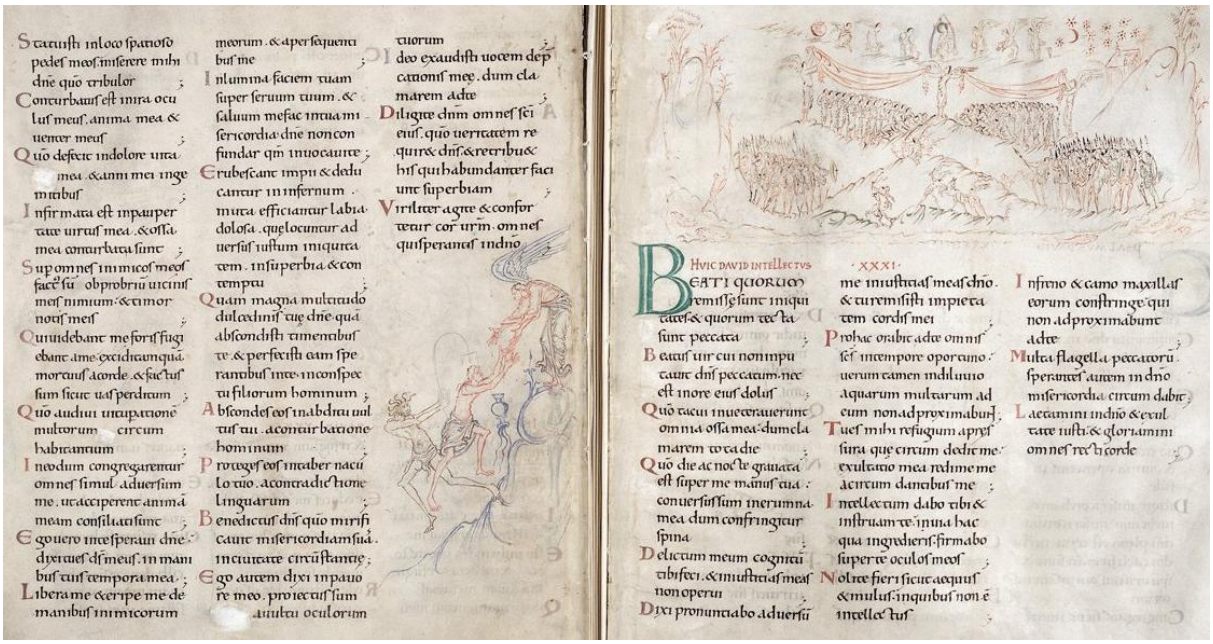

FIG. 17. The embattled Psalmist in context (Harley 603, 17v–18r)

FIG. 18. Psalm 31, with detail (left) of figure added by artist G

the left of the page, and artist G saw a chance to follow his gaze down into a new scene, fashioning a response to Psalm 31's plea, 'Make thy face to shine upon thy servant'.[82]

The Psalmist's plight, caught between the angel and the demon, was thus not the eleventh-century artist's main concern.[83] As his pointing man indicated, he was looking past the spirits to the throne of God. But this marked a sharp contrast with the way that the Utrecht Psalter had treated supernatural forces. Every time a psalm addressed God directly, imploring him for some sign or favour, the illustrations of the Utrecht Psalter had shown an angel performing the required task on God's behalf. So when Psalm 30:4, for instance, said to God, 'Thou hast brought forth, O Lord, my soul from hell: thou hast saved me from them that go down into the pit', the Carolingian artist responded by showing an angel standing beside the Psalmist as he escaped from a hellish pit (fig. 15 above). The late Anglo-Saxon artist responsible for the image of the Psalmist hemmed in on either side by an angel and a demon evidently thought about angels rather differently. In this scene, the angel was emphatically not the Lord's surrogate, nor even his agent. The angel was here contributing to the Psalmist's sense of spiritual unease as much as the demon. The little figure who gestured up to the heavens was instructing the Psalmist to set his sight upon no intermediary, angelic or otherwise, but to place his trust in God alone. It was the only dependable counsel in an age when religious thinkers had become increasingly unwilling to ascribe great power to guardian angels, and instead drew attention to the limits of that power and the constant need for it to be renewed.

82 Ps. 31:17; Noel, *Harley Psalter*, pp. 100–101.

83 *Pace* Kathleen M. Openshaw, 'Weapons in the daily battle: images of the conquest of evil in the early medieval psalter', *Art Bulletin* 75 (1993), 17–38, at p. 29.

CHAPTER FOUR

The rules of the otherworld

As an Old English poet turned his attention from the present life to the future, he ceased to narrate gnomic certainties about the world he knew and stared instead into the unknown fate that awaited him after death:

> Only the Ruler knows where the soul will turn afterwards, and all the spirits who go before God after their death-day wait for judgement in the Father's embrace. The shape of the future is dark and hidden; the Lord alone knows, the saving Father.[1]

Christian teaching sought to equip the living with the means to contemplate this future with expectation and certainty. While the writer of the poem now known as *Maxims II* evidently found such instruction insufficient, others apparently took comfort from the eschatological doctrines of the Church. Bede attributed much of the initial progress of the conversion to Christianity to a new-found sense of certainty about humanity's future fate. In his *Historia ecclesiastica*, a pagan noble's address to King Edwin concerning the merits of the new religion, in which the experience of mortal life was memorably likened to the short flight of a sparrow through a fire-lit hall, concluded that:

> this life of men is visible for a moment; but as to what might follow after, or even what went before, we have no idea. So if this new teaching brings something more certain, it seems right that it be followed.[2]

In general terms, the further ahead one looked, the easier it was to be certain of what awaited. The Final Judgement, and the entry into eternal life that would follow after,

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1 *Maxims II*, lines 58b–64a, ed. Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie, *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems* (New York, 1942), p. 57.

2 Bede, *HE*, II.13 (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 182–4).

were critical to Christian teaching. There was still plenty to ponder and discuss, of course, but the debates of theologians about the end of time had largely progressed to the level of detail by Bede's day. It was well established, for instance, that a final persecution would have to be suffered as the world neared its end, instigated by Antichrist but to be endured only until he himself was defeated and killed. A curious Anglo-Saxon might reasonably, therefore, speculate about the manner of Antichrist's destruction, only to find that the evidence appeared to be equivocal as to whether it would be the returned Christ or the archangel Michael who would deal the fatal blow. Yet no-one would have felt that this ambiguity shook their confidence in the general shape of Christian teaching about the Last Days, for it was hardly the kind of question upon which an entire vision of the future depended. One could admit uncertainty about the details without feeling that one's eschatological outlook was thereby compromised. Bede himself was certainly content to keep his options open, saying in *De temporum ratione* that Antichrist's destruction would be done '*either* by the Lord himself *or* by the archangel Michael, as some teach'.[3]

One of the things about which it was possible to be certain was that in the future, the present barriers between the human world and the angelic realms would be dissolved. In fact, according to the apocryphal Apocalypse of Thomas and several Old English sermons dependent on it, they would be violently torn apart on the sixth day before the great Judgement: 'the heavens will burst asunder from the east to the west, and all the race of angels will look down upon mankind through the opening. Then everyone will

[3] Bede, *De temporum ratione*, ch. 69 (ed. Jones, p. 539: my emphasis). The two notions seem to derive ultimately from 2 Thessalonians 2:8 and Daniel 12:1 respectively; although in an earlier letter to Acca, bishop of Hexham, Bede had attributed the idea that Michael would defeat Antichrist to Gregory the Great: *Epistola* XV, ed. Migne, *PL* 94, col. 707. A number of commentators have stated that Bede had in mind Gregory's statement in *Hom. in euang.*, XXXIV about one who 'will be destroyed by a most dreadful punishment when he does battle with the archangel Michael' – but Gregory himself seems to have been referring to Satan rather than Antichrist here ('the ancient enemy, who in his pride desired to be like God'). Bede may simply have misunderstood Gregory's meaning here, since he sharply differentiated between Satan and Antichrist in his own writings: cf. Peter Darby, *Bede and the End of Time* (Farnham, 2012), pp. 118–19.

see what it will be like at the end of this world'.[4] Thereafter, the angels would play an active part in the events of the Last Days, and the allusive but nonetheless detailed account of their activities provided by the book of Revelation was familiar to all. A passing nod to its images of trumpet-blowing angels, or a short description of the shining throngs descending from the skies with the Judge, became an economical way for Anglo-Saxon artists and writers to evoke a Doomsday setting.[5] They might also have speculated further about the numbers of the angels that would accompany Christ (five thousand, according to one Old English sermon), or the manner in which they would be dressed (the archangel Michael would wear a garment made from a cloth which angels called *spiritum paraclitum*, or so an esoteric discussion of the Pater Noster revealed), but such small innovations simply fitted into a framework that was well understood, a sequence of events which Anglo-Saxon Christians could rightly consider to be a certainty.[6]

This distant future was not, however, the thing that troubled the anonymous poet of *Maxims II*. It was rather the question of what would happen between an individual's

[4] Blickling VII (ed. Kelly, p. 64); cf. Bazire-Cross III (p. 50), CCCC 41, homily III, ed. Max Förster, 'A new version of the Apocalypse of Thomas in Old English', *Anglia* 73 (1955), 6–36, at p. 25; Vercelli XV (ed. Scragg, p. 258). A full edition of the Apocalypse of Thomas is forthcoming from Charles D. Wright, and promises to resolve many of the present obscurities about the text and its transmission, as well as the relationship of the Old English sermons to the various versions of the Apocalypse. Until that time, see his '*The Apocalypse of Thomas*: some new Latin texts and their significance for the Old English versions', in *Apocryphal Texts and Traditions*, ed. Powell and Scragg, pp. 27–64; and 'Vercelli Homily XV and *The Apocalypse of Thomas*', in *New Readings*, ed. Zacher and Orchard, pp. 151–84.

[5] See variously: Bede, *De dei iudicii*, lines 57–8, 64–5, 142–5, ed. J. Fraipont, CCSL 122 (Turnhout, 1955), pp. 441, 444; Bede, *VCP*, ch. 42 (ed. Colgrave, p. 294); Alcuin, *Ep.*, CCLXXX (ed. Dümmler, p. 438); *Christ and Satan*, lines 597–607, ed. Robert Emmett Finnegan, *Christ and Satan: A Critical Edition* (Waterloo, ON, 1977), p. 86; *Christ III*, lines 12–32, 58b–63, ed. Bernard J. Muir, *The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry: An Edition of Exeter Dean and Chapter MS 3501*, 2 vols. (2nd ed., Exeter, 2000), i, 79, 81; Cynewulf, *Elene*, lines 1280–81a (ed. Gradon, p. 74); Vercelli II and VIII (ed. Scragg, pp. 56 and 143–5); Ælfric, *CH*, II.38 (ed. Godden, p. 324). For artistic depictions, see especially the image of the Second Coming in the Benedictional of St Æthelwold, 6v, edited in facsimile by Andrew Prescott, *The Benedictional of Saint Æthelwold: A Masterpiece of Anglo-Saxon Art* (London, 2002); cf. also the Eyam Cross (discussed above, pp. 58–61).

[6] *Be heofonwarum and be helwarum*, ed. Loredana Teresi, '*Be heofonwarum 7 be helwarum*: a complete edition', in *Early Medieval English Texts and Interpretations: Studies Presented to Donald G. Scragg*, ed. Elaine Treharne and Susan Rosser (Tempe, AZ, 2002), pp. 211–44, at p. 226; *Solomon and Saturn I*, prose section, ed. Anlezark, *Old English Dialogues*, p. 74. The prose Solomon and Saturn dialogue on the Pater Noster has traditionally been separated by editors from the poetic section which precedes it in the manuscript, and often considered as a separate piece entirely; but I find the arguments for the unity of the verse and prose compelling: see Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe, *Visible Song: Transitional Literacy in Old English Verse* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 68–9; Wright, *Irish Tradition*, pp. 233–4.

death and the universal Judgement to which they would one day be summoned. There were fewer biblical supports here and no shortage of opinion, much of it dependent on radically different assumptions about the relationship of body and soul, the shape of the universe, and time. Ideas about the interim fate of the soul were thus malleable and open to reinterpretation in a way that the End itself was not. A productive vein of scholarship has investigated the ways in which these ideas were historically constructed – the degree to which in their apparent divergence and contradiction can be seen common concerns which tied each particular vision of the afterlife to a particular historical moment. The terms of the enquiry are still to a large extent those set by Jacques Le Goff's stimulating but flawed investigation of Purgatory, a theological concept which he saw as the specific creation of the high Middle Ages, tied intimately to the new social conditions of twelfth-century Europe.[7] His argument about 'the birth of Purgatory' provoked immediate critique, with others quick to point out that many of the features which Le Goff considered peculiar to the central and later Middle Ages could also be found in the earlier part of the period, even though they had not yet acquired the name 'Purgatory' (*purgatorium*) for themselves.[8] Yet while Le Goff's conclusions have been disputed, his central concern – the changing spatialization of the afterlife – set the agenda for almost all subsequent scholarship on the topic. In recent years, historians have busied themselves with the early medieval sources to which Le Goff himself paid only scant attention, bringing greater sensitivity to the ways that the early Middle Ages wrote about and thought about the geographical shape of the otherworld.[9]

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7 Jacques Le Goff, *La naissance du Purgatoire* (Paris, 1981).

8 For immediate reactions: R.W. Southern, 'Between heaven and hell', *Times Literary Supplement*, 18 June 1982, pp. 651–2; Adriaan H. Bredero, 'Le moyen âge et le Purgatoire', *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique* 78 (1983), 429–52, esp. pp. 450–52; Aaron J. Gurevich, 'Popular and scholarly medieval cultural traditions: notes in the margin of Jacques Le Goff's book', *Journal of Medieval History* 9 (1983), 71–90, esp. pp. 79–84; Graham Robert Edwards, 'Purgatory: "birth" or evolution?', *JEH* 36 (1985), 634–46.

9 Of particular relevance here are Ananya Jahanara Kabir, *Paradise, Death and Doomsday in Anglo-Saxon Literature* (Cambridge, 2001); Marina Smyth, 'The origins of purgatory through the lens of seventh-century Irish eschatology', *Traditio* 58 (2003), 91–132; Sarah Foot, 'Anglo-Saxon

The geography of the interim state of souls was, nevertheless, only one of the issues with which early medieval thinkers were concerned. Wherever it was that the souls of the dead were ultimately kept, their voyage from life brought them into immediate and very real contact with the spirits of the upper air long before they ever reached any place of rest. Opinion varied with each new attempt to explain the ways that the departing human soul might make its journey through this scarcely imaginable world of angels and demons. In our search for the origins of Purgatory and our efforts to map the imagined afterlives of early medieval Christians, we may have demoted these denizens of the otherworld into a simple supporting cast, the stock characters of apocalypses, vision-narratives and soul-journeys. But it is clear that for many in Anglo-Saxon England, the encounter between the departing human soul and the waiting spirits was of critical importance, a source of profound anxiety and a matter to which the faithful naturally turned to their preachers for reassurance. The way that those preachers sought to find certainty amidst the difficult terrain of speculative theology reveals a tension within Anglo-Saxon Christianity, a product of the fact that the matter of the afterlife had become divided between hagiographers on the one hand and homilists on the other. Saint's Lives and sermons handled the question of the soul's afterlife in quite different ways, by reading different significance into the interaction of angels and demons with human souls at death. This chapter investigates the way that this tension was negotiated, and how a new understanding of the process of death came to emerge at the end of our period. It was a drawn-out affair, though, and the Old English poet of *Maxims II* can perhaps be forgiven for maintaining that, despite the best efforts of individual theologians, 'the shape of the future is dark and hidden'. He bemoaned a lack of incontrovertible, first-hand testimony, concluding: 'No-one comes back here under our

"Purgatory"', in *The Church, the Afterlife and the Fate of the Soul*, ed. Peter Clarke and Tony Claydon (Woodbridge, 2009), pp. 87–96; Helen Foxhall Forbes, '*Diuiduntur in quattuor*: the interim and judgement in Anglo-Saxon England', *JTS*, n.s. 61 (2010), 659–84; Isabel Moreira, *Heaven's Purge: Purgatory in Late Antiquity* (Oxford, 2010).

roofs to tell men for sure what the Ruler's destiny is, the dwelling of the victorious folk where he himself lives'.[10] But in this, the poet was mistaken.

BREAKING THE RULES OF DEATH

One night in the 690s, a Northumbrian man named Dryhthelm died. To the alarm of his mourners, he rose again the next day. Not given to fulsome speech in general, he was unwilling to speak indiscriminately about the things he had seen during that night. Only through repeated questioning did a priest named Hæmgils succeed in piecing together his experiences, and it was from these conversations that Dryhthelm's death and return to life came to be known by Bede. Whether by the efforts of Hæmgils, Bede or some combination of the two, Dryhthelm's discontinuous answers to Hæmgils' questions were crafted into a controlled narration, told in the resurrected man's voice yet cast in a literary mode which drew inspiration from Virgil and Christian *uisiones*.[11] In that form, the dead man's speech became the longest first-person narration in Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica*, an arresting tale of personal revelation in a book which already brimmed with the miraculous and the otherworldly.

As if remembering a dream, Dryhthelm's recollections began hazily with the memory that he had not been alone when he had left his body: 'There was someone, of shining appearance and bright attire, who was leading me'. Walking for the most part in silence, the figure never openly disclosed his identity. A later tenth-century reader of the *Historia*, little inclined towards such ambiguities, would begin his own Old English version of the story of Dryhthelm with the more explicit identification of the figure as 'an

[10] *Maxims II*, lines 64b–67 (ed. Dobbie, p. 57).

[11] Bede, *HE*, V.12 (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 488–98). On the quotation from Virgil, *Aeneid*, VI.268 and other literary echoes, see further Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature*, pp. 260–61; Andrew Rabin, 'Bede, Dryhthelm, and the witness to the other world: testimony and conversion in the *Historia ecclesiastica*', *Modern Philology* 106 (2009), 375–98, at p. 396.

scinende engel'; but in truth, the figure's radiant form and dress left little uncertainty.[12] It becomes clear that the angel was Dryhthelm's guide (*ductor*) on a tour around the otherworld. Dryhthelm himself was clearly aware that he was no longer among the living, and thought at first that a deep valley which he saw filled with souls caught between raging fires and intolerable frost must be hell, and that a peaceful sunlit meadow populated by joyful souls at rest must be heaven. As he did, the angel refuted his silent thoughts – '"You should not presume so," he said, "for this is not hell as you think" [...] "No, this is not the kingdom of heaven as you assume"' – for in the darkness beyond the valley, a dark pit spewed forth fire, smoke and foul vapours; and beyond the meadow, songs and wondrous fragrance emanated from some abode of light. Only at the conclusion of the tour did the angel explain the nature and relationship of these four distinct realms and the souls they contain: the inescapable fiery pit was hell, holding the souls of the irredeemably sinful; the valley held those who died sinful but repentant and who would yet be judged on Doomsday; the souls in the meadow were kept from torment, but were not perfect enough to have gained immediate entry into the kingdom of heaven, which Dryhthelm had seen as a bright light ringing with the songs of the saints. The lesson over, the angel instructed Dryhthelm to return to his body, there to attend to his own soul better now that the world that awaits after death was made known to him.

Dryhthelm's story was not unique. Accounts of death, seeming-death and other unearthly visions formed a genre, and as a genre they shared conventional elements. The figure of an angelic interpreter or instructor was one of those conventions. Their function as God's messengers had always leant them potential as surrogates for the author and a means of providing unobtrusive explanations of otherworldly sights. They had fulfilled

[12] Ælfric, *CH*, II.21 (ed. Godden, pp. 199–200). For other implicit angels in Bede's History, compare *HE*, I.19, III.8 and IV.11 (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 60, 238 and 367).

this role since the earliest Jewish and Christian apocalypses.[13] The apocryphal *Vision of St Paul* made little made little attempt to disguise the convenient artificiality of the interpreting angel, which appears unannounced partway through the narrative with ready answers.[14] A Merovingian abbot's dreaming glimpse of the otherworld, reported by Gregory of Tours, was similarly provided with knowledgeable bystanders only at the moment they became necessary. The abbot, Sunniulf, remembered for being too lenient with his monks, saw souls negotiating a burning river in front of a house painted white. Most of the souls were painfully submerged, but a few had managed to make it across a narrow bridge. Uncertain of what he saw, 'he asked those who were with him what they thought this meant'. His companions, who tell him that only those who kept good discipline over their flocks will not fall from the bridge, have not previously been mentioned – they are not even identified, although they should probably be understood as angels.[15] They emerge only when Gregory needs an authoritative, and appropriately otherworldly, outside voice to instruct the visionary and, through him, the reader.

In the case of Dryhthelm and his angelic guide, others have shown just how closely the angel's speech at the end of the vision corresponds to Bede's own homiletic explanations on the posthumous fate of the soul.[16] In these, he expounded a fourfold

[13] Richard Bauckham, 'Descent to the underworld', in his *The Fate of the Dead: Studies on the Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (Leiden, 1998), pp. 9–48, at p. 36. The angel of Revelation was a model for writers of subsequent Christian visions, but when it was written it was already 'a motif bound up with visionary experiences which served to legitimate prophetic messages addressed to early Christian communities': see Loren T. Stuckenbruck, *Angel Veneration and Christology: A Study in Early Judaism and in the Christology of the Apocalypse of John* (Tübingen, 1995), pp. 260–61.

[14] *Visio Pauli* (Long Latin), ch. 11 (ed. Silverstein and Hilhorst, pp. 82–3).

[15] Gregory of Tours, *Libri historiarum*, IV.33, ed. Bruno Krusch and Wilhelm Levison, MGH, SS rer. Mer. I.1 (Hanover, 1951), p. 166. Sims-Williams identifies the speakers as Sunniulf's monks, but since their response comes while he is still asleep, they can only be some kind of supernatural figures: cf. *Religion and Literature*, p. 267.

[16] Rabin is correct to remind us that we cannot always 'assume a transparency between the author and his narrative voice', and thus that we cannot automatically suppose Dryhthelm's vision to reflect Bede's own beliefs about the afterlife: 'Bede, Dryhthelm, and the witness'. But the extremely close parallels, detailed by Foxhall Forbes, between the angel's explanation and Bede's own expositions in his homilies demonstrate beyond doubt that in this case, Bede 'did indeed believe precisely what he narrated': see '*Diuiduntur in quattuor*', pp. 667–73.

division of the human race derived from the scheme proposed in Gregory the Great's *Moralia in Iob*, which stated that: 'some people are judged and perish, others are not judged and perish. Some are judged and reign, others are not judged and reign'.[17] Elaborating upon the pope's concise formulation, Bede laid out the different states of these four groups in the interim period before Judgement Day. He reasoned that if there were four kinds of people, then the otherworld must therefore consist of four separate places: with the saints already assigned to heaven, the less-than-perfect waiting until Judgement in 'paradise', those of mixed moral worth purged in fire before coming to that Judgement, and the unbaptized and apostate consigned immediately to eternal torment.[18] The vividly segregated landscape narrated in Dryhthelm's voice gave this scheme immediacy and force, but the angel's explanation of it only repeated Bede's own homiletic message. Whatever it had said in Hæmgils' version of events, let alone in anything that Dryhthelm may himself have attributed to that night in the 690s, the angel in the *Historia ecclesiastica* speaks with Bede and for Bede.

While there can be no doubt that Bede considered the angel to be a useful didactic tool and intended its final exposition to serve a generally instructive purpose, the spirit ultimately spoke to Dryhthelm only of his own conduct. Although the narrative encourages the reader to place themselves in the dead man's shoes, not least because Bede refrains from mentioning his name before the vision is concluded, Dryhthelm's journey was never archetypal. He remained an exception in this rigidly rule-bound land of the dead, since he was finally instructed to leave it and correct his life before returning to it better prepared. This is emphatically not the experience which all souls will share, and it cannot go unnoticed that his had been a curiously unhindered journey, free of either obstacle or demonic assault. Even an apparently climactic moment in the middle of

[17] Gregory, *Mor. in Iob.*, XXVI.xxvii.50 (ed. Adriaen, p. 1304).
[18] Bede, *Hom.*, I.2 and 13 (ed. Hurst, pp. 12–13 and 89–90).

the tour, when Dryhthelm was abandoned by his angel and left standing alone at the mouth of hell, was utterly free from danger – for although demons rose from the pit and threatened him with fiery tongs, he later recalled that 'although they terrified me, they did not dare to touch me'. We might suspect that it was only Bede's editorial hand that held them back, and that maybe this was a scene that could have played out differently in his source. Perhaps Bede, aiming for consistency between the narrative and his theological position, felt compelled to make sure that Dryhthelm was never in danger of being dragged into the eternal hell without having committed some cardinal sin. Elsewhere, however, Bede spoke of the threat of demons waylaying even the most meritorious of souls, and that only with God's help could a soul overcome them.[19] The fact that Dryhthelm travels unopposed not only robs his journey of tension, it makes him more like a privileged guest on a guided tour than an archetypal sinner on the brink of damnation.

If some power preserved Dryhthelm from any real danger, the accompanying angel professed to be unaware of it. Explaining why he had led Dryhthelm towards hell only to vanish into the noisome air, the angel said that 'I did it so that I could find out what should happen to you' (*ut quid de te fieri deberet agnoscerem*). This was not always the case. The angels who guided the soul of St Fursa, the Irish ascetic whose seventh-century Life Bede knew and retold in abridged form, had clearly been appointed to their role by a higher power.[20] Unlike Dryhthelm, Fursa was not in fact dead on either of the two occasions when the angels bore his soul up into the high heavens. His body lay

[19] See the imagined transit of Benedict Biscop's soul in Bede's *Historia abbatum*, ch. 14, ed. Plummer, *BOH*, i, 378.

[20] *HE*, III.19 (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 268–77). There is frustratingly no single critical edition of the entire *Vita S. Fursei*: Bruno Krusch's edition omits the larger part of the Life given over to the saint's visions, while Maria Pia Ciccarese's edition of the visions omits the biographical conclusion. Supplement, therefore, Ciccarese, 'Le visioni di S. Fursa', *Romanobarbarica* 8 (1984–5), 231–303 with Krusch, 'Vita Sancti Fursei', MGH, SS rer. Merov. IV (Hanover, 1902), pp. 436–40.

motionless all the while 'as if dead' (*quasi obisse*), but when Fursa rose again 'as if from the depth of death' (*quasi ex profunda mortis*) he could only 'groan at the greatness of human foolishness' when he saw the crowd of mourners who had mistaken him for a corpse.[21] Although he did not refrain from telling others what awaited them in this universal afterlife, the angels who accompanied him all the way had been charged with making sure that he would return to tell the tale. They showed him how departing souls are tested by purgatorial fire before being allowed to the holier places beyond, but then parted the flames for him and provided an armed escort to protect his soul (*ab igne defendebant eum*) and allow it to pass untested through it.[22] Everything which followed for Fursa thus happened on borrowed time. The normal procedures of the otherworld were suspended for a time to allow one chosen soul to pass through the impassable fire, there to meet the celestial hosts who come forward from 'the secret part of heaven' to meet him.

This had clearly been Dryhthelm's experience as well. After receiving his instructions about what to do with Dryhthelm's soul, the angel took him to an impossibly vast wall. But again, this presented no obstacle to the tour, and Dryhthelm soon found himself on top of it – 'by what means I know not'. His angel was granting him access to places that would otherwise have been barred to him, temporarily breaking the rules that govern this otherworld in order to complete Dryhthelm's lesson. It proved the same also for another early Anglo-Saxon visionary, the monk of Wenlock whose experiences were

[21] *Vita Fursei*, chs. 11 and 17 (ed. Ciccarese, pp. 291 and 302). Familiarity with visions attributed to genuinely dead characters, such as Dryhthelm or the monk of Wenlock, has caused many to assume that Fursa's experiences are also post mortem. In fact, although Fursa 'gladly welcomed death' (ch. 5, ed. Ciccarese, p. 283: *laetus excepit mortem*) when the angels make their second visit, the Life seems to go out of its way to assert that this was a miraculous soul-journey rather than an actual death. A comparison should be made instead with the nearly contemporary account of the monk Barontus, whose visions are prefaced by the archangel Raphael telling demons that 'I am taking this soul with me before the tribunal of the eternal Judge, but I leave hope [of recovery] here in his body': *Visio Baronti monachi Longoretensis*, ch. 3, ed. Wilhelm Levison, MGH, SS rer. Merov. V (Hanover, 1910), p. 380.

[22] *Vita Fursei*, ch. 8 (ed. Ciccarese, p. 287).

reported by Boniface in the letter we discussed in the previous chapter.[23] Like Fursa, the monk's soul came first to an immense fire which encircled the world, but was shielded from it by an angel who 'touched my head with a protecting hand and brought me safe from harm in the flames'.[24] On the other side, he gathered with other souls in a place where their worldly deeds were inspected while angels and demons consider the merits of each one in turn. Although both the monk's sins and his virtues were made known there, the tally of his life's works remained uncounted. His entire vision seems to have taken place as he stood at 'that assembly' (*illum conuentum*), but although the fate of a certain abbot's soul was decided in front of him, his own worth was never reckoned before he was returned to the body by his angels.[25]

THE ROAD OUT OF LIFE

Recognizing that these brief glimpses into the afterlife are narrated by a central character who is deliberately presented as exceptional is important, and is too often overlooked. It is obvious enough for texts like the *Vision of St Paul*, in which the narrator is always an onlooker and never a participant, but Bede's account of Dryhthelm and Boniface's letter about the monk of Wenlock claim to relate the experiences of people who had actually died and who might therefore be considered everymen on a universal journey out of the world. Instead, as much as their tales revealed the rules by which the otherworld was structured, the progress of their own souls through it explicitly contravened those rules at every stage.

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[23] *Die Briefe*, X (ed. Tangl, pp. 8–15).

[24] On this detail, see Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature*, pp. 252–4.

[25] Boniface only identifies the place of his static visionary towards the end of the vision, when an abbot's soul is brought 'ad illum conuentum'; he had, however, previously said that the monk had been met by souls who assembled around him ('illuc, ubi ipse fuit, conuenisse'). We should, therefore, identify his third reference to a *conuentum* of souls – from which holy souls travel to enter heaven ('Ad quod sanctae gloriosaeque animae ab illo secedentes conuentu properabant') – as this initial place of judgement, even though it follows his description of an interim paradise. This has typically been misunderstood, and from it Boniface's otherworld has been made to seem more theologically peculiar than it really is: cf. Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature*, pp. 263–4; Kabir, *Paradise*, pp. 88–9, 99–101; Foot, 'Anglo-Saxon Purgatory', pp. 92–4; Foxhall Forbes, '*Diuiduntur in quattuor*', pp. 673–4.

As a result it becomes difficult to separate which of the visionary's experiences were typical of every human death and which had happened to him alone. While at least part of the purpose of these vision-narratives was didactic, providing instruction by giving vivid shape to the pleasures and pains of the world to come, they are at their most problematic when they are read as a road-map for the individual soul. The singular problem remains the role of the angels themselves. Almost everything happens according to their volition – even the visionary's final return to the body, the most exceptional event of all, happens 'by the angel's command' rather than of the visionary's own will.[26] To some extent this is a mere narrative strategy, not dissimilar to using the angel as a mouthpiece for the author. But when an otherworldly journey begins with the observation that angels came to collect the soul as it emerged from its body, it is not quite possible to know whether they are enacting a role that will play out at every deathbed, or whether this is just the first of the exceptions made for the chosen soul.

At first sight, this problem would seem easily answered. The earliest evidence for the liturgy of the sick and the dying, first attested in mid-eighth-century Francia but drawing upon older traditions that might originate from fifth- or sixth-century Rome, prescribes three antiphons to be intoned in the moments after death.[27] Interspersed with psalmody, the antiphons call upon the heavenly powers to assist the deceased:

[26] *Die Briefe*, X (ed. Tangl, p. 15); cf. *Vita Fursei*, ch. 17 (ed. Ciccarese, p. 302). Dryhthelm professed ignorance about the means by which he returned to life, but it had nevertheless happened according to the angel's command that 'you must now return to the body': *HE*, V.12 (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, p. 494).

[27] *Ordo* XLIX, ed. Michel Andrieu, *Les 'Ordines romani' du haut moyen âge*, 5 vols. (Leuven, 1931–61), iv, 529–30. The most detailed study of the funeral rites remains Damien Sicard, *La liturgie de la mort dans l'église latine des origines à la réforme carolingienne* (Münster, 1978); but see also Frederick S. Paxton, *Christianizing Death: The Creation of a Ritual Process in Early Medieval Europe* (Ithaca, NY, 1990), pp. 37–44; Kabir, *Paradise* pp. 113–22. While Andrieu's *ordo* XLIX is generally considered to be of Roman origin, Bernard Moreton has expressed doubts which have still not yet been properly addressed: see his review of Sicard, *Liturgie de la mort*, in *JTS*, n.s. 31 (1980), 231–7.

> Come to [their] aid, saints of God; run to meet [them], angels of the Lord, receiving their soul and presenting it in the sight of the Most High.
>
> May Christ who created you receive you, and may angels lead you into the bosom of Abraham.
>
> May a choir of angels receive you and place you in the bosom of Abraham so that with Lazarus, he who was once a poor man, you may have eternal rest.[28]

While there is little unambiguous evidence for the liturgical forms in use in early England before the tenth century, it seems likely that these formulae were known to the Anglo-Saxons from at least the mid-eighth century.[29] By then, similar wishes were certainly being voiced in private devotion, at least by the users of the personal prayerbooks which survive from eighth- and early ninth-century Mercia. Amidst a much longer litany of petitions to named intercessors found in two of these prayerbooks, for instance, is an appeal to 'the holy and glorious archangel Michael, who took the power to guard souls, that he might deem my soul worthy to be taken up when it leaves my body'.[30]

It would, however, also be a mistake to read prayers like this as straightforward narrations of the manner in which all souls will leave the material world, for these petitions deliberately tell only half of a less certain story. The liturgical ritual for the moment of death models itself around the story in the gospel of Luke about the rich man and the beggar, Lazarus, whose fortunes were reversed after death: 'And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom. And the rich

[28] Most of the early liturgical manuscripts give only the incipits of their prescribed orations; these are the fullest forms of the antiphons, as collated from later witnesses by Sicard, *Liturgie de la mort*, pp. 66–71.

[29] Kabir, *Paradise*, p. 114; developing Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature*, p. 274.

[30] The petition is part of a longer prayer structured as a litany: Royal Prayerbook, 18r–19v (ed. Kuypers, p. 208); Cerne, 40v–41v (ed. Kuypers, pp. 80–82 [no. 1]). Lapidge argues that it may pre-date the Council of *Clofesho* in 747, since the prayer does not follow the synod's instruction to accompany all petitions to St Gregory with petitions also to St Augustine: *Litanies*, pp. 26–7.

man also died: and he was buried in hell'.[31] Wherever this 'bosom of Abraham' was, and whatever its relationship with Paradise, the Kingdom of Heaven and other possible or eventual locations of dead souls, the story assured that Lazarus was now in a place of peace, and the rich man in torment.[32] The funeral antiphons were therefore petitioning that the particular circumstances of this one biblical death would now be replicated in the present, every Christian soul in turn. But they stop short of simply tracking the soul's invisible progress through a series of otherworldly checkpoints. The moment of death came not with words of gentle mourning, but with imperative commands – *subuenite! occurrite!* – to help the soul, and to run to intercept it. Everything that followed depended on the arrival of this escort, although the antiphons deliberately refrain from saying anything about what might happen if it did not appear. The Anglo-Saxon prayerbooks did not have to be so delicate. They relayed no public ceremonies that tried to be mindful of a community's grief, but offered private entreaties for those still living, and they did not hold back from saying precisely what might happen to the souls of the dead without an angel's guidance. One asked that the archangel Michael 'free the soul from the power of the infernal ones and from the way of darkness, so that it may not come before the lion and the dragon who is accustomed to drag off wretched souls and lead [them] to eternal torment'.[33] Another asks God to 'send an angel of peace who might guard my soul and lead it into the place of rest, making it pass through the dominions and powers of darkness undaunted'.[34]

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31 Luke 16:19–31.

32 On relationship between these possible destinations of the soul according to the different theologies of patristic and early medieval writers, see variously: Joseph Ntedika, *L'évolution de l'au-delà dans la prière pour les morts. Étude de patristique et de liturgie latines (IV^{e}–VIII^{e} s.)* (Louvain, 1971), pp. 136–225; Le Goff, *Naissance*, pp. 70–74; Charles E. Hill, *Regnum caelorum: Patterns of Future Hope in Early Christianity* (Oxford, 1992), esp. pp. 9–40; Kabir, *Paradise*, esp. pp. 15–48, 113–22.

33 Cerne, 57r–57v (ed. Kuypers, pp. 113–14 [no. 18]). The imagery comes ultimately from Ps. 90:13, although Carol Neuman de Vegvar suggests a more direct debt to Gallican liturgy: 'The doors of his face: early hell-mouth iconography in Ireland', in *Aedificia Nova: Studies in Honor of Rosemary Cramp*, ed. Catherine E. Karkov and Helen Damico (Kalamazoo, MI, 2008), pp. 176–97, at p. 186, n. 51.

34 Royal Prayerbook, 34r (ed. Kuypers, p. 215).

These thumbnail sketches of the road leading out of the world express a fear that there would be no orderly protocol overseen unthinkingly by benevolent gatekeepers. They imagine instead the constant possibility of ambush and misstep, of taking the wrong path and being unable to save oneself from whatever lay at the end of it. Both the liturgical and the private prayers ask for an angelic guide to accompany the soul precisely because there was no guarantee that one would automatically be present. They imagine that long before the soul might reach some kind of destination, whether an eternal realm or a provisional state to await Doomsday, it had to face a journey through an uncertain territory. The importance of this place that is no place, through which souls do not remain but only travel, is easy to overlook. Yet it was through this less defined space that Dryhthelm walked for hours until his angel found out what to do with him, and in which the monk of Wenlock joined a crowd of gathered souls who still awaited their place in the otherworld. This was a short but absolutely critical period for the soul, a brief window before its place in the otherworld would become fixed until the end of time. The fear quietly voiced in the private prayerbooks was that this might prove a dangerously capricious place, in which the soul might find itself suddenly in peril if some higher power was not at hand to 'snatch me from the hands of my enemies'.[35] Even the relatively orderly *conuentum* of souls seen by the monk of Wenlock, though it began with a mood of legalistic efficiency, degenerated into a scramble over the soul of an abbot seized 'unjustly' (*sine iure*) by demons. The monk himself, the only soul exempt from the assembly's ruling, had reached this place with an angelic escort. These other

[35] Royal Prayerbook, 36v–37r (ed. Kuypers, pp. 216–17). The petition in this instance is directed to God, but it forms part of an abecedary sequence of prayers in which an earlier entreaty had already asked that an 'angel of peace' lead the soul after death. The degree to which the compiler intended the individual petitions in the sequence to interlock is unclear, especially since parts of the individual prayers in the sequence are also found in Nunnaminster, 25v–26r, 27r, 28r–28v (ed. Birch, pp. 70, 72 and 74): see Barbara Raw, 'A new parallel to the prayer *De tenebris* in the Book of Nunnaminster (British Library, Harl. MS. 2965, f. 28rv)', *Electronic British Library Journal* (2004), art. 1, pp. 1–9, at <http://www.bl.uk/eblj/2004articles/pdf/article1.pdf>.

souls, however, seem to have made the journey without any angel's help, and he watched them as they simply 'left their bodies and gathered in the place where he was'.[36]

Apparently, time could stretch out for these other souls while their fate was being decided. In his late eighth-century poem about, and dedicated to, the church of York, Alcuin told a story about how a Northumbrian hermit named Balthere had saved a soul that was being chased through this shadowy place by demons.[37] The soul had fallen from the sky while Balthere sat at prayer and explained that it had been a deacon in its earthly life. The deacon had once touched a woman's breasts and failed to confess it, and so the demons now sought to capture his soul for his sin, but for the past thirty days the soul had managed to escape them.[38] Affronted by a demon's insult to St Peter, Balthere interceded 'with tears for the soul's guilt [...] until he saw with his own eyes that it had been carried high over the stars of heaven by angelic arms'. The story does not divulge much about how Alcuin himself thought about the geography of the otherworld. Since the lustful deacon's soul seems finally to have entered the eternal heaven, it does not seem to bear much resemblance to Dryhthelm's quadripartite afterlife, which Alcuin had rendered into verse earlier in the poem.[39] But however many places Alcuin's otherworld contained, it is clear that the deacon had not yet been consigned to any of them, for the demons intended to take it somewhere else, *sub Tartara*. However naive and peculiar the idea that a soul might fall back to earth from the otherworld, clearly the place where the souls of the dead would remain until the Resurrection was not fixed at the very moment of death, but remained undecided for a short time thereafter.

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36 *Die Briefe*, X (ed. Tangl, pp. 9, 12–13).

37 Alcuin, *Versus de patribus regibus et sanctis Euboricensis ecclesiae*, ed. Peter Godman, *Alcuin: The Bishops, Kings and Saints of York* (Oxford, 1982), pp. 104–6.

38 It has been suggested that Alcuin, a deacon himself, might have been trying to associate this *leuita* rescued from torment with the state of his own soul: Michael Gleason, 'Water, water, everywhere: Alcuin's Bede and Balthere', *Mediaevalia* 24 (2003), 75–100, at p. 91. Unless we assume that the deacon's admission is the veiled confession of a guilty conscience, it seems unlikely that Alcuin would have chosen only to identify himself with the one character in the poem noted for his lasciviousness.

39 Alcuin, *Versus de patribus*, lines 876–1007 (ed. Godman, pp. 72–80).

Unlike a chosen visionary on a tour around the otherworld, Alcuin's lascivious deacon was just an ordinary soul who had died unprepared and therefore unaided. If he had ever intoned the prayer known to his countrymen which asked the archangel Michael 'that he might deem my soul worthy to be taken up when it leaves my body', then the sin which he had failed to confess evidently made him unworthy of an angel to guide his way.[40] This connection between the worthiness of one's life and the ease with which one would depart it was made absolutely clear by set of related stories told by another Northumbrian poet, Æthelwulf, in his verse history of an unnamed northern monastery.[41] He described how after the founding father, Eanmund, had collected his community together, he prayed to God that one day, 'a holy angel should think the monks worthy to be taken back safely to heaven'.[42] A subsequent message from a visionary ascetic named Ecgberht shortly revealed that his prayer had been answered, and that the evil spirits who formerly 'set snares for many people and never ceased to bear the wicked along the hard road, where eternal toil brings no rest to the traveller' had now been replaced by a better host:

> Should I say everything? The lofty ministers come down with light from the heavens, and carry back saintly souls to the stars; shining in the light they praise the Lord and lift flowery crowns to their heads forever.[43]

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[40] Royal Prayerbook, 18r–19v (ed. Kuypers, p. 208); Cerne, 40v–41v (ed. Kuypers, pp. 80–82 [no. 1]).

[41] Crayke and Bywell have been proposed as the site of Æthelwulf's monastery, but the question remains open: cf. D.R. Howlett, 'The provenance, date, and structure of *De abbatibus*', *Archaeologia Aeliana*, 5th ser., 3 (1975), 121–30; Michael Lapidge 'Aediluulf and the school of York', in *Lateinische Kultur im VIII. Jahrhundert: Traube-Gedenkschrift*, ed. Albert Lehner and Walter Berschin (St Ottilien, 1989), pp. 161–78, rptd in his *Anglo-Latin Literature, 600–899* (London, 1996), pp. 381–98.

[42] Æthelwulf, *DA*, lines 81–7 (ed. Campbell, p. 9).

[43] *Ibid.*, lines 159–82 (pp. 15–17). The spiritual nature of Ecgberht's vision caused the poem's editor difficulties, and others have subsequently followed him in reading the *turba nefanda* who 'often hovered about' before Eanmund built his monastery as an earthly band of human robbers: Campbell, *De abbatibus*, pp. xxv and 14; Foot, *Monastic Life*, p. 101. But although Æthelwulf does talk about the physical transformation of the monastery's hilltop site, his description should be understood primarily as an account of how angels now visit a place that was formerly abandoned to demons. Hagiographical accounts of the eviction of demons from sites chosen by the professional religious are well known: Adomnán, *VC*, III.8 (ed. Anderson and Anderson, pp. 192–4); *VCA*, III.1 (ed. Colgrave, p. 96); Bede, *VCP*, ch. 17 (ed. Colgrave, pp. 214–6); Felix, *VG*, chs. 25–34 (ed. Colgrave, pp. 88–110); see also David F. Johnson, 'Spiritual combat and the land of Canaan in *Guthlac A*', in *Intertexts*, ed. Blanton and Scheck, pp. 307–17.

Ecgberht's vision is anachronistic – or perhaps more fittingly, prophetic – since none of Eanmund's monks had yet gone to their death, but Æthelwulf's intention was to confirm that Eanmund's prayer had been heard, and that his monks lived worthily of the reward he sought for them. The later account of the death of one the most pious brethren, a virginal blacksmith named Cwicwine, reiterated the connection, describing how this 'saintly soul' had been collected by singing hosts of angels in a way that demonstrated the unparalleled excellence of his life.[44]

But according to Æthelwulf, this was not the way that it had to be. A less meritorious lay-brother named Merhtheof experienced a rather less comfortable exit from life. Like Dryhthelm and the monk of Wenlock, he happened to return to the body, but under very different circumstances to those chosen visionaries.[45] He was alone as he 'departed from the world, and rested his steps in unknown lands'. The otherworld he wandered through was gloomy and shaken by storms, filled with indistinct and malevolent faces that terrified him. Through the dire crowd, he saw the spirits of his children, who had died from disease, and while they now appeared in a blessedly angelic state – dressed in white and shining with light – they offered him no explanatory tour of the otherworld. They only accompanied him to 'the judgement, which the supreme magistrate from his high throne decides for every departing soul'. There, this *pretor maximus* condemned Merhtheof for breaking an oath made to his wife that neither of them would remarry if the other died and, heedless of the excuses made by Merhtheof's

[44] Æthelwulf, *DA*, lines 278–320 (ed. Campbell, pp. 25–7).

[45] *Ibid.*, lines 321–94 (pp. 27–33). Hans Joachim Kamphausen suggests that Merhtheof's 'death' might be entirely metaphorical, standing for his state of moral sin before being spiritually reborn into 'a second, clean life': *Traum und Vision in der lateinischen Poesie der Karolingerzeit* (Bern, 1975), pp. 90–98. Æthelwulf doubtless intended Merhtheof's experiences to convey a moral lesson to others, but his note that the man's soul came back to its body (line 386: 'peruenit ad corpus') would be poorly suited to Kamphausen's metaphorical reading, and seems sufficient to judge that Æthelwulf believed that Merhtheof really had died and then returned to the world.

sons, the judge decreed that he would meet with whatever fate his dead wife should deem appropriate.[46] His wife, as radiant as her children and dwelling in a shining mountaintop house, ordered him 'to go to the shades of the prison to be swallowed up amidst the dark flames', but finally took pity as her children begged that he be returned to life to correct his ways.

No angel took Merhtheof from his body. Although his sons served as his guides for part of his journey, they could not make an exception for him when his soul came to the *pretor*'s judgement. His whole experience was utterly unlike the visions recounted by Bede and Boniface. The monk of Wenlock had somehow avoided his life's worth being reckoned so that he might tell of his what he had seen; Merhtheof's judgement, on the other hand, was real and unavoidable. His return to the body happened not because his posthumous journey was a privileged guided tour, but because of a technicality: the immutable sentence of the *pretor* was that his wife should choose his fate, and she finally chose to return him to life. In Merhtheof's story, therefore, we come closest to an account of what might face an 'ordinary' soul in the afterlife. The soul's journey is arduous and apparently hostile – Æthelwulf did not dwell on the terrors of the road, but the 'threatening faces' who blocked Merhtheof's way with gloomy battlelines (*tristes phalanges*) recall the armed bands of demons which Ecgberht had said lay waiting on a road of eternal toil. While this man's death was not therefore utterly devoid of the agency of spiritual forces, the benevolent presence of angels hoped for in prayer and liturgy was notably absent. Unlike more pious individuals, whose marvellous deaths

[46] That Merhtheof's remarriage should have brought him post-mortem punishment has perplexed several scholars – 'for it was not the doctrine of the day that a second marriage was sinful': Campbell, *De abbatibus*, pp. xxxiii–xxxiv; Hunter Blair, *Northumbria*, p. 147. It might be best to understand Merhtheof's sin as the breaking of a *personal* vow made to his wife, rather than a general rule of Anglo-Saxon marriage. This has the benefit of explaining why it was that the Judge himself did not set the terms of Merhtheof's punishment, but instead deferred to the judgement of the wronged party.

precede this cautionary tale, Merhtheof's unremarkable moral worth meant that he entered the otherworld unaided.

THE CHOSEN FEW

It may seem obtuse to privilege this one narrative, and to insist that the early Anglo-Saxon Christians who intoned prayers asking for heavenly spirits to meet them after death, or who wrote about visionaries who had been led out of the body by angels, did not therefore expect that the angels were present at each and every deathbed. After all, for centuries there had been some who had asserted that the angels would make at least a token appearance in the final moments of even the most sinful person. The *Vision of St Paul* had described the process whereby souls left their bodies more exhaustively than most. It told of how two hosts of angels attended the deaths of both the good and the bad. The dying person was claimed by either 'holy angels' or 'impious angels', according which could 'find a habitation in him'. Extracting the soul, they brought it before God, who then decreed whether it should be handed over either to great joy or to punishment.[47] Like similar descriptions in a variety of fourth- and fifth-century writings, the *Vision of St Paul* proposed that the inspection of the dying would be an orderly affair, with neither group of angels trying to snatch the soul from the other.[48] This spirit of co-operation would not last. Among the visions attributed to St Columba by his seventh-century hagiographer, Adomnán of Iona (d. 704), were aerial battles for custody of the recently dead, knife-edge struggles in which the saint's timely intercession was often the only thing that finally decided the soul's fate one way or the other.[49] This seems to have been

[47] *Visio Pauli* (Long Latin), chs. 11–16 (ed. Silverstein and Hilhorst, pp. 82–103).

[48] Compare, for example, pseudo-Macarius, *Spiritual Homilies*, XXII, ed. Hermann Dörries, Erich Klostermann and Matthias Kroeger, *Die 50 Geistlichen Homilien des Makarios* (Berlin, 1964), p. 194; *Bohairic Life of Pachomius*, ch. 82, trans. Armand Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia*, 3 vols. (Kalamazoo, MI, 1980–82), i, 105–10; and others conveniently summarized by Daley, *Hope of the Early Church*, pp. 117–18, 174, 185.

[49] Adomnán, *VC*, III.6, 10, 13 (ed. Anderson and Anderson, pp. 190, 196, 200); on which see also Smyth, 'Origins of Purgatory', pp. 115–24.

a familiar idea in early medieval Ireland. A homiletic exemplum now known as 'the Two Deaths', or 'the Three Utterances of the Soul', first attested in a Hiberno-Latin sermon contemporary with Adomnán, confidently proclaimed that two hosts of rival spirits would descend unerringly upon the dying, 'and they will hold a contest for the soul of every single person, the just and unjust alike, so that both will know to which of them it belongs'.[50]

The origins and transmission of the Two Deaths exemplum remain obscure in the absence of a full investigation of its complicated manuscript history, but this sermon was certainly known to Anglo-Saxon scribes working on the Continent in the later eighth century, and seems likely to have had some currency in England itself prior to that date.[51] It probably lies behind the story which immediately follows Bede's account of Dryhthelm in the *Historia ecclesiastica*, a cautionary tale about the ignominious death of a thegn in the service of Coenred, king of Mercia.[52] On his deathbed, the unnamed man had been visited by a pair of angels, who presented him with 'a very beautiful but exceedingly small book' containing a record of all his good deeds; and then by a numberless army of demons brandishing 'a volume of horrible appearance, enormous size and unbearable weight' which listed his sins. Claimed by the demons, the man watched as the angels vanished and 'two extremely wicked spirits who had blades in their hands' approached, pushing the weapons into his head and his foot. He endured an

[50] Robert E. McNally, '*In nomine Dei summi*: seven Hiberno-Latin sermons', *Traditio* 35 (1979), 121–43 [Homily I].

[51] Charles D. Wright's forthcoming edition and study will be a welcome advance upon the current scholarship on the various recensions and adaptations of the exemplum; his preliminary comments suggest that the earliest manuscript witness is an eighth-century manuscript from Freising written by the Anglo-Saxon scribe Peregrinus (Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, clm 6433): see 'Three Utterances apocryphon', in *The Apocrypha*, ed. Biggs, pp. 80–83. Tomás O'Sullivan's ongoing research investigates the possibility that the sermons may have been collected together in Anglo-Saxon England, but we await the publication of his '*Predicationes Palatinae*: The Sermons in Vat. Pal. lat. 220 as an Insular Resource for the Christianization of Early Medieval Germany' (unpublished PhD thesis: Saint Louis University, 2011).

[52] Bede, *HE*, V.13 (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 498–502).

agonizing wait, for the daggers were 'creeping inside my body with great torment, and as soon as they meet, I will die'. Although Alaric Hall has suggested that this curious cause of death reflects distinctly Anglo-Saxon ideas,[53] other details appear to draw upon the scenario presented in the early insular homily on the Two Deaths. The demons' triumphant cry to the watching angels – 'that man is ours' (*noster est iste*) – was identical in the story and the sermon, while the books of good and bad deeds are reminiscent of the sermon's observation that the archangel Michael possesses a volume containing the entirety of every person's works.[54] Whether or not we suspect a direct literary relationship with this particular Hiberno-Latin text, Bede's cautionary tale clearly owes something to a long tradition of earlier works which spoke of angels and demons measuring the worth of every person shortly before taking their souls.

And yet, as he brought his tale to a close, Bede went out of his way to specifically reject this apparently obvious meaning. While he claimed to be retelling the story *simpliciter* – 'just as I learned it from the venerable Bishop Pehthelm' – he followed his narrative with a carefully judged explanation that was intended to make his readers interpret the tale in a particular way. What the man had experienced was not universal death. What he had seen was shown to him so that he could tell others about what lay in store for them – but at Doomsday, and not before:

> As for the different books he saw presented to him by good and evil spirits, this was done by divine providence, so that we may remember that our thoughts and deeds do not melt away into the wind but are all kept for the examination of the high Judge [*ad examen summi iudicis*], and will be shown to us in the end [*in fine*] either by friendly angels or by our foes.[55]

[53] Hall, *Elves*, p. 110.

[54] The verbal correspondence is noted by Colgrave and Mynors, *Ecclesiastical History*, p. 500, n. 1; Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature*, p. 255; Charles D. Wright, 'The Irish tradition', in *A Companion to Anglo-Saxon Literature*, ed. Philip Pulsiano and Elaine Treharne (Oxford, 2001), pp. 345–74, at p. 348.

[55] Bede, *HE*, V.13 (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, p. 502). That Bede's reference is to Judgement Day, rather than the moment of death, has generally gone unnoticed by translators and commentators: Colgrave and Mynors (trans.), *Ecclesiastical History*, p. 503; Aaron J. Gurevich, 'Au Moyen Age: conscience individuelle et image de l'au-delà', trans. Joanna Pomian, *Annales. Économies, sociétés, civilisations* 37

Whether or not this was how Bishop Pehthelm had interpreted the story when he first told it, Bede's disarmingly matter-of-fact explanation attempted to ensure that a cautionary tale about one man's damnation would not appear to undercut the singular importance of the final Day of Judgement. Similar thoughts emerge from his previous exegetical writings. In a commentary on the seven catholic epistles, Bede said that even demons already cast out of heaven await their sentence on that day, since they await renewed condemnation for the evils done by humanity at their instigation.[56] He did not deny that there were some who would be consigned to eternal torment even before Judgement Day, and he openly hoped that relating their miserable deaths in his History would move his readers to confess their own sins.[57] But it seemed to Bede more acceptable to assume that the thegn's death had therefore followed some strange and particular pattern through which God had intended to deliver a message to the faithful, rather than that the man had seen death as it would come to every soul.

Bede grasped for the exceptional where previous generations had sought the universal because for him, as for many of his contemporaries, death was no longer the great leveller. A sense that God took a keener interest in the remarkable deaths of a few chosen souls pervaded Latin Christendom and early Anglo-Saxon hagiographers, Bede included, spent an extraordinary amount of time relating the miraculous things that accompanied the deaths of the venerated saints. Their hope was to find some tangible sign that the souls of these chosen few had not simply slipped away into the unknown, but had been decisively claimed by the powers of heaven. These signs would not be subtle or ambiguous, such as might easily be missed at an ordinary person's deathbed. St

(1982), 255–75, at p. 264; Pierre Monat and Philippe Robin (trans.), *Histoire ecclésiastique du peuple anglais*, 3 vols. (Paris, 2005), iii, 89.

56 Bede, *In epist. sept. cath.*, III.ii.4 and 11 (ed. Hurst, pp. 269–70 and 273).

57 Cf. Bede, *HE*, V.14 (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 502–4). He had already described how Dryhthelm saw the irredeemably sinful dragged into the eternal hell: V.12 (pp. 490–92).

Guthlac's hagiographer, Felix, told of the heavenly fire that engulfed Guthlac as he raised his dying hands to heaven, the air thundering with the songs of angels so sublime that the saint's awestruck companion fled the fens in terror.[58] Peter Brown found it surprising, even paradoxical, to observe how hagiographers in the Latin West used scenes like this, inspired in large part by Gregory the Great's *Dialogi*, to assert the inequality of death rather than some universal glory that would be bestowed on all Christians.[59] But even Gregory had hinted that this might be the case. Although he was confident that 'the sound of heavenly singing often accompanies the death of the elect', it was not the sound of supernatural undertakers who stood close by. It was simply an anaesthetic, a sound heard from afar 'so that while they listen to it, they might be preserved from feeling pain at the separation of soul and body'.[60] In contrast, when angels came in person to collect the soul of Stephen, abbot of Reiti, even those who could not see the supernatural visitors ran from the room, shaking in terror like Guthlac's companion. As Gregory said, 'the power that received this soul at death must have been mighty indeed, for no human being could endure its presence'.[61]

These stories reinforced, in their own way, the sense that the deaths of ordinary Anglo-Saxons Christians were not in fact moments when the spirits necessarily clustered around the body, struggling and inspecting and assessing. Stephen of Ripon was quick to say that the melodious sound of wings heard at St Wilfrid's death was 'without a doubt' the sound of the angels arriving for his soul – which in turn 'proved that our holy bishop

58 Felix, *VG*, ch. 50 (ed. Colgrave, p. 158).

59 Peter Brown, '*Gloriosus obitus*: the end of the ancient other world', in *The Limits of Ancient Christianity: Essays on Late Antique Thought and Culture in Honor of R.A. Markus*, ed. William E. Klingshirn and Mark Vessey (Ann Arbor, MI, 1999), pp. 289–314, at pp. 302–6.

60 Gregory, *Dialogi*, IV.15, ed. Adalbert de Vogüé, *Grégoire le Grand. Dialogues*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1978–80), iii, 58. The image of angels as 'supernatural undertakers', passively awaiting but not participating in human death, is gratefully borrowed from Peter Marshall, 'Angels around the deathbed: variations on a theme in the English art of dying', in *Angels in the Early Modern World*, ed. Marshall and Walsham, pp. 83–103, at p. 95.

61 Gregory, *Dial.*, IV.20 (ed. de Vogüé, iii, 76); *Hom. in euang.*, XXXV (ed. Étaix, pp. 327–8).

stood in the presence of the Lord and among his saints'.[62] An absence of signs meant therefore an absence of angels: if their presence could only be observed at a few exceptional deaths, then the quieter deaths of ordinary people suggested that most souls simply made their way into the otherworld unaided. This was a long way from the idea that every human death was the location of a violent struggle for supremacy over human souls. It might not be coincidental that although the vision-narratives of Boniface and Æthelwulf describe 'a trial to which all souls must come', this trial was now convened at some distant place in the otherworld, rather than at the bedside. Even Dryhthelm came eventually to this place where his angel had to go away 'to find out what should happen to you', although Bede deliberately avoided saying precisely what he meant by this. Rejecting the notion that the fate of every soul was decided at the deathbed, while asserting that some essentially similar decision had to be reached somewhere else in the otherworld, was perhaps no more than an act of collective hair-splitting on the part of these three writers. But it arose from a firm conviction that the angels would only actually descend unbidden in the case of those few who were uniquely worthy of immediate entry into heaven, and whose worth had probably been measured by God days or even years in advance of their deaths, as hagiographers took pains to demonstrate. The angels who spoke to Eorcengota, the sainted daughter of Eorcenberht, king of Kent, before she died, or to Bishop Chad at Lichfield a full week before his death, thus revealed to them that God's judgement had already been made, and that they would return soon to escort them to their allotted place in heaven.[63] St Wilfrid apparently knew from the

[62] Stephen, *VW*, ch. 66 (ed. Colgrave, p. 142).

[63] Bede, *HE*, III.8, IV.3 (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 238–40, 338–44). Bede's account of Eorcengota's death at Faremoutiers drew on what 'was related even to this day by those who lived there'; the community is known to have used vision-narratives to promote their Rule: see Alexander O'Hara, 'Death and the afterlife in Jonas of Bobbio's *Vita Columbani*', in *Church, Afterlife and Fate*, ed. Clarke and Claydon, pp. 64–73; with Julia M.H. Smith, 'The problem of female sanctity in Carolingian Europe, *c.* 780–920', *P&P* 146 (1995), 3–37, esp. at p. 34. Bede may well have recast their stories, as he seems to have done with the material about Chad. He states in his preface that his information came from Lastingham, and that it pertained equally to Chad's brother, Cedd. The latter is somewhat

archangel Michael the time and manner of his death four years before it happened.[64] For these souls who had already been found worthy, their eternal reward was guaranteed and their passage to it was therefore direct, immediate and unhindered – a mere transition from one mode of existence to another. 'I will lead you', one eighth-century poet imagined an angel telling the newly disembodied soul it had been sent to meet, 'the ways will be gentle'.[65]

For the rest of humanity, with no signs that their souls were received immediately by the powers of heaven, a short but critical period seemed to open between life and afterlife. It was into this yawning gap that the living poured prayers and supplications on behalf of the dead. A petition in the Royal Prayerbook looked ahead to that crucial moment and tried to ensure that any prayers offered just after death would be as effective as any angelic guide, making sure that 'all the prayers sent for me in that hour might come to your open ears of mercy, my Lord Jesus Christ'.[66] If the assistance of angels seemed only guaranteed for the deaths of the holy saints, then the necessity of prayer for the rest of humankind must have appeared ever more crucial.

THE SILENT UNDERTAKERS

Alcuin did not know precisely where his soul would go when he died, but it did not greatly trouble him. Like the others raised at York in the latter half of the eighth century, he knew that it would be a beautiful and joyous place because a young boy from the community had once visited it and returned to describe the place to the brethren. Alcuin remembered the boy and retold his vision as the conclusion of his poetic history of

elliptically said to have 'been in the habit of visiting the brothers', but his role seems oddly minimised; Bede's retelling may have differed substantially from the story that as it had been told to him.

64 Stephen, *VW*, ch. 56 (ed. Colgrave, p. 122). See below, pp. 176–81.

65 *Guthlac A*, lines 6–8a (ed. Roberts, p. 83).

66 Royal Prayerbook, 34r (ed. Kuypers, p. 215).

York.[67] He was reminded of it again when he wrote to the cathedral from his new home on the Continent, sometime around 795:

> And even if another place is assigned to my body, I still believe that my soul – whatever kind of place it is to have – will be granted peace with you, God willing, through your prayers. For I believe that the souls of our brotherhood will be brought together in a place of happiness, just as our boy Seneca's vision testifies.[68]

Alcuin's professed uncertainty about where exactly his soul would go was perhaps a simple show of humility, but Alcuin clearly took more comfort in considering the future reward than dwelling on the mechanics of how his soul reach it. It was ultimately of little consequence when the Resurrection would eventually 'grant eternal blessedness to all the righteous in the kingdom of heaven'. Many of Alcuin's contemporaries probably shared his optimism that 'whatever kind of place' they might find themselves in, they would be safe if they had attended to their soul during life and if the proper rites were enacted as they died.[69] But outright certainty about the things that awaited after death remained possible only for those saints and sinners to whom foreknowledge had been granted. That made it rather easier for Anglo-Saxon Christians to talk about the kind of death that would *not* come to them than the kind that would.

This was a somewhat unsatisfactory position for preachers and homilists. If hagiographers tended to polish every fragment of heavenly grace so that it shone upon a single holy individual, homilists had an equally natural tendency to try to find some universal principle in even the most exceptional event. Their efforts sometimes led them into remarkable inconsistency. The tangle that one late Anglo-Saxon homilist got into

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67 Alcuin, *Versus de patribus*, lines 1597–1648 (ed. Godman, pp. 128–32). For the boy and his vision, see below, pp. 189–91.

68 Alcuin, *Ep.*, XLII (ed. Dümmler, p. 86).

69 On optimism, see Paxton, *Christianizing Death*, p. 44; Helen Foxhall Forbes, *The Development of Notions of Penance, Purgatory and the Afterlife in Anglo-Saxon England* (unpublished PhD thesis: University of Cambridge, 2008), pp. 125–31.

when writing about how angels attended Christ, after his temptation in the wilderness, is instructive. His source was a sermon by Gregory the Great, and he began by following it to assert that the appearance of the angels was clear evidence of Christ's divinity: 'for if he were not true God above all creatures, angels would not have attended him'. No sooner had the words left his pen than he added a note of his own which utterly contradicted the statement he had just quoted: 'Thus it is shown that angels look after all believers when they have defeated the devil'.[70] He made no attempt to explain how these two statements could be squared, and it is clear that in this instance, his search for relevance and universal applicability had taken precedence over consistency.

This may well explain the reason why a few Anglo-Saxon homilists continued to use the early Hiberno-Latin sermon on the Two Deaths, even though we have seen that its account of angels and demons fighting over the dying was so strikingly at odds with mainstream opinion in eighth- and ninth-century England. Alcuin might have been happy to remain somewhat uncertain about exactly what would happen to his soul at death, but this was hardly the way to offer a powerful reminder to a congregation about the different fates that awaited the good and the bad. The Two Deaths exemplum was therefore attractive to those preachers who needed nothing more than a blunt instrument with which to convey a basic reminder that the manner of one's life dictated the shape of things to come. The bulk of it was taken up with the words that the angels and demons would say to the souls that had taken, as they revealed what was in store for each: for the bad soul, 'it is going to get rougher for you. You will see the hardship of your kind, away from the tents of the just', while for the good, 'it is going to get sweeter for you. We will lead you to the tents of the saints, away from the abodes of the unjust'. At the level of

[70] Blickling III (ed. Kelly, p. 22); cf. Gregory, *Hom. in euang.*, XVI (ed. Étaix, pp. 112–13).

morality alone, this was a simple message. For those Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastics who compiled sermons for use during the eighth and ninth centuries, the vivid but problematic seems to have been preferable to the carefully-considered but unengaging.

The Two Deaths exemplum continued to be employed by Anglo-Saxon homilists during the tenth and eleventh centuries. A full picture of how it was reused and reworked must still await the publication of all the manuscript witnesses to the Latin tradition; many of the conclusions drawn from the Old English versions alone have since been modified as successive Latin sources have come to light.[71] Nevertheless, it is clear from those texts which have been published that although the story of the Two Deaths continued to impress with its imagery, many of the homilists who continued to use it made various attempts to modify some of its more problematic assertions. Chief among these was perhaps the statement in the most common Latin recension that as soon as the souls of the dead had been fought over, 'the impious go into eternal fire, and the just into eternal life'.[72] Immediate entry into the eternal kingdom hardly squared with the idea that God's Judgement of the human race was still to come in the future, and a subsequent vernacular version of the homily, preserved in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Hatton 114, shows that either the Old English translator or a redactor before him had found the assertion untenable. Yet rather than reject the homily outright, he sought only to 'correct' its evidently erroneous statement:

> Then the angels lead the soul into the marvellous joy of paradise, where henceforth it dwells and rules with God's chosen ones, without any evils and sufferings always until the end, [in the place] where the souls of holy men rest until Doomsday.[73]

The Hatton homily had consciously relocated the good soul's destination from an eternal

[71] See Mary F. Wack and Charles D. Wright, 'A new Latin source for the Old English "Three Utterances" exemplum', *ASE* 20 (1991), 187–202. For forthcoming work, see above, p. 145, n. 51.

[72] McNally, 'Seven Hiberno-Latin sermons', p. 136.

[73] Bazire-Cross IX (p. 123). On other changes made to the fate of the soul in this homily, see also Kabir, *Paradise*, pp. 53–5.

to a provisional place of rest. It had tried to alter its source just enough that its teaching would not appear to contradict the fundamental notion of a Last Judgement, while otherwise preserving its appealingly simple distinction between the good and the bad. It had hardly done enough – if there remained only two possible destinations for souls after death, then any segregation of the sinner from the righteous remained indistinguishable from the sentence which God would eventually pronounce on Judgement Day. But at least the final reward of the kingdom of heaven was reserved for that day, and that seems to have been sufficient for this homilist.

Others made similar attempts to reconcile the exemplum with the universal Judgement. The Old English sermon entitled *Be heofonwarum and be helwarum*, which describes only the impious soul, actually relocated the story from the deathbed to Doomsday, making the segregation of souls unproblematic – but now raising new problems by failing to remove the references to the demons who 'remove the soul violently from its body', which went against the doctrine of the resurrection of the body.[74] Another version, an abbreviated Latin redaction of the original homily and an Old English translation dependent on it, retained the deathbed setting but did away with the struggle of the spirits. In this version, the good and the bad souls were simply met by the appropriate angel or demon to carry them away.[75] In this abbreviated version, the difference between the two souls still remained black and white – very literally so, since one soul is 'seven times blacker than a raven', while the other is 'seven times brighter than the sun' – but removing the moment of struggle, where the soul can only be won by

[74] *Be heofonwarum and be helwarum* (ed. Teresi, p. 227). Rudolph Willard ascribes the inconsistency to accident and loss of material: *Two Apocrypha in Old English Homilies* (Leipzig, 1935), pp. 68–74. Loredana Teresi, on the other hand, argues that the homilist was running through memorized motifs with only minimal care as to their combined effect: 'Mnemonic transmission of Old English texts in the post-Conquest period', in *Rewriting Old English in the Twelfth Century*, ed. Mary Swan and Elaine M. Treharne (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 98–116, at pp. 105–7, 114–15.

[75] The Latin text is edited by Wack and Wright, 'New Latin source', pp. 189–90; they reproduce alongside it an emended version of the Old English version, Fadda I (pp. 19–23).

one or other of the spirits, perhaps made some allowance for a grey area between the two moral extremes. Still, the radiant soul met by the angels was not made out to be some exalted martyr being ushered into an eternal kingdom. Ananya Kabir has shown the careful way that the abbreviated homily distinguishes paradise, to which the soul is immediately led, from the eternal heaven, which the angels proclaim is still to come.[76] The exemplum thus remained a way for homilists to talk about things that awaited relatively ordinary, although undoubtedly meritorious, souls.

The cumulative shape of these alterations is fortunately more important than their specific details. Together, they demonstrate that while several later Anglo-Saxon homilists had clearly found problems with the Two Deaths exemplum, each tried to rework the story rather than relinquish it. By adjusting its relationship with Doomsday and the eternal Kingdom of Heaven, they sought to retain its basic message that the spirits would one day have custody of the soul according to the manner in which it had lived on earth. It is worth considering that this was not the only way that the exemplum could have been reworked. Its two 'characters', if they can even be called that, were thinly-drawn opposites of virtue and wickedness – 'the holy man' and 'the sinful man' in one of the Old English versions, 'the righteous and the unrighteous' in another. They could easily have stood as exceptional figures, the predestined saints and the prematurely damned, like those who had met their deaths in Bede's History. But preaching about the things that every human soul would eventually experience for themselves was a more powerful message to deliver to a congregation, and late Anglo-Saxon homilists clung to any material that might provide them with a way to talk about death and judgement at their most universal.

[76] Kabir, *Paradise*, pp. 51–3.

As they did, any sense that death came differently to the exceptional few than to the ordinary good dissolved. None of the Two Deaths pieces sought to complicate their message by trying to differentiate the truly saintly from other good souls. Passing references to hagiographic death-scenes across the writings of Ælfric reveal that he too saw little distinction between a saint's death and that of any ordinarily virtuous Christian. Following the words of Paschasius Radbertus and his ninth-century sermon on the Assumption, Ælfric reminded his audience that 'we read everywhere in books that angels very often came to the passing of good men, and with spiritual hymns led their souls to the heavens'.[77] His main point was identical to the one made by Paschasius: that if these glories attend the deaths of the saints, then the heavenly grace bestowed upon the Virgin Mary must have excelled them all. But Ælfric's decision not to talk about the *funera sanctorum* and the *animae electorum*, and instead to refer more generally about the deaths of 'good men' (*to goddra manna forðsiþe*), was also intended to offer some comment on the kind of death that might come to members of his congregation. His later homily for the fifth Sunday in Lent was more explicit that the 'good man' and the saint shared essentially the same state until Doomsday. Pausing for a moment as he repeated wise words gathered from the pages of Augustine, Ælfric asked his audience to consider their own futures: 'what is the death of good men [*godra manna deað*] but a transition and a passage from death to everlasting life? The body turns to earth and awaits the resurrection, and feels nothing during that time. The pure soul also awaits the eternal resurrection, but it dwells in glory in that interval with the saints'.[78]

The exceptionally pious and the merely good might not dwell in quite the same conditions; when it suited him, Ælfric was happy to repeat Christ's assurance that 'in my

[77] Ælfric, *CH*, I.30 (ed. Clemoes, p. 432); Paschasius Radbertus, *De assumptione S. Mariae uirginis*, ch. 49, ed. Albert Ripberger, CCCM 56C (Turnhout, 1985), p. 130.
[78] Ælfric, *CH*, II.13 (ed. Godden, p. 132).

Father's house there are many dwellings' to imply some sense of a meritocracy within the society of heaven, in which 'everyone receives a dwelling according to what he has earned'.[79] Yet when he alluded to these different dwellings in a late sermon for the octave of Pentecost, he clearly thought that all good men would reach their allotted place by the same means. The angels would be responsible for them all:

> To the passing of good men [*to goddra manna forðsiþe*], God sends his angels, to take their souls at their departure and lead them to rest, as we learn in books, and Christ offers them a dwelling according to their works.[80]

This was a passing detail in a sermon almost entirely devoted to matters of death and the afterlife. It was the product of Ælfric's long study of Julian of Toledo's *Prognosticum futuri saeculi*, which he had been poring over for decades by now, and which formed the basis of much of his eschatological opinion.[81] Julian had cited the biblical story of Lazarus, carried by the angels to the bosom of Abraham, as the basis for his belief that angels regularly attend 'the separation of holy souls as they leave the body'.[82] Leaving Lazarus aside and stating more generally that 'we learn this in books' (*we leorniað on bocum*) seems to have been Ælfric's attempt to avoid being drawn into a discussion of what exactly the bosom of Abraham was, and how it might relate to other locations of good souls – a subject on which he was perennially coy.[83] Alluding to things 'learned from books' was a characteristically Ælfrician way to insist on the authority of his

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[79] John 14:2. Ælfric, *CH*, I.24 (ed. Clemoes, p. 377); see also *CH*, I.30 (ed. Clemoes, p. 434), following Paschasius, *De assumptione*, ch. 97 (ed. Ripberger, p. 153). Ælfric's decision whether to emphasis uniformity or meritocracy within heaven varies according to context, sources and other concerns: see Kabir, *Paradise*, pp. 38–43.

[80] Ælfric, *Supp.*, XI (ed. Pope, i, 424–5).

[81] A series of excerpts from Julian's *Prognosticum* are among the earliest extant works of Ælfric, and formed the basis of his later discussions of death and the afterlife: see further Enid M. Raynes, 'MS. Boulogne-sur-Mer 63 and Ælfric', *Medium Ævum* 26 (1957), 65–73; Milton McC. Gatch, 'MS Boulogne-sur-Mer 63 and Ælfric's First Series of *Catholic Homilies*', *JEGP* 65 (1966), 482–90. The excerpts are edited as an appendix in Milton McC. Gatch, *Preaching and Theology in Anglo-Saxon England: Ælfric and Wulfstan* (Toronto, 1977), pp. 134–46.

[82] Julian, *Prognosticum futuri saeculi*, I.10, ed. J.N. Hillgarth, CCSL 115 (Turnhout, 1976), p. 24.

[83] Kabir, *Paradise*, pp. 37–48.

opinions,[84] but his intention here can only have been to recall deathbed scenes from saints' Lives and related narratives. He had retold a number of these stories himself in his own *Lives of the Saints*.[85] And yet while his sources had seen the angelic carriage of the soul as a particularly noteworthy distinction, it seems that Ælfric saw in these hagiographic deaths only a pattern that would be repeated, unquestionably, for any 'good man' among his congregation.

The kind of hagiography that Ælfric had in mind must have pre-dated the English saints' Lives written within his own lifetime, for although there had been something of an explosion of hagiographic writing in England during the second half of the tenth century, the new hagiographers no longer looked for the evidence of angelic choirs descending to claim one of their own. Even the testimonies of awestruck witnesses failed to maintain the interest they had once held. After St Wilfrid's relics arrived at Canterbury, carried off from Ripon when a West Saxon army burned down the saint's monastery in 948, Archbishop Oda sought to 'beautify' them with a poetic retelling of Wilfrid's life. The poem he commissioned, the *Breuiloquium uitae Wilfridi*, was a monument of learned, almost impenetrable, diction but one which changed little of the substance of the original eighth-century *Vita Wilfridi*.[86] Yet the poem's author, a member of Oda's household named Fredegaud, passed over the marvellous sound of angels which accompanied the saint's death and burial, as well as sightings of them lingering at the site

[84] Peter Jackson observes the frequency of the phrase in Ælfric's writings: 'Ælfric and the purpose of Christian marriage: a reconsideration of the *Life of Æthelthryth*, lines 120–30', *ASE* 29 (2000), 235–60, at p. 240.

[85] Ælfric, *Lives of the Saints*, XX, XXVI, XXVIII, XXXIV and XXXVI, ed. Walter W. Skeat, *Ælfric's Lives of the Saints*, 2 vols. (London, 1881–90), i, 440; ii, 142, 162, 372 and 408.

[86] Fredegaud, *Breuiloquium uitae beati Wilfridi*, ed. A. Campbell, *Frithegodi monachi breuiloquium uitae beati Wilfridi et Wulfstani cantoris narratio metrica de sancto Swithuno* (Zurich, 1950). The circumstances of the poetic Life are related euphemistically in Oda's prose preface (ed. Campbell, pp. 1–3). The attack on Ripon is reported in *ASC* 948 D, and was probably not unprecedented: see D.W. Rollason, 'Relic-cults as an instrument of royal policy, *c.* 900–*c.* 1050', *ASE* 15 (1986), 91–103, at pp. 95–6. On the identity of the author of the *Breuiloquium* and a speculative, but compelling, reconstruction of his career, see Michael Lapidge, 'A Frankish scholar in tenth-century England: Frithegod of Canterbury/Fredegaud of Brioude', *ASE* 17 (1988), 45–65.

of his death thereafter, both of which had been insistently reported in his source.[87] It was not that Fredegaud doubted that angels had been present, for he wrote confidently about how the archangel Michael had forewarned Wilfrid of his death and returned again to take his soul.[88] The difference was that proving these claims with the reports of others had become unnecessary. When Archbishop Oda's own death came to be memorialized in hagiography, Byrhtferth of Ramsey offered an exuberant description of the manner in which his soul must have ascended through the stars to be placed amidst the hosts of heaven, even though no tangible sign had demonstrated it.[89] St Dunstan's hagiographers described similarly jubilant but entirely hypothetical scenes of the welcome received by a distinguished soul as it joined with the angels and saints. It is true that Adelard related how one of Dunstan's clergy had seen the saint in a vision turning away the angels who had come for his soul, delaying his death until he had completed the necessary Ascension Day services. But even after such revelations, Dunstan's final hour remained a quiet and unremarkable affair that played out according to 'the age-old laws of death' (*leges auitae mortis*).[90] If the angels had returned, they left no discernible signs of their presence.

The attention of hagiographers had drifted from the deathbed because the presence of angels there was no longer a sufficient indicator of sanctity. What had once been considered a privilege guaranteed only for a few was now being upheld by homilists as a regular and expected part of Christian death, and tenth- and eleventh-century hagiographers clearly agreed. The writer who signed himself B. marvelled that Dunstan had heard angelic voices announcing the deaths of kings and clerics, and been able to watch from afar as angels carried the soul of a dead boy away from Glastonbury one

87 Stephen, *VW*, chs. 65–7 (ed. Colgrave, pp. 140–46). On the importance of these events to Stephen's hagiographic agenda, see below, pp. 184–5 and 187–8.
88 Fredegaud, *Breuiloquium*, lines 1293–1308 and 1354–9 (ed. Campbell, pp. 57–8 and 60).
89 Byrhtferth, *VO*, II.1 (ed. Lapidge, p. 32).
90 B., *Vita Dunstani*, ch. 38; Adelard, *Lectiones in depositione S. Dunstani*, X–XII (ed. Winterbottom and Lapidge, pp. 104–8, 136–40).

day.[91] Yet the manner of the boy's life elicited not the slightest comment from him. When Dunstan questioned a prior from Glastonbury about it the next day, the boy's death had already escaped the man's mind. The prior did finally remember it, but neither he nor B. even saw fit to mention his name. The story was at least partly conventional, reminiscent of scenes like the one found in the eighth-century *Vitae Cuthberti*, in which St Cuthbert had watched the death of a young shepherd named Hadwald in a spiritual vision. In this earlier tale, however, the death brought Hadwald immediate praise: Cuthbert's anonymous hagiographer reported that his soul was seen 'set amid the choirs of angels, saints and martyrs', and this was sufficient for Bede to call Hadwald both 'a saint' and 'a chosen soldier of God' (*praelectus miles*).[92] The things seen by Cuthbert and Dunstan were thus similar, drawing from a shared hagiographic repertoire, but their significance had been reconsidered. For Dunstan's hagiographer B., and for others across later Anglo-Saxon England, simply knowing that angels had been present was no longer enough to distinguish the exceptional from the merely good.

It is important not to overemphasize the significance of these shifted ideas. They hardly amount to a revolution in belief, nor alert us to a radically different understanding of what death was and how it operated. What they illustrate is instead an almost accidental process of redefinition, and its effects. Attempts to provide concrete instruction about death had involved preachers gathering what material they had, trying to smooth its edges and nullify its more obvious problems, so as to deliver basic moral admonition through the re-statement of past opinions. But past opinions tended to concern themselves with paradigms of holiness and depravity for the greatest rhetorical

[91] B., *Vita Dunstani*, chs. 20, 34–5; cf. Adelard, *Lectiones*, V (ed. Winterbottom and Lapidge, pp. 64, 96–100, 122–4).

[92] Respectively *VCA*, IV.10 (ed. Colgrave, p. 126); Bede, *VCP*, ch. 34 (ed. Colgrave, pp. 260–64); and Bede, *Vita metrica S. Cuthberti*, line 667, ed. Werner Jaager, *Bedas metrische 'Vita sancti Cuthberti'* (Leipzig, 1935), p. 109.

effect. The passing of the very good and the very bad could be known with certainty, and these were the deaths that everyone knew attracted the attention of correspondingly heavenly and hellish spirits. Rather than probe the more complicated grey area between these two extremes, an unclear middle ground about which some eighth- and ninth-century writings were noticeably anxious, homilists preferred to find ways to reduce the uncertainty. They more often talked in deliberately expansive terms about 'good souls', or made it clear that what numbered someone among the *halgan menn* in death were small and achievable works of piety. The 'holy soul' who was collected by the angels in a story told in the late Old English homily Napier XLVI was simply a charitable and obedient man, attentive in church and a regular giver of alms. He awaits Doomsday in the bosom of Abraham, the homilist said as he held the man's fate within reach of his congregation: the manner of his death 'could be shared if we follow his example in the things of this world'.[93] In the early years of the eleventh century, Byrhtferth of Ramsey asserted that all that was required for the angels to claim a person's soul was a rough tally of deeds: 'if there are more misdeeds than others, then the demons will have the tormented soul; if there are found more good deeds than others, then the angels will receive the blessed soul with great hymns and bring it to eternal bliss'.[94] It is unclear if Byrhtferth even thought that those few misdeeds needed atonement, as long as they were outnumbered by the good. Each homilist had his own opinion, conditioned by his sources and perhaps also by his optimism. But they shared a common intent to make their message apply to as many of their audience as possible. By simply refusing to talk about the difference between the exceptionally saintly and the averagely pious, all these varied and even incompatible sermons available to Anglo-Saxon preachers in tenth- and eleventh-century England drew the angels closer to the deaths of ordinary people. The

[93] Napier XLVI (pp. 237–8).

[94] Byrhtferth, *Enchiridion*, postscript (ed. Baker and Lapidge, p. 246). On the place of this homiletic piece as a conclusion to Byrhtferth's work, see Peter S. Baker, 'The Old English canon of Byrhtferth of Ramsey', *Speculum* 55 (1980), 22–37, at p. 34.

fact that saints' Lives contemporary with these sermons had simultaneously broken with tradition and ceased to use the deathbed as an infallible marker of sanctity suggests that the new teaching offered by Anglo-Saxon homilists was being heard and accepted.

This chapter has involved itself less with what the angels were believed to do, than with exactly when and for what reasons they were believed to do it. Behind it all lies a single biblical verse, which told how 'it came to pass, that the beggar died and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom. And the rich man also died, and he was buried in hell'. The shifting emphases of successive Anglo-Saxon writers essentially form an extended gloss on the fate of Lazarus and the meaning of his death. It was never particularly a question of the angels themselves, only the significance of their actions. But perhaps the pursuit after significance helped, in its own small way, to redefine the kind of world that the Anglo-Saxons inhabited. The spirits who walked abroad in early Christian England could disguise their appearance but not their presence. There was always some sign that showed their utterly different nature to the mundane sphere which they occasionally visited. Simply by manifesting themselves in the human world they distorted its natural laws and sent a palpable ripple through this temporary, transitory place. The rarity with which such signs appeared at human deaths might have contributed to a sense of unease about what awaited the soul, but it also reinforced the notion that angelic intervention, if it could be attained through prayer, came with awesome power. The efforts of tenth-century preachers to find some system in death, to discern laws that governed the soul in its last moments, meant that they talked about angels simply as part of that system. There was little consensus about the details – maybe the angels would come to inspect the dying, perhaps they only came for the good – but the moral standards required before an angel might show an interest in one's death had slipped. That which

they had once done only for the saints, accompanied by heavenly fire and thunderous singing, was now being done silently and invisibly at less exalted deathbeds. But that silence now made angels more akin to the mundane natural forces of the world. They worked without discernible trace, and the world carried on without noticing. It was a small step towards a different kind of mental universe, in which the supernatural might not necessarily be less powerful but was certainly more subtle in its workings.

CHAPTER FIVE

The servants of the saints

Towards the end of his commentary on the book of Tobit, Bede considered at length the significance of Tobias' dog. It is fair to say that the animal had not played a critical role in the eventful journeys of his master, who had travelled for days with an archangel that was pretending to be a man, escaped being eaten by an enormous fish, saved a woman from a demon and married her. Of the dog, it is only been noted that 'Tobias went forward, and the dog followed him'; and that when he returned, 'the dog, which had been with them on the way, ran ahead, and coming as if he had brought the news, showed his joy by his fawning and wagging his tail'.[1] But Gregory the Great had stated that the barking of biblical dogs sometimes signified the words of preachers, and Bede was quick to extend the symbolism to encompass such notable canine traits as running and tail-wagging.[2] He assured his readers that looking for spiritual meaning in Tobias' dog was not as inconsequential as it might at first seem, warning that 'one must not scorn the figure of this dog, who is a traveller and companion of an angel'.[3] To be granted an extended period in the presence of an angel was no small matter. It changed everything.

In the fens of eighth-century England, there lived a hermit who had met with an angel every morning and evening for over a decade.[4] The hagiographer who recorded this for posterity made it clear that the hermit was no stranger to otherworldly visitors,

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1 Tob. 6:1, 9:9.
2 Gregory, *Hom. in euang.*, XL (ed. Étaix, p. 395); *Mor. in Iob*, XX.vi.15 (ed. Adriaen, p. 1014).
3 Bede, *In Tobiam*, XI.9, ed. David Hurst, CCSL 119B (Turnhout, 1983), p. 15; similarly VI.1 (p. 8).
4 Felix, *VG*, ch. 50 (ed. Colgrave, p. 156).

benevolent or otherwise. Demons swarmed around him as soon as he had picked out his retreat, an ancient and suitably ominous burial mound on the edge of the marshes, and he fought against them with the help of the disembodied spirit of a long-dead martyr.[5] But even though it was the martyr, the apostle Bartholomew, who first helped him establish himself among the fens and actually saved him from being dragged into hell one night, it was that daily closeness with an angel that truly marked the hermit out from others. Over a century after his death, when the hermit was considered a saint and his life briefly summarized in a calendrical martyrology, it was unnecessary to say anything more than that he had had a portentous birth, and so subsequently 'deserved it that an angel of God spoke to him every evening and again in the early morning and told him heavenly mysteries'.[6] This abbreviated summary was proof enough of an exceptional life. The hosts of early medieval Christians who prayed to saints and visited their shrines knew that miraculous intercession could occasionally be won by any of the faithful, and knew also that simply attracting the attention of the heavenly powers did not indicate that God numbered someone among his chosen few. A person who was found to be in more prolonged contact with celestial beings, on the other hand, who could look upon them as companions just as real and tangible as any human friend, was altogether different. Such a one belonged to the massed ranks of the holy whose lives would be told and retold by future generations, and whose intercession in heaven was sought long after their bodies had grown cold. At a time when a dog mentioned only in two lines of scripture merited an exegete's attention because it had walked with an angel, the handful of men and women whom the angels treated as equals could hardly fail to provoke even greater wonder.

5 *Ibid.*, chs. 25–36 (pp. 88–116)

6 *Old English Martyrology*, ch. 63, ed. Günter Kotzor, *Das altenglische Martyrologium*, 2 vols. (Munich, 1981), ii, 52–3.

The image of the early medieval saint surrounded on all sides by the powers of heaven and hell has become a familiar one, and the particular experiences of St Guthlac, the fenland hermit met by the spirits at his marshy retreat, have often been used to illustrate it. Indeed, with his formative years spent at the head of a warband emulating 'the deeds of the heroes of old', and his later life withdrawn 'into the shady groves of the wilderness' in the manner of the desert monks of distant Egypt, Guthlac has always seemed a fitting encapsulation of how late antique ideas of Christian sanctity could be transplanted into a new social setting.[7] Thanks especially to the work of Peter Brown, we are much better equipped to understand how those ideas had first risen to prominence in the Late Roman period, and how they had functioned at a time of religious change and diversity.[8] They had taken root in a world which was already brimming with supernatural power, and expressed a new kind of relationship with the divine. For the followers of the saints, the gap between the celestial and the mundane was bridged not by a numinous host of spiritual forces, but by the more familiar figure of a dead human being. In its early expression, the relationship of the living with these new human intercessors was reminiscent of the way in which previous Christians had thought about the care of guardian angels assigned to their souls in constant protection and companionship. In Peter Brown's estimation, the arrival of the saints eroded that once closely-felt bond between the individual and their personal angel, replacing it with a more recognisable kind of friendship between two people, one of whom simply happened to be dead. While the angels remained occasionally invested in human affairs after the fourth century AD, they could no longer truly be the close companions and intimate partners of

7 Felix, *VG*, chs. 16, 25 (ed. Colgrave, pp. 80, 88).

8 Fundamental are: 'The rise and function of the holy man in Late Antiquity', *Journal of Roman Studies* 61 (1971), 80–101; and *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago, 1981). Although these earlier works remain influential, it is important to read them now alongside Brown's own reassessments of their central themes: see *Authority and the Sacred: Aspects of the Christianisation of the Roman World* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 59–70; 'The rise and function of the holy man in Late Antiquity, 1971–1997', *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 6 (1998), 353–76. In this connection, see also James Howard-Johnston and Paul Antony Hayward (eds.), *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1999).

mankind – not when a new generation had found its 'need for intimacy with a protector with whom one could identify as a fellow human being'.[9]

Acknowledging the appeal of the cult of the saints should not lead us to assume, however, that it utterly swept away older ideas at the moment of its arrival. As Guthlac's experiences in the marshes of eighth-century England demonstrate, the advance of the saints did not necessitate the simultaneous retreat of the angels. Guthlac had enjoyed both the personal protection of St Bartholomew and the visitations of an angel, and although his hagiographer lavished attention on Bartholomew's occasional dramatic appearances, it was the nameless angel which remained Guthlac's constant companion and support. Nor was Guthlac himself much of a companion to others after he died and joined Bartholomew in the choirs of the holy. The story told about the visit of Æthelbald, the future king of Mercia, to the saint's tomb is instructive in its emphasis.[10] The king was devastated when he heard of Guthlac's death, for the hermit had interceded for him in the past, offering advice and prophetic encouragement in the long days of his exile.[11] Æthelbald went to the saint's grave and wept: 'Where shall I find help now, most excellent father? Who will give me counsel? Who will console me if you leave me?' When Guthlac's soul appeared to him one last time, Æthelbald might have thought for a moment that he had been mistaken – that he was being shown how their old conversations need not cease simply because death had come between them. But although the grave was evidently no impediment to the saint, this was to be their last meeting. Guthlac had come to direct his old acquaintance towards a more obvious source of guidance and comfort, which Æthelbald in his despair seemed to have overlooked: 'Fear not, be strong, for God is your helper'. The saint delivered final prophecies about

9 Brown, *Cult of the Saints*, pp. 50–68, esp. pp. 61–2.
10 Felix, *VG*, ch. 52 (ed. Colgrave, pp. 164–6).
11 *Ibid.*, chs. 40, 49 (pp. 124, 148–50).

the course of Æthelbald's life, as if to ensure that the man would have everything he needed to live the rest of his life without Guthlac's personal guidance, and then departed. He may have come before Æthelbald 'clothed in angelic splendour', but Guthlac did not now offer the kind of relationship which he himself had enjoyed with the angel who came to him unbidden every morning and evening. Among the various different ways in which the powers of heaven might occasionally intervene in earthly affairs, that relationship still stood apart in the minds of early eighth-century writers.

The rise of the saints was not, therefore, contingent upon a decline of the angels, as if heavenly power could only have for itself in one kind of champion. The construction of early Anglo-Saxon sanctity was in fact *dependent*, to a large extent, on the continued workings of the angelic. This was nevertheless a dependency which the saints seem to have outgrown over the course of the early Middle Ages. If we are interested in the changing mental world of early medieval Christianity, then this is a process which we must chart and explain. This chapter argues that the changing relationship of saints and angels in Anglo-Saxon Christianity is best understood not in terms of functional replacement, as one type of intercessor gradually accrued the characteristics and duties of the other, but rather as a symptom of developments within the genre of hagiography itself. Those developments centred around one crucial concern: how to prove sanctity? This was a question which hagiographers were compelled to answer, however tacitly. As we shall see, angels were for a while a useful form of hagiographic proof, but simultaneously shot through with ambiguity and difficulty in a way that other kinds of miraculous emanations were not. The way that successive generations of hagiographers handled this question of miraculous proof seems ultimately to have been responsible for the gradual sidelining of angels in the *uitae* of Anglo-Saxon saints. As they did, much of what had previously distinguished the angelic from other kinds of supernatural power

inevitably became hard to discern, so that by the end of the period, it was no longer possible for Anglo-Saxon Christians to say with confidence what was distinctive about the spirits which had once so fascinated their ancestors.

THE PRIVATE CONVERSATIONS OF ANGELS AND HOLY MEN

When St Guthlac's clerical servant, Beccel, finally plucked up the courage to ask his master why he had often heard him deep in conversation when he appeared to be alone, his curiosity was satisfied when the saint told him he had been talking to an angel. Although many of his contemporaries would journey across kingdoms to speak with visionaries, or make copies of the latter-day 'letters from Christ' which occasionally dropped from the heavens, Beccel did not press Guthlac for some new piece of celestial wisdom. Nor did the hagiographer Felix, through whose pen all this is told, seek to speculate and connect the saint's admission with the various predictions and forewarnings he had made during his life. This apparent disinterest was not unusual in saint's Lives. While hagiographers took note when angels appeared with direct and pointed messages, a steady stream of angelic conversations was never subjected to a great deal of scrutiny. Bede, for instance, was far more interested in the somewhat mundane remedy prescribed by an angel for the young St Cuthbert's swollen knee than he was with the saint's more intimate meetings with angels in later life.[12] Years of heavenly communication were simply condensed into a passing notice that Cuthbert 'often deserved to see and talk to angels' after being tested by one of them at Ripon.[13]

In truth, there was only so much that either Felix or Bede could say about the words of the angels, for the saints themselves had refused to speak openly about them.

[12] Bede, *VCP*, ch. 2 (ed. Colgrave, pp. 158–60); cf. *VCA*, I.4 (ed. Colgrave, pp. 66–8). Valerie I.J. Flint notes the 'medical orthodoxy' of other surprisingly practical, rather than miraculous, angelic healings in early medieval saints' Lives: *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe* (Oxford, 1991), p. 163.

[13] Bede, *VCP*, ch. 7 (ed. Colgrave, p. 178).

Guthlac had paraphrased St Paul when he said that the things that his angel had shown him were expressly forbidden to others:

> every morning and evening the Lord has sent an angel to talk with me for my consolation, who showed me mysteries which it is not lawful for man to utter, who relieved the hardness of my toil with heavenly oracles, and who revealed to me things which were absent as though they were present.[14]

This modern era needed no Old Testament prophets to act as God's mouthpieces on earth. When the angels came with messages for the holy few, they spoke of personal, and private, matters. Even if the angels' words had a very obvious relevance for others, they were revealed only under duress. An especially pious and penitent monk named Adomnán was told by an unidentified figure in a night-time vision that a fire would destroy the place in which he dwelt, the double monastery of Coldingham in Northumbria, to punish the rest of the community for its persistent sins.[15] Adomnán tried to keep his foreknowledge to himself, but could not hide the tears which alerted others that something was wrong. When he finally told the abbess, he said that he had been afraid to trouble her with the prophecy – but in any case, the apparition had not urged him to announce God's intentions. The angel's message was intended as a personal exhortation to Adomnán, and his visitor had spoken to him of his own conduct: 'You do well to choose to spend the night hours of rest in vigil and prayer instead of indulging in sleep'. While it has always been recognized that this story, told in some detail by Bede, was included in the *Historia ecclesiastica* 'to warn the reader about the workings of the Lord and how terrible he is', the importance of the visionary monk at the centre of it has generally been overlooked.[16] When the angel reeled off a litany of sins committed by

[14] Felix, *VG*, ch. 50 (ed. Colgrave, p. 156). Cf. 2 Cor. 12:4.
[15] Bede, *HE*, IV.25 (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 420–26).
[16] Since Coldingham was a double monastery, the episode has been read as evidence of Bede's distaste for mixed monastic communities – most insistently by Stephanie Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women and the Church: Sharing a Common Fate* (Woodbridge, 1992), esp. pp. 101–3. However, as David Rollason rightly notes, 'although Bede criticises the loose morals of [Coldingham's] inmates, there is no suggestion that these derived from its double character': *Northumbria, 500–1100: Creation and Destruction of a Kingdom* (Cambridge, 2003), p. 135.

Adomnán's fellows, Bede certainly intended that his words would be a warning for other over-worldly ecclesiastics – but Bede devoted just as much attention to Adomnán's own virtuously penitent way of life. The appearance of a heavenly messenger was a demonstration of Adomnán's personal holiness as much as a condemnation of monastic indiscipline, intended to edify a pious individual by encouraging him to persevere in his labours. His reluctance to disclose his private consolation was thus understandable, even expected. Elsewhere in the *Historia ecclesiastica*, Bede said that St Fursa would only repeat the things shown to him by angels to those who came to him with a spirit of true penitence. The original *Vita Fursei* had claimed no such thing, and suggested that the saint had been eager to expound his otherworldly visions to others.[17] Evidently a more guarded attitude was the proper response in early Anglo-Saxon eyes.

Even when necessity dictated that the saints retell their conversations with angels, they kept their words to a minimum. When angels came to speak with Bishop Chad at Lichfield, an event related by Bede on the basis of stories told by the brothers of Lastingham, a monk named Owine was at work and heard the sound of singing descend upon the oratory in which Chad was praying alone. He heard it again half an hour later, returning the way it had come, and could not hide his curiosity from the bishop. Chad told him:

> If you heard a voice singing and realized that a heavenly company had come, I order you in the name of the Lord not to tell anyone before my death. For truly, they were the spirits of angels come to call me to the heavenly rewards which I have always loved and desired; and they promised to return in seven days and to take me away with them.[18]

Chad's explanation stripped the encounter to its barest essentials. But the angels had been

[17] Bede, *HE*, III.19 (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, p. 274). *Vita Fursei*, chs. 17–18 (='Le visioni' ed. Ciccarese, pp. 302–3 [ch. 17]; plus 'Vita sancti Fursei', ed. Krusch, p. 436 [ch. 4 (=18)]).

[18] Bede, *HE*, IV.3 (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 340–42). Bede identifies his source in the preface, although there is some reason to suppose that his retelling might have been substantially rearranged: see above, pp. 149–50, n. 63.

with him in the chapel for a full thirty minutes. As Joseph Nagy has observed of similar scenes in Irish hagiography, the dialogue of the saints with their otherworldly visitors 'is never conveyed or captured in its totality [but is] only a fragment of what was or could have been said'.[19] Even those tiny pieces of angelic wisdom were frequently accompanied by an order of secrecy, so that no-one else should know until after the saint's death. Similar injunctions were made for all kinds of miracles, and hagiographers explained that the saints were following the example of Christ, who had demanded the same of those who witnessed his Transfiguration.[20] Applied to those celestial conversations which the saints would only mention when pressed, and even then with guarded words, no reader of the early Anglo-Saxon saints' Lives could fail to understand that although the angels still fulfilled their ancient duty as God's messengers to humanity, their messages were not meant for general consumption.

To some extent, these were old ideas. It had always been a commonplace that, since those closest to God were doubtless more perceptive than ordinary souls, the saints had an affinity with the angels that moved through a world otherwise blind to their presence. Among the Sayings of the Desert Fathers, for example, was a story of a group of holy men who had gathered together in conversation. 'One of them had the gift of vision' and he alone was therefore able to watch as angels waved branches in their honour, for as long as their talk pertained to matters of the soul.[21] In sixth-century Wales, St Samson had similarly been the only one able to see the angelic hands that joined his as he celebrated Mass, while an entire congregation looked on unawares.[22] Yet while the

[19] Joseph Falaky Nagy, *Conversing with Angels and Ancients: Literary Myths of Medieval Ireland* (Dublin, 1997), p. 3.

[20] See especially Bede, *VCP*, ch. 10 (ed. Colgrave, p. 190), directly quoting Matt. 17:9.

[21] *Apophthegmata patrum*, ch. 228, trans. Benedicta Ward, *The Wisdom of the Desert Fathers: Systematic Sayings from the Anonymous Series of the 'Apophthegmata patrum'* (Oxford, 1975), p. 62.

[22] *Vita prima S. Samsonis*, I.44, ed. Pierre Flobert, *La Vie ancienne de saint Samson de Dol* (Paris, 1996), p. 210. The *Vita* was written in Brittany *c.* 700, but based on an earlier, now lost, Life written in Cornwall *c.* 600. This event is part of the interconnected series of miracles relating to Samson's

early Anglo-Saxon saints sometimes experienced visions in the sight of others, looking with spiritual eyes upon things happening many miles away, the angels who brought them quiet words of comfort chose more secluded places to make their presence known. Sulpicius Severus had thought it a truism that 'the one who is often visited by men cannot often be visited by angels', and eighth-century English hagiographers agreed.[23] Felix certainly thought that his words encapsulated St Guthlac's experience, and imagined his saint quoting them to the visiting Bishop Wilfrid.[24] This did not mean that angels restricted their attentions to hermits, but the aristocratic Anglo-Saxon monasteries that have often struck historians as little more than a 'special kind of nobleman's club' could be crowded places, and the spirits tended to wait until the saints were alone.[25] They visited Cuthbert at Ripon while he was at work in the guesthouse, on a winter morning when it lay empty; Chad received their summons in his own private oratory; and Wilfrid, indeed, was met by one while imprisoned by royal command 'in some secret place where the sun rarely shines' – not to work some miraculous prison-break, as the angels did for the apostles, but simply to ease his hardship and terrify his captors.[26]

episcopal ordination which, as I argue elsewhere, seem to have been the climax of the original Cornish Life: cf. 'The Lives of St Samson: rewriting the ambitions of an early medieval cult', *Francia* 38 (2011), 1–31, at pp. 26–30.

23 Sulpicius Severus, *Dialogi*, I.17, ed. Jacques Fontaine, *Sulpice Sévère. Gallus: Dialogues sur les 'vertus' de saint Martin* (Paris, 2006), p. 170.

24 Felix, *VG*, ch. 39 (ed. Colgrave, p. 122).

25 The phrase is James Campbell's: 'Elements in the background to the Life of St Cuthbert and his early cult', in *St Cuthbert, his Cult and his Community to AD 1200*, ed. Gerald Bonner, D.W. Rollason and Clare Stancliffe (Woodbridge, 1989), pp. 3–19, at p. 12. For similar opinions, see Patrick Wormald, 'Bede, *Beowulf* and the conversion of the Anglo-Saxon aristocracy', in *Bede and Anglo-Saxon England: Papers in Honour of the 1300th Anniversary of the Birth of Bede*, ed. Robert T. Farrell (Oxford, 1978), pp. 32–95, at pp. 50–57; Foot, *Monastic Life*, p. 236.

26 *VCA*, II.2 and Bede, *VCP*, ch. 7 (ed. Colgrave, pp. 76–8, 174–8); Bede, *HE*, IV.3 (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 338–40); Stephen, *VW*, ch. 36 (ed. Colgrave, pp. 72–4). On angels attending saints in prison: although Stephen himself suggests the parallel with the imprisoned St Peter (Acts 12:7), Wilfrid's experiences are sufficiently different to show that his hagiographer had not simply lifted an older story and changed its protagonist. The basic idea had, nevertheless, become somewhat traditional in the martyr narratives composed in Late Antiquity but still well known in the early eighth century: see, for example, the entries in Bede's *Martyrologium* for SS Benignus of Dijon, Apollinaris, Mark the Evangelist and Felix of Nola, printed by Henri Quentin, *Les martyrologes historiques du Moyen Âge. Étude sur la formation du martyrologe romain* (2nd ed., Paris, 1908), pp. 62, 63, 86, 107.

The consistent emphasis on the physical isolation of the meetings of the saints was more than a narrative backdrop. It was a way for hagiographers to make a lot out of a little. By locating these angelic conferences behind closed doors, while others slept or busied themselves elsewhere, they suggested the possibility that these things could have been going on, unreported, all of the time. One or two stories could easily stand for an entire lifetime of heavenly conversations, about which none save the saint had ever known. Precisely by refusing to narrate those conversations in full, and turning their attention to the very circumstantial ways that they had ever come to anyone's attention, hagiographers gave the impression that their stories were simply the tip of an iceberg. On Iona in the late seventh century, Abbot Adomnán was clear that this was how the stories about his venerable predecessor, Columba, ought to be interpreted, and his words apply equally to the position of hagiographers in neighbouring England. St Columba had frequently said that he watched angels carrying the souls of the dead, but on one occasion he was seen leaving the monastery to receive their ministrations himself. Adomnán insisted that all that made this event unique was that someone else had been there to witness it:

> One should take note of this story, and carefully think about the number and nature of the sweet and angelic visitations which came to the blessed man, as he stayed awake on many winter nights and prayed in the most remote places while others rested. There was no way that these could come to people's notice, but they were doubtless frequent; for although some of them, day or night, could somehow be found out by men, these were unquestionably very few in comparison with all the angelic visitations about which no-one could know anything.[27]

Adomnán's assertion is the statement of a man trying to wring every last drop of divine grace from an inherited body of stories.[28] It might strike us as simple bluster, like the conventional statements in hagiographic prefaces about the abundance of miracles which

[27] Adomnán, *VC*, III.16 (ed. Anderson and Anderson, p. 206).

[28] The existence of an earlier book containing stories of Columba's miracles is indicated by a surviving fragment which survives in some of the manuscripts of Adomnán's work, following *VC*, III.5 (ed. Anderson and Anderson, pp. 188–90).

the author has neither the space nor the ability to relate. It is nevertheless worth noting how easily we still dance to their tune. We often tend to assume that early medieval saints' Lives are more filled with angels than they really are, but hagiographers were in fact remarkably economical with their reports of angelic appearances. A handful of stories, narrated in a way that hinted at many more left untold, was all that was required to hint at a life lived in constant closeness with heavenly companions.

The convenience of all this for hagiographers was hard to miss. The saints' access to information withheld from others had the potential to provide a ready explanation for their sometimes erratic behaviour or questionable judgements. Writers of saints' Lives across early medieval Europe busied themselves with showing the hidden causes of the saints' otherwise puzzling decisions. Jonas of Bobbio thus explained that St Columbanus would surely have pressed on from the shores of Lake Constance to preach to the pagan Slavs, instead of ignoring them and taking the less urgent road to Italy, had an angel not appeared to dissuade him from his missionary course.[29] Whether we should necessarily suppose that all stories of this sort are convenient fictions dreamed up by writers to exonerate their saintly heroes, or to disguise uncomfortable truths, is a difficult matter. Some individuals later revered as saints *had* actually claimed that they had received messages of this sort through visions. St Patrick's own explanation for beginning his mission in Ireland was that it he was following orders given in his dreams, instructed by disembodied voices and by a mysterious figure named Victoricus. He was quick to point this out to critics of his mission, and described his dreams with his own words in his *Confessio*. However we choose to interpret Patrick's account, and however much later writers reshaped it when they came to write Patrick's *uitae*, these visions were the saint's

[29] Jonas, *Vita S. Columbani*, I.27, ed. Bruno Krusch, MGH, SS rer. Germ. XXXVII (Hanover, 1905), pp. 216–17. On Jonas' attempts to cast Columbanus into a missionary mould, despite the realities of his life, see Ian N. Wood, *The Missionary Life: Saints and the Evangelisation of Europe, 400–1050* (Harlow, 2001), pp. 31–9.

own way of justifying his actions to his contemporaries.[30] Assuming that all hagiographic accounts of heavenly message are posthumous fictions would therefore be as unrealistic as taking them all at face value. Nevertheless, that those who commissioned and wrote saints' Lives were not above using accounts of angelic directives to fabricate their own accounts of a safely dead saint's deeds is made abundantly clear by one Anglo-Saxon *uita* in particular. Since it is also a fundamental source for late seventh- and early eighth-century history, its testimony deserves a close examination.

According to the Life written by Stephen of Ripon, St Wilfrid fell gravely ill as he made his way across Francia from Rome. Taken to the town of Meaux, he lay at the brink of death for four days; as soon as he was returned to health on the fifth day, he ordered his anxious companions to leave him alone with Acca, his priest. Wilfrid told him that he had just been visited by the archangel Michael, who announced that through the prayers of the Virgin Mary and Wilfrid's own followers, his sickness would pass, he would return to England, and there regain the lands and monasteries which had been taken from him years earlier. He had been granted four more years of life, and Michael instructed him to repay the Virgin's intercession with a church built in her honour, and to prepare himself for the day the archangel would return for his soul.[31] Those preparations were made in Wilfrid's last days. After being restored to his old diocese as the angel had promised, he gathered a few trusted companions together in the treasury at Ripon to give them final instructions. Making arrangements for the division of his treasure and indicating that his kinsman Tatberht should assume the abbacy of Ripon after his death, but keeping all this from the rest of the community, Wilfrid headed for Mercia. He

[30] Patrick, *Confessio*, ed. A.B.E. Hood, *St Patrick: His Writings and Muirchu's Life* (London, 1978); the visions pertaining to the Irish mission are chs. 23–5, 29 (pp. 27–8), on which see also Nagy, *Conversing with Angels*, pp. 29–34. Although Patrick was not specific about the identity of Victoricus, his hagiographers identified Victoricus as an angel from the first and expanded his involvement with the saint: see Muirchú, *Vita S. Patricii*, chs. 1, 7 and 11 (ed. Hood, pp. 63–4, 66).

[31] Stephen, *VW*, ch. 56 (ed. Colgrave, pp. 120–22).

distributed lands and wealth to each of his monasteries there, telling one or two people about the plans he had made at Ripon, before he finally succumbed to another bout of illness at the monastery of Oundle. At the moment he died, those who were with him heard the sound of wings over the monastery. They heard it again as they washed his body, 'and the wise men who were present said that, beyond any doubt, the choirs of angels had come with Michael to lead the holy bishop's soul into paradise'.[32]

Wilfrid's final disposal of ecclesiastical office, property and treasure has been central to estimations of his character by modern historians. Stephen might have extolled the saint as a champion of the Benedictine Rule, but the proprietary arrangements made for his diocese in these last days bear more resemblance to a secular aristocrat's will than to St Benedict's stipulations.[33] The preparations made in the treasury at Ripon are so unlike anything from conventional hagiographical *topoi*, and so filled with the sober details of property and succession, that they have hardly been questioned. And yet, as a forceful essay by D.P. Kirby has emphasized, the instructions given to the few chosen men in the treasury bear no resemblance to the description of Wilfrid's final address to the rest of the community which immediately follows.[34] To the former, the bishop announced his departure for Rome and designated that his kinsman Tatberht would now be head (*praepositus*) of Ripon, to become abbot after Wilfrid's death. To the assembled Ripon monks he thus announced that the current *praepositus*, Caelin, would be leaving to resume his former life as a hermit – but said of himself that he was leaving for Mercia,

[32] *Ibid.*, chs. 63–6 (pp. 136–42).

[33] Among others: Wormald, 'Bede, *Beowulf* and the aristocracy', pp. 54–5; *idem.*, 'The age of Bede and Aethelbald', in *The Anglo-Saxons*, ed. James Campbell (London, 1982), pp. 70–100, at p. 83; David Pelteret, 'Saint Wilfrid: tribal bishop, civic bishop or Germanic lord?', in *The Community, the Family and the Saint: Patterns of Power in Early Medieval Europe*, ed. Joyce Hill and Mary Swan (Turnhout, 1998), pp. 159–80, at pp. 175–9; Alan Thacker, 'Wilfrid [St Wilfrid] (*c.* 634–709/10)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 60 vols. (Oxford, 2004), lviii, 944–50, at pp. 948–9; Foot, *Monastic Life*, p. 259; Blair, *Church*, pp. 97–9. A more positive spin is attempted by D.H. Farmer, 'Saint Wilfrid', in *Saint Wilfrid at Hexham*, ed. D.P. Kirby (Newcastle, 1974), pp. 35–59, at p. 57.

[34] D.P. Kirby, 'Bede, Eddius Stephanus and the *Life of Wilfrid*', *EHR* 98 (1983), 101–14, at pp. 108–9.

planning to visit King Ceolred and to return with a new abbot, 'the man whom I found worthy to preside over you'. Kirby saw this apparent inconsistency as evidence of late revision and interpolation in the *Vita Wilfridi*, but his insistence that Stephen here presents 'two contradictory accounts of Wilfrid's intentions' is overplayed.[35] What Stephen in fact alleges is that Wilfrid had veiled his intentions from his community, entrusting his final wishes only to a select few before ordering the rest that if he should die before he returned, they should 'accept and set up as abbot whoever these witnesses [i.e. those whom he had gathered in the treasury] will come and declare to you, and render the same obedience to him which you promised to me'.[36] Stephen says that Wilfrid's followers worried about the bishop's reluctance to lay plans for the future; only months before, 'all these things had seemed to men to be lacking'.[37] They might still have seemed so, for although the bishop met with 'all his abbots' on his final journey, he only 'recounted his will in full to some of them'.[38] In these concluding chapters of Wilfrid's Life, Stephen sought to demonstrate that although the bishop had not made his last bequests publicly known, he had nevertheless attended to every particular in secret.

It has not yet been recognized that, in Stephen's telling, this entire sequence of events is inextricable from the angelic prophecy that set it in motion. Wilfrid's actions can only be understood as those of a man who knew that his death was approaching. Stephen impresses upon the reader that Wilfrid's final preparations were entirely

[35] *Ibid.*, pp. 106–10. Kirby saw similar evidence of 'contradiction' in the statements about King Aldfrith's succession, only one of which specifically names his son Osred as his heir (chs. 59–60), and argued that the stress on Wilfrid's personal nomination of Tatberht to Ripon and Acca to Hexham would be best explained by dating those passages to the years after 731, when Acca was been deposed from his see. Without rehearsing the doubts of others, I would add only that it is difficult to see why is was, if these really were authorial revisions made at a time of acute need, that the author nevertheless did the job so badly as to render his testimony equivocal at precisely those points that he was now trying to insist upon. The stress upon Wilfrid's personal nomination of his successors seems more appropriate to other contexts: see below, pp. 179–81.

[36] Stephen, *VW*, ch. 64 (ed. Colgrave, p. 138).

[37] *Ibid.*, chs. 62–3 (pp. 134–6).

[38] *Ibid.*, ch. 65 (p. 140).

motivated by the words uttered by the archangel Michael years before at Meaux. The angel had given clear instructions: 'You must be prepared [*paratus esto*], for after the space of four years I will visit you again'.[39] That time had come, and Wilfrid told the men gathered in the Ripon treasury that 'I give these orders so that when the archangel Michael visits me, he may find me prepared [*paratum inueniat*]; for many signs of my death crowd around'.[40] Everything in those last days follows 'as if he foresaw his death', or 'as if by the spirit of prophecy'.[41] These authorial asides should not be read as attempts to twist mundane events into evidence of sanctity. They show Stephen's awareness that prophetic revelation was all that stopped his narration from becoming deeply improbable. Without it, we are otherwise led to believe that although it was always Wilfrid's intention to divide his monasteries among his followers, he gave no indication of his wishes even after at least two attacks of near-fatal illness, nor issued them on his deathbed, but had fortuitously spent what would turn out to be his last days making all necessary arrangements in a flurry of secret activity. In other words, the entire conclusion to the *Vita Wilfridi* depends on accepting Stephen's assurance that Wilfrid really had been able to predict his own death. Even if Stephen had not attributed the source of that foreknowledge to an angelic visitation, this is a notion that we ought rightly to question.

Whatever Wilfrid might actually have said when he regained consciousness after several days of illness, the idea that he awoke knowing that he had a mere four more years to live can only be classed as retrospective fiction. Nevertheless, it cannot have been the personal work of an inventive hagiographer, for Stephen said that his story could be verified by Acca, Wilfrid's priest and now bishop of Hexham. Stephen could hardly have made this claim without the bishop's approval, since his *Vita Wilfridi* was

[39] *Ibid.*, ch. 56 (p. 122).
[40] *Ibid.*, ch. 63 (p. 138).
[41] *Ibid.*, chs. 62 and 65 (pp. 134 and 140).

dedicated jointly to Acca and to Tatberht of Ripon, and had been written at their request.[42] It might be possible to agree with Kirby that the episode simply attests to Acca's 'lively interest in the visionary',[43] were it not that the whole purpose of the story was to explain how Wilfrid had arranged the future of his diocese only at the last minute, and why he had not done so more publicly. The dedicatees of the Life were the two men who it said owed their present positions directly to their predecessor's alleged foreknowledge. The culmination of Wilfrid's preparations for the archangel's return was his decision to appoint Tatberht not only to the abbacy of Ripon, but also to the stewardship of his entire monastic network. Stephen's words bear repeating:

> Before [his death], Wilfrid described his whole life from memory in conversation to the priest Tatberht, as though on that day, as they were riding down the road, he foresaw his own death. Indeed, he also recounted all the lands in various places which he had previously given to abbots or which he now decreed to be given, such as it was with the monastery of Hexham, which he ordered to be given to the priest Acca – he of blessed memory who is by the grace of God bishop after him.[44]

In circumstances explicitly dependent on the foreknowledge granted by the archangel, Tatberht had been made responsible for both the material future of his churches and the saint's own posthumous reputation. Even the *uita* now being brought to a close was being set up as a straightforward continuation of Wilfrid's personal reminiscences that day. But Stephen's remains a tale of two houses. The whole 'kingdom of churches' (*regnum ecclesiarum*) is effectively reduced to Ripon and Hexham.[45] Had Wilfrid not died at Oundle, the only other monastery directly identified by name, it too would have

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42 *Ibid.*, preface (p. 2).

43 Kirby, 'Bede, Eddius and the *Life*', p. 112. William Trent Foley notes that the episode marks the beginning of a new tone in the Life's final section, but offers little other comment on its significance: *Images of Sanctity in Eddius Stephanus' Life of Bishop Wilfrid, an Early English Saint's Life* (Lewiston, NY, 1992), pp. 37–8.

44 Stephen, *VW*, ch. 65 (ed. Colgrave, p. 140). Stephen's use of the phrase 'of blessed memory' (*beatae memoriae*) to refer to a living person is unusual. Kirby thought that they might indicate that Acca was in exile, indicating that these words were written after his deposition in 731 and thus postdating the rest of the Life by almost two decades: 'Bede, Eddius and the *Life*', pp. 107–8. But after taking Wilfrid's place at Hexham, Acca was always distant from Ripon, where Stephen and his primary audience were. It is easy to forget that although Stephen treats the two institutions as if they were neighbours, Hexham and Ripon are almost eighty miles apart.

45 Stephen, *VW*, ch. 21 (ed. Colgrave, p. 42).

remained anonymous. The Life's narrowness of focus is more a product of its patrons than the reality of Wilfrid's cross-kingdom empire. Stephen was only interested in demonstrating how the succession to the abbacy of Ripon and the bishopric of Hexham had come about. It came down to an oral will that bore no relation to what anyone remembered the saint saying in public, and an angelic revelation to which only the beneficiaries of that will could attest. It is difficult to escape the conclusion that the convergence of *post euentum* prophecy with the more worldly business of ecclesiastical inheritance was a deliberate and self-interested fiction woven by the men who had set themselves up as Wilfrid's heirs. Although Stephen's work has often been called 'partisan', it may now be time to reconsider exactly whose cause he was most insistently championing.

The *Vita Wilfridi* is a special case. The angels who came to other early Anglo-Saxon saints did not always spring from the mind of someone looking for the *deus ex machina* which might give credibility to an otherwise dubious series of events. Unlike the archangel Michael's appearance to Wilfrid, the messages they brought to other saints mostly remained unrepeated, and even hagiographers did not claim to know them. Nevertheless, Wilfrid's vision serves to underline the essential usefulness of the angels that ensured that their presence remained a conventional part of early medieval *uitae*. Other types of miracle-stories often tend to feel complete in themselves: portentous signs accompanying a saint's birth indicated greatness, but were ultimately of little consequence to their future deeds; miraculous healings showed the intervention of the saints at its most critical, but were also discrete incidents contingent on the particular circumstances that led the sick and the desperate to seek their intervention. In these moments, the flame of divine power burned brightly, but intermittently. Evidence of

conversations with angels, on the other hand, cast a saint's life in the glow of a more constant light. They delivered personal messages of comfort, consolation and revelation in moments of quiet solitude which seemed all the more intimate and mysterious for being only partially revealed to others. Yet these were also precisely the qualities which allowed certain hagiographers to reach back and insert messages into the mouths of angels which might reshape a few elements of an otherwise problematic or inconvenient life into a form they found more suitable.

THE BURDEN OF PROOF

Although it was undoubtedly convenient for writers to claim that their saints were in the habit of speaking with angels when no-one else was present, assertion alone was only persuasive to the most uncritical reader. It was certainly not sufficient if one intended to place anachronistic fictions into the mouths of God's own messengers. As Henry Mayr-Harting has aptly said of this kind of story, it is wrong to think 'that anyone at any time could easily produce an angel to suit his purpose, like a magician in a pantomime rubbing his magic lantern to bring up a genie through a trap door'.[46] Medieval Christians accepted the reality of miracles, but seldom without evidence. And most miracles did indeed leave behind some kind of evidence: the abandoned crutches of men and women restored to health, or the springs of clear water called into existence through a saint's prayers. The bodiless beings that appeared to the saints when they were alone seldom left such tangible things behind them. Outside England, they sometimes left footprints in solid rock, and a few places in Italy and Byzantium claimed that the archangel Michael had carved new caves and moved rivers to make room for cult sites where human beings might venerate him.[47] In later centuries, religious communities occasionally claimed to

[46] Mayr-Harting, *Perceptions of Angels*, pp. 9–10.

[47] Muirchú provides a rare example unconnected with St Michael: *Vita Patricii*, ch. 11 (ed. Hood, p. 66). Physical signs of Michael's presence are reported in the texts associated with his cult and liturgical

have taken possession of items that the angels had abandoned on earth: by at least the eleventh century, the relic-collection at Exeter included a candle held by one of the angels at Christ's tomb; before long, the abbey of Mont St-Michel announced that it had the archangel's sword and shield in its keeping.[48] But even by *c.* 1200 these things were few in number, and the angels who talked to the early Anglo-Saxon saints with such secrecy came and went without a trace. The one that called on St Cuthbert did not even disturb the freshly fallen snow.[49]

Lacking any material evidence of angelic apparitions, it might be expected that Anglo-Saxon hagiographers had to try harder to establish the truth content of their stories. In fact, they simply appealed to the testimony of witnesses – specifically, witnesses who were 'true and religious men'. This was standard practice when reporting any kind of miracle-story, as conventional as any other *topos* of the genre. Yet no matter how trustworthy these informants might have been, as witnesses to angelic manifestations they function rather imperfectly. An unvoiced question renders their testimony less clear-cut than it might seem to be: precisely what is it that they are testifying to? Cuthbert had told a few *probatissimi uiri* that he was in the habit of receiving angelic assistance, said the anonymous monk of Lindisfarne who first wrote a Life of the saint, but they could only tell stories about things that they had not themselves

veneration: see variously: *Liber de apparitione sancti Michaelis in monte Gargano*, chs. 3 and 5, ed. Georg Waitz, MGH, SS rer. Lang. (Hanover, 1878), pp. 541–3; 'Homiliary of St-Père', homily LV, ed. J.E. Cross, 'An unpublished story of Michael the Archangel and its connections', in *Magister Regis: Studies in Honour of Robert Earle Kaske*, ed. Arthur Groos (New York, 1986), pp. 23–35, at p. 34; *Narratio de miraculo a Michaele archangelo Chonis patrato*, ed. Max Bonnet, *Analecta Bollandiana* 8 (1889), 289–307. On the latter, and further discussion of 'negative relics', see Peers, *Subtle Bodies*, pp. 157–80.

48 The documents inventorying the Exeter relic-collection, some but not all of which had been donated in the mid-tenth century by King Æthelstan, are edited with detailed discussion by Patrick W. Conner, *Anglo-Saxon Exeter: A Tenth-Century Cultural History* (Woodbridge, 1993), pp. 171–209. For the relics possessed by Mont-St-Michel, see Baudri de Bourgueil, *Relatio de scuto et gladio sancti Michaelis*, ed. Pierre Bouet and Olivier Desbordes, *Chroniques latines du Mont Saint-Michel (IX^{e}–XII^{e} siècle)* (Caen, 2009), pp. 347–65.

49 *VCA*, II.2 and Bede, *VCP*, ch. 7 (ed. Colgrave, pp. 78 and 176).

seen.[50] We have already seen how even witnesses who stood nearby when the saints received their visitors seldom understood what was happening until the saint explained it to them. The monk Owine heard a celestial song descend upon St Chad's oratory, but had seen nothing himself and so had to ask the bishop to explain it for him; Beccel had heard Guthlac talking to someone for years, but had no idea as to whom until his master told him.[51] While it was improper to question the saints' own explanations – Bede was emphatic that 'whatever such a man said must be true' – the testimony of eye-witnesses was only ever a partial proof of the event itself.[52] On its own, such an account awaited interpretation, whether from the lips of the saints or from the pen of the hagiographer who wrote with the benefit of hindsight.

Retrospective reinterpretation was a critical part of what Stephen of Ripon was attempting at the end of his *Vita Wilfridi*. He wrote within five years of the saint's death, and addressed himself throughout to the old followers of 'our bishop' (*pontifex noster*).[53] He was therefore narrating recent history to a readership that had lived through it. Yet even as he drew upon their memories of events, he was quietly asserting that these were insufficient to say what had really happened. The matters relating to the archangel's prophecy had either taken place out of their sight, or they had not known enough to interpret them correctly at the time. Birds had been heard in the skies above Oundle when Wilfrid died, 'as a cloud of witnesses confirm' (*nube testium confirmante*), but Stephen

[50] *VCA*, I.4 (ed. Colgrave, p. 68).
[51] See above, pp. 169–75.
[52] Bede, *HE*, IV.3 (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, p. 344).
[53] The *Vita Wilfridi* can be dated closely to 711 × 714 – after the first anniversary of Wilfrid's death (ch. 68), but before the death of Ælfflæd, abbess of Whitby, to whom Stephen refers in the present tense (ch. 59) as Kirby noted: 'Bede, Eddius and the *Life'*, p. 106. Walter Goffart's protestation that there is 'nothing incompatible with composition after the abbess's death', and his re-dating to *c.* 720, is far from the obvious way to read Stephen's description of 'fidelissimi testes [...] ex quibus est Aefleda abbatissa et sapientissima uirgo, quae est uere filia regis': *VW*, ch. 59 (ed. Colgrave, p. 128); Walter Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History (A.D. 550–800): Jordanes, Gregory of Tours, Bede, and Paul the Deacon* (Princeton, NJ, 1988), p. 281, n. 210. Stephen's primary audience may have been limited for the most part to Ripon, to judge from the greater place given to its affairs: cf. Kirby, 'Bede, Eddius and the *Life*', pp. 110–11.

said that the sound of their wings was not comprehensible in itself, and needed more careful consideration. Although it might not have been apparent to most people, those who were wise (*sapientes*) had 'known beyond any doubt that the choirs of angels had come with Michael to lead the holy bishop's soul into paradise'.[54] Stephen was providing further reason to believe that Wilfrid's last days had been overseen by the archangel, as his successors now claimed, and that everything had turned out the way that it had been foretold. Now that the story of the apparition had been made known, old memories could be reconsidered.

While the saints walked and talked with spirits whom they saw with their bodily eyes as well as in spiritual visions, the experience of the rest of mankind generally hinged on the correct interpretation of this kind of secondary sign: the presence of strange sounds and smells, or unexpected lights. It did not always take long to interpret the signs. When a bright light and a beautiful fragrance filled the church in which St Ceolfrith's body was interred, 'it could be plainly understood that the ministers of eternal light and perpetual sweetness had been present'. But it was an interpretation nonetheless, not as self-evident as the things seen by the saints.[55] Unusual dreams might provide both the most vivid and the most potentially problematic evidence for the ordinary person, for it was widely known that the things seen during sleep could be dangerous guides to reality. While they might afford a temporary glimpse of things normally hidden to bodily eyes, they might equally originate simply from one's own mind, if they were not the deceptions of cunning demons.[56] The dreamer could not take them immediately at face

[54] Stephen, *VW*, chs. 65–6 (ed. Colgrave, pp. 140–42).
[55] *Vita S. Ceolfridi*, ch. 40, ed. Plummer, *BOH*, i, 404.
[56] The wealth of different ancient and medieval responses to this issue has provoked a lively field of enquiry. See especially: A.H.M. Kessels, 'Ancient systems of dream-classification', *Mnemosyne*, 4th ser., 22 (1969), 389–424; Martine Dulaey, *Le rêve dans la vie et la pensée de saint Augustin* (Paris, 1973); Steven F. Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 17–122; Paul Edward Dutton, *The Politics of Dreaming in the Carolingian Empire* (Lincoln, NE, 1994), pp. 27–38; Patricia Cox Miller, *Dreams in Late Antiquity: Studies in the Imagination of a Culture* (Princeton, NJ, 1994),

value. On the night that St Hild died, a nun named Begu was asleep in the dormitory at Hackness, thirteen miles away. Begu had been a nun for thirty years, but her works, it seems, were not exceptional. That night, she thought she heard the monastery's bell ringing, as it did when the nuns were summoned to prayer or when there had been a death in the community. Opening her eyes, it seemed to her that the dormitory roof had been rolled back, and she saw an immense light in which Hild's soul was being carried to heaven by angels.[57] These things were not unique, and we saw the importance that Anglo-Saxon writers placed on such scenes in the last chapter. Hild's successor, Ælfflæd, would be told a very similar story by a visiting St Cuthbert only a little while later.[58] Cuthbert's spiritual sight would come while he was awake and instantly aware of what he had seen; Begu, on the other hand, was uncertain about what had just happened. When she awoke and saw everyone else still asleep, the dormitory intact and the bell no longer ringing, 'she realized that what she had seen had been revealed to her either in a dream or in a mental vision [*uel in somnio uel in uisione mentis*]'. She therefore sought the advice of her superior, Frigyth, who had assumed the responsibilities of the abbess in Hild's absence. Frigyth was sufficiently convinced by the story to wake the others and mourn the passing of the abbess, but it was only when messengers from Whitby arrived announcing Hild's death that Begu's sight truly confirmed as a genuine vision.

Doubtless this careful construction of Begu's reaction was the work of Bede, who reported the vision to attest to Hild's sanctity. Certainly, the story presents an ideal relationship of deference to one's monastic superiors as well as eulogizing a saintly soul. It nevertheless made clear that when different kinds of people realized that they were in the presence of angels, their experiences were not identical. Ordinary men and women,

pp. 39–105; Isabel Moreira, *Dreams, Visions, and Spiritual Authority in Merovingian Gaul* (Ithaca, NY, 2000), pp. 13–38.

57 Bede, *HE*, IV.23 (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 412–4).

58 *VCA*, IV.10 and Bede, *VCP*, ch. 34 (ed. Colgrave, pp. 126 and 260–64). See above, p. 160.

like Begu or the crowds at Oundle, could be under no illusion that they had been granted some special privilege, an apparition intended to deliver a personal message for the benefit of their own souls. Nor should they now think that a door onto another world had been opened to them, and that they might spend the rest of their lives receiving regular visitations from heavenly beings. They had simply chanced to be bystanders while God glorified another. Policing this distinction was an essential part of any hagiographer's task. It was absolutely necessary to preserve a difference between the wonder-worker through whom God shone his light, and the others who were occasionally allowed to catch a glimpse. There were no hard and fast rules here; the experience of the ordinary person might vary according to the circumstances. Nevertheless, when the things they had seen seemed too great for one of their station, the writers of saints' Lives felt compelled to step in with explanations for their readers. Thus when Adomnán of Iona described how one of St Columba's monks had followed the saint, against his command, and saw 'with his own bodily eyes' the angels who came to talk to him, the hagiographer was quick to explain how a disobedient monk could possibly have been allowed to see such things for himself:

> This cannot have happened, I think, without God's permission, so that the name and honour of the saint might be spread even further because this vision had been made known, despite the saint's own reluctance.[59]

A similar sentiment was voiced by Stephen, narrating the last of the angelic happenings connected with St Wilfrid's last days. Shortly after his death and burial, the monastery at Oundle was attacked by a band of marauders intent on razing it to the ground. When they came to the room in which Wilfrid had died, they struggled to set light to the thatch on the roof, and one of them pushed his way inside. Within the room there stood a young man dressed in white holding a golden cross. The attacker ran out in terror, shouting to

[59] Adomnán, *VC*, III.16 (ed. Anderson and Anderson, p. 204).

the rest that an angel protected the place, and Wilfrid's room alone escaped the blaze. Its physical survival might have been evidence enough that something strange had happened there, but Stephen still felt compelled to add his own explanation of how a layman, and a sinful one at that, could ever have looked upon the face of an angel. Like Adomnán, he concluded that it had been done by God 'to make his saint known to people'.[60]

While the saints were thus not the only people whose paths sometimes crossed with heavenly spirits, the testimonies of ordinary men and women who had occasionally found themselves in the presence of an angel were never reported without some kind of qualification or caveat from a hagiographer. Writers insisted that a clear contrast ought to be made between the 'full and proper' appearance of an angel to God's chosen saints, and the experiences of other people, who saw things only 'improperly and in part, by looking in from the outside or by prying'.[61] These were Adomnán of Iona's terms, but this was an argument that was maintained by the writers of other insular saints' Lives, both Irish and Anglo-Saxon, who were active before the middle of the eighth century. In many ways, it was an argument that they were compelled to make if they were to uphold angelic visitations as evidence of preeminent holiness, while simultaneously narrating the things seen by less exalted souls which proved that those encounters really had happened. When these two categories appeared in danger of overlapping, the simplest explanation was that God had briefly made an exception in order to make some greater truth known. While this was not a problematic notion in itself, proving a rule by appealing to anomalies was a risky business. It should probably not surprise us too greatly, therefore, to discover that it eventually became untenable.

60 Stephen, *VW*, ch. 67 (ed. Colgrave, pp. 144–6).
61 Adomnán, *VC*, III, preface (ed. Anderson and Anderson, p. 182).

At the end of his poem about the church of York in which he had spent his formative years, Alcuin related a sequence of miraculous events centred around a young boy he had known in his childhood.[62] He did so to close his work with a brief glance towards the future, for the boy had died and returned to life, saying that during that brief space his soul had been taken to a beautiful place where he saw the dead brethren of York gathered together in joyful bliss. The story had a personal relevance for Alcuin, who was writing his poem either just before or just after leaving York for a new life at Charlemagne's court in 781/2.[63] The vision was thus a reassurance to himself and, he hoped, to his old friends at York that their separation would only be temporary. Yet while Alcuin had personal reasons for telling the story, it was not the purely literary flourish of a nostalgic writer. The boy's anonymity in his poem makes the tale appear dubiously vague, as if it were simply a convenient way for Alcuin himself to bid farewell. But at York itself, the boy was a well-known figure. From a later letter of Alcuin's to the cathedral community, which referred in passing to 'the vision of our boy Seneca' – presumably either his assumed name, or a nickname – it is clear that the brothers of York knew more about the boy than Alcuin himself had put into writing.[64] His story is therefore a compressed retelling of the kind of local legend, strikingly free of a political or moralizing agenda, which only rarely found written form. Alcuin was chiefly

[62] Alcuin, *Versus de patribus*, lines 1597–1648 (ed. Godman, pp. 128–32).

[63] The poem has been assigned generally to the last three decades of the eighth century, but opinion varies on both the precise context in which it was first written and the extent to which Alcuin may have revised it thereafter. The question cannot be considered closed: see variously: Donald A. Bullough, 'Hagiography as patriotism: Alcuin's "York Poem" and the early Northumbrian *vitae sanctorum*', in *Hagiographie, cultures et sociétés: IV^e–XII^e siècles*, ed. Évelyne Patlagean and Pierre Riché (Paris, 1981), pp. 339–59, at p. 339; Godman, *Bishops, Kings and Saints*, pp. xlii–xlvii; Edward James, 'Alcuin and York in the eighth century', in *Science in Western and Eastern Civilization in Carolingian Times*, ed. Paul Leo Butzer and Dietrich Lohrmann (Basel, 1993), pp. 23–39, at p. 36.

[64] Alcuin, *Ep.*, XLII (ed. Dümmler, p. 86), quoted above, p. 151. Alcuin's habit of nicknaming is well known, and 'Seneca' would fit with the classically-inspired trisyllabic names he chose for other members of the York community (in contrast to the Virgilian and Old Testament names used at the Carolingian court, and the saints' names given to Frankish religious figures). If it was a nickname it seems an oddly inappropriate one, given the views of the classical Seneca about life after death; in which case the fictional letters of Seneca to St Paul might more plausibly be its inspiration. I owe these observations to Mary Garrison, whose forthcoming work promises to shed more light on the situation; for now, see her comments in 'The social world of Alcuin: nicknames at York and the Carolingian court', in *Alcuin of York*, ed. Houwen and MacDonald, pp. 59–79.

interested in the vision which 'Seneca' had reported, but that was only one in a series of strange events which had taken place over several months. It began when the boy was visited by an angel during a solitary night-time vigil. The angel approached him with a mysterious book to read, and foretold that 'something greater' was drawing near. The boy's death and resurrection confirmed the angel's words, but they were not the end of the tale. He went on to foretell the death of one of the other brethren and later that year, when he was struck once more by sickness, another member of the York community saw an angel descend again from heaven, release his soul with a kiss and carry it away, this time for good.

Few of these details were unexpected. Only the angel's kiss bears little resemblance to the usual *topoi* of visions and visitations, and is probably an evocative addition made by Alcuin to express a sense of fellowship and brotherhood, for this was how he used the image of the kiss in his own letters.[65] Yet while the story owes much to hagiographical motifs, 'Seneca' himself was no saint. Not even Alcuin – who was writing the recent history of his church in order both 'to praise holy men and to create them', as Simon Coates has said[66] – claimed that the boy's experiences showed that he had been marked out by sanctity. Perhaps promoting one so young as a saint seemed problematic; but youth was never an insurmountable barrier to cultic veneration, as the growing collection of late antique child martyrs and medieval saints increasingly made plain.[67] This boy from York was never added to their number, for although he had received some mysterious revelation from an angelic visitor, a vision of otherworldly

[65] For a particularly effusive example, see Alcuin's letter to Arno, archbishop of Salzburg: *Ep.*, X (ed. Dümmler, pp. 35–6). See also Philippe Depreux, 'Gestures and comportment at the Carolingian court: between practice and perception', *P&P* 203 (2009), 57–79.

[66] Simon Coates, 'The bishop as benefactor and civic patron: Alcuin, York, and episcopal authority in Anglo-Saxon England', *Speculum* 71 (1996), 529–58, at p. 529.

[67] Anna Benvenuti Papi and Elena Giannarelli (eds.), *Bambini santi. Rappresentazioni dell'infanzia e modelli agiografici* (Turin, 1991); Patricia Healey Wasyliw, *Martyrdom, Murder, and Magic: Child Saints and their Cults in Medieval Europe* (New York, 2008).

bliss, foreknowledge about the deaths of others, and the personal escort of an angel to finally take him from his body, he had achieved all this without any great feat of piety. He remained, for Alcuin, *simplex animo*.[68]

Considering Alcuin's story against the background of earlier Anglo-Saxon hagiography, one gets the sense that the angels had lowered their standards over the course of the eighth century. Adomnán, the visionary monk of Coldingham, had had to live in a state of extreme ascetic deprivation to merit a lesser sight; Guthlac endured a year of isolation perched on a burial mound besieged by demons before any angel came to speak to him. A few decades later, the things that had previously been the hard-won privilege of the saints – a series of heavenly encounters offering personal revelation, culminating in a visibly angelic death – were now being offered to an ordinary boy in a Northumbrian cathedral school. Gone also was the old insistence of hagiographers that the spirits would only manifest themselves openly and unambiguously to the ones they had come to visit. Alcuin happily informed his readers that the angel's final appearance to the dying boy was watched by another brother who was stood nearby.

These observations would count for little if Alcuin stood alone, an enthusiastic reporter of miracles but one who was simply uninterested in probing the different kinds of angelic visitations and what they might reveal about the people who had received them. Yet it was Alcuin's attitude, rather than the views of Stephen or Bede or Felix, which later Anglo-Saxon hagiographers would share. In the first quarter of the ninth century, Æthelwulf gave a similar account of events which had taken placed at his own, unnamed, Northumbrian monastery. Its history was punctuated by the occasional visits of angels: sometimes seen openly by the monks, sometimes perceived in dreams or visions,

[68] Alcuin, *Versus de patribus*, line 1603 (ed. Godman, p. 130).

sometimes only known to be nearby from the sound of their voices.[69] These were all remarkable things, but Æthelwulf wrote as if they were all equivalent manifestations of the holy, making no attempt to distinguish which were 'full and proper' apparitions and which were the lesser sights seen 'improperly and in part'. Æthelwulf was, of course, describing the history of a house rather than extolling the merits of one particular person whose experiences had to be sharply differentiated from those of his fellows. Still, when English writers did return to the task of writing about the lives and miracles of individual saints, after the mid-tenth century, they too avoided the tendency of earlier hagiographers to try to schematize different kinds of heavenly encounters as if they fitted neatly into a typology. It was the sainted Dunstan, and not some prying monk, who stood outside the closed door of an oratory at St Augustine's, Canterbury, peering uninvited through an opening to listen to the sound of heavenly music sung by unfamiliar voices.[70] Although he could sometimes perceive angels going about their business, his own meetings with his guardian angel took place only during the hours of sleep.[71] Where a premium had once been placed on actual corporeal conversations with celestial spirits, while others wondered whether the things seen by their mind's eye were real or illusory, hagiographers now muddied the waters between these previously distinct experiences. Lantfred of Winchester's accounts of nocturnal apparitions relating to the translation of St Swithun seem almost deliberately opaque, for although Lantfred explicitly refers to them as 'dreams' (*somnia*) which come to sleeping men, each supernatural conversation begins with the heavenly visitor seeking assurance that the one they have come to see is in fact wide awake.[72] It is far from obvious what Lantfred intended his readers to

[69] Æthelwulf, *DA*, lines 234–66, 309–20, 518–24, 574–8, 656–795 (ed. Campbell, pp. 21–3, 27, 43, 47, 53–63).

[70] B., *VD*, ch. 36 (ed. Winterbottom and Lapidge, p. 100).

[71] *Ibid.*, chs. 29–30 (pp. 86–90).

[72] Lantfred, *Translatio*, chs. 1–2 (ed. Lapidge, pp. 260, 266–8). Similarly perplexing is another miracle-story, in which a sick man is told by St Swithun that he will receive healing if he stays awake in a vigil at Swithun's tomb; yet the man's health returns only when he finally succumbs to sleep: *Translatio*, ch. 3 (pp. 280–82).

conclude from these descriptions which seem to flit in and out of consciousness, but his stories are symptomatic of the changed attitude of hagiographers. At some point during the second half of the eighth century, they seemed to have found it impossible – or irrelevant – to continue to try to distinguish clearly between the ways in which different kinds of people perceived the supernatural when it drew close. It no longer provided a convincing indicator of whether this or that person was more or less holy than another. Accordingly, it had no further usefulness in the argument of a saint's Life, and hagiographers turned their attention to other things which might better demonstrate the special sanctity of a particular holy person.

One would imagine that evidence of contact with the angels would always have remained among the clearest indication that a person had not lived a normal earthly existence. But it was the need for the early hagiographers to prove that the secret conversations of saints and angels really were going on behind closed doors, by recourse to the testimonies of witnesses, that had brought about this strange reversal. The testimonies of ordinary bystanders were meant to bolster the idea that a particular person had been marked out, as a special gift from God, by the ability to see and to talk with the angels. In fact, they had precisely the opposite effect. They seem to have impressed upon the minds of their readers only the sense that, if the circumstances were right, anyone at all might see an angel with their waking eyes. The hagiographer's need to provide evidence for his miracle-stories brought the angels out of their invisible world and gave them a substance which could be occasionally perceived by humankind, saint and ordinary Christian alike. Religious communities like late eighth-century York started telling their own stories about encounters with angels that had happened in their very midst. Those stories drew their ideas and imagery from the common stock of hagiographic motifs about angelic visitations and marvellous deaths, but no longer used

them as the building-blocks of an argument about the pre-eminence of a chosen soul. The boy visited by angels, whose life was briefly told by Alcuin, never became immortalized by a reverential cult. He remained to the end 'our boy Seneca' and if his otherworldly vision had not struck a chord with Alcuin's personal situation and his departure for the Continent, it would never have been preserved. Stories like this one did not spread far, and retained a purely local significance. Yet the fact that they existed at all ensured that the hagiographical tradition from which they derived had had its day. It is a telling sign that when, early in the eleventh century, Byrhtferth of Ramsey described the burial of St Ecgwine, he said that Ecgwine himself had chosen the spot where his body was to be laid, because that was where he wanted to stand on Doomsday 'to rise again when he, joyously accepting the triumph of his own resurrection, shall hear the sweet voice of the holy angels'.[73] It did no discredit to Ecgwine's memory to suggest that he had not heard their voices before and still awaited the day when he would hear them, for the angels had long ago ceased to be an infallible marker of who was or was not to be considered a saint.

THE RHYTHM OF THE SAINTS

When the angels first started bringing unexpected news to ordinary Anglo-Saxon Christians, they still brought mysteries and revelations, profound things which would otherwise have been forbidden for humankind to know. They spoke in cryptic words and departed with promises of 'greater things' to come.[74] By the time that two of them descended upon a house in Winchester in the summer of 969, they had contented themselves with humbler mysteries, for they came to show where the owner of the house had misplaced his sword and the key to his strongbox.[75] Lantfred, who first described their visitation, would doubtless have said that this observation missed the point: the

[73] Byrhtferth, *Vita S. Ecgwini*, IV.6, ed. Lapidge, *Lives of Oswald and Ecgwine*, p. 280.
[74] Alcuin, *Versus de patribus*, line 1613 (ed. Godman, p. 130).
[75] Lantfred, *Translatio*, ch. 2 (ed. Lapidge, pp. 268–70).

house belonged to a moneyer who had taken in a crippled pilgrim, and the miraculous restitution of lost property was meant to spur the moneyer into finally keeping his long-delayed promise to take the man to the Old Minster for healing. Yet the wholly circumstantial nature of the errand entrusted to these angels offers the clearest sense of the changed status of heavenly messengers in the hagiography of Anglo-Saxon England. In place of a startlingly otherworldly emanation which the hagiographer could only capture in part, Lantfred offers an account so minutely precise that any sense of its unearthliness was soon buried under a mass of more mundane details:

> Glowing with the radiance of inexhaustible light, the beautiful youths [led Æthelsige, the crippled pilgrim] to the strongbox of his host, the moneyer, which was then opened with a key. They showed him the unharmed property [i.e. the sword] which the man had lost. Then, securing the chest with the latch and putting the aforementioned key under the sleeping moneyer's pillow, they ordered the sick man to reveal to his lord that his scabbard had not been altogether taken from him by theft, but had been gathered among his treasures by heavenly means...

No sooner was the vision concluded then Lantfred ran through the whole thing again, reiterating every detail as Æthelsige reported what he had seen to the moneyer. When the reader then learns that the moneyer did indeed look under his pillow, find the key, open the chest, discover his sword and see that it was unharmed, any brief sense of wonderment at the shining figures who brought the message had been long forgotten, replaced by the repetitious listing of items lost and found.

Writing at a luxurious pace, Lantfred expended vastly more words on angelic apparitions than any hagiographer before him. Even so, in this and two other accounts of similar visitations, his eyes were only briefly drawn to the angels themselves.[76] His attention remained fixed on the message they brought, but the messengers themselves could almost have been anyone. Lantfred had opened his miracle-collection with another

[76] *Ibid.*, chs. 2 and 35 (pp. 266–8 and 324–6).

vision, in which St Swithun had given instructions to an unnamed smith concerning the exhumation and translation of his remains, but for the visionary themselves there was little which would have marked out a saintly encounter from an angelic one.[77] Whatever heavenly spirit arrived, they delivered their message and promptly left; if they returned another night, it was to reiterate their instructions or to add to them rather than to strike up a lasting bond with the person they called upon. Even when the angels spoke with St Dunstan, their conversations lacked the familiarity which eighth-century hagiographers had managed to evoke in their far more allusive accounts. Dunstan received his final summons from angelic envoys, as Anglo-Saxon saints like Chad had done before him. In Chad's case, his visitors had lingered over their duty for half an hour, although none could guess what they might have said to him in that time.[78] The crowd of cherubim and seraphim which now brought similar news to Dunstan did not share their leisurely pace: the angels arrived ready to claim his soul, were promptly rebuffed when Dunstan pointed out the inconvenience of the moment (since he was expected to preside over the feast of the Ascension that day), and duly rescheduled his death for the following Saturday. 'With these words, the vision was gone'.[79] Dunstan's guardian angel was little better, entering into his dreams with the brisk manner of a choirmaster rather than the warmth of a friend: he drilled his pupil by making him recite antiphons until the visionary lesson concluded, so that Dunstan in turn could teach them to others.[80]

In short, much of what had previously distinguished angelic conversation from other types of heavenly apparition had dissipated. Although the new breed of hagiographers working in late tenth- and early eleventh-century England still spoke eagerly about recent manifestations of angels, these visitations had a more narrowly

[77] *Ibid.*, ch. 1 (pp. 260–62).
[78] Bede, *HE*, IV.3 (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 340–42); see above, pp. 171–2.
[79] Adelard, *Lectiones*, X (ed. Winterbottom and Lapidge, pp. 136–8).
[80] B., *VD*, ch. 29 (ed. Winterbottom and Lapidge, p. 86).

functional air about them. The effect of a visionary encounter was ultimately more important than knowing whether or not angels had been instrumental in it. When Ælfric wrote his own summary of St Swithun's miracles, making a digest of the stories reported before by Lantfred, his feast-day audience would hardly even have known that the angels had ever been involved.[81] His account of the crippled Æthelsige and his journey to the Old Minster entirely passed over the visitations which took place in the house of the moneyer, in which the two angels had directed him to St Swithun's tomb and won over his host by revealing his lost sword. Ælfric found it sufficient just to say that Æthelsige went to the tomb 'like he was told to' (*swa swa him gesæd wæs*). A second miracle, in which the two angelic youths again brought a sick man into the presence of St Swithun, was retold more fully, but Ælfric still saw little that was specifically angelic about the event. While in Lantfred's telling, the shining robes, youthful beauty and explicitly 'angelic' faces of the supernatural visitors had given away their identity, Ælfric called them *halgan* – a word which clearly denoted their heavenly origin but rather obscured whether they were human or angelic in nature; we might simply translate it as 'saints', in the human sense, save that Ælfric also added that they flew through the air.[82]

Since Ælfric had otherwise worked to make the story more rather than less clear-cut, removing Lantfred's attempt to keep the identity of St Swithun a mystery as long as possible, it seems odd that these figures should ever have attained their somewhat ambiguous guise. Yet a measure of ambiguity had in fact crept into all manner of visions

[81] Ælfric, *Life of St Swithun* (*Lives of the Saints*, XXI), ed. Lapidge, *Cult*, pp. 590–608. For varied assessments of Ælfric's handling of his source material and his purposes in this piece, see Gretsch, *Ælfric and the Cult of Saints*, pp. 172–94; Elaine Treharne, 'Ælfric's account of St Swithun: literature of reform and reward', in *Narrative and History in the Early Medieval West*, ed. Elizabeth M. Tyler and Ross Balzaretti (Turnhout, 2006), pp. 167–88; Jones, 'Ælfric and the limits', p. 103.

[82] It is difficult to determine whether Ælfric's detail about the two figures being able to fly (*LS* XXI, ed. Lapidge, p. 602: 'þa flugon hi geond þa lyft and feredon þone adligan') is a deliberate addition or a simple misunderstanding of his source, for Lantfred had described only the nobleman flying mysteriously above his guides, who themselves remained on the ground (*Translatio*, ch. 35, ed. Lapidge, p. 326: 'sursum in aera eleuatus super eos uolauit diuinitus').

reported by Ælfric's contemporaries. Wulfstan of Winchester described how a monk named Theodric had been chastised in his sleep by a mysterious 'someone' after trying to emulate St Æthelwold's capacity for reading by candlelight, to see if his eyes were a match for the elderly bishop's. The angered figure in his dreams bore an unfamiliar face (*quidam uultu incognitus*), and condemned his audacity with words of absolute authority – 'You cannot play with me by deceiving me, as you suppose' he said, stabbing Theodric in the eyes when he tried to deny his actions – but there were no clues to his identity.[83] Other people saw things that were just as perplexing: radiant old men, with the hair and robes of angels but with the aged bearing and priestly garb of human saints; or doves that seem at first glance to be straightforward manifestations of the Holy Spirit yet soon delivered the news of death usually granted to angels.[84] All these drew from old tropes and imagery, but the combination of details seemed now to defy absolute identification and point in several different directions. Certainly the writers who reported them were content to leave them open and undefined in a way that their predecessors had not. If the general tenor of a vision revealed its heavenly origin, that was enough.

If there was a pattern to these stories of recent visions and apparitions, it had little to do with the nature of the beings which came to visit the living. While angels still played their part in bringing messages from the heavens, there was almost nothing which made their arrival any different to the appearance of a dead saint, the Holy Spirit, or some more ambiguously manifested figure. Each was essentially an extra in the human dramas recounted by hagiographers and miracle-collectors, and that made it easy to give them the same lines to read and to dress them all in almost undifferentiated costumes. Although they provided the most vivid accounts of the continuing involvement of angels in the affairs of late Anglo-Saxon England, these tenth- and eleventh-century texts gave

[83] Wulfstan of Winchester, *Væthel*, ch. 35 (ed. Lapidge, pp. 52–4).
[84] *Ibid.*, ch. 38 (p. 56); B., *Vita Dunstani*, chs. 3, 11 (ed. Winterbottom and Lapidge, pp. 14, 36–8).

their readers little indication that there was anything particularly special or distinctive about the angels or their duties. In contrast, the saints remained sharply in the foreground. It could hardly be otherwise when *uitae* and *miracula* were composed with the sanctity of a particular individual in mind.

Nevertheless, it is worth dwelling on the importance of text and genre, and how they might shape beliefs about the array of invisible forces which populated early medieval Christianity. Peter Brown saw the reason why so many of the ancient functions of angels ultimately came to be appropriated by saints in wholly qualitative terms. When Christians contemplated the powers of heaven that might offer unseen assistance and intervention in their lives, he argued, they looked for a patron who might best fulfil their need – specifically, 'the need to find the recognizable face of a human being, whose behaviour could be rendered intelligible'.[85] Yet both the faces of the saints and their behaviour, as they were known to their posthumous followers, owed more to the efforts of writers and preachers than to their own inherent characteristics. It was only the industry of hagiographers which gave definition to the saints, creating the familiar figures of the *sanctorale* in place of the less humanized power which emanated from some consecrated place. There was no equivalent advocate for the angels to give them an equally definite shape. The cults of the saints drove the production of hagiography, but there was nothing which drove anyone to write so directly and extensively about the angels. Their role was always a supporting one and one which, as we have just seen, became increasingly generic. If 'the story of angels in the medieval west' is indeed a narrative of their 'diminishing importance [...] as social agents', as Henry Mayr-Harting summarized it,[86] then it was a direct result of the fact that they shared the pages of saints'

[85] Brown, *Cult of the Saints*, p. 66.
[86] Mayr-Harting, *Perceptions of Angels*, pp. 13–14.

Lives with a different kind of supernatural intercessor whose actions always dominated. We can chart them quietly slipping away into the background in the corpus of saints' Lives written between *c.* 700 and *c.* 1000, and watch as they incrementally lost the qualities that previously made them distinctive.

Only once or twice a year, when a feast was offered to St Michael the Archangel, did an angel assume the prominence usually preserved for the saints drawn from human ranks.[87] On those days, congregations across Christendom were presented with an angel whose actions, even perhaps his personality, might be known more concretely than any of the nameless messengers who occasionally passed through the stories of other people's lives. On the feast of St Michael, a preacher might show his flock the face of an angel. The words of one particular sermon known in Anglo-Saxon England spoke as if he actually stood there before them all:

> This is the holy archangel St Michael who was the receiver of the soul of Abel, the first martyr, whom his brother Cain slew out of envy. This is the holy archangel St Michael who is the saviour of men; and with the help of the Lord he saved the lives of Noah, his three sons, and their four wives in the great flood. This is the holy St Michael whose memory we honour today...[88]

The homily continues in the same vein for almost its entire length, enumerating all the works that the archangel has performed for the good of humanity, as well as those which still await in the Apocalypse. Both its tone and its particular claims about Michael are peculiar – there is certainly no scriptural evidence to suppose that Michael had involved himself with either Abel or with Noah, nor even the more contestable testimony of

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[87] The place of St Michael in the liturgy was not absolutely fixed in the Middle Ages. Most pre-Conquest texts refer only to one feast in his honour, on 29 September: see Francis Wormald (ed.), *English Kalendars before AD 1100* (London, 1934); cf. also *The Old English Calendar Poem*, lines 176–80, ed. Dobbie, *Minor Poems*, p. 54. The *Old English Martyrology*, on the other hand, names both 8 May and 29 September as his feast-days (ed. Kotzor, ii, 97 and 223–4). Richard F. Johnson provides commentary, if not always clarity, about these dates and their relationships: 'Feasts of Saint Michael the Archangel in the liturgy of the early Anglo-Saxon church: evidence from the eighth and ninth centuries', *LSE*, n.s. 31 (2000), 55–79.

[88] CCCC 41, homily V, ed. Raymond J.S. Grant, *Three Homilies from Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 41* (Ottawa, 1982), pp. 56–64.

biblical apocrypha – and the present location of the homily, squeezed with other miscellanies into the margins of an older manuscript (Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 41), only adds to its strangeness.[89] When other preachers sought an equivalent way to bring Michael to life for their audiences, who would certainly have known his name but might have struggled to explain why he was important, they turned instead to legendary material set in more recent times. A homily of indeterminate Celtic, perhaps Breton, origin in the so-called 'Homiliary of St-Père' provides an equally idiosyncratic account of St Michael, in which it was said that the archangel appeared in the form of a bird to slay a dragon which had been terrorizing pagans in southern Asia.[90] Michael's intervention both brought that people to God, and resulted in the building of a church dedicated to his honour.

The homiliary containing this sermon was certainly known in pre-Conquest England, but there is little way to gauge its popularity. In any case, there were other, better known, shrines dedicated to the archangel, foremost of which was Monte Gargano in southern Italy. It had become a major pilgrimage site by the mid-seventh century, attracting not only powerful local interest from the Lombard dukes of Benevento, but also more distant arrivals attested by the runic inscriptions left by Anglo-Saxon pilgrims

[89] For other items in the margins of CCCC 41, see Sarah Larratt Keefer, 'Margin as archive: the liturgical marginalia of a manuscript of the Old English Bede', *Traditio* 51 (1996), 147–77; Thomas A. Bredehoft, 'Filling the margins of CCCC 41: textual space and a developing archive', *Review of English Studies* 57 (2006), 721–32. Grant valiantly attempts to find sources for the claims made in the homily for St Michael, but his efforts only serve to confirm how far it was from established traditions, orthodox or otherwise: cf. *Three Homilies*, pp. 67–77. For other explorations of the homily's sources and analogues, see Cross, 'Unpublished story', pp. 26–32; Maria Elena Ruggerini, 'Saint Michael in the Old English Martyrology', *Studi e materiali di storia delle religioni* 65 (1999), 181–97, at pp. 191–2.

[90] 'Homiliary of St-Père', homily LV, ed. Cross, 'Unpublished story'. The events are said to have taken place 'in dextrali parte Asiae', and the use of *dextralis* to mean 'south' points to a Celtic origin, as Clare Stancliffe has argued: 'Red, white and blue martyrdom', in *Ireland in Early Medieval Europe: Studies in Memory of Kathleen Hughes*, ed. Dorothy Whitelock, Rosamond McKitterick and David Dumville (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 21–46, at p. 24. As so often, identification of a generally 'Celtic' trait has occasionally been taken as proof of a specifically Irish origin, but this ought to be resisted without further evidence. Rauer argues that Breton authorship might be preferable, owing to the prominence of dragon-slaying exploits in Breton saints' Lives: *Beowulf and the Dragon*, pp. 116–24.

in the cave-sanctuary which had been consecrated, so it was said, by the archangel's own hand.[91] It was the existence of a cult site with a prominent place in the secular and ecclesiastical politics of its day which secured for Michael a hagiography of sorts, an account of his apparitions at Monte Gargano and the miraculous foundation of his shrine.[92] That *Liber de apparitione*, written in the later seventh century or the early eighth, provided suitable material for both Carolingian and Anglo-Saxon homilists to talk with authority about the archangel and his continued involvement with humanity. In England, it formed the basis of two tenth-century vernacular sermons on Michael: Blickling Homily XVI, and Ælfric's piece for the feast in his first series of *Catholic Homilies*.[93] Both provided full accounts of the story of Monte Gargano, following their hagiographic source closely before impressing upon their audiences that Michael was more than a local patron of an Italian mountaintop. The anonymous homilist of Blickling XVI moved abruptly to an evocative image of an icy hell, describing the sinners hanging from an immense cliff over dark and haunted waters in a scene derived from a version of the *Vision of St Paul*, urging his audience to seek Michael's aid to avoid the hanging sinners' fate after death.[94] Ælfric, on the other hand, closed by reminding his audience that since 'the old law informs us that archangels are set over every nation', then 'it is to

[91] The inscriptions carved into the pillars and walls at Monte Gargano, dating from the seventh to the ninth centuries, have attracted a substantial amount of discussion since they were discovered in the last century. The best synthesis is R. Derolez and U. Schwab, 'The runic inscriptions of Monte S. Angelo (Gargano)', *Academiae Analecta. Mededelingen van de Koninklijke Academie voor Wetenschappen, Letteren en schone Kunsten van België: Klasse der Letteren* 45 (1983), 95–130.

[92] *Liber de apparitione* (ed. Waitz, pp. 541–3). Although a long historiographical tradition has treated Michael's cult as if it were a novelty, often drawing out spurious pseudo-folkloric meanings in the process, the hagiography of Monte Gargano needs to be seen within the wider context of other early medieval cults, as shown by Alan Thacker, '*Peculiaris patronus noster*: the saint as patron of the state in the early Middle Ages', in *The Medieval State: Essays Presented to James Campbell*, ed. J.R. Maddicott and D.M. Palliser (London, 2000), pp. 1–24, at pp. 10–15; and Nicholas Everett, 'The *Liber de apparitione S. Michaelis in Monte Gargano* and the hagiography of dispossession', *Analecta Bollandiana* 120 (2002), 364–89. Older studies still offer useful insights, but require more careful sifting.

[93] Blickling XVI (ed. Kelly, pp. 136–44); Ælfric, *CH*, I.34 (ed. Clemoes, pp. 465–75). The first indication of its use in a homiletic context is from the homiliary compiled by Hrabanus Maurus in *c.* 816: *Homiliae de festis praecipuis*, XXXII, ed. Migne, *PL* 110, cols. 60–63.

[94] Blickling XVI (ed. Kelly, p. 144). The scene has attracted substantial comment due to its similarities with Grendel's mere in *Beowulf*: their relationship, and mutual dependency on a redaction of the *Visio Pauli*, is discussed in detail by Wright, *Irish Tradition*, pp. 116–36.

be believed that the archangel Michael now has the care of Christian men [...] their constant support on earth, and their intercessor in heaven''.[95]

While the material available in later Anglo-Saxon England for the feast of the archangel Michael was thus highly varied in nature, it tended to treat the matter of the saint's inhumanity in only one of two ways. Homilists either downplayed the significance of the fact that the saint was also an angel, or else exalted in his unearthliness with an exhaustive list of angelic duties and attributes. The first was the obvious consequence of following hagiographical material originally written for Michael's earthly shrine, which had made every effort to tether this immortal and bodiless being to a particular time and place, much like any human saint who had achieved fame as a builder of churches. Homilies which took this route honoured Michael's deeds while leaving his nature largely unexplored. The opposite response, epitomized by the CCCC 41 sermon, was to try to fashion for Michael a biography by which a feast-day congregation could know the personal history of an angel. The inevitable problem was that since the archangel was poorly attested in scripture, fleetingly mentioned only in the books of Daniel, Jude and Revelation, his early history was wholly conjectural. The CCCC 41 homily thus attempted to redress the balance by taking the deeds of anonymous biblical angels (the rescue of the three youths from Nebuchadnezzar's furnace, for example) and claiming that these were in fact done by Michael; or else by turning generic angelic traits (such as guarding souls or relaying prayers to God) into Michael's particular specialities. The sermon in the Homiliary of St-Père made a more limited attempt to do the same by reusing liturgical antiphons and responses which described the archangel's duties: it was on their authority that the homilist affirmed to his audience that Michael was set over all their souls and would be

[95] See further below, p. 205.

the one to lead them finally into heaven.[96] The most general of angelic tasks were thus apt to be re-appropriated as evidence of a single archangel's special care, when more personal details about Michael and his deeds were hard to find.

The responses of homilists to the feast of St Michael show that although an angel was – for once in the Christian calendar – the centre of attention, the necessary focus on an individual meant that the active role of angels, collectively, was just as limited as when they shared the stage with a human saint in work of hagiography. Michael alone emerged from the sermon as an active force of equivalent stature to the saints venerated throughout the rest of the year, a figure who was not some background presence but an intercessor whose assistance could be sought. To be sure, it did often seem appropriate for homilists to provide a few words of general instruction about the rest of the angels on this day, but they painted a static and distant picture that the vivid accounts of Michael's deeds quickly outshone. Where Michael was illuminated by miracle-filled hagiographical legends, information about the other nameless spirits tended to be of a dry and encyclopaedic nature in comparison. The Homiliary of St-Père thus followed its account of Michael's dragon-slaying exploits with an etymological exposition derived chiefly from Isidore of Seville, merely running through the names and functions of the nine angelic orders – of which only the lowest ranks of angels actually interacted with mankind as Michael did, the rest confining themselves to purely celestial tasks.[97] Ælfric appended a similar list of angelic traits to his sermon on St Michael, basing himself chiefly on Haimo of Auxerre. As we saw in a previous chapter, the exercise succeeded

[96] Reproduced with discussion by Cross, 'Unpublished story', pp. 26–7.

[97] 'Homiliary of St-Père', homily LV (ed. Cross, pp. 34–5); cf. Isidore, *Etym.* VII.5 (ed. Lindsay, i). The other item for the feast of St Michael in the homiliary is in fact entirely dependent on Isidore's discussion of the angels, with no additions other than a concluding benediction: homily LIV, ed. Thomas N. Hall, *A Digital Edition of Cambridge, Pembroke College MS 25*, available at <http://www.stoa.org/Pembroke25/Website-tv/HTML/54.html>.

only in tying Ælfric in knots, as he tried to reconcile the angels' role as intermediaries with his view of an all-knowing and ever-present God.[98] He therefore moved on to surer ground, by returning to Michael and his main subject for the day. By a reasoning which no other early medieval Christian seems to have shared, Ælfric argued that the statement in the book of Daniel, in which Michael had been called 'the prince of the Jewish people', ought now to be revised:

> It is to be believed that the archangel Michael, who was the prince of the Hebrew people while they believed in God, now has care of Christian men; he showed that when he built himself a church among a faithful people on Monte Gargano, as we read before.[99]

While Ælfric had struggled to express the way that ordinary guardian angels might intervene in the lives of the humans they watched over, this emphatic conclusion about Michael's overarching care for all of Christendom made it a moot point. From the fact that the archangel had gained a written dossier of miracles to match any human saint, it could be known 'that the great heavenly angel is a constant support of Christian men on earth, their intercessor in heaven with Almighty God'. Such things could not be said so easily of the rest of the angels.

If the saints did indeed owe much of their appeal to the 'recognizable face' which they gave to the otherwise scarcely imaginable power of God, and the way that they acted according to behaviour which was 'intelligible' to ordinary Christians,[100] the cult of St Michael the Archangel demonstrates that this was not the result of their essential humanity. An inhuman saint and a human one functioned in analogous ways: the face which writers and preachers gave to them was not the one with which they had been

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98 See above, pp. 109–10.

99 Ælfric, *CH*, I.34 (ed. Clemoes, pp. 474–5). Godden suggests that Ælfric's comment was dependent upon Gregory's *Moralia in Iob* (XVII.xii.16–73), but the correspondence is not close: cf. *Commentary*, p. 289. Darrell D. Hannah's study of earlier Christian traditions relating to the archangel notes that 'none of our extant sources argue that Michael is no longer patron of the Jews': *Michael and Christ: Michael Traditions and Angel Christology in Early Christianity* (Tübingen, 1999), pp. 165–6.

100 Brown, *Cult of the Saints*, pp. 62, 66.

born, but one which was fashioned by those who venerated them. It could be granted to an angel as much as to a human being, but only the archangel who had happened to acquire his own cult following on earth had ever attained it. His place in the liturgical cycle demanded that his face, his history, his actions be brought periodically before the congregations which had gathered to venerate him as they would any other saint. The homilies written and used in later Anglo-Saxon England show the various ways that churchmen responded to the challenge of making an archangel known as an individual, rather than simply one among a numberless host. They used the hagiography produced by his cult-sites where they had it, or else created their own biographical outlines by which Michael could measure up to the standards required for feast-day commemoration. Whichever version of Michael their words conjured up – the dragon-slayer, the apocalyptic hero, or the guardian of a mountaintop shrine – the repetition of the liturgical cycle lent it familiarity.

Gregory of Tours had once noted that 'it was the way of common men to venerate the more attentively the saints whose struggles could be read over and again [*quorum agones relegunt*]'.[101] Only if an angel had an equivalent platform could attain something like a personality to rival those well-known human figures. But with the exception of Michael, the rest remained ill-defined, known through their supporting role in other people's legends and becoming increasingly unimportant to them. The hagiographers who had once placed a premium on accounts of angelic conversations, using them as the clearest possible sign that a person had lived a life of heavenly purity, found it impossible to maintain that claim when there seemed to be so many others who had occasionally stood close enough to the saint to somehow share in their vision. Their place in the *uitae* of Anglo-Saxon saints dwindled over the course of the period, gradually losing much of

[101] Gregory of Tours, *Liber in gloria martyrum*, ch. 63, ed. Bruno Krusch, MGH, SS rer. Merov. I.2 (Hanover, 1885), p. 531.

what had previously seemed distinctive. The heavenly encounters reported by writers in the century before the Conquest seemed all of a type, cast in the same mould and hard to distinguish from each other. When it had become possible for a writer to report only that a dreaming man 'was shown a heavenly vision, which comforted and consoled him and told him to be stout of heart' without even saying who or what had appeared to him,[102] then it is little wonder that the continued appearance of angels to Anglo-Saxon men and women seemed altogether less worthy of note even to those who still reported them. The angels could not capture the imagination as they once had when there was no opportunity to know them as regularly and as fully as Christians knew the culted saints of the liturgical calendar. Their sporadic interventions with humanity seemed eclipsed by the great individuals whose lives and achievements were lauded from page and pulpit.

[102] *Encomium Emmae reginae*, III.9, ed. Alistair Campbell, *Encomium Emmae reginae*, rptd with supplementary material by Simon Keynes (Cambridge, 1998), p. 50. The vision is reduced to its essential political kernel: that Harold Harefoot would shortly die and that the dreamer – Harthacnut – would inherit the kingdom. On the text and its political background, see Keynes, *Encomium*, pp. xxix–xxxviii, lxvi–lxxi; Andy Orchard, 'Literary background to the *Encomium Emmae Reginae*', *JML* 11 (2001), 156–83; Elizabeth M. Tyler, 'Talking about history in eleventh-century England: the *Encomium Emmae Reginae* and the court of Harthacnut', *EME* 13 (2005), 359–83.

CHAPTER SIX

Prayer, benediction and the edges of beliefs

If hagiographers and homilists were the earthly spokesmen for the citizens of heaven, it was nevertheless still possible for rest of the faithful to arrange a private audience with the celestial powers. In their personal devotions and their public worship, Anglo-Saxon men and women pursued a more direct kind of contact with both the saints and the angels. The fragmentary remains of a prayerbook written at, or near to, Worcester in the years around 800 (London, British Library, Harley 7653: the 'Harley Fragment') now opens in the midst of just such an address:

> < . . . > be my healthiness.
> Cherubin, you be my strength.
> Seraphin, you be my health and arms.[1]

The request was rather elliptical, but this was no metaphorical flourish. A second entreaty in the same manuscript made a similar appeal in more forthright language, looking to the angels as a source of protection and assistance in the face of danger:

> I entreat the entirety of the angels: drive out whatever impurities, whatever bond, whatever crimes of men may wish to harm me.[2]

In one sense, these are self-explanatory sentiments. We have already seen that the guarding angel is a major theme in Anglo-Saxon religious writing, and attempting to secure that protection through prayer seems like a natural way to put that belief into practice. Certainly, the well-being of body and soul is a central concern of this

1 Harleian Prayerbook, 1r (ed. Warren, p. 83).
2 *Ibid.*, 2r–2v (ed. Warren, p. 84).

manuscript, as it is for the other extant prayerbooks made in Mercia during the late eighth and early ninth centuries.[3]

Yet the terse practicality of requests like these has often attracted the suspicion of modern readers, regularly falling foul of scholarly attempts to distinguish 'magic' from 'religion'. Nineteenth-century anthropological definitions characterized any attempt to command supernatural forces as inherently 'magical', in contrast to the way that 'religion' sought only to petition, and usually revere, a deity or superior being. The convenience of the distinction still endears it to historians, even though anthropologists themselves abandoned it long ago.[4] Although the historical evidence provides ample evidence for ecclesiastical prayers voiced as imperative commands, as well as magical outcomes promised by texts which make their requests through humble entreaty of natural or supernatural forces, the adjuration/supplication distinction continues to unconsciously influence historical analysis.[5] The fact that the earliest Greek and Latin entreaties to *angeloi* or *angeli* come not from medieval Christian prayerbooks but from the inscribed curses and mystical papyri of antiquity has only strengthened the impression that the practice of talking to angels 'does not have its roots in Christian soil'.[6]

Commands that the angels fulfil what is asked of them tend, therefore, to attract attention as anomalies wherever they might appear, as unorthodox practices on the

[3] See Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature*, pp. 285–302.

[4] Keith Thomas therefore finds it sufficient to note that although the way that the distinction was made by older generations of anthropologists 'has been rejected by their modern successors [...] it is useful in so far as it emphasizes the non-coercive character of Christian prayers': *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England* (London, 1971), p. 41.

[5] For pertinent comments about the later medieval context, see Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 14–16.

[6] The conclusion of Michael W. Herren, *Hisperica Famina: II. Related Poems* (Toronto, 1987), p. 31. On the ancient background, see especially Rebecca Lesses, 'Speaking with angels: Jewish and Graeco-Egyptian revelatory adjurations', *Harvard Theological Review* 89 (1996), 41–60; Silke Trzcionka, *Magic and the Supernatural in Fourth-Century Syria* (London, 2007). For 'pagan angels' in antiquity, see below, p. 213, n. 18.

margins of medieval Christianity. Anomalies demand explanations, and scholars have accordingly proposed roots in pagan invocation, crudely Christianized by the substitution of an angel for the name of a pre-Christian deity; or in 'popular religion' suppressed by the mainstream Church, but apparently of more 'pragmatic' value to ordinary believers than any sanctioned alternatives. In both cases, the influence of Celtic, or specifically Irish, spirituality is occasionally inferred, reflecting a sense that such residual paganism or popular mysticism might run unchecked on the fringes of Christendom.[7] Even when an appeal was made in the impeccably humble language of confessional prayer, there were still ways in which these unorthodox or superstitious tendencies could manifest themselves. A third prayer from the incomplete Harleian prayerbook addressed the angels not only by rank, but also by name:

> I beseech the holy and glorious archangel Michael, Gabriel and Uriel, Raphael and Raguel, Heremiel and Azael, that they may take my soul on the utmost day with a choir of angels and lead it to the pleasantness of paradise.[8]

That angels might bear names was not in itself an outlandish notion, since Michael, Gabriel and Raphael were clearly named and identified as angels in the canonical books of the Bible.[9] A search for the origins of the other four angels called upon in this prayer, however, leads not into scripture but instead into either the apocrypha – notably the book of Enoch – or into mystical texts of Jewish and gnostic origin.[10] Since many of these texts were themselves treated with suspicion even in antiquity, the fact that an Anglo-

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7 For pagan influence, Keck, *Angels*, pp. 164, 174–5, and Sangha, *Angels and Belief*, pp. 38–9; both drawing upon Flint, *Rise of Magic*. Similar comments are common in older scholarly treatments, as for instance Felix Grendon, 'The Anglo-Saxon charms', *Journal of American Folklore* 22 (1909), 105–237, at p. 145. Irish influence is presumed by Richard F. Johnson, 'Archangel in the margins: St Michael in the homilies of Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 41', *Traditio* 53 (1998), 63–91; and Karen Louise Jolly, 'Prayers from the field: practical protection and demonic defense in Anglo-Saxon England', *Traditio* 61 (2006), 95–147, at pp. 124–35. For popular religion, see below, pp. 230–31.

8 Harleian Prayerbook, 4r (ed. Warren, p. 85).

9 Michael: Dan. 10:13, 10:21, 12:1; Jude 9; Rev. 12:7–9. Gabriel: Dan. 8:16–26, 9:21–7; Luke 1:19–20, 1:26–38. Raphael: Tob. 3:25–12:21.

10 A wealth of catalogues and reference tools have made these origins clearer than ever: see especially J. Michl, 'Engel V (Katalog der Engelnamen)', in *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, ed. Theodor Klauser (Stuttgart, 1950–), v, cols. 200–39; also Gustav Davidson, *A Dictionary of Angels, including the Fallen Angels* (New York, 1967). For speculation as to their origins, see Olyan, *A Thousand Thousands Served Him*.

Saxon author or compiler apparently followed in their footsteps seems to point at best ignorance, at worst to a blatant disregard for correct modes of prayer and veneration. When it is noted that the Harleian prayer to the seven angels is found again in the early ninth-century Book of Cerne, but this time with its 'more dubious archangels' removed, this impression seems confirmed.[11]

This sketch of scholarly reactions to extant Christian angelic invocations may be accused of simplifying the arguments of others to the point of distortion. Certainly, many are quick to point out 'the difficulty of distinguishing the "allowed" from the "forbidden"' in this matter.[12] But the starting-point for discussion has always been in the unorthodox, even if scholars might ultimately suggest some mechanism whereby invoking angels could find a place in orthodox ecclesiastical documents, like prayerbooks or liturgical collections. There is a sense that while these practices could be tolerated or rendered harmless to a certain extent, they could never divest themselves of their transparently non-Christian ancestry. To read the evidence in this way prevents us from considering prayers involving angels as a meaningful religious practice in Anglo-Saxon England, or anywhere else in medieval Europe. At the heart of a prayerbook's compilation, a scribe selected from existing texts to transmit those which seemed the most valuable or potent (or equally, it should not be forgotten, the most appropriately or even beautifully worded) for future use – perhaps also supplying new compositions, although the appeals to angels in the Harley Fragment are evidently copies rather than original creations.[13] Searching for the means by which the obscure names of arcane

[11] Cerne, 63v–64r (ed. Kuypers, pp. 126–7 [no. 29]); Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature*, p. 288, n. 66. For Cerne's attitude towards non-scriptural angels, see further below, p. 224.

[12] Mayr-Harting, *Perceptions*, p. 24, n. 49; likewise Flint, *Rise of Magic*, pp. 189–90; Karen Louise Jolly, 'On the margins of orthodoxy: devotional formulas and protective prayers in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 41', in *Signs on the Edge: Space, Text and Margin in Medieval Manuscripts*, ed. Sarah Larratt Keefer and Rolf H. Bremmer (Paris, 2007), pp. 135–83, at p. 148.

[13] Sims-Williams notes scribal errors and other corruptions: *Religion and Literature*, pp. 287–8.

angels issued from the pens of Anglo-Saxon scribes is not without purpose, and we will have occasion to consider it again, but we would better understand the nature of Anglo-Saxon beliefs about angels by understanding what was asked of them, and how it was asked. This chapter considers the commonplace and the unusual together, and argues that they are best considered as products of one and the same literary environment rather than as the divergent practices of different groups. Even when the apocryphal or unorthodox inspirations of particular prayers are demonstrable, it quickly becomes clear that those who first wrote them were attempting to work within the established norms of religious practice rather than trying to circumvent them. Yet at the same time, expressing one's beliefs about angels and their abilities through the language of prayer was no simple matter. Troublesome implications linger around even the most mainstream of liturgical blessings which involve themselves with angels – not because there was something fundamentally unchristian about the practice, but rather through unresolved difficulties with the very act of addressing petitions to the powers of heaven.

THE APPEARANCE OF UNORTHODOXY

It cannot be denied that the idea of calling directly on the angels had aroused strong reactions during the early centuries of Christianity. The synod that met at Laodicea in Anatolia during the fourth century included it among other prohibited actions:

> Christians must not forsake the glory of God and his church, and go away and invoke angels and gather assemblies: these things are forbidden. If, therefore, anyone is found engaged in this secret idolatry, let him be anathema, for he has forsaken our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and gone over into idolatry.[14]

The council may not have had a single group or a particular kind of practice in mind. Although the synod was gathered scarcely more than ten miles from Colossae, whose citizens had been warned by St Paul 'not to let anyone disqualify you [from

[14] Laodicea, c. 35, ed. Périclès-Pierre Joannou, *Discipline générale antique (IV^e^–IX^e^ s.). Tome I, 2: Les canons des Synodes Particuliers* (Grottaferrata, 1962), pp. 144–5.

righteousness by] insisting on self-abasement and worship of angels [*threskeia ton angelon*]', this was more than a purely local matter.[15] The letter to the Colossians seems to have drawn on an emerging Christian notion that traditional Jewish worship involved 'serving the angels and archangels, the month and the moon', as the second-century *Preaching of Peter* alleged.[16] Many of the other injunctions against incorrect worship pronounced at Laodicea certainly did seek to discredit specifically Jewish observances, or superstitions which Christians attributed to them.[17] At the same time, even the non-Abrahamic religions of the late Roman world could be found addressing dedications 'to Zeus most high and the good angel', and accusations of 'angel worship' became part of a broader language of religious polemic.[18] Denouncing the Valentinians around AD 180, Irenaeus of Lyons made every effort to distinguish their practices from those of 'true Christians':

> Nor does the Church do anything by angelic invocations, nor incantations, nor any other perverse curiosity; but when it directs its prayers purely, cleanly and straightforwardly to the Lord who made all things, and invokes the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, it brings about miracles.[19]

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15 Col. 2:18.

16 This fragment of the *Preaching of Peter* is quoted by Clement of Alexandria (*Stromateis*, VI.5) and Origen (*Commentarii in euangelium Iohannis*, XIII.17). The connections between it and the prohibitions in Colossians are discussed by Muehlberger, 'Angels', pp. 157–60. Other explanations of Colossians' elusive phrase have tried to connect it with popular belief, local syncretism, rabbinical mysticism and magical amulets, with varying success. See, among others: A. Lukyn Williams, 'The cult of angels at Colossae', *JTS*, o.s. 10 (1909), 413–38; Fred O. Francis, 'Humility and angelic worship in Col. 2:18', *Studia Theologica* 16 (1962), 109–34; Harold A. Attridge, 'On becoming an angel: rival baptismal theologies at Colossae', in *Religious Propaganda and Missionary Competition in the New Testament World: Essays Honouring Dieter Georgi*, ed. Lukas Bormann, Kelly Del Tredici and Angela Standhartinger (Leiden, 1994), pp. 481–98; C.E. Arnold, *The Colossian Syncretism: The Interface between Christianity and Folk Belief at Colossae* (Tübingen, 1995); Loren T. Stuckenbruck, *Angel Veneration and Christology: A Study in Early Judaism and in the Christology of the Apocalypse of John* (Tübingen, 1995), pp. 111–19.

17 See Marcel Simon, *Verus Israel. Étude sur les relations entre chrétiens et juifs dans l'empire romain (135–425)* (Paris, 1948), pp. 374–7, 382–3.

18 The dedication to Zeus and the good angel, from a second-century inscription at Stratonicea, is collected with other evidence for 'pagan angels' by A.R.R. Sheppard, 'Pagan cults of angels in Roman Asia Minor', *Talanta* 12–13 (1980–81), 77–101 [no. 1]. For previous discussions of this material, see Franz Cumont, 'Les anges du paganisme', *Révue de l'histoire des religions* 72 (1915), 159–82; F. Sokolowski, 'Sur le Culte d'Angelos dans le paganisme grec et romain', *Harvard Theological Review* 53 (1960), 225–9. Cline revisits the evidence in relation to Laodicea: *Ancient Angels*, pp. 142–55.

19 Irenaeus, *Aduersus haereses*, II.32 (ed. Rousseau and Doutreleau, iv, 342).

A combination of all these concerns, both real and imagined, probably lay behind the canon of Laodicea. Whoever it thought was that was going round 'invoking angels', they stood outside the Church. It was more concerned with the potential attraction of these extra-ecclesial groups than with making an outright ban on entreaties to angels. Nevertheless, that is how its ruling was interpreted. Theodoret, fifth-century bishop of Cyrrhus, thought the very notion of invoking angels in prayer a 'disease' that still infected the cult of the archangel Michael, despite the fact that 'a synod convened in Laodicea of Phrygia forbade by law praying to angels'.[20] The council's ruling did not, therefore, slip quietly into oblivion. It remained known to subsequent compilers of canon law and found its way into the penitential tradition.[21] With the outraged voices of synods and theologians still ringing out well into the ninth century, the numerous appeals to angels compiled in Anglo-Saxon Mercia look all the more improper.

While they might have been numerous, we ought to note that very few of these appeals were actually directed solely to the angels. It was more common to find an entreaty to the angels embedded within a much longer list of benevolent intercessors. The request made in another item from the fragmentary Harleian prayerbook, an evening hymn, typifies the standard form of these petitions:

> I ask the Father and the Son; I ask the Holy Spirit; I ask the new Church; I ask Enoch and Elijah; I ask the [seven] patriarchs; I ask John the Baptist; I also ask the [good/blessed][22] angels; I ask the perfect prophets; I ask the elect martyrs; I ask [St] Patrick; I ask St [Curig]; I ask the Saviour of the World, I ask our Redeemer: that they might see fit to save my soul [when it] leaves the body.[23]

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[20] Theodoret, *Interpretation of the Letter to the Corinthians*, II.18, ed. Migne, *PG* 82, col. 613.

[21] For example: *Collectio Hispana*, VII.35, ed. Gonzalo Martínez Díez and Félix Rodríguez, *La colección canónica hispana III. Concilios griegos y africanos* (Madrid, 1982), p. 165; *Poenitentiale pseudo-Theodori*, ch. 27, ed. F.W.H. Wasserschleben, *Die Bussordnungen der abendländischen Kirche nebst rechtsgeschichtlichen Einleitung* (Halle, 1851), p. 596.

[22] MS: 'Rogo et b< . . . > angelos'. Both *bonos* and *beatos* are possible reconstructions: Warren, *Antiphonary of Bangor*, ii, 86, n. 4; cf. Birch, *Ancient Manuscript*, p. 119.

[23] Harleian Prayerbook, 7r–7v (ed. Warren, p. 86). The invocation of Patrick and Curig suggests an Irish origin, although Sims-Williams notes that the latter was also culted in Wales: *Religion and Literature*, pp. 284–5.

Although made so briefly as to be almost incidental, the undeniably direct petition to the angels would have made Theodoret of Cyrrhus bristle. By the time this prayerbook was put together in late eighth century, however, prayers like this one had become a familiar part of religious expression across large parts of Christendom. Its practice of addressing supplicatory prayer to a listing series of intercessors seems to have first arisen in the east and become common in Greek liturgies by at least the sixth century, if not substantially earlier. These 'litanies of the saints' had no absolutely fixed form, but sought to obtain the assistance of heaven by calling a variety of its citizens to the aid of the supplicant, invoking them either individually by name or collectively by rank. While the precise means by which litanies of saints spread westwards remain largely conjectural, it has long been recognized that the earliest evidence for their adoption in the Latin West comes from the British Isles, and that it was on the basis of their insular use that they would became known on the Continent by the mid-eighth century.[24]

Although it is the formal development of litanies which has attracted the attention of liturgists, we should not overlook the fact that this development was driven by a sense that it was somehow beneficial to pray to a collected group of heavenly citizens, rather than to God alone. This was not intercession of a strictly functional kind, for the saints and their Creator were being called upon together. Rather, the naming of the saints seems to have been intended to amplify a prayer already offered to God – presumably either because it was thought that such a prayer was more likely to be answered, or because it seemed in some way more appropriate. Early examples of this kind of serial invocation restricted themselves to the human powers of heaven, some named as individuals but

[24] Edmund Bishop, *Liturgica Historica: Papers on the Liturgy and Religious Life of the Western Church* (Oxford, 1918), pp. 137–64; Ernst Kantorowicz, *Laudes regiae: A Study in Liturgical Acclamations and Mediaeval Ruler Worship* (Berkeley, CA, 1946); Lapidge, *Litanies*, pp. 2–41. Suggestive but impressionistic comments on the early development are given by Anton Baumstark, *Liturgie comparée. Principes et méthodes pour l'étude historique des liturgies chrétiennes* (3rd ed., Chevetogne, 1953), pp. 87–90.

most called upon collectively.[25] By the seventh century, not only had litanies begun to invoke greater numbers of individual saints, but they also looked beyond them to the angels.[26] Although prominently placed at the head of the litany among the higher powers, the spirits had not been sought for any specifically angelic qualities which they might bring with them. They had been brought in to fill out the ranks, in a particular form of prayer which saw merit in exhaustiveness. Thereafter, it would be difficult to find a litany, either eastern or western, which did not number angels among its massed ranks of intercessors. Praying to angels had thus become a part of accepted, and ultimately mainstream, Christian practice without anyone ever really noticing.

However it was that they first came to be known in early medieval Britain, it soon became commonplace to find descending lists of heavenly intercessors in all manner of prayers and devotions. Many could be short, just the basic outline of a litany inserted in the midst of other appeals addressed to God alone. The petition in the Harleian evening hymn quoted above was thus bookended by others made directly to God; others, like a penitential piece in the Book of Cerne otherwise assembled from snippets of psalmody, might conclude with a short litanic section to reinforce their message:

> ...May the Lord's right hand forever preserve me. May Christ's grace always defend me from the enemy. Lord, direct my heart on the way of peace. May the angels and archangels pray for me. May the patriarchs and prophets pray for me. May the twelve apostles and all the holy martyrs pray for me in the name of the Holy Trinity. Amen. Lord God, hear me in my need; hasten, Lord, to help me. O Lord, thou wilt open my lips, and my mouth shall declare thy praise.[27]

Short though they were, appeals like this had become a major part of the devotional

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[25] See, for example, the 'Liturgy of St James', ed. F.E. Brightman, *Liturgies Eastern and Western*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1896), i, 35, 40 and 66 (Mary, John the Baptist, apostles, prophets, martyrs and 'all the holy and righteous'); and i, 47–8 (Mary, John the Baptist, apostles, Stephen, Moses, Aaron, Elias, Elisha, David, Daniel, prophets and 'all the holy and righteous').

[26] A Syrian example is edited by Anton Baumstark, 'Eine syrisch-melchitische Allerheiligenlitanei', *Oriens Christianus* 4 (1904), 98–120, at pp. 116–19; Lapidge reproduces Baumstark's Latin translation, with further discussion: *Litanies*, pp. 17–18.

[27] Cerne, 50v–51v (ed. Kuypers, pp. 100–102 [no. 14]).

language available to Anglo-Saxon Christians. No two prayers voiced them in exactly the same way. Some were basic and summary in nature, while others subdivided the ranks of heaven ever more minutely.

It was on that basis that the numbers of angels, like the numbers of human intercessors, could swell and multiply:

> Angels and archangels, virtues and powers, principalities and dominations, thrones, cherubim and seraphim, patriarchs and prophets, apostles and martyrs and confessors and all the holy virgins, and all the saints of God: pray for me so that I might deserve to have eternal life in heaven.[28]

No functional need had necessitated that this prayer list each of the nine angelic orders in turn, where others sufficed to say *omnes angeli orate pro me*.[29] There is certainly little indication that the specific duties of each angelic rank, those which had been asserted by Gregory the Great and Isidore of Seville after him, were being sought so that 'carefully selected angels might fill the gaps left by those magicians' whose services were now forbidden.[30] Where the Anglo-Saxon prayerbooks lingered over the names of the angels, they still sought their assistance collectively. Even when litanic prayers did address different demands to each intercessor they invoked, their combined effect remained more important than anything which was asked of any one saintly or angelic helper in particular. The same concerns recur again and again, but directed each time to a different patron. Three items in the Book of Cerne, for instance, seek intercession for the moment that the soul will come before the throne of the Judge, each describing the moment with some variant of the phrase 'apud iustum iudicem, ut demittat peccata mea'. Yet while the petition was almost identical in each case, one prayer asked this favour from the archangel Michael; another from the angels collectively but *not* from Michael, whose

[28] Cerne, 77v (ed. Kuypers, p. 154 [no. 55]).
[29] Cf. also Royal Prayerbook, 40v–42r (ed. Kuypers, pp. 218–19); Cerne, 70r–70v (ed. Kuypers, pp. 139–40 [no. 42]).
[30] Flint, *Rise of Magic*, pp. 162–3; likewise Keck, *Angels*, p. 174.

assistance was sought instead for the transit of the soul; and a third time from the saints and martyrs.[31] It was important that the demand was made, but it hardly mattered to whom. Both the making of petitions and the naming of intercessors have a compendious quality to them. Few individual prayers remain focused upon any specific concern for long; they seek to cover a wide variety of circumstances, and address their demands to a correspondingly wide range of heavenly forces. This was the context in which prayer was offered to the angels, and there is therefore little to suggest that Anglo-Saxon Christians looked to them as a distinct kind of intercessor. They remained one among a multitude, and it was the assistance of the multitude which so many of the items in the early Anglo-Saxon prayerbooks were attempting to secure.

By the mid-eighth century, the idea of the litany – the beneficial nature of serial invocation – had thus become deeply rooted in insular devotion. It was not yet so elsewhere. When a papal synod gathered late in the autumn of 745, to be read a prayer written by a Frankish priest accused of heresy, these compendious lists of names and petitions were still an unfamiliar expression of piety in Rome.[32] The priest, Aldebert, had already been declared a blasphemous madman, but according to the record of his condemnation it was upon the reading of his prayer that the council's mood changed from incredulity to outrage.[33] It was not, of course, its formal qualities that condemned Aldebert – rather the fact that it sought to enlist the service of eight angels, which it named as Uriel, Raguel, Tubuel, Michael, Adinus, Tubuas, Sabaoc and Simiel. The members of the council were quick to observe that they recognized only the name of Michael from scripture, and duly charged him with 'calling demons to his aid under the

[31] Cerne, 63v, 76v–77r (ed. Kuypers, pp. 126, 152–3 [nos. 29, 53, 54]).

[32] Kantorowicz notes that the Roman use of litanies hardly predates the turn of the ninth century: *Laudes regiae*, p. 35.

[33] *Die Briefe*, LIX (ed. Tangl, pp. 108–20); Nicole Zeddies, 'Bonifatius und zwei nützliche Rebellen: die Häretiker Aldebert und Clemens', in *Ordnung und Aufruhr im Mittelalter. Historische und juristische Studien zur Rebellion*, ed. Marie Theres Fögen (Frankfurt, 1995), pp. 217–63, at pp. 240–41.

guise of angels'. It was a deduction that came easily to other would-be legislators. Among an earlier Frankish list of prohibited writings was a note warning against 'All the amulets [*phylacteria*] which are written with not with the names of angels, as they pretend, but rather of demons'.[34]

Yet Aldebert's invocation had little in common with ways that phylacteries and talismans tended to be made.[35] His prayer opened with Christ, addressed in somewhat idiosyncratic but nonetheless biblically-inspired language:

> It began as follows: 'Lord God almighty; Father of Christ, of the Son of God, of our Lord Jesus Christ; alpha and omega, *who sittest upon the cherubim* and seraphim [cf. 2 Kings 19:15]; great piety and abundant sweetness are with you. *Father* of the holy angels, *who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all the things that are in them* [cf. Acts 4:24], I call upon you, cry out to you, invite you upon wretched men, because you have seen fit to say: *Whatsoever you shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you* [cf. John 16:23]. To you I pray, to you I cry out, to Christ the Lord I entrust my soul.'
>
> As it was read out in order, he came to the place where it said: 'I pray and conjure and supplicate myself to you, angel Uriel, angel Raguel, angel Tubuel, angel Michael, angel Adinus, angel Tubuas, angel Sabaoc, angel Simiel.'
>
> When this sacrilegious prayer had been read through right to the end, the most holy and blessed Pope Zacharias said, "What is your response to that, most holy brothers?"[36]

The prayer had been read in its entirety but the council's verdict concerned only its brief invocation of angels. While they could hardly have been expected to turn a blind eye to the strange list of names, evidently nothing else in the prayer had attracted their disapproval, outlandish though it may have seemed to them in its expression. They assumed that the names were an unambiguous indicator of his intentions. Scholarly discussions of Aldebert have tended to assume the same, noting either that other lists of

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[34] *De libris recipiendis et non recipiendis*, ch. 5, ed. Ernst von Dobschütz, *Das Decretum Gelasianum de libris recipiendis et non recipiendis* (Leipzig, 1912), pp. 57–8; on which see Rosamond McKitterick, *The Carolingians and the Written Word* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 202–4.

[35] Compare the objects and texts assembled by Francisco Javier Fernández Nieto, 'A Visigothic charm from Asturias and the classical tradition of phylacteries against hail', in *Magical Practice in the Latin West*, ed. Richard L. Gordon and Francisco Marco Simón (Leiden, 2010), pp. 551–99. Campbell Bonner's less focused collection still has some value as a catalogue: *Studies in Magical Amulets, chiefly Graeco-Egyptian* (London, 1950).

[36] *Die Briefe*, LIX (ed. Tangl, p. 117).

arcane names can be found in 'the world of forbidden magical practices'; or that since there are still others in purely liturgical contexts, Aldebert's list is simply 'a reflection of the bewildering variety of traditions current in the churches of Gaul, and the unsettled nature of late antique angelology'.[37] Yet to judge from the comparatively few words which Aldebert expended upon the angels, in contrast to the effusive quality of the opening petition to God, his own interest in the spirits may have been minimal. Combined with the fact that his demands upon them were unspecific, it may well be that his prayer was of the compendious and litanic kind we have already seen, trying to list as many intercessors as possible but making requests of them which were generic or which only attained their force from their cumulative quality.

This was certainly what motivated other private prayers to call upon the angels by name as well as by rank, regardless of whether or not they looked beyond the few names known from scripture. A lengthy prayer copied into both the Royal Prayerbook and the Book of Cerne, although it made much of the archangel Michael, appears to have had nothing particular in mind when it turned to the rest of the angels. After its opening supplications to the Trinity, it called out their names anyway, but with only the vaguest of entreaties:

> I ask the holy and glorious archangel Michael, who received the power to guard souls, that he might deem my soul worthy to be taken up when it leaves my body, to lead through into the pleasantness of paradise, there to place it into the rest of the blessed spirits. I also beseech the archangel Gabriel, the servant of lofty God's throne. And the same with the nine orders of the angels, and the hosts of the angels, who are angels and archangels, virtues, powers, principalities, dominations, thrones, cherubim and seraphim: intercede for me, you who every day render praises to eternal God before the throne of glory, saying: Holy, holy, holy...[38]

[37] Jeffrey Burton Russell, 'Saint Boniface and the eccentrics', *Church History* 33 (1964), 235–48, at pp. 237–8; Aaron J. Gurevich, *Medieval Popular Culture: Problems of Belief and Perception*, trans. János M. Bak and Paul A. Hollingsworth (Cambridge, 1988), p. 71; Flint, *Rise of Magic*, pp. 168–9; Matthew Innes, '"Immune from heresy": defining the boundaries of Carolingian Christianity', in *Frankland: The Franks and the World of the Early Middle Ages. Essays in Honour of Dame Jinty Nelson* (Manchester, 2008), pp. 100–25, at p. 117.

[38] Royal Prayerbook, 18r–19v (ed. Kuypers, p. 208); Cerne, 40v–41v (ed. Kuypers, pp. 80–82 [no. 1]).

This was angelology learned by rote, repeated only to fulfil the formal qualities of prayer modelled around the structure of a litany. In that context, the Harleian prayerbook's invocation of strange angels, excerpted at the start of this chapter, was clearly different only by degree:

> Likewise I beg the angels, archangels, virtues, powers, principalities, dominations, thrones, cherubim and seraphim that they may intercede for me, a sinner, before the just Judge, so that he may dismiss all my sins. I beseech the holy and glorious Michael, Raphael and Uriel, Gabriel and Raguel, Heremiel and Azael, that they may take my soul on the utmost day with a choir of angels and lead it to the pleasantness of paradise. I ask Peter, Paul, Andrew and Jacob, John and Thomas, Bartholomew and Mathew, Philip and Jacob, Simon and Thaddeus that they help me on the Day of Judgement, so that my joyful soul may behold the purest divinity. I pray John and Clement, Gregory and Benedict, Martin and Laurence, Stephen and George that they help me all the time. All the saints and martyrs, pray for me.[39]

I quote these somewhat repetitious and unengaging lists of names at greater length than is strictly necessary simply to demonstrate the extent to which each is very much of a type with the last. Extracting a clause which lists only the noncanonical names of angels, as Aldebert's accusers did in 745, can give a misleading sense of the whole when so much of the rest is drawn from the same common stock. The Harley prayer above, with its invocation of Uriel, Raguel, Heremiel and Azael, made no greater use of them than any other prayer which restricted itself to purely biblical angels.

It was thus the basic, and entirely orthodox, desire for serial invocation that motivated the inclusion of non-canonical angels in insular prayers, no matter how unusually the requests made of them were articulated:

> In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Gabriel be my breastplate. Michael be my sword-belt. Raphael be my shield. Uriel be my protector. Rumiel be my defender. Phanniel be my health. And I beseech all the saints and martyrs that they might help me before the just Judge...[40]

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[39] Harleian Prayerbook, 4r–4v (ed. Warren, p. 85).

[40] Cerne, 77r–77v (ed. Kuypers, pp. 153–4 [no. 54]). The prayer is only otherwise found in the *Collectanea pseudo-Bedae*, ed. Martha Bayless and Michael Lapidge, *Collectanea Pseudo-Bedae* (Dublin, 1998), p. 196 [no. 387]. There is, however, a partial analogue from a later miscellany edited by R.I. Best, 'Some Irish charms', *Ériu* 16 (1952), 27–32, at pp. 31–32 [no. 8]. This in turn ought to be compared with the beginning of headless text in the Harleian Prayerbook, 1r (quoted above, p. 208).

This terminology of armour and protection drew from different inspiration than the often colourless phrasing of litanies. 'Breastplate' poems – *loricae* – built upon the language of St Paul, who enjoined Christians to don spiritual armour against evils, and were clearly a common part of prayer in early medieval Ireland.[41] They did not usually make reference to extrabiblical angels as this one did, but their concerns for cumulative intercession, and cumulative protection, place them firmly within the same mental world as the litanies of saints. The question of whether Irish *loricae* actually derive their entire structure from litanies has not, to my mind, been adequately investigated, although the connections have occasionally been raised in a cursory footnote, or else elided by referring to 'litany-like *loricae*'.[42] While it cannot be answered here, we should note that they were not treated as a distinct class of invocation by the Anglo-Saxon compilers who placed them alongside their own litanic prayers.[43] Both litanies and *loricae* made multiple, interlocking requests of a series of divine powers, and both could be made to seem more detailed and specific by calling on named individuals instead of anonymous groups of intercessors. In the pursuit of specificity, the formal qualities of a particular kind of prayer had evidently encouraged a number of early medieval churchmen to try to reach beyond scripture and add new names to their devotions.

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41 Louis Gougaud, 'Étude sur les *loricae* celtiques et sur les prières qui s'en rappochent', *Bulletin d'ancienne littérature et d'archéologue chrétiennes* 1 (1911), 265–82 and 2 (1912), 33–41, 101–27; Herren, *Hisperica Famina II*, pp. 23–31. For their biblical inspiration, see Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature*, pp. 277–9; Jennifer Reid, 'The Lorica of Laidcenn: the biblical connections', *JML* 12 (2002), 141–53.

42 Jane Stevenson thus notes, but does not develop, the fact that 'the structural resemblance of the lorica of Laidcenn to the liturgical genres of litany and exorcism [...] make its status a little more questionable than might first appear': 'Hiberno-Latin hymns: learning and literature', in *Irland und Europa im früheren Mittelalter: Bildung und Literatur / Ireland and Europe in the Early Middle Ages: Learning and Literature*, ed. Próinséas Ní Chatháin and Michael Richter (Stuttgart, 1996), pp. 99–135, at p. 100, n. 2. While the similarities are not confined to the *lorica* of Laidcenn, the fact that his composition must be earlier than 661 (the year of his death) has consequences. If Laidcenn's *lorica* were shown to be dependent upon the form of the litany, it would force us to reconsider Lapidge's valiant attempt to champion Theodore of Canterbury as the pioneer of the litany of saints in the West (*Litanies*, pp. 20–25), since Laidcenn was already dead when Theodore took up his see: cf. Michael W. Herren, 'The authorship, date and provenance of the so-called *Lorica Gildae*', *Ériu* 24 (1973), 35–51.

43 Kathleen Hughes, 'Some aspects of Irish influence on early English private prayer', *Studia Celtica* 5 (1970), 48–61, esp. at pp. 59–61.

To focus attention on the goals and methods of a particular genre of devotional writing in this way is not to claim that looking for unusual and apocryphal lore about angels was a perfectly regular activity for early medieval Christians, or that the kind of prayers condemned by the eighth-century papacy were simply misunderstood pieces of orthodoxy. But we can better understand why some early medieval ecclesiastics accommodated the invocation of extra-biblical angels in their own personal devotions if we do not resort to heavy-handed judgements about how they gave in to 'a powerful temptation [...] to recover unorthodox traditions'.[44] The evidence for the place of angels in prayer before *c.* 850 is a continuum, and its oddities are extensions of the norm rather than inversions of it. This was not something which religious and secular authorities at the time found easy to accept, even if they did not necessarily share the opinion of the papal court that any angelic name which lacked biblical support must therefore be demonic. The *Admonitio generalis* issued by Charlemagne in 789, and a string of Carolingian capitularies after it, preferred a more mundane explanation as the likely source of these names: 'the unknown names of angels may neither be made up nor named, except for those which we hold in authority: Michael, Gabriel, Raphael'.[45]

In fact, it is extraordinarily difficult to find the name of an angel in an early medieval text which actually can be shown to be a fabrication. Instead, they repeated names which had first arisen centuries before, in Jewish or gnostic circles.[46] It is not now generally possible to trace the means by which these ancient names came to be available to an early medieval Christian, but their lack of inventiveness is enough to reveal a

[44] Keck, *Angels*, p. 174.

[45] *Admonitio generalis*, c. 16; *Capitulare missorum item speciale*, c. 5; Haito, *Capitula ecclesiastica*, c. 19; Ansegis, *Capitularium collectio*, I.16: ed. Alfred Boretius, MGH, Capit. I (Hanover, 1881), pp. 55, 102, 365, 399. Herard, *Capitula*, c. 3, ed. Rudolf Pokorny and Martina Stratmann, MGH, Capit. episc. II (Hanover, 1995), p. 128.

[46] The sources of Aldebert's angels, for example, are pursued by Russell, 'Boniface and the eccentrics', pp. 237–8. They can hardly be said to have been 'for the most part imaginary', as Faure asserts: 'L'ange du Haut Moyen Âge', p. 37.

genuine effort to search for obscure angelic material – or, more plausibly, to make a note of it when it happened to appear – rather than to engage knowingly in pious fraud. We might even detect an attempt to cross-check such material against known authorities, at least to judge from the way that one prayer with its extra-biblical angels was handled. The prayer from the Harleian prayerbook which enlisted the support of Michael, Raphael, Uriel, Gabriel, Raguel, Heremiel and Azael was also copied into the later Book of Cerne, but with the final three angels removed.[47] And yet it preserved Uriel, a name which had no greater scriptural basis than the others. Uriel, however, had found his way into the list of named angels compiled in Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae*.[48] The deletion of his more exotic colleagues by an Anglo-Saxon copyist was thus not the work of someone categorically unwilling to engage with extra-biblical material, only someone who more cautiously investigated the credentials of new mysteries before he saw fit to repeat them.

To the professional religious, raised in an environment which encouraged reasoned speculation about the hidden meanings of scripture, such an attitude of scholarly curiosity may well have come naturally. Certainly, with the exception only of Aldebert, non-canonical names of angels were intended as an addition to things already known rather than an arcane alternative. When biblical and extra-biblical names stood side by side in litanic prayers, scriptural angels took priority over new arrivals. Similarly when a wooden coffin was made for St Cuthbert's body in the late seventh century, its sides covered with figures of saints and with seven named angels, the artists singled out Michael and Gabriel for special attention (figs. 19 and 20). The biblical pair stand prominently on one of the narrow ends of the coffin, their names inscribed beside

[47] Harleian Prayerbook, 4r (quoted above, p. 210); Cerne, 63r (ed. Kuypers, p. 126 [no. 29]).
[48] Isidore, *Etym.*, VII.5 (ed. Lindsay, i).

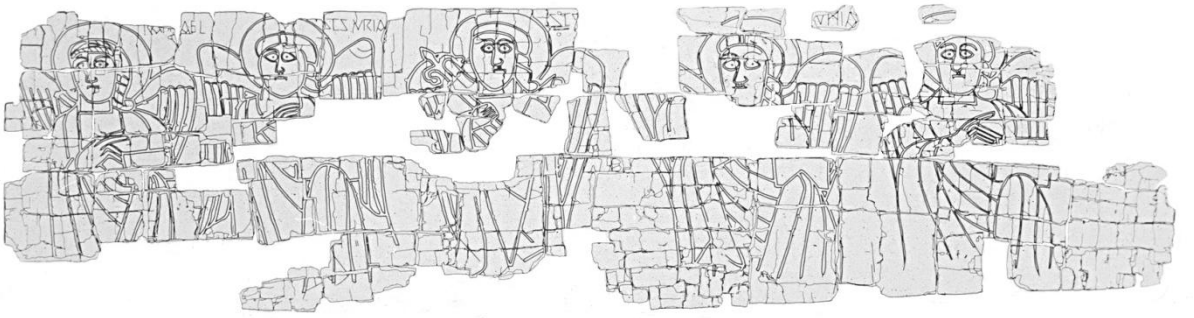

FIG. 19. Remains of St Cuthbert's wooden coffin, long side. The inscriptions, from left to right, read: [SCS] RA[PH]AEL, SCS VRIA[EL], SCS [. . .], [SCS R]VMIA[EL], [. . .]

them. The other five assembled on the long side include less familiar names like Rumiel and Uriel, but seem to have been enlisted chiefly to complete the roll call. The archangel Raphael had once announced that he was 'one of the seven who stand before the Lord', and the makers of Cuthbert's coffin were more concerned with depicting that overall scheme than with the allure of strange names.[49] Certainly it is clear that, as they made their way across the coffin, the artists realized that they had more space to fill than they had angels remaining, but decided to stretch the final few angels to fit the available space rather than drafting in reinforcements.[50]

FIG. 20. St Cuthbert's coffin, narrow end. [SC]S MICH[AE]L, [SCS G]ABR[I]AEL

Ernst Kitzinger saw 'magical' intentions behind the inclusion of the apocryphal angels on the coffin, but we may equally be dealing with knowledge amassed and displayed for its own sake.[51] The ostentatious parading of knowledge certainly came easily to others. The wilfully obscure *Solomon and Saturn I*, for instance, placed the

[49] Tob. 12:15. Raphael's words seem a more likely inspiration for lists of seven named angels than 'the desire to have an angel for each day of the week', as John Carey suggests: 'Angelology in *Saltair na Rann*', *Celtica* 19 (1987), 1–8, at p. 6. The connection with the seven days is, nevertheless, a later elaboration on the theme: Tomás P. Ua Nualláin, 'A prayer to the archangels for each day of the week', *Ériu* 2 (1905), 92–4; supplemented by Robin Flower, 'Ad Ériu II, p. 92', *Ériu* 5 (1911), 112.

[50] As observed by Kitzinger, 'Coffin-reliquary', p. 283, n. 2.

[51] *Ibid.*, p. 280.

names of unusual angels into the mouth of King Solomon simply to show his evident access to hidden and mysterious lore, rather than to provide a reader with useful or edifying information:

> Saturn said: "So who tracks the devil from heaven's forest and brings him into the arms of Christ's warriors, who are called thus: cherubim and seraphim?"
> [Solomon said:] "Uriel and Rumiel." [52]

If oblique pieces of arcane lore could sometimes be assembled around angelic names in this way, then they could also be stripped away again to 'restore' them to a dry and pristine state. Buried within the Textus Roffensis is thus the following note, forthright and carefully written: 'Here are the names of the seven archangels: Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, Uriel, Barachiel, Raguel, Pantasaron'.[53] The names were taken from a protective prayer, found in numerous manuscripts between the ninth century and the fifteenth, which instructed the reader to 'have Raguel in mind when you go on a journey and you will go prosperously', or 'have Pantasaron in mind when you come to a banquet and everyone will acclaim you'.[54] Someone had clearly found these promises worthless, but thought that the names themselves were still worth preserving for the curious and the contemplative. The Textus Roffensis itself belongs to the post-Conquest period, of

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[52] *Solomon and Saturn I*, prose section (ed. Anlezark, p. 72). The following question-and-answer make brief reference to 'Satan and Sathiel', the latter of which ought presumably to be compared to the puzzling line in an abecedary hymn from Durham Collectar, 88v (ed. Lindelöf, p. 198): 'Raguel id est fortis id est Satahel'; on which see Charles D. Wright, 'Apocryphal lore and insular tradition in St Gall, Stiftsbibliothek MS 908', in *Irland und die Christenheit: Bibelstudien und Mission / Ireland and Christendom: The Bible and the Missions*, ed. Próinséas Ní Chatháin and Michael Richter (Stuttgart, 1987), pp. 124–45, at p. 138 and n. 79.

[53] Rochester, Cathedral Library, A.3.5 (s. xii[1]), 116v; reproduced in facsimile by P.H. Sawyer, *Textus Roffensis: Rochester Cathedral Library Manuscript A.3.5*, 2 vols. (Copenhagen, 1972–62), i.

[54] Cf. Cologne, Dombibliothek, MS 174 (s. ix–x), 45v, ed. Philipp Jaffé and Wilhelm Wattenbach, *Ecclesiae metropolitanae Coloniensis codices manuscripti* (Berlin, 1874), p. 73; Cambridge, Sidney Sussex College 85 (s. xiv), p. 5, ed. M.R. James, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Manuscripts in the Library of Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge* (Cambridge, 1895), p. 69; Lincoln, Cathedral Chapter Library, MS 98 (s. xiv–xv), see Rodney M. Thomson, *Catalogue of the Manuscripts of Lincoln Cathedral Chapter Library* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 75; New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MS 775 (s. xv), 275r, ed. M.J. Swanton, 'A fifteenth-century cabalistic memorandum formerly in Morgan MS 775', *Harvard Theological Review* 76 (1983), 259–61, at p. 259; Durham, University Library, Cosin V.V.19 (s. xvi[in]), 67v–68r. A lost fifteenth-century manuscript seen by M.R. James contained an almost identical list of names, apparently in the context of a litany: *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Manuscripts in the Fitzwilliam Museum* (Cambridge, 1895), p. xxxi.

course, but similar things might never have been very hard to find in previous centuries. When one late Anglo-Saxon scribe from Canterbury, or a monastery associated with it, added rubrics to a collection of homilies he was working on, he entitled one of them *Sermonem angelorum nomina*. He was mistaken, for the piece was in fact a letter from Christ himself, or so it claimed, reminding his people about the proper observance of Sundays. The scribe was perhaps misled by the preponderance of strange names in its opening lines – Effrem, Achorius, Jeremia, Talasius – and reference to the archangel Michael.[55] But in his error, the scribe demonstrated the extent to which the names of angels, although they have their origins in ancient and often extra-ecclesial sources, had made their own small contribution to Anglo-Saxon religious culture. He did not think that coming across a genuine 'sermon on the names of angels' in Anglo-Saxon England was beyond the realms of possibility.

This is an increasingly disparate body of material, but viewing it together as a collection serves to highlight just how many different ways there were in which Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastics might cling onto scraps of information about lists of angels unmentioned in scripture. Amongst it all, we can detect different motivations for keeping it: the practical, the scholarly, the ostentatious, the simply curious. These were, nonetheless, distinctly individual responses. Arcane lore about the names of angels remained fragmentary, it did not build on itself and attain the stature of a tradition. Yet perhaps the fact that it never rose above a miscellany, a nagging presence on the edge of better understood ideas, was precisely what made it appealing to those ecclesiastics whose 'magpie mentality' resulted in the collection of other bodies of esoteric lore in

[55] CCCC 419, p. 73. The explanation of the scribe's error was plausibly suggested by Haines, *Sunday Observance*, p. 66, n. 22. The piece is edited as 'Old English Letter B' in her collection of other Sunday Letters (pp. 118–25).

Anglo-Saxon England.[56] If they acted upon their new-found knowledge in their private devotions, as the Mercian prayerbooks show that some did, it was to supplement that which was already known, not to subvert it. While that made their actions unorthodox in the eyes of many, it was a testament to their own personal conviction that Christian knowledge could be enriched through enterprise and discovery.

PRAYERS FOR HEALTH AND HARVEST

Lists of angelic names might have a clear place in an ecclesiastical context, but one late Anglo-Saxon manuscript appears to offer a glimpse of a rather different world. In the years around 970, Aldred, provost of Chester-le-Street, appended a miscellaneous collection of material to a late ninth- or early tenth-century Southumbrian servicebook in his possession, a book now known in its entirety as the Durham Collectar (Durham, Cathedral Library, A.IV.19).[57] His additions ranged widely from hymns and collects to poems on salvation and apocryphal lore about the creation of Adam, but among them were a set of five prayers designed to protect a field from the ill effects of pests, disease and demonic corruption.[58] Such blessings for the natural world were a common sight in liturgical and extra-liturgical collections throughout the Middle Ages.[59] Aldred's prayers, however, evidently drew their inspiration from a more unexpected source, for amidst his blessings were curious assertions about the activities of an archangel named Panchiel:

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[56] The wide view of their activities is given by Andy Orchard, 'Esoteric knowledge', in *A Social History of England, 900–1200*, ed. Julia Crick and Elisabeth van Houts (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 381–90; his characterisation of their outlook is at pp. 382–3.

[57] The original servicebook, without the Chester-le-Street additions, is edited by Alicia Corrêa, *The Durham Collectar* (London, 1992). For the added Old English gloss and the appended items, see U. Lindelöf (ed.), *Rituale ecclesiae Dunelmensis. The Durham Collectar* (London, 1927).

[58] Durham Collectar, 66r–67v (ed. Lindelöf, pp. 145–7). For a consideration of Aldred's additions as a whole, see Karen Louise Jolly, *The Community of St Cuthbert in the Late Tenth Century: The Chester-le-Street Additions to Durham Cathedral Library A.IV.19* (Columbus, OH, 2012).

[59] The best guide is now Tamsin Rowe, 'Blessings for Nature in the English Liturgy, *c.* 900–1200' (unpublished PhD thesis: University of Exeter, 2010), pp. 218–45. Of published works, Adolph Franz's 1909 survey remains a valuable collection, although few of his conclusions would now be accepted without qualification: *Die kirchlichen Benediktionen im Mittelalter*, 2 vols. (Freiburg, 1909). Derek A. Rivard's recent monograph, while useful in some of its details, suffers from its ahistorical approach: *Blessing the World: Ritual and Lay Piety in Medieval Religion* (Washington, DC, 2009).

Creature over the crop for birds on fourteen < . . . > [60]
We pray to you, almighty God, controlling God, who named your son Jesus Christ with twelve names. Therefore I adjure you creature of water through the archangel Panchiel, that demons and flying things, worms and mice and all venomous animals may be burned up and chased from our fields, in the name of God the Father and Son and Holy Spirit, you who reigns forever and ever.

Likewise for birds.
Creator and keeper of the human race, giver of spiritual grace, bestower of eternal salvation, send forth your Holy Spirit over this creature of water so that armed with the power of heavenly protection it might grant the health of the soul and the body. Through the Lord.

Likewise another.
Holy Lord, almighty Father, eternal God, send forth your Holy Spirit with the archangel Panchiel, so that it [i.e. the Holy Spirit] may defend our fields from worms, from flying things, from demons, from thunderbolts, from all temptations of the devil, by the invocation of your holy name, Jesus Christ, who reigns with the Father and who lives with the Holy Spirit, forever and ever.

Likewise another.
We entreat you holy Lord, almighty Father, eternal God: nourish the germinating seed, as Panchiel wishes in your name – he who, with forty-four thousand angels, is over all the fruits of the earth and over seeds – which may, by this creature, take root and then remain unharmed over the wide earth, so that your name may be extolled on the whole earth, indeed in all places, so that [all] the peoples may know that there is no other God beside you. Through almighty God and through the ruling Lord and through his son Jesus Christ, who called the twelve apostles by [their] names. Therefore I adjure you, creature of water, that the Lord commands [that] neither evil nor disease nor temptation may work in this crop; but instead, like the demon Asmodeus who was driven out by the fish gall through the archangel Raphael, so may winged things be driven from our fields, and this creature be made useful for the driving away and conquering of demons. In the name of God the Father and Son and Holy Spirit.

A creature against birds who attack our fields and eat them.
Through the Lord, almighty Father, you who have named your son with twelve names, I adjure you creature of bread that you be a fire burning against snares of the devil and winged things: just as the demon Asmodeus fled, who was driven out by the fish gall through the archangel Raphael, so may winged things by driven out from our crops. In the name of God, Father and Son and Holy Spirit. Lord, deign to bless our crop through this creature of water and through the blessing which we bless so that the flying things of the sky and birds of the earth by overthrown from them through the invocation of your name, Father and Son and Holy Spirit.

[60] The end of the rubric presumably indicated the day(s) on which the prayers were to be used. The instruction has evidently been illegible since at least the nineteenth century, when Edward Churton, archdeacon of Cleveland (d. 1874), used the prayers as the basis for his *Stanzas on Lammas Day*, and speculated in a note that 'This ceremony most probably took place in Rogation week': *Poetical Remains*, ed. Susanna M. Inge (London, 1876), p. 28. Jolly argues that it may have been an instruction for use fourteen days before Lammas: 'Prayers from the field', pp. 108–11. However, since the prayers make reference both to new seed and ripe crops, the prayers may have been intended as quite general formulae meant for more regular repetition – especially since a later copy of two of the prayers, in a twelfth-century lunarium, recommends their use on the fourteenth day of any month: see below, p. 232, n. 69.

Intriguing as they are, these prayers and their unusual claims about an obscure archangel have largely escaped scholarly attention. Recently, however, Karen Jolly has proposed that these prayers might provide rare evidence of a strand of popular religion otherwise suppressed by the early medieval church.[61] They represent a 'shadow tradition', she argued, which was in fact widespread, because it targeted the needs of communities in a more 'pragmatic' manner than the kind of prayers more commonly found in service books and prayer compilations. Where the latter made only generalized appeals for supernatural assistance, this popular tradition of angelic prayer was made more efficacious by the fact that it addressed one being which was known to have a particular area of expertise. Jolly saw this confirmed by two prayers added into the margins of an eleventh-century copy of the Old English Bede (Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 41),[62] which gave further non-canonical names for angels and demons in formulae for use against pain in the ears and in the stomach:

> *Against sore ears*.
> Christ, glorious King, shut out Fondorael[63] from the ears of this servant of God [by sending] the angel Raphael. You [i.e. Fondorael] must quickly withdraw from the tormenting of [his] ears, but in the angel Raphael may you [i.e. Christ] bring health to his hearing.[64]
>
> *Against great sickness.*
> Help[65] us, our health-giving God: shut out the evil angel Laniel,[66] who makes stomach pain of the stomach [*sic*], but in your holy angel Dormiel grant the health of your servant in your holy healing name.

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61 Jolly, 'Prayers from the field'.

62 CCCC 41, p. 326, ed. Oswald Cockayne, *Leechdoms, Wortcunning, and Starcraft of Early England*, 3 vols. (London, 1864–6), i, 387. It is presumably only the fact that these Latin texts bear Old English rubrics similar to items found in Anglo-Saxon medical compilations that has led to their inappropriate classification as 'charms' rather than prayers, as observed (though not acted upon) by Jolly, 'Margins of orthodoxy', p. 161.

63 MS: *fondorohel*, corrected with superscript *a* to *fondorahel*. Although Jolly adduces the medial *-h-* as a distinctively Irish/Northumbrian feature ('Prayers from the field', pp. 125–7), it is in fact an entirely common occurrence in Hebrew names written by Latin scribes across early medieval Europe, as observed by Jean Rittmueller, CCSL 108F (Turnhout, 2003), p. 114. For the purposes of translation, the demon's name ought therefore to be rendered Fondorael (as *Israhel* = Israel, *Michahel* = Michael, etc).

64 The prayer is addressed in the second person throughout, but the command *recede ab aurium torquenti* cannot be directed to Christ, and thus presumably addresses the demon. Similarly, it seems unlikely that the following request for health to be restored is directed to the demon, and must therefore refer back to the opening invocation of Christ.

65 MS: *Adiuua*, mistakenly read as *Adiurer* by Cockayne.

66 MS: *Lanielem*. The demon's name is somewhat faded, but still legible. It is not clear why the name

Jolly saw these texts as part of an unbroken tradition stretching back to Late Antiquity, resilient to any efforts to forbid it, and so probably transmitted orally: 'a popular, but not mainstream liturgical, practice of calling on a named archangel with a specific area of expertise'.[67]

The prayers from the Durham Collectar and CCCC 41 certainly demand explanation, and if it were possible to prove Jolly's argument then we would have to take its implications about an orally transmitted subculture of pan-European religious belief very seriously. Yet a closer examination of the prayers' underlying ideas and their manuscript contexts suggests that they too, like the litanies and lists of angels compiled in ecclesiastical contexts, arose within a rather more bookish world of libraries and learning. More than that, these short formulae provide excellent evidence for the way that some early medieval ecclesiastics went about turning the obscure and the esoteric to more practical applications. The literary and the pragmatic did not necessarily occupy opposite ends of a religious spectrum, and these two collections of prayers can show just how closely the two could be aligned.

While it is not inherently improbable that a handful of textual fragments might now be the only witness to a lively oral tradition, there is good reason to suppose that neither the angels Panchiel and Dormiel nor the demons Fondorael and Laniel ever circulated far beyond the manuscripts that contain their names. At the same time, there were clearly once more of these than now survive. Variant versions of several of the crop

should have caused previous readers so much difficulty: James read *Sanielem*, Cockayne and Johnson supplied *Lanielum*; and Johnson and Jolly seem unaware that *-em* is an inflectional ending: cf. M.R. James, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Manuscripts in the Library of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1912), i, 84; Cockayne, *Leechdoms*, i, 387; Johnson, 'Archangel in the margins', p. 68; Jolly, 'Margins of orthodoxy', p. 166.

67 Jolly, 'Prayers from the field', pp. 118–19.

blessings which Aldred copied into the Durham Collectar can be found in a very dispersed collection of European manuscripts. Roughly contemporary with Aldred's work is a German servicebook (Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, lat. 1888) which contains a shorter version of his third benediction,[68] while a twelfth-century compilation of insular computus materials, perhaps made at Lyons (Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica, lat. 642), includes a lunarium which recommends blessing the crops on the fourteenth day of the month, using a prayer which runs together the first and third of the Chester-le-Street set.[69] Aldred's prayers show similar evidence of conflation: his fifth benediction certainly brings together two previously separate adjurations of bread and of water, the latter of which appears in its original form in a collection of liturgical materials appended to a manuscript written by the British scribe Bledian during the tenth century.[70] The prayers against illness from CCCC 41, on the other hand, evidently travelled as a pair, for they are found again together amidst other medical formulae in a twelfth-century manuscript (Cambridge, Gonville and Caius College 379/599).[71] Yet although the

[68] *Monumenta veteris liturgiae Alemannicae*, ed. Martin Gerbert, 2 vols. (San-Blasianis, 1777–9), ii, 92: '*Oratio super segetes.* Domine sancte, Pater omnipotens, eterne Deus, permitte Spiritum Sanctum tuum cum Panchielo archangelo, ut defendat segetes nostras a uermibus, a uolucribus, a demonibus malis, ut magnificetur nomen tuum deus in omni loco. per.'

[69] *Lunaria et zodiologia latina*, ed. Emanuel Svenberg (Gothenburg, 1963), p. 36: '*Luna xiiii*. Mari pleno. Accipe fructum nouum creatum a Deo, et fac super messem pro auibus cum oratione ista: Domine sancte, pater omnipotens, aeterne Deus, permitte spiritum sanctum tuum paraclytum cum Panachiele archangelo, ut defendat segetes nostras a uermibus, a uolucribus, a demonibus, ab omni temptestate diaboli, per inuocationem sancti nominis Domini nostri Iesu Christi et per Deum omnipotentem. Te Deum dominantorem omnium deprecamur patrem supplices, qui filii tui Iesu Christi nomina nominasti, et per te adiuro creaturam aquae, ut per te et per Michaelem archangelum tuum effugentur demones et uolucres et uermes et mures et omnia animalia uenenosa a nostris segetibus. In nomine Dei patris omnipotentis et filii et spiritus sancti. Amen.'

[70] Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 572, 40r, ed. Arthur West Haddan and William Stubbs, *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents relating to Great Britain and Ireland*, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1869–78), i, 697: 'Alme deus clemens omnipotens sanctificationis tue uirtute semina hic aspersa infertilem messem, ad acomodam umare uictus, concede quesumus oportuno tempore peruenire. Benedicere et sanctificare digneris domine segetes nostras per hanc creaturam aque et benedictionem qua benedictimus ut abiciantur demones ac uolucres celi et uermes terre ab ea per inuocationem nominis tui patris et filii et spiritus sancti. Amen.' The liturgical prayers on this folio (dealing with the distribution of funeral food and the manumission of slaves as well as the blessing of crops) appear to be a miscellany, although the Old English rubrics treat them as if they were meant to be carried out sequentially. Subsequent additions to this part of the manuscript include cryptograms and a paschal table found in Winchester manuscripts, but it remains unclear whether these formulae were also written there. The present shape of Bodley 572 is a collection of five originally separate manuscripts: see Ker, *Catalogue*, pp. 376–7 [no. 313].

[71] Printed in Godfrid Storms, *Anglo-Saxon Magic* (The Hague, 1948), p. 315 [nos. A5 and A6].

manuscripts are a diverse collection, they repeat the same small number of formulae. This does not suggest that prayers involving the angels Panchiel or Dormiel were ever particularly widespread, but rather that a small group of texts had changed hands several times before ending up in this somewhat disparate collection of manuscripts.

In the case of our two Anglo-Saxon manuscripts, it is also clear that neither Aldred nor the marginal scribe of CCCC 41 put a great deal of thought into exactly what it was that they were writing out. The latter struggled with the unfamiliar name of the demon Fondorael, although he at least noticed his error and squeezed a correction onto his already cramped page.[72] The mistakes in the blessings for the crops, on the other hand, went entirely unnoticed by Aldred. Comparing his versions to the other manuscripts makes sense of some of their more illogical clauses – trying to free the crops *ab omni temptatione diabuli* when it might be more useful to protect them *ab omni tempestate diaboli*, or attempting to set pests alight by sprinkling them with water rather than using the more sensible means of burning bread.[73] Given Aldred's efforts to accompany the prayers with a vernacular gloss, these obscurities should probably be attributed to a corrupt exemplar rather than to his own negligence. Nevertheless, the fact that they remained uncorrected indicates that the rites associated with these non-canonical angels were transmitted textually and sometimes with little understanding. If they had ever held any place in popular traditions, neither Aldred nor the annotator of CCCC 41 seems to have known it.

[72] See above, p. 230, n. 63.

[73] Durham Collectar: 'defendat segites nostras a uermibus, a uolatilibus, a demonibus, a fulminibus, ab omni temptatione diabuli'; cf. BAV, lat. 642: 'defendat segetes nostras a uermibus, a uolucribus, a demonibus, ab omni tempestates diaboli'. The Durham Collectar's fifth prayer (67r–67v) is inconsistent about whether water or bread is to be used, and seems to have conflated two originally separate prayers, the latter of which is preserved in Bodley 572, 40r.

The two short prayers against earache and stomach pain provide the best indication that these outwardly practical texts drew their inspiration from uncommon but bookish origins. Their basic assumption that physical ills could have supernatural causes was widely shared, but their assertion that individual demons might specialize in particular afflictions was not. The idea had been occasionally voiced in Late Antiquity, and it found extended form in the apocryphal text of perhaps the third or fourth century known as the Testament of Solomon, in which the eponymous king compels demons to assist the construction of the Temple and interrogates them about their activities. A few receive prolonged questioning, but most simply reveal their names and predilections in a formulaic manner, along with the name of an angel who has power over them:

> The demon replied, "I am the first decan of the zodiac; I am called Ruax. I cause men's heads to suffer pain and I cause their temples to throb. Should I hear only 'Michael, imprison Ruax', I retreat immediately." The second [demon] said, "I am called Barsafael. I cause men who reside in my time period to have pains on the sides of their heads. Should I hear 'Gabriel, imprison Barsafael', I retreat immediately." [74]

The prayers of CCCC 41 are thus not unique in identifying diseases with named demons. It might be possible that the similarities between Greek apocryphon and Latin prayers both arise from a poorly-attested but apparently persistent 'shadow tradition', as Jolly thought, were there not good reasons to suspect a closer relationship. The language used to describe the removal of the demons is strikingly similar. The instruction in one prayer for the demon to withdraw (*recede*: go back, retreat, pass away) corresponds precisely to demons telling Solomon that they retreat from the name of their opposing angels (*anachoro*: I retreat, withdraw, depart). The other prayer asks that the demon be 'shut out' (*exclude*: shut off, remove, exclude) in terms related, although not completely analogous, to the Testament's repeated order for the demons to be imprisoned (*egkleison*: shut up, imprison – a word used in Daniel 12:4, rendered *claude* in the Vulgate).

[74] Testament of Solomon 18:5–6, ed. Chester Charlton McCown, *The Testament of Solomon* (Leipzig, 1922), p. 52*; trans. D.C. Duling, 'The Testament of Solomon', in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth, 2 vols. (London, 1983–5), i, 935–87.

In addition to shared terminology, the Testament of Solomon makes reference to a demon called Sphendonael, a name found in no other place and from which CCCC 41's otherwise unattested Fondorael, the name of the demon who torments ears, would appear to derive. His speciality in the Testament of Solomon is the mouth rather than the ears, but it should be noted that he immediately follows on from the demon who causes ear pain. It may be that the manuscript available to the creator of these prayers was corrupted by eyeskip, and had conflated two of the demons' responses. This is not special pleading: misreading and confusion caused by the unfamiliar names of angels and demons is the rule rather than the exception in the complex manuscript history of the Testament of Solomon. A fragmentary papyrus of *c.* 500 is the only extant witness to the Testament before the fifteenth century, and comparing it with the later manuscripts shows that it was precisely the obscure names that caused scribes trouble, while the formulaic responses of the demons opened further opportunity for error.[75] The portion of the text which mentions Sphendonael and his angelic opposite, Sabrael, is not extant in the early papyrus, making it difficult to be completely certain about the original forms of the names, but at least one of the later manuscripts (British Library, Harley 5966) rendered them Phendonael and Saphael, forms which might plausibly be misread further as Fondorael and Raphael, as CCCC 41 has it.[76] Whether Laniel and Dormiel, from CCCC 41's prayer against stomach pain, also arise from misreadings from the Testament of Solomon is less clear, but probable; the name of the demon who 'sits on the stomach of a man and causes convulsions' is subject to particular variation in the extant manuscripts.[77] But the combination of the general idea that individual named demons cause specific diseases, the shared instructions for the demons to 'withdraw' and be either 'shut up' or

[75] See Sarah L. Schwarz, 'Building a Book of Spells: The So-Called *Testament of Solomon* Reconsidered' (unpublished PhD thesis: University of Pennsylvania, 2005), esp. pp. 173–5. The nature of the fragmentary early papyrus raises further complications: see below, p. 236, n. 78.

[76] British Library, Harley 5596 (s. xv), 17v (= McCown MS L).

[77] Testament of Solomon 18:21 (ed. McCown, p. 55*).

'shut out', and the coincidence of at least one pair of names are sufficient reasons to judge that some version of the Testament of Solomon was the direct inspiration for the prayers copied into the margins of CCCC 41.

The conclusion to be drawn from this rather complicated manuscript history is that a Latin writer had sought to turn an obscure Greek demonology to practical advantage. His source, either corrupt or misunderstood, asserted that the demons who caused two particularly common illnesses were countered by the angels Raphael and Dormiel, and the prayers he composed naturally made use of this information. That source was not well known – these prayers are, in fact, the first definite indication that the Testament of Solomon, or at least part of it, was ever read in the early medieval West.[78] Given the exceptional preservation of other rare eastern apocrypha in Ireland at this time, it is natural to suggest that the prayers are therefore of Irish origin. While this seems likely, it should not lead us to resurrect old stereotypes about the supposed peculiarity of Irish Christianity and its esoteric excesses: the Irish might have had more access to apocryphal material in this period, but these prayers alone would suffice to show that Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastics had an equal interest in it when it lay to hand.[79] It would nevertheless be misleading to talk about an 'Irish tradition' about the medical

[78] The unique early witness to the Testament of Solomon is a fragmentary fifth- or sixth-century *rotulus* known as the Vienna Papyrus. It contained only the portion of the Testament concerning the thirty-six demons from which our Latin prayers derive (corresponding to 18:4–40 in McCown's edition). Since its existence demonstrates that the passage circulated independently, the writer of our prayers might plausibly have seen only this passage rather than the entire Testament in its current form. Persuasive reasons have been advanced to think that the text on the *rotulus* was an extract from a fuller story relating to Solomon, not a separate work only later connected with the biblical king, but the matter is still far from certain: see variously Dennis C. Duling, 'The Testament of Solomon: retrospect and prospect', *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 2 (1988), 87–112; Todd E. Klutz, *Rewriting the Testament of Solomon: Tradition, Conflict and Identity in a Late Antique Pseudepigraphon* (London, 2005); Sarah L. Schwarz, 'Reconsidering the Testament of Solomon', *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 16 (2007), 203–37.

[79] On biblical apocrypha in Ireland, see especially Martin McNamara, *The Apocrypha in the Irish Church* (Dublin, 1975). On the influence of Irish apocryphal learning in Anglo-Saxon England, see Wright, *Irish Tradition*, pp. 21–7, 215–29.

specialities of particular angels when the prayers that mention them look like a purely individual response to an encounter with an exceptionally rare apocryphal tract.

The same is true of the set of benedictions for the crops known to Aldred the provost at tenth-century Chester-le-Street. They may also have been of Irish origin, since the three manuscripts which preserve these *orationes super segetes* all contain other texts which clearly had been written in Ireland.[80] But like the prayers for aggrieved ears and stomachs, their assertion that there was a named archangel who was set 'over all the fruits of the earth and over seeds' is attested in no other Irish source. Doubtless whoever composed these blessings was convinced of the truth of what he wrote, but his certainty about the archangel Panchiel and his duties probably derived from no more than a single document which he took to be authoritative. Exactly what that document was is by no means clear: the angel's name is Hebrew in origin (from Phanuel or Penuel: 'face of God') and had been used in relation to people and places before it became attached to an angel.[81] Despite its originally more mundane applications, the book of Enoch asserted that Phanuel was one of the four 'angels of the presence'.[82] It was presumably on this basis that a miscellaneous handful of late antique and medieval texts mention an angel with this name in passing. Of these, a Coptic amulet which makes a brief reference to 'Phanuel, the one who is over the fruit' is sufficient to show that the original creator of

[80] Vienna, ÖNB 1888 contains a mass for the sick and an anatomical exorcism that both exhibit Irish traits: see Patrick Sims-Williams, 'Thought, word and deed: an Irish triad', *Ériu* 29 (1978), 78–111, at pp. 89–95. Vatican, BAV lat. 642 contains, in addition to computistical material with general insular links, a letter of pseudo-Jerome attributed to Irish authorship by Bruno Krusch: see Charles W. Jones, 'The "lost" Sirmond manuscript of Bede's *computus*', *EHR* 52 (1937), 204–19, at pp. 208–11. The material added to Durham A.IV.19 is more difficult to assess, for although a number of the additions are certainly of Irish origin, some of them – like the version of the *Homo octipartitus* – had been known to the English for some time: see Charles D. Wright, 'Why Sight holds flowers: an apocryphal source for the iconography of the Alfred Jewel and Fuller Brooch', in *Text, Image, Interpretation*, ed. Minnis and Roberts, pp. 169–86. Nevertheless, Wright observes more direct connections with Irish learning in the manuscript's abecedary poem on salvation history: *Irish Tradition*, p. 255, n. 147; cf. *idem.*, 'Apocryphal lore', p. 138.

[81] Place-name: Gen. 33:30–31; Jdg. 8:8–9 and 17. Personal name: 1 Chron. 4:4, 8:25; Luke 2:36.

[82] 1 Enoch 40:2–10, 54:6, 71:8–9 and 13, trans. Matthew Black, *The Book of Enoch or 1 Enoch: A New English Edition* (Leiden, 1985), pp. 45, 53, 68, with additional comments on p. 201.

the field prayers had not simply invented the association of the angel with the harvest, but had followed the authority of some earlier text. [83] It is scarcely possible now to say what that text was; in any case, it need not have been particularly detailed. If the prayers from CCCC 41 were based solely upon single lines from the Testament of Solomon, then some equally brief statement found among other enticingly esoteric mysteries might have been sufficient to prompt another early medieval ecclesiastic to act upon his newfound knowledge.

Establishing the rarity of these prayers and their sources does not rob them of significance. What they demonstrate is the extent to which even manifestly uncommon ideas, derived from unusual sources, found their way into Anglo-Saxon Christianity *only* when they were expressed through the entirely mainstream channels of normal benediction and liturgical prayer. The *orationes super segetes* in particular are constructed in the most part from formulae borrowed or adapted from pre-existing liturgical rites, as Jolly ably demonstrated.[84] They are therefore not an alternative to more orthodox prayers: if they were simply stripped of the angel's name, they would not stand out greatly from other blessings for seeds, fruit and crops found in various other medieval servicebooks. This is, in fact, exactly what happened. The prayer involving Panchiel which had been copied by the mid-tenth-century compiler of Vienna, ÖNB 1888 in Mainz was recopied in other German manuscripts from the eleventh century onwards, but with its instruction to send the Holy Spirit 'cum Panchielo archangelo' replaced by 'cum angelo et archangelo'. It would remain in use in this form for the

[83] The text is edited, with an Italian translation, by Francesco Rossi, *Di alcuni manoscritti copti che si conservano nella Biblioteca Nazionale di Torino* (Turin, 1893), pp. 121–52 (p. 127). An English translation can be found in Marvin Meyer and Richard Smith, *Ancient Christian Magic: Coptic Texts of Ritual Power* (San Francisco, 1994), pp. 133–46 [no. 71].

[84] Jolly, 'Prayers from the field', pp. 112–17.

duration of the Middle Ages.[85] Clearly, its original creator had not taken his frame of reference from any tradition other than that of standard liturgical practice if his benedictions could be so readily divorced from their dubious archangel. The peculiarity of the ideas which motivated the prayers against earache and stomach pains from CCCC 41 was perhaps less readily overlooked, and probably contributed to their limited dissemination. Yet even their author had been trying to work within the normal language of prayer rather than against it. The Testament of Solomon which had provided him with the names and specialities of the demons Fondorael and Laniel had also given the words of simple incantations to repel them: 'If I hear "Sabriel, imprison Sphendonael", I retreat immediately [...] Whoever says "Iouda Zizabou" into the right ear of the afflicted for the third time makes me retreat'. The anonymous author of our prayers could have taken his source at its word, and simply noted these incantations for future use. But this was not his response. He extracted the basic information about the demons that caused illness, and the angels which could counter them, and recast it as a petition made solely and directly to God. The established language of prayer was the only vehicle for such entreaties, even when their inspiration came from far outside the mainstream beliefs of Christian tradition.

THE EFFECTS OF LITURGICAL PRAYER

Whatever else it meant to the individual believer, to speak in the language of prayer was to acknowledge that there were things that could not be accomplished by humanity alone. Prayers and benedictions were thus necessarily precise about what they were asking for, and from whom they asked it. Those who wrote and used them did not, however, pretend

[85] Jolly ('Prayers from the field', pp. 120–23) compares Durham A.IV.19 and Vienna, ÖNB 1888 with the version printed by Cyrille Vogel and Reinhard Elze, *Le Pontifical romano-germanique du dixième siècle*, 3 vols. (Vatican City, 1963), ii, 363 [no. 214A]. Henry Parkes, whose reassessment of the 'Romano-Germanic Pontifical' manuscripts is eagerly awaited, informs me that the earliest witness to the revised form of the prayer is Bamberg, Öffenliche Bibliothek, cod. lit. 53, 134v (s. xi[1], ?Seeon for Bamberg). Others are listed by Andrieu, *Ordines romani*, i, 53.

to know exactly how their desires might become realities. The two prayers copied into CCCC 41, for instance, for instance, addressed themselves to God and describe the illnesses which are to be reversed (the identification of the individual demons involved being akin to a diagnosis in this context) and intimate that an angel might act as his agent, but make no attempt to convey how the angel might achieve its goal. Instead, they skirt around the process of healing with the vaguest of phrases – God is asked to work *in* his angels, whatever that might mean (*in Raphaelo angelo,* or *in Dormielo sancto angelo*). More common benedictional formulae were just as evasive when they came to express the sought-after moment of transformation: the critical moment in the blessing of ashes, according to the formulae found in a variety of Anglo-Saxon liturgical books, was the request for God to 'send your holy angel from heaven, who may bless and sanctify these ashes so that they can be a salutary medicine for all who call out humbly in your name'.[86] How an angel might be able to change the properties of the ashes, or how its blessing differed from the human benediction currently being spoken over the ashes, are not articulated. What mattered was that the supplicant had not sought to achieve the transformation himself, but had deferred to God and the means which were proper to him. Anything further was a moot point if one thought that God, or whatever agent he might send, did indeed have the ability to bring about an act of healing or sanctification.

Instead of appealing to the deity with a prescriptive set of instructions, then, benedictional formulae used less precise but more evocative ways to frame their demands. Many pointed out the similarities between their petition and an equivalent event from the biblical past, in the hope that God might continue to work in ways which were evidently familiar to him: 'Lord, bless this house and all who dwell in it, just as you

[86] Egbert Pontifical, 49r–49v (ed. Banting, p. 40); Robert Missal, 41v (ed. Wilson, p. 61).

saw fit to bless the house of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob'.[87] In similar fashion, one of Aldred's hopes for his crops was that 'winged things may be driven from our crops, like the demon Asmodeus who was driven by the fish gall through the archangel Raphael'.[88] The parallel did not have to be exact: if Aldred ever used the prayers he copied into the Durham Collectar, he would have walked into the fields sprinkling water (this prayer specifically mentions the use of *creatura aquae*) rather than the innards of a fish. The mention of Raphael, Asmodeus and the dismembered fish was not, therefore, an attempt to painstakingly recreate a successful exorcism as it was described in scripture. Nor we should think that the biblical allusions embedded within prayers of this sort were primarily intended to be 'read devotionally as spiritual allegories', as has occasionally been suggested.[89] Individual ecclesiastics copying and using them *could*, of course, choose to read them in this way, but in the case of Aldred and his crop blessings, the reader had clearly not given them a great deal of devotional contemplation – had he given their source in the book of Tobit any sustained thought, he would have found that his prayers had mistakenly ascribed the exorcism of Asmodeus to the wrong part of the fish.[90] Whatever personal edification they might occasionally have given to their human users, allusions like this were firmly directed to God himself. They sought to emphasize that the demands being made of him were not unreasonable, but were entirely in accordance with the established pattern of his laws.

87 Eighth-Century Gelasian, 235v (ed. Dumas, i, 443 [no. 2820]); Egbert Pontifical, 152r (ed. Banting, p. 124).

88 Durham Collectar, 67r (above, p. 229).

89 Jolly, 'Prayers from the field', p. 136; Rowe, 'Blessings for Nature', pp. 251–3.

90 The Vulgate was somewhat inconsistent as to which organ was used (compare Tob. 6:8 and 8:2), and the inconsistency evidently bothered some early medieval readers: see Richard Marsden, 'The survival of Ceolfrith's *Tobit* in a tenth-century insular manuscript', *JTS*, n.s. 45 (1994), 1–23, at p. 20. But in any case, the exorcism had been accomplished by either one or both of the fish's heart and liver; the gall, on the other hand, was used for curing of Tobit's blindness (6:9, 11:4–15). The discrepancy is noted and discussed also by W.J.P. Boyd, 'Aldrediana XXV: *Ritual* Hebraica', *English Philological Studies* 14 (1975), 1–57, at pp. 33–4.

This gave benedictions an air of conservatism, even when the things which they hoped to achieve were actually more novel than they suggested. Rites for blessing new church bells asked God that whenever the bell was rung, it might simultaneously hold back the power of wrongdoers, the wiles of demons and phantasms, and the more mundane threats of storms and tempests – in addition to the simple task of calling the faithful to prayer. In essence, the bell was to be a weapon against anything that might harm the church and its people. We might interpret this as a request for the bell to be imbued with quasi-magical properties of its own,[91] but this is an interpretation which the conclusion of the blessing sought specifically to reject. The ringing of the bell was just the signal for protection which would come from elsewhere: 'and so, when the sound of this little instrument goes through the clouds, may an angelic hand watch over this monastery of the Church, and may its everlasting protection save the minds and bodies of believers'.[92] The apotropaic functions with which the benediction had opened were thus made distinct from the bell's own agency, and placed firmly within the power of the angel roused by its call – hardly a problematic notion, when it was known that angels could indeed offer protection to human souls. Other liturgical blessings whose ultimate aim was to shield something or someone from harm couched their requests in similar language, and presumed that the angels could simply extend their appointed duties by overseeing the protection of a few more things on the earth. The mass held in the centre of a new graveyard, the culmination of the rite by which burial grounds were consecrated in later Anglo-Saxon England, thus took the precaution of having God 'assign your angel as a guard for this cemetery'.[93] This was a relatively newly-minted petition, part of a

[91] Cf. Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, pp. 31–2; Flint, *Rise of Magic*, pp. 188–90.

[92] Egbert Pontifical, 127r (ed. Banting, p. 127); Robert Benedictional, 124r–124v (ed. Wilson, p. 105); Leofric Missal B, 9r (ed. Orchard, ii, 16 [no. 50]). Orchard comments on the ubiquity of the formula: *Leofric Missal*, i, 135.

[93] Egbert Pontifical, 75v (ed. Banting, p. 59); Robert Benedictional, 121r (ed. Wilson, p. 102); Dunstan Pontifical, 44r–44v (ed. Conn, p. 79); Brodie Pontifical, 35v–36r (ed. Conn, p. 229); CCCC 44, p. 171; CCCC 146, p. 93.

ritual which seems to have been developed in England itself,[94] but its provision for an angelic watchman had a solidly traditional outlook. It echoed the much older prayers which were still being copied into Anglo-Saxon books, like those which were intended to fortify the houses of the living: 'Hear us, holy Lord, omnipotent Father, eternal God, and deign to send your holy angel from the heavens, who may guard, cherish, protect, visit and defend all those living in this dwelling'.[95] The several different formulae for blessing travellers provided variations on a similar theme, hoping that God 'might see fit to send an angel of peace, who might accompany your servant on the right path', or in another 'the unending company of angels [...] by whose comforting presence you [i.e. the travellers] may come and go unhurt'.[96]

Taken on their own terms, petitions of this sort provided a plausible means whereby supernatural assistance might answer a particular human need. Their demands neither fell back on 'magical' reasoning, nor required God to make some great exception to the normal laws of his creation. They asked him to work only in the ways in which he was already known to work. Yet all the same, the writers of benedictional formulae had narrow concerns which did not always encourage them to pause and consider the implications of what they were asking. While they expected that their prayers could be answered by the angels whom God often used to protect and oversee human affairs, their blessings made no reference to the personal guardian angels which might already be stationed over the living. The spirits which these benedictions called down were fresh

[94] See Helen Gittos, 'Creating the sacred: Anglo-Saxon rites for consecrating cemeteries', in *Burial in Early Medieval England and Wales*, ed. Sam Lucy and Andrew Reynolds (London, 2002), pp. 195–208.

[95] Old Gelasian, 221r (ed. Mohlberg, pp. 225–6 [no. 1558]); Eighth-Century Gelasian, 257r–257v (ed. Dumas, i, 482 [no. 3013]); Robert Missal, 199v (ed. Wilson, p. 277).

[96] Old Gelasian, 188v and 189v (ed. Mohlberg, pp. 192–3 [nos. 1317 and 1320]); Eighth-Century Gelasian, 166v and 234r (ed. Dumas, i, 299 and 439–40 [nos. 2098 and 2799]); Supplement (ed. Deshusses, i, 571 [no. 1726]); Egbert Pontifical, 127v–128v (ed. Banting, pp. 105–6); Leofric Missal B, 16r (ed. Orchard, ii, 24 [no. 125]). Cf. also Robert Missal, 189r (ed. Wilson, p. 261); Leofric Missal C, 29r (ed. Orchard, ii, 42 [no. 208]).

reinforcements, but their newly allocated duties overlapped noticeably with the things which a person's own guardian angel did. There was little reason to suspect that a guardian angel's attentions wavered if one set out on a journey, or entered a house or a church, but early medieval churchmen across Europe had still seen fit to devise and retain prayers asking for even greater numbers of angels to watch over their lives. The priest whose liturgical books instructed him to ask God to 'give to this people the guardian angel who faithfully foretold the conception of Mary's son' on 8 September, yet read from his homiliary on 29 September that 'every one of the faithful has an angel assigned to them for their protection', might justifiably have wondered whether his benedictions were intended to supplement or to supplant the angels already watching over his congregation.[97]

In a previous chapter, we saw that the confidence which ecclesiastical writers placed in the guardian angel and its abilities did in fact dwindle over the course of the Anglo-Saxon period. In place of the old monastic stories which remembered the fates of sinners whose misdeeds had cost them the protection of their angels, and with it their lives, the homilies and poems of the tenth century spoke about the guardian angel as a frequently powerless force, a silent spectator incapable of offering constant protection to the human being it accompanied.[98] It may well be that the way that angelic protection was articulated through liturgical benedictions contributed to this theological shift. The specificity of blessings, the fact that they provided for the minutiae of daily life as well as the major festivals – 'a safeguard for the small things as much as the great', as the

[97] This admittedly hypothetical situation follows the 'Eighth-Century Gelasian' blessing for the Nativity of the Virgin Mary (ed. Dumas, i, 291–2 [no. 2077]), and Haimo of Auxerre's homily for the Feast of St Michael (ed. Migne, *PL* 118, cols. 770–76). The former is not uncommon in Anglo-Saxon books – e.g. Egbert Pontifical, 113r (ed. Banting, p. 93); Robert Benedictional, 50r (ed. Wilson, p. 37) – and the latter, used eventually by Ælfric, was spread widely by inclusion in the expanded version of Paul the Deacon's homiliary (ed. Migne, *PL* 95, cols. 1525–30).

[98] See above, pp. 107–23.

Regularis concordia said of them – did not lend itself to the idea that human life was dependably overseen by a lifelong warden.[99] It was also supremely difficult to express any sense of angelic constancy through prayers which always asked God to renew and extend the protection which he gave through his spirits. The blessings for the crops added to the Durham Collectar highlight the problem succinctly. They named Panchiel as 'he who, with forty-four thousand angels, is over all the fruits of the earth and over seeds', yet the very act of praying and blessing the crops showed that this multitude of angels could not be expected to carry out this duty unaided.[100] They did not even address their demands to Panchiel himself, but to God alone: it was he himself who might ultimately 'nourish the fertile seed, as Panchiel wishes'. Presumably, whoever had first written these words did really believe that an archangel looked over the fruits of the earth, on the basis of some obscure text which he had taken to be authoritative; but by articulating this belief as a request, he robbed Panchiel of any direct agency whatsoever. Other blessings could not avoid giving the same impression that whatever duties the angels fulfilled, they could not be trusted to carry them out without human prompting. A unique, if somewhat garbled, prayer found in the original part of the Durham Collectar thus asked 'may the angel who is placed over our animals guard them [*angelus qui positus est super animalia nostra custodiat ea*], so that the devil will not be able to ride them'.[101] The safety of livestock was a pressing concern, but this was a petition which changed nothing: the angel had been assigned its task before anyone had asked it to do anything, and it would

[99] *RegConc*, ch. 14 (ed. Kornexl, p. 21).
[100] Durham Collectar, 66v (quoted above, p. 229).
[101] *Ibid.*, 57v–58r (ed. Corrêa, p. 231 [no. 646]). While the majority of the original Collectar is dependent on a Continental exemplar, this prayer is the last of a miscellaneous group of Latin blessings (55r–58r) which bear Old English rubrics and have no known Continental analogues. While their recent editor largely passed over them, they appear to derive from a different source. If their rubrics indicate an English origin, then they may well preserve a hitherto unnoticed *libellus* of practical benedictions, made for the use of a local priest in ninth-century England; a booklet of the kind described by Helen Gittos as 'small, probably unbound, collections of rites, especially those for use in the field': '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 Later Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. Francesca Tinti (Woodbridge, 2005), pp. 63–82, at p. 64.

remain at its post thereafter. The fact that the request had to be made at all thus complicates, rather than complements, the belief which it was trying to express.

It may well seem inappropriate to ask so much from prayers and benedictional formulae, short and practically-minded statements whose writers had neither the opportunity nor the inclination to present a considered theological opinion. They did not attempt to define belief, nor to describe minutely what they thought was happening in the unseen world of spiritual beings. But it is precisely because that world and its workings *were* unseen that the implied relationships between the Creator, his invisible agents and his needful believers expressed through prayers are important. The ministrations of angels could not be known objectively, and the words which enlisted their services were therefore both the beginning and the end of any Anglo-Saxon Christian's direct experience of the angelic. This makes the fact that angels sat somewhat uncomfortably in conventional language of prayer far from inconsequential. When prayers and benedictions seemed to be offering the angels pointed reminders rather than simple thanks, it should probably not surprise us that Anglo-Saxon homilists and other ecclesiastical writers increasingly thought of heavenly spirits as rather inconstant protectors whose attention needed regular renewal.

Praying for the assistance of the angels was never a discrete activity, something which could be sharply distinguished from other types of petition involving other sources of supernatural power. This chapter has conducted a somewhat anachronistic exercise by treating them in isolation, for the prayers of early medieval Christians ranged widely across the heavens, and the intervention of angels was sought in much the same way as the help of the saints or of God himself. Yet only the angels seemed poorly served by this shared language of entreaty. Seeking the intercession of the saints, for instance, never

carried with it the troublesome implications about the constancy and effectiveness of their power which linger at the edges of angelic prayers. The problem was that angels had always been defined, to a greater or lesser extent, in functional terms in a way that the saints were not. When a preacher or a theologian found it necessary to say what angels were, they did so by explaining the tasks which they performed. The spirits watched over human souls, supported their virtues, guided their progress through a dangerous world. Naturally, these functions came to the minds of ecclesiastics as they wrote new prayers and benedictions to secure protection, safety and salvation for themselves and their contemporaries. But the conservative tone of liturgical prayer meant that the angels only ever seemed to be asked to perform tasks which they were thought already to be doing. They had been a late arrival into the mainstream of early medieval prayer, fitted into litanies of intercessors for the sake of completeness rather than on their own terms, and pressed into service in liturgical blessings primarily as a way to assure God that one's demands were reasonable and achievable. If we seek to understand why it was that the angels, such a deep-rooted part of Christianity, came to be overshadowed by the intercessory power of human saints over the course of the early Middle Ages, it may well be that the constraints put upon angels by the language used to voice early medieval Christians' most pressing concerns effectively shut them out. Augustine had once wondered whether he ought to have sought the help of the spirits in the process of his own personal reconciliation to God: 'Should I have turned to the angels?' he asked, 'But with what prayer? With what holy rites?'[102] It was precisely by trying to seek the help of the angels through language which was ill-suited for the purpose that the religious elite of early medieval Europe succeeded in unconsciously remodelling their mental universe.

[102] Augustine, *Confessiones*, X.42, ed. Luc Verheijen, CCSL 27 (Turnhout, 1981), p. 191.

CONCLUSION

When I began this study, I expected that the changing ways that the surviving sources from pre-Conquest England expressed their beliefs about the unseen actions of ethereal beings were probably to be explained by underlying social changes. The transformations of the religious life, the political and military upheavals of the ninth century, the formation of a single kingdom of the English – these and other broad changes in the cultural and political landscape of early medieval England would be seen faintly reflected in the attempts of successive generations to express their belief in a heavenly society populated by suprahuman beings. To think about angels was, after all, to think about a particular paradigm of goodness and perfection, for theirs was said to be an undimmed life free from worldly troubles: they were always bound to be, as Peter Hunter Blair put it, 'the apotheosis of short-lived, rheumaticky Anglo-Saxon man'.[1] Writing about angels might not exactly have been escapism, but it did offer the opportunity to give shape to one's ideals or to imagine the inversion of earthly society and its shortcomings. If the historian were to chart how this idealized image shifted over time, it would seem possible to use it as an index of changing circumstances in the 'real world' of early medieval England.

There are certainly moments when the preoccupations of a particular time and place have suggested themselves. The imprint of tenth-century ecclesiastical politics

[1] Hunter Blair, *Northumbria in the Days of Bede*, p. 145.

upon the particular vision of the angelic fall propounded by the circle of Æthelwold, bishop of Winchester, clearly united theological speculation with contemporary concerns in the most direct and polemical way possible. Nevertheless, the cumulative impression to emerge from this thesis is that while ideas about angels underwent change and development, sometimes involving quite profound reversals of past certainties, they seldom map onto the known contours of cultural and religious change in the period 700–1000. Particularly striking is how little impact the tenth-century reform movement seems to have made on these beliefs. A great deal used to be made of the 'reformed' sensibilities exemplified by Ælfric and Wulfstan driving out the 'confused' and near-superstitious fancies of their predecessors, bringing a return to sound patristic theology in place of dubious legend and apocryphal anecdote. Few scholars would now make that claim so baldly, with both the restricted reach of the reform movement and the individual idiosyncrasies of its major spokesmen now widely recognized. But it is still common to find discussions of tenth-century English material divided up, with the works of named late Anglo-Saxon Benedictines compared only with each other and taken as evidence of 'theology', and the more difficult evidence of unidentifiable earlier homilists and poets treated as a separate category more indicative of 'literature' than of serious religiosity. While this thesis has not made a systematic attempt to assess the relationship between the two bodies of evidence, offering only a focused examination of a single theme, several of its chapters note the broad similarities between the ideas voiced by tenth-century writers on either side of the reform. The traditional landmarks in the ecclesiastical history of early medieval England only take us so far in explaining how and why Anglo-Saxon beliefs about angels changed as they did.

Many aspects of these beliefs must now be obscured by discontinuities in the extant sources, but this thesis has shown that it is nevertheless possible to discern certain

broad trends in the changing ways that Anglo-Saxon Christians thought, speculated and sometimes worried about sharing their world with a host of spiritual beings. The earliest extant Anglo-Saxon discussions of angels, from the years around 700, already assumed that much was common knowledge. They could pass over once difficult theological problems – like how the angels fell, or how their society was organized – with brevity and confidence. These were areas in which patristic guidance was available, but not every aspect of Anglo-Saxon thought had sprung from the pages of an Augustine or a Gregory. Equally matter-of-fact declarations about the duties of guardian angels seem to have evolved from opinions voiced more recently by monastic writers after the fifth century, a somewhat self-righteous train of thought which believed that being entrusted to the care of a supernatural protector was a privilege for those individuals who had successfully proved their moral worth. In early eighth-century England, this notion contributed to a widespread sense that angels, if their assistance could be obtained, might intervene decisively and with irresistible power in the lives of human beings.

In the physical world, such things were rare. Guardian angels might protect the righteous from harm on the spiritual plane, but early Anglo-Saxons took the actual manifestation of heavenly beings in their own world as an almost infallible sign that the person they come to see was a saint picked out by divine grace. This was never clearer than at a person's death, when an exceptional few would find an escort waiting to navigate their soul through an otherwise uncertain territory which might prove dangerously capricious. Others nevertheless hoped, in advance of their own death and at the passing of their friends and relations, to secure a similarly easy transition into the next life, offering prayers that sought to obtain as a special favour that which the holy saints had been granted by right. Praying for the intervention of angels in this way had once attracted suspicion, an improper thing for Christians to do, but eighth-century

Anglo-Saxon devotions called upon angels just as they would any other kind of heavenly power. Some may even have been convinced that the surest way to ensure their benevolence, whether now or in the future life, was to model their own way of life after theirs, although opinion varied considerably as to what that might mean in practice.

How long Anglo-Saxon Christians had been thinking about angels in these ways is unknowable, for we cannot trace these ideas much earlier than *c.* 700. They were probably never as static as this sketch inevitably makes them appear; certainly they did not remain unchanged for long. In the second half of the eighth century, the tales told about angelic visitations began to take on a more varied quality, no longer sufficient to prove the preeminent sanctity of the one who received their messages but also available to less exalted souls. If that suggested that angels might more regularly intrude upon human society, then it was a sign of changing times. By the ninth century, Anglo-Saxon preachers assured their congregations that those duties which the spirits had once performed only for the holiest few – offering them care and protection in life, and attending their souls at the moment of death – were now being granted to a much wider array of men and women. While we cannot pinpoint precisely when this new thinking had taken hold, these themes first become visible in the resurgence of writing produced at the close of the ninth century, and continue strongly in the sources thereafter.

Yet the closer union of two worlds did not succeed in making Anglo-Saxon England more supernaturally charged, but in restricting to a certain extent the supernal qualities that had once sharply distinguished angels from lesser creatures. Their interventions at the deathbed no longer crackled with rare power, leaving tangible signs of an otherworldly emanation which awed the devout. Nor did the angels' involvement with the souls of the living appear to be as decisive or even as dependable as before,

when homilists and other writers were more inclined to stress the limits of guardian angels' abilities and struggled to find an active role for them. Even their previously unquestioned state of absolute moral perfection now seemed open to doubt, and the voices which had once called for humanity to lift itself up in emulation of angels fell silent. None of this dislodged angels from their place in the prayers of the faithful, but those petitions found it easier to remind angels of their duties rather than to obtain the dramatic assistance which the angels had granted once to the saints. Indeed while a new generation of Anglo-Saxon saints accompanied the Benedictine movement of the mid-tenth century, this renewed outpouring of miracles only rarely required angelic assistance. By the end of the period, although angels could be found actively involved with a much broader cross-section of Anglo-Saxon society, along the way they had lost many of the powerful and entirely otherworldly qualities which had once marked them out.

I have talked here, and in other parts of this thesis, of loss – that angels lost certain characteristics over time, or that their interactions with humanity lost those things which had once distinguished them from other kinds of supernatural activities in the minds of believers. In doing so, I do not mean to imply a return to previous simplistic narratives of a drawn-out 'disenchantment' of religion over the course of the Middle Ages, some 'great historic process in the development of religions' whereby the supernatural was progressively ousted by the spread of rational thought.[2] There are other ways to explain changes of this nature. An unexpectedly recurrent theme of this study has been the extremely circumstantial and often accidental means by which angels came

[2] The notion comes ultimately from Max Weber, *Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus*; trans. Talcott Parsons, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York, 1958), p. 105. Its historiographical impact is cogently critiqued by Alexandra Walsham, 'The Reformation and the "disenchantment of the world" reassessed', *The Historical Journal* 51 (2008), 497–528.

to be sidelined in various strands of Anglo-Saxon thought. We have seen, for instance, that the methods which hagiographers had used to prove that angels really had brought unearthly mysteries to the saints, using the eyewitness testimony of lesser individuals who chanced to catch a glimpse, undermined the very argument they were trying to make about the saints' privileged access to the celestial plane. When stories of angelic visitations in Anglo-Saxon saints' Lives diminished in scale and importance, it was because they had outlived their usefulness as part of the hagiographic agenda rather than because tenth-century writers had consciously revised their opinions of heavenly beings. In the same way, the angelic signs which disappeared from Anglo-Saxon deathbeds after the mid-ninth century had not been driven away by some wave of scepticism, but by the efforts of preachers to assure their congregations that benevolent spirits might still be in attendance even if they left no trace of their presence. Although in both cases angels were stripped of attributes which had previously possessed great significance, we do not have to look far beyond the aims of the writers and the requirements of the literary genres they were using to understand why.

To say that textual considerations of this kind dictated the shape of the beliefs contained within them is hardly radical. Reminders that our sources 'are not mere receptacles from which beliefs and ideas may be recovered in pristine form' now regularly preface studies of medieval intellectual and cultural history, emphasising the fact that issues of form and genre become critically important when 'texts [...] were not merely expressions of belief, but became in turn part of the material from which tradition participants constructed and transmitted their own conceptions of the beliefs involved'.[3] Just as important to the ideas examined in this thesis, however, has been the interaction between different genres of religious writing, and the effects of this cross-pollination on

[3] Kabir, *Paradise*, p. 7; Hall, *Elves*, p. 17.

the overall shape of Anglo-Saxon thought. That is, while individual genres moulded angels into particular forms, their ideas and the ways that they expressed them did not remain locked within a single kind of religious writing. We have thus seen how homiletic observations about the role of angels as guardians of human souls dictated the kinds of requests made of them in liturgical prayer; or how narrative literature about the creation and fall of the angels gave structure to the thoughts of homilists and exegetes when they expressed their own opinions on the subject. Anglo-Saxon authors presumed that any kind of writing about angels offered an equally valid insight onto an objective exterior reality, each simply and uncomplicatedly illuminating a different aspect of these unseen beings. It was thus perfectly reasonable to gather information found in one literary genre, and to press it into the service of another. But the fit was seldom exact. Narrative literature about the unfolding of God's Creation might have given vivid shape to an otherwise obscure history of the angels, but it had also introduced causal connections between the fall of the angels and the creation of man in the process: when literature inspired sermon, that causal framework remained and attained a significance as great as anything found in the Bible itself. Similarly, voicing one's belief in the protective powers of angels through prayerful requests, asking God to make sure that his spirits watched over travellers or church congregations, was on the one hand a sensible precaution for the wellbeing of body and soul, but at the same time it undermined the notion that angels were in fact dependable guardians at all. The point at which ideas crossed from one literary form into another was thus precisely the point at which complications, reconsiderations and accidental innovations were likely to occur.

Quite apart from whatever this thesis may have said about Anglo-Saxon England and its shifting beliefs about angels, that last observation seems to me pertinent for the study of early medieval religion more generally. The sources available to us are a

disparate collection of extremely varied material and we often worry, with good reason, whether by assembling it together, we are producing an impression of order and coherence which simply does not reflect the realities which we are trying to reconstruct. We might take comfort, however, in the fact that the individuals whose words and ideas we use were also grappling with a diverse and discontinuous literary inheritance left by their predecessors, and were attempting to combine insights gleaned from poetry, liturgy, scripture, exegesis, sermon and prayer alike in order to understand an unseen world which they did not – could not – experience directly. They synthesized and conflated, trying to find connections between these different strands of their religious culture. Few seem to have purposefully set out to change opinions already held; and yet we can see that the things which they were saying shifted and changed all the same, as an unforeseen but perhaps unavoidable consequence of their actions. We do not often make room for accidental change of this sort in our histories of religions and past beliefs – but the history at least of angels in Anglo-Saxon Christianity cannot be understood without it. Just as we have become aware of our own interaction with the sources and the effects of combining evidence taken from different kinds of writing each operating according to their own genre rules, we need to become sensitive to the ripples produced when medieval authors did the same. This thesis has suggested that they were sometimes sufficient to transform long-standing and apparently traditional ideas about angels into new forms, and that those remodelled ideas could go on to play a major part in the religious culture which housed them. The degree to which that might also have been true for other aspects of medieval religion, other beliefs held at different times and in different places, still awaits exploration.

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